

Competing for International Discourse Power in the Digital Platform Era: An Embedded Model and Case Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Discourse possesses the capacity to shape reality, and the concept of “discourse power” continues to evolve alongside transformations in global communication. Digital platforms, by virtue of their vast user bases and extensive data resources, have restructured multiple dimensions of social life and emerged as a key arena for contesting international discourse power. This study develops an embedded model of digital platforms and international discourse power by examining their theoretical implications, strategic orientations, and structural interconnections. Using TikTok and Twitter as illustrative cases, it analyzes how major powers engage in discourse competition within the digital platform environment. The findings suggest that international discourse power in the platform era follows a logic of contestation for dominance, characterized by competition over capital, content, and technology—injecting new variables and uncertainties into the global communication order. Looking ahead, artificial intelligence will play an increasingly central role, discourse dissemination mechanisms will continue to innovate, and the development of autonomous, internationally recognized digital platforms will be imperative.

INTRODUCTION

Discourse possesses the power to construct reality and embodies the interplay of power relations. As an essential component of national power, discourse power serves as a key indicator of a nation's strength, influence, and appeal on the global stage (Sun, 2019). The configuration of international discourse power, in particular, determines an international actor's global influ-

ence, representing its authority to define, interpret, and evaluate people, events, and phenomena—thereby reflecting transformations in the international order (Shen, 2022).

Contemporary digital space, shaped by the convergence of artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and big data, has fundamentally restructured politics, economics, and culture. Accelerated digitalization has turned platforms into new organizational and infrastruc-

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tural forms for social life. Unlike traditional media structures, digital platforms concentrate massive capital and user bases, thereby aggregating power as a form of socio-technical infrastructure (van Dijck, 2018).

Competition among nations provides the driving force for changes in the international system and global order. The rise of digital platforms extends this competition beyond the political and economic spheres into the realm of information and communication, introducing new demands on states' comprehensive governance capacities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Competition for International Discourse Power

The construction of international discourse power is closely linked to the nature of "discourse" and "power." Influenced by the distribution of power in the international system, its formation is shaped by multiple factors and operates according to its own distinctive mechanisms (Tang, 2017).

Competition over discourse is inseparable from the interplay of discourse power. Discourse power has thus become an indispensable component of international political power. In essence, the struggle for global discourse power is a contest over the rights and authority embedded within discourse—encompassing ideological confrontation, political values, institutional models, and narrative framing. It also extends to the production of discourse in international affairs, the formulation of global rules and standards, and the competition for interpretive and evaluative authority (Yu, 2023). In this process, powerful states seek to disseminate their values, political systems, and cultural influence to expand their spheres of influence and impose their national will. Conversely, weaker states are often marginalized in this hierarchical discourse order, risking discursive silence and exclusion.

Traditional patterns of discourse competition among international actors have been widely observed. For example, hegemonic states often shape global public opinion to establish discursive authority, using it as a tool to contain rising powers (Newman & Zala, 2018). This dominance allows hegemonic states to secure institutional advantages, laying the groundwork for agenda-setting and narrative control in international discourse. In response, emerging powers strategically deploy discursive tools to counter hegemonic suppression, construct favorable narratives, and project a positive international image (Hardy & Maguire, 2016; John, Catherine & Alexander, 2019).

Joseph Nye (2012) analyzed competition over international discourse power through the lens of soft power, emphasizing its reliance on attraction rather than coercion. Other scholars have further explored how a state's international status (Larson, Paul & Wohlforth, 2014), nation branding (Van Ham, 2002),

framing strategies, strategic narratives, and prestige collectively shape its participation in the struggle for global discourse power.

Digital Platforms as a New Arena for Global Communication

Given their central role in producing and organizing infrastructural resources, digital platforms have gained increasing prominence in the international system, becoming a major site for information production and global communication (Helmond, 2015; Plantin, 2018; Tworek, 2019; Ji, 2020; Kuang, 2021).

On the one hand, digital platforms embody the logic of digital geopolitics and are deeply intertwined with the trajectory of international communication. Under the platformization trend, micro-level platforms, meso-level platform ecosystems, and macro-level geopolitical configurations are increasingly interwoven (van Dijck, 2018). As a result, the previously clear boundaries between states have become increasingly blurred, and the actors participating in global communication have grown more diverse (Nieborg, 2019; Ji, 2020).

