

Strategic Narratives in the Political-Economic Game: The Sino-U.S. Discursive Battle in TikTok Banning Incident

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Abstract. Through comparative analysis of Chinese and U.S. official media coverage regarding the "TikTok ban" incident, this study deciphers narrative divergences between the two nations on technological sovereignty and national security. Combining Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling with discourse analysis, the research reveals that Chinese media constructs a collectivist narrative framework centered on "multilateral cooperation" and "anti-hegemony," emphasizing technological sovereignty and regulatory preservation. In contrast, U.S. media employs metaphors like "technological threat" and "freedom crisis" to shape individualized confrontation logic, amplifying national security risks. Policy adjustments and economic dynamics drive narrative evolution from technological disputes to geopolitical contests, highlighting the complexity of international rule-making in the digital era. This study provides strategic insights for media narratives in international political discourse and exposes the profound impact of Sino-US ideological conflicts on global communication.

Keywords: Sino-US relations, TikTok ban, strategic narratives, market regulations, technological sovereignty

1. Introduction

As the world's largest short-video social platform by user base, TikTok has emerged as a focal point in Sino-US technological competition since 2019. The U.S. government, citing "data security threats" and "ideological infiltration," has implemented successive administrative bans and legislative measures against TikTok. Meanwhile, Chinese state media has framed the TikTok ban within an "anti-hegemony" and "protection of corporate rights" narrative, elevating it to a symbolic case of technological sovereignty contention. This confrontation intensified during the Biden-Trump transition period, where policy stances shifted from comprehensive bans to interest-exchange negotiations, revealing deep-seated contradictions in global rule restructuring. Within this context, Sino-US media's strategic narratives function not merely as policy mouthpieces but as crucial instruments for shaping international opinion and competing for discourse power. This study selects Chinese state media (People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, China Media Group) and U.S. mainstream media (The New York Times, Associated Press, CNN) to systematically investigate narrative strategies of both sides under the divergent international engagement approaches and national interest claims.

Existing scholarship predominantly focuses on TikTok governance policies or single-nation media analysis, lacking cross-cultural comparative research and sufficient exploration of structural differences in Sino-US narrative frameworks. Through quantitative topic modeling and textual analysis, this research deciphers how Chinese and Western mainstream media construct differentiated narratives around the TikTok ban incident, providing empirical support for understanding "narrative gaming" in international communication, as well as practical insights into international interactions between multinational corporations and the media in the context of economic and technological issues.

2. Literature review

The concept of "strategic narrative" refers to a discursive tool in international politics that systematically constructs narratives to influence audience perceptions and contest legitimacy. It is not merely rhetorical ornamentation for policy legitimization but a core medium for shaping power relations[1]. State actors utilize historical memory, identity, and strategic interests to form narrative templates, projecting their worldviews and reconstructing value judgment criteria for others[2].

The theoretical development of strategic narratives is rooted in interdisciplinary dialogues. In the field of narratology, the "narrative paradigm" reveals that humans make decisions based on the "coherence" and "credibility" of stories rather than pure logic, providing a cognitive foundation for analyzing emotional mobilization in diplomatic discourse[3]. Communication studies frame strategic narratives as a process of "meaning production," emphasizing the role of media in narrative construction. Critical discourse analysis is widely employed to deconstruct metaphors and power dynamics within narratives, while framing theory elucidates how media reinforces ideological opposition through selective thematization[4]. In the field of management, strategic management treats narratives as tools for corporations to navigate geopolitical risks. Narratives must integrate with the "technology-politics-discourse" triadic interaction model to address tensions between globalization and techno-nationalism[5]. This study focuses on the divergent narratives in Chinese and U.S. mainstream media coverage of TikTok, aiming to deconstruct the mechanisms of Sino-U.S. narrative competition.

In terms of methodology, academia has established multidimensional analytical approaches. Comparative case studies dissecting the narrative frameworks of China's "Belt and Road Initiative" and the U.S. "Indo-Pacific Strategy" reveal structural differences: China emphasizes historical continuity through "common development," whereas the U.S. prioritizes the universal applicability of "freedom of navigation" [2]. Critical discourse analysis decodes the U.S. "domino theory" narrative during the Cold War, demonstrating how the "red threat" metaphor strengthened alliance cohesion through fear rhetoric[6]. Grimmer and Stewart applied machine learning to model themes in UN speech texts, identifying cyclical power shifts in the weighting of "development" versus "security" narratives, thereby quantifying their communicative efficacy and audience reception[1]. Synthesizing prior research, this study adopts a mixed methodology: the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model identifies thematic distributions in Sino-U.S. media coverage of TikTok, quantifying significant differences in narrative frameworks, while textual analysis of specific reports reveals the interaction between ideology and power, achieving the organic unity of the macro-structure and the micro-texts.