On the other hand, digital platforms empower individuals and multiple actors, thereby introducing new variables into international communication dynamics. By enabling diverse participants to engage in communication, digital platforms significantly facilitate cross-border discourse production (Zhang, 2019). More importantly, the integrative function of social platforms in shaping communicative contexts has become increasingly salient. The adage "whoever controls the platform controls the narrative" has emerged as a new maxim of international communication and public diplomacy in the digital era (Shi, 2020).

This study adopts case analysis and process-tracing methods to examine the mechanisms of discourse competition within the digital platform environment. It further proposes a theoretical framework of platform communication to address three core research questions:

- Why have digital platforms become a new arena for the construction of international discourse power?
- What are the representative cases of international discourse power competition among major powers on digital platforms?
- What are the likely trajectories for future competition over international discourse power in the platform era?

THE EMBEDDEDNESS OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSE POWER

International discourse power is not only constructed within the environment of digital platforms but is also deeply embedded in them. The larger and more perva-

sive a platform becomes, the greater its capacity to shape the formation of international discourse power. This section clarifies how digital platforms become new arenas for the construction of discourse power by analyzing three dimensions—theoretical implications, goal orientation, and intrinsic connections—and seeks to explain the mechanisms through which platformization and discourse power mutually reinforce each other.

Theoretical Implications: the Embedding of Discourse Space and Communication Structure

By virtue of their inherent attributes, digital platforms have not only reorganized the basic forms of communication, the patterns of relational connectivity, and the modes of information distribution, but have also reconfigured the global discourse space and the architecture of communication. As emergent socio-technical infrastructures, platforms have fostered a progressive embedding of online discourse space and communication structures, which is manifested in several key ways.

First, the discourse space has expanded on an unprecedented scale. Discourse space constitutes the arena through which a nation exercises international discourse power and reflects its strength in shaping the global communication order. The rise of digital platforms has created a new environment for discourse production, endowing it with novel characteristics (Chen, 2020). In this environment, diverse communicative actors not only collaborate within the shared discourse space but also inevitably engage in competition for discursive influence. These actors must leverage the available discourse space to maximize their discursive functions, thereby playing an essential role in the construction of international discourse power.

Second, communication structures have been optimized through more targeted resource allocation. Under conditions of rapidly advancing media technology, digital platforms have become central coordinators of information resources. This transformation has occurred at two levels: in the physical layer, platforms have penetrated nearly every aspect of daily life, becoming indispensable information infrastructures; and in the communicative layer, they have reshaped the modes through which communication spaces are connected. As communication activities feed data back into platform operations, they simultaneously generate new informational resources, enabling increasingly precise and targeted allocation of communicative resources.

Finally, the distribution of power within discourse space and communication structures has been fundamentally reconfigured. Algorithms and data technologies, as socio-technical and cultural systems, inevitably introduce new dynamics of power struggle. The integration and redistribution of power relations create an emergent power system, embedding discourse space and communication structures within one another and producing new characteristics for the

global communication ecology. Communication structures oscillate between decentralization and recentralization, with enhanced capacity and efficiency of resource allocation. This mutual reinforcement consolidates their embedded relationship. Moreover, the evaluative mechanisms established by digital platforms—based on the data generated within discourse space and communication structures—further strengthen this embeddedness by intensifying the management and distribution of information resources (Lee, 2015).

Goal Orientation: Constructing Digital Soft Power

The Digital Transformation Index Report 2023 highlights that digital platforms serve as a critical catalyst for enterprise digital transformation. Functioning as a bridge between digitalization and soft power, platforms compensate for the limitations of mass communication in regulating and integrating information resources, elevating soft power to new levels. This development also extends and updates Joseph Nye's classical theory of soft power. To effectively build digital soft power, three interrelated elements are essential: digital cognition, digital thinking, and digital transformation.

Digital cognition constitutes the fundamental prerequisite for constructing digital soft power. Soft power—often defined as the ability to attract, persuade, or co-opt—traditionally comprises three core dimensions: culture, political values, and foreign policy. In the era of platformized communication, soft power increasingly manifests in more subtle and diffused forms of influence. Through the widespread dissemination of digital cognition, platforms coordinate diverse global communication actors and integrate massive information resources, thereby establishing discursive authority and legitimizing the construction of digital soft power (Guo, 2021). Moreover, by leveraging their robust capacities for information transmission and content generation, platforms deepen cultural identification among both existing and emerging user communities, fostering common ground while accommodating differences.

Digital thinking represents the guiding principle for building digital soft power. By cultivating a mindset that prioritizes digital connectivity and centrality, platforms can reinforce the connective function of the internet, acting as mediators between nodes to create stronger relational ties. This process enables the deep integration and reorganization of information resources while consolidating the central position of platforms within communication structures. Digital thinking thus provides the normative foundation for constructing digital soft power, extending the base established by digital cognition.

Digital transformation serves as the inevitable pathway for advancing digital soft power. Digital technologies reshape the internal elements of discourse systems and their interrelations, creating an organic linkage between online and offline spheres and acting

as a core driver for discourse power construction in the digital age. The technological advancement of digital tools brings vast developmental potential, enabling the more rational allocation of communication resources under the coordination of multiple actors. By cultivating digital cognition and embedding digital thinking, societies can guide comprehensive digital transformation, thereby creating favorable conditions for the development of international discourse power. Ultimately, the construction of digital soft power maximizes the role of digital technology in allocating informational resources and strengthens nations' capacities to participate in global discourse competition.

Intrinsic Connection: Communicative Power in the Information Society

Communicative power serves as a mirror of both discourse systems and communication structures, and its evolution inevitably reshapes the configuration of power relations. As the foundation of social organization, power relations are often constructed and reinforced in people's minds through processes of communication and interaction (Castells, 2013). In this sense, communicative power becomes the intrinsic linkage through which digital platforms and international discourse power are mutually embedded.

Information Society Theory posits that technology shapes specific modes of development, and that the core elements of productivity define the trajectory of social progress. These modes of development penetrate all layers of society and influence the formation of social behavior. The technological revolutions spurred by scientific innovation have provided the driving force for what has been called a "techno-economic paradigm," with the information technology revolution in particular resolving key challenges of communication and information processing, eventually ushering in an "information technology paradigm" (Freeman & Perez, 1988).

The emergence of the information society has also transformed the modes of power control. During previous periods of social transition—such as agricultural and industrial society—information sources were largely concentrated at the upper echelons of communication structures, resulting in a top-down, hierarchical flow of information. The development of internet technologies redistributed communicative agency, granting greater power to nodes at the periphery and gradually enabling bottom-up modes of power control to gain prominence. Nevertheless, as digital platforms consolidate their position as the central nodes of communication activities, they have progressively strengthened their control over peripheral nodes, further entrenching their centrality. Within this environment, the formation and operation of international discourse power increasingly follow this organizational logic of centralized platform governance.

CASE STUDIES OF INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSE POWER COMPETITION ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS

TikTok: a New Focal Point of Digital Geopolitical Competition

ByteDance was among the first Chinese technology companies to integrate artificial intelligence with mobile internet scenarios. Its short-video platform TikTok leverages AI and big data technologies to precisely match user preferences with content, thereby disrupting the traditional relationship between users and media content. Short-video platforms, accessed via mobile smart devices, distribute videos typically ranging from a few seconds to several minutes in length. They satisfy a wide spectrum of social needs, including self-expression and exposure, fragmented-time audiovisual entertainment, structured emotional resonance, and connection in highly mobile social contexts.

TikTok represents one of the most successful cases of reverse market expansion from a developing country into developed markets. As of September 2021, its monthly active users surpassed one billion, placing it among the small group of digital platforms globally to achieve this milestone.

Geopolitical contestation surrounding TikTok has become increasingly prominent in recent years. In 2020, then-U.S. President Donald Trump issued an executive order to ban TikTok, sparking widespread user backlash. The order was blocked by federal judges before taking effect and later rescinded by the Biden administration. Nevertheless, Western governments' scrutiny of TikTok has not abated: the United States, European Union, and Canada have successively prohibited government employees from using the platform on security grounds. These developments illustrate how TikTok has become a focal point of intensifying digital geopolitics and technological competition.