Current scholarship reflects three consensuses: strategic narratives operate through a tripartite mechanism of "coercion-communication-identification"; narrative vitality relies on "historical memory" and "emotional resonance"; and narrative competition exhibits "self-reinforcement" and "lock-in effects." However, existing studies predominantly focus on single cultural contexts, offering

limited explanations for cross-national narrative framework differences and insufficient tracking of narrative evolution, which fails to focus on how the key events trigger the re-adjustment of the narrative frames of the two sides. Therefore, this study synthesizes Chinese and American media reports on the topic of "TikTok ban", introduces a timeline to analyze the interaction of media narratives with corporate responses and policy shifts, compares the differences in narrative frames of national actors, and tries to add how media narratives dynamically evolve in response to key event nodes.

3. Research design

3.1. Data acquisition and manipulation

Previous studies have shown that traditional news topic analysis mostly relies on content analysis methods, with core steps such as data collection and coding classification all requiring manual completion, which is highly subjective and efficiency-limited[7]. Based on this, this study innovatively adopts the LDA topic modeling method, directly starting from the semantic structure of the original text, achieving topic clustering through Gibbs sampling technology, and optimizing the number of topics with the perplexity index, ultimately forming a dual probability distribution representation of document-topic and topic-word[8]. This method breaks through the limitations of traditional quantitative analysis, effectively identifying implicit topic associations in the corpus, and provides an extensible technical path for the in-depth mining of massive text data. The specific operation steps are as follows:

The first stage is data collection. The Chinese mainstream media selected for this study include People's Daily Online, Xinhua News Agency, and China Media Group. The Western mainstream media include The New York Times, Associated Press, and CNN. Using a crawler tool with "TikTok" as the keyword, relevant news reports from the official websites of these mainstream media were obtained. After eliminating missing and duplicate sample data, a total of 2,476 Chinese news reports and 14,884 Western news reports were obtained, respectively establishing text databases of TikTok-related reports from Chinese and Western mainstream media.

The second phase involves data preprocessing. A multi - tiered cleaning strategy is employed. Initially, advertisements, navigation bars, and repetitive texts are eliminated, while policy - relevant paragraphs with intact semantics are retained. Subsequently, the word - segmentation performance is enhanced through the utilization of a custom stop - word list (e.g., "expand", "in") and a domain - specific dictionary (e.g., "TikTok", "ban"). For Chinese texts, the Jieba word - segmentation tool is utilized to load the domain dictionary. For English texts, morphological restoration and stop - word removal are carried out via the NLTK library. Eventually, interfering words are removed to guarantee that the analysis is centered on the core semantics.

The third stage involves theme identification and Extraction. The LDA model was applied to mine latent themes from preprocessed texts. The optimal number of topics was determined by evaluating the perplexity of models with different topic quantities. High-frequency word lists for each topic were extracted, followed by manual filtering and categorization through human review, ultimately forming thematic classifications. Theme evolution analysis was subsequently conducted from the perspective of issue domains.

3.2. Research question design

This study treats individual news articles as analytical units, focusing on discursive competition between Chinese and U.S. mainstream media regarding TikTok. It addresses three core questions:

First, how do Chinese and American media construct differentiated narrative frameworks through thematic distribution and semantic associations? Specifically, do Chinese media emphasize themes like "technological sovereignty" and "anti-hegemony" to reinforce collectivist narratives, while American media focus on core themes such as "national security" and "data surveillance," employing metaphors to shape discourses of technological threat?

Second, how do these discursive practices reflect national interests and economic demands? Do Chinese media enhance legitimacy by citing authoritative sources like government statements and policy white papers, whereas American media rely on indirect sources such as anonymous officials and think tank reports to construct "othering" narratives?

Third, how do media narratives dynamically evolve alongside Sino-American policy and economic interactions? This investigation particularly examines whether key event nodes trigger significant shifts in thematic prominence across both narrative systems.

4. LDA topic modeling and analysis

Perplexity metrics were used to determine optimal topic clusters. Based on scale characteristics and research objectives, 10 latent topics were selected for both Chinese and English news corpora. The Latent Dirichlet Allocation model in the scikit-learn library was trained on preprocessed texts, with lower perplexity indicating higher likelihood of texts belonging to specific latent topics and improved clustering efficacy. Topic modeling of Sino-U.S. TikTok news coverage revealed core themes in the corpora, with each topic represented by its top 10 high-probability keywords. The thematic modeling results for Chinese and American mainstream media are as follows.

4.1. Theme modeling for TikTok news in mainstream Chinese media

Topic 1: ban, Supreme Court, law, unconstitutional, ByteDance, removal, service restoration, Department of Justice, bill, effective date

Topic 2: Trump, executive order, grace period, president, sale, national security, China, signing, inauguration, resolution

Topic 3: users, research, usage duration, approval rate, tourism, social media, correlation coefficient, hypothesis, survey, data

Topic 4: Ministry of Commerce, response, legal rights, market economy, business environment, Sino-US cooperation, opposition, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, fairness, damage

Topic 5: Apple, Google, app store, service providers, re-listing, Oracle, internet, agreement, support, cooperation

Topic 6: overseas users, perception, online dissemination, report, social media, cultural influence, international security, research institutions, analysis, data collection

Topic 7: user feedback, content creation, small businesses, creators, influence, protests, supporters, shutdown, reactions, concerns

Topic 8: national security, data privacy, regulation, Chinese parent company, transparency, information security, risks, legislation, review, compliance

Topic 9: ByteDance, parent company, sale, shares, partners, market strategy, investors, adjustment, long-term solutions, global operations

Topic 10: short video, content ecosystem, creator economy, entertainment, cultural export, youth, user-generated content, algorithmic recommendation, platform rules, community

Guided by the 10 thematic domains identified in Chinese news reporting, further analysis of the news corpus reveals these topics can be regrouped into four major categories, reflecting the primary concerns of Chinese mainstream media regarding the TikTok issue: First, Legal and Policy Responses, encompassing Theme 1, Theme 4, and Theme 8. Second, Governmental Actions and National Security, comprising Theme 2, Theme 5, and Theme 9. Third, User and Societal Impact, incorporating Theme 3, Theme 6, and Theme 7. Fourth, Platform Ecosystem and Technological Governance, which includes Theme 10. Specific thematic configurations are detailed in the accompanying table.

Table 1: Topic classification of TikTok news in Chinese mainstream media

Theme Category	Theme Description	Corresponding Keywords
Legal and Policy Responses	U.S. Judicial Sanctions	ban, Supreme Court, law, unconstitutional, ByteDance, removal, service restoration, Department of Justice, bill, effective date
	China's diplomatic Rights Protection	Ministry of Commerce, response, legal rights, market economy, business environment, Sino-US cooperation, opposition, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, fairness, damage
	Response to U.S. Accusations	national security, data privacy, regulation, Chinese parent company, transparency, information security, risks, legislation, review, compliance
Governmental Actions and National Security	Threats of U.S. Unilateral Policies	Trump, executive order, grace period, president, sale, national security, China, signing, inauguration, resolution
	Market Adaptability Strategies	Apple, Google, app store, service providers, re-listing, Oracle, internet, agreement, support, cooperation
	Long-term Strategies for Countering Sanctions	ByteDance, parent company, sale, shares, partners, market strategy, investors, adjustment, long-term solutions, global operations
User and Social Impact	Positive Social Values	users, research, usage duration, approval rate, tourism, social media, correlation coefficient, hypothesis, survey, data
	Cross-cultural Digital Cognitive Security	overseas users, perception, online dissemination, report, social media, cultural influence, international security, research institutions, analysis, data collection
Platform Ecosystem and Technological Governance	User-generated Ecosystem Cultural Creation Ecosystem Governance	user feedback, content creation, small businesses, creators, influence, protests, supporters, shutdown, reactions, concerns short video, content ecosystem, creator economy, entertainment, cultural export, youth, user-generated content, algorithmic recommendation, platform rules, community

4.2. Thematic modeling of TikTok news in mainstream U.S. media

Topic 1: Supreme Court ban constitutional lawsuit injunction legal challenge First Amendment ruling appeals court enforce

Topic 2: Trump executive order administration delay national security deal presidency election campaign authority

Topic 3: restore app store users service relaunch download access outage liability agreement

Topic 4: Romania election meddling content moderation EU lawmakers propaganda influencers platforms investigation misinformation

Topic 5: data security China ByteDance surveillance risk encryption compliance cybersecurity espionage geopolitical

Topic 6: creators content income monetization