From TikTok's perspective, the process of international discourse power competition can be divided into four distinct stages:

Stage 1: Initial Suppression (October 2019 – July 2020)

The U.S. government began to take notice of TikTok's growing influence and gradually banned federal employees and military personnel from using the app on work devices.

Stage 2: Intensified Containment (August 2020 – October 2021)

The United States escalated its efforts to restrict TikTok. Presidential executive orders aimed at banning or forcing divestiture brought the issue to the center of global attention. Although Biden revoked Trump's ban orders, he instructed the Department of Commerce to conduct a security review of TikTok.

Stage 3: Comprehensive Encirclement (November 2021 – December 2023)

Competition surrounding TikTok entered a phase of heightened confrontation. Three high-profile U.S. congressional hearings targeting TikTok became symbolic of this period, signaling a shift toward full-scale containment.

Stage 4: Forced Divestiture Pressure (January 2024 – Present)

Both chambers of the U.S. Congress passed legislation demanding that ByteDance divest its control of TikTok. President Biden signed the “Sell or Ban” Act, imposing a final deadline. ByteDance has since taken multiple countermeasures to comply or challenge these actions.

U.S. government concerns regarding TikTok focus on three major areas, to which TikTok has responded with a range of strategies:

Algorithmic Transparency and Social Impact.

In the 2023 congressional hearings, legislators expressed concerns about TikTok’s recommendation algorithm, alleging its opacity could negatively influence public opinion, mental health, and youth values. U.S. policymakers argued that the algorithm could shape agenda-setting in ways detrimental to the American national image. TikTok responded by expressing conditional support for legislation to strengthen online safety protections for minors and by optimizing its recommendation mechanisms for sensitive user groups to improve value alignment.

Cross-Border Data Flows and National Security

Given ByteDance’s Chinese origin, U.S. authorities voiced fears that TikTok might share collected data with the Chinese government, posing a national security risk. TikTok’s executives countered by emphasizing the company’s global corporate structure and operational independence, clarifying that TikTok’s U.S. operations are organizationally and technically separate from Douyin. TikTok also launched “Project Texas,” a \$1.5 billion initiative to localize U.S. user data storage under the oversight of a third-party security partner.

Shifts in Political Stances

Since 2020, U.S. presidents have repeatedly shifted their positions on TikTok. While Trump initially pushed for a ban, he softened his stance after leaving office and later criticized Meta’s dominance. During the 2024 election cycle, Trump openly opposed banning TikTok, arguing it was needed to counterbalance Meta’s market power. Both parties even used TikTok for campaign messaging. Despite this, Congress continued to advance legislation to force divestiture, and by January 2025, Biden signed the “Sell or Ban” Act, after which TikTok suspended its U.S. services on January 19, 2025. TikTok has responded by filing lawsuits to block enforcement, seeking negotiations to delay the ban,

and mobilizing users through in-app notifications to contact legislators and express opposition.

Throughout this geopolitical contestation, diverse communicative actors have made decisions aligning with their immediate or long-term interests, competing for control over the information dissemination channels mediated by TikTok and thereby shaping the global competition for international discourse power.

Twitter: a Stage for Public Diplomacy Contestation

Since its launch in 2006, Twitter has become one of the most influential digital platforms worldwide, providing a unique mode of communication that allows users to share opinions and ideas in real time. With its vast user base, low content threshold, celebrity participation, and ability to shape public discourse, Twitter stands as one of the most emblematic cases of global digital platforms.

Due to its broad international reach, Twitter has become a key tool for political leaders to announce policies, manage public relations, and mobilize citizens. The integration of Twitter into public diplomacy dates back to the Obama administration, which was among the first to recognize the platform’s potential for ideological influence. In the context of Middle East issues, the U.S. government employed Twitter and other platforms to spread political messages, identify key influencers, incite protests, and promote American-style democracy—achieving a relative advantage in shaping regional narratives. Beyond the Middle East, Twitter’s political impact has been evident in the 2008 U.S. presidential election, the Ukraine crisis, and other major events, where opinion leaders leveraged their follower networks to mobilize grassroots movements, ultimately reshaping political and social structures. These episodes demonstrate Twitter’s capacity to serve as both a platform for political mobilization and a conduit for global media amplification.

In the 21st century, as internet technologies and digital platforms have become increasingly pervasive, the United States has invested heavily in building an integrated information capability. It has emphasized big data and AI-driven outreach while establishing new institutional mechanisms for social media communication, intelligence gathering, and sentiment analysis (United States Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2018). Specialized offices—such as the Office of eDiplomacy and U.S. Cyber Command—were created to manage networked diplomacy and information operations. President Obama’s foreign policy emphasized “smart power,” leading to the appointment of a Chief Information Officer (CIO) to oversee government websites and enhance the delivery of official information. Subsequent administrations under Trump and Biden have used Twitter as a platform to announce China-related policies and convey their personal positions. Twitter has thus become a crucial tool for the U.S. to con-

duct diplomacy toward China and disseminate American values, often weighing in on sensitive issues such as China's internal politics, COVID-19, and human rights.

China's engagement with international social media for public diplomacy began relatively late but has shown significant progress. Chinese ambassadors, Foreign Ministry spokespersons, and major media figures have opened personal accounts on Twitter and other international platforms to actively communicate China's policies and culture. Since 2019, China's presence on Twitter has become increasingly visible, with the number of Chinese diplomats' accounts growing more than fivefold. They have responded proactively to Western criticisms and clarified China's positions on various issues, leading to a deepening of public diplomacy competition between China and the United States within the Twitter sphere.

This competition can be divided into three stages:

Stage 1: Parallel Play (2006–2009)

After Twitter's launch, although it was restricted in mainland China, the United States sought to leverage its influence in cyberspace to reach Chinese audiences indirectly.

Stage 2: Emerging Engagement (2010–2017)

Western states began to actively use Twitter to orchestrate "color revolutions," significantly expanding the platform's global influence. During this period, Chinese officials also started to use Twitter for diplomatic communication, marking the beginning of sustained interaction between the two countries on this platform.

Stage 3: Intensified Confrontation (2018–Present)

As global geopolitical tensions escalated, the discursive contest between China and the United States on Twitter became increasingly fierce. Multiple types of communicative actors engaged in interactive exchanges, introducing new variables into the global public sphere and even influencing international political outcomes.

A representative example is the phenomenon of "Twitter diplomacy," which has emerged as a tool for China to counter U.S. network hegemony. Unlike traditional state-to-state diplomacy, public diplomacy targets foreign publics, employing cultural exchange and information dissemination to shape public opinion and, ultimately, influence foreign policy outcomes. Since 2019, U.S. officials have frequently attacked China on issues such as Hong Kong, Xinjiang, human rights, COVID-19, and China's political system, while Chinese diplomats have launched counter-narratives on Twitter. The "wandering balloon" incident in early 2023 exemplifies this intensified confrontation: after days of heated exchanges on Twitter and official statements from the Pentagon, the controversy gradually subsided by late June 2023.

In addition to state-level interactions, Twitter itself plays an active role in shaping discourse. Driven by commercial and political interests, the platform has engaged in content moderation practices such as account suspension, post deletion, throttling or boosting content, and labeling accounts. These interventions shed light on media power relations, agenda-setting dynamics, and state–platform interactions. For example, during the 2019 Hong Kong protests, Twitter shut down multiple batches of Chinese mainland accounts on the grounds of "state-backed disinformation," while allowing anti-China content to proliferate. In June 2020, just months before the U.S. presidential election, Twitter carried out a large-scale purge of accounts allegedly violating its policies, affecting international discourse. Since 2020, the platform has labeled certain state-affiliated media and journalists from China and Russia, signaling its regulatory stance. While Twitter has welcomed media accounts from around the world and professed editorial independence, its practices nevertheless impose implicit constraints on certain actors.

STRUGGLES FOR DOMINANCE: THE LOGIC OF INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSE POWER COMPETITION IN THE ERA OF PLATFORM COMMUNICATION

In the context of platform-mediated communication, international discourse competition is driven by three interrelated forces: the foundational status of digital capabilities, the interactive behaviors of international actors, and the contestation surrounding the meta-attributes of digital platforms. Together, these forces constitute a dynamic model that propels the global struggle for discourse power and shapes its key characteristics.

As demonstrated in the TikTok case, disputes over data governance, algorithms, and public opinion touch upon the deeper question of where national power begins and ends within the digital space. The struggle for platform dominance will thus remain a strategic high ground in future global power competition. Digital platforms not only diffuse discursive power across various international actors but also become the object of intensified state efforts to consolidate control. This contestation primarily unfolds across three dimensions: capital, content, and technology.

Contest for Capital Dominance

As enterprises become increasingly reliant on information technologies, data, and internet-based business models, the digital economy has emerged as a fundamental infrastructure of contemporary capitalism, legitimizing its continued expansion (Srnicsek, 2018). With the decline of traditional manufacturing, data has become a critical driver of economic growth and vitality. The rapid rise of digital platforms enhances the power of transnational corporations and shifts certain state functions toward markets and society. Platforms with

significant economic value also wield considerable political influence through their implicit control over technology and capital (Robinson, 2009). As such, competition for capital dominance on digital platforms is a crucial arena of international rivalry.

Contest for Content and Information Control

Digital platforms monopolize the definition, interpretation, and adjudication of online discourse, while controlling data, users, and traffic flows. The rapid and unregulated growth of platforms has disrupted traditional public opinion pathways, displacing the agenda-setting role once dominated by mainstream media. Shifts in content production and distribution have direct implications for global geopolitical dynamics. The U.S. efforts to suppress TikTok and simultaneously leverage Twitter illustrate its intent to maintain digital hegemony in order to secure discursive advantage. Both states and platforms actively innovate communication formats and narrative strategies to capture user attention and strengthen influence, intensifying the competition for content dominance.

Contest for Technological Leadership

The race to develop advanced digital technologies and control digital infrastructure has reached a fever pitch among major powers. Platforms' data processing and information dissemination capacities enable users to transcend traditional cognitive boundaries, gain deeper insights into the global discourse order, and reframe prevailing narratives (Xu & Bu, 2021). At the same time, the continuous improvement of collective digital literacy and technical competence facilitates the reconstruction of the global discursive landscape, further underscoring the centrality of technological control. In the age of information geopolitics, those who master the core technologies of information dissemination and set the rules for information flows will occupy the commanding heights of competition over international discourse power.

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSE POWER COMPETITION IN THE DIGITAL PLATFORM ENVIRONMENT

This study centers on the construction of international discourse power in the new media environment, positioning digital platforms as a key arena for global communication and for the production and contestation of discourse power. As the international communication order evolves in tandem with shifting global political and economic dynamics, new characteristics and trends continue to emerge.

First, artificial intelligence will play an increasingly pivotal role. The proliferation of AI-generated content (AIGC) tools over the past few years signals that AI has entered a stage of not merely understanding but active-

ly creating content. As a foundational technology underpinning digital platforms, AI will shape the future trajectory of platform communication and occupy a central position in the construction of international discourse power. Among the emerging AIGC tools, ChatGPT—launched in November 2022—garnered unprecedented attention, reaching over 100 million monthly active users within just two months and setting a record for user growth among social products. ChatGPT's innovation lies in its ability to generate content based on embedded knowledge and intent recognition. In recent years, large language models have become increasingly critical to AIGC, offering superior intent extraction and improving the quality of generated content—fundamentally transforming the process of knowledge production. The rise of AIGC has rendered knowledge creation, organization, and dissemination more efficient and intelligent, while diversifying the actors involved in communication. This shift introduces greater complexity into the international communication environment, bringing both opportunities and unprecedented challenges for the construction of discourse power. The question of how to harness these opportunities while mitigating risks to reinvigorate global communication remains a pressing task for the international community.

Second, discourse dissemination mechanisms will continue to evolve. To align with the logic and dynamics of platform communication, the construction of international discourse power requires innovation at both macro and micro levels. At the macro level, ideological shifts driven by structural transformations in world politics necessitate the evolution of discourse strategies to maintain their effectiveness. Discourse innovation at this level interacts with macro-level social change, shaping and being shaped by global political, economic, and cultural transformations. At the micro level, discourse is enacted by specific communicative actors who operate in constantly shifting contexts. Thus, micro-level strategies must be responsive to changing communicative environments, enabling greater sensitivity to context and more effective alignment between messages and audiences. Through such innovations, discourse can function as a connective tissue linking diverse actors within the new media ecosystem, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of international communication.

Finally, new globally recognized and autonomously controlled digital platforms must be developed. The construction of such platforms is essential for building sustainable international discourse power. However, the global platform ecosystem is characterized by monopolistic structures, entrenched cognitive biases, and ideological polarization, posing significant challenges to the realization of this goal. In recent years, Chinese efforts to build and expand platforms for international communication have faced resistance and exclusion in certain countries and markets. Nevertheless, pioneers continue to explore solutions by innovating across social media,

gaming, and mobile technologies in order to create platforms that reflect China's discursive agency. Future efforts should proceed along two lines: First, leveraging competitive market logic, with strong policy support, to foster innovation and position Chinese platforms to enter key global markets—particularly those along the Belt and Road Initiative; and secondly, systematically assessing countries and regions not yet integrated into global platform ecosystems, building upon existing diplomatic, trade, educational, media, and people-to-people networks to provide internet access points and user-friendly information services. Such efforts could incubate an international public digital platform outside existing platform hegemonies, thereby enhancing global inclusivity in digital communication.

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Table A1 | Major Events of TikTok Regulation in the United States (as of September 2025)

Date	Event
Dec 2019	The U.S. military began banning the use of TikTok.
Jul 22, 2020	The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee unanimously passed a bill banning federal employees from using TikTok on government devices.
Aug 2, 2020	After negotiations among Microsoft, TikTok, and the White House, Microsoft confirmed it would continue talks to acquire TikTok's U.S. operations, with a deadline of Sept 15.
Aug 3, 2020	ByteDance founder Zhang Yiming issued an internal letter stating that the company would explore all possibilities in response to U.S. decisions.
Aug 6, 2020	President Trump signed an executive order banning any transactions with ByteDance, TikTok's parent company, effective 45 days later (Sept 20).
Aug 14, 2020	Trump signed another executive order requiring ByteDance to divest all rights related to TikTok's U.S. operations within 90 days.
Jun 2021	President Biden revoked Trump's executive orders and instructed the Department of Commerce to review TikTok's 'security risks.'
Oct 26, 2021	The Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security held a hearing entitled 'Protecting Kids Online: Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube.'
Sep 14, 2022	The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee held a hearing on 'Social Media's Impact on Homeland Security.'
Mar 23, 2023	The House Committee on Energy and Commerce held a hearing titled 'TikTok: How Congress Can Safeguard American Data Privacy and Protect Children from Online Harm.'
May 17, 2023	TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew testified before Congress for five hours.
Mar 13, 2024	The House passed a 'TikTok bill' requiring ByteDance to divest control of TikTok or face removal from app stores.
Apr 24, 2024	President Biden signed the 'Sell or Ban' Act, setting a final deadline in Jan 2025.
Dec 6, 2024	The U.S. Court of Appeals upheld Biden's TikTok legislation; the ban would take effect on Jan 19, 2025, prohibiting downloads and use of TikTok in the U.S.
Sep 14–15, 2025	China and the U.S. reached a basic framework consensus on TikTok during the Madrid trade talks.

Table A2 | Major Events in China–US Competition over Twitter (as of April 2025)

Date	Event
2009	Twitter was regulated and blocked in mainland China.
Late 2010	Western countries began using Twitter to promote 'color revolutions' and ideological penetration.
Jul 2019	During the Hong Kong protests, Chinese 'Diba' netizens organized campaigns on Twitter to voice their stance.
Aug 2019	Twitter suspended a large number of mainland Chinese accounts and removed related posts during the Hong Kong unrest.
Mar 2020	Following the COVID-19 outbreak, Chinese and U.S. diplomats engaged in sharp discourse confrontations on Twitter.
Aug 2020	Twitter began labeling Chinese state-affiliated accounts.
Aug 2022	Twitter removed accounts deemed to promote U.S. influence.
Feb 2023	The 'wandering balloon' incident triggered intense China–U.S. public opinion clashes.
Aug 2024	U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns posted statements on X (Twitter's current name) about China, the South China Sea, and sanctions against Russia.
Apr 2025	U.S. Vice President Vance made controversial remarks about China, to which Chinese officials responded through X platform channels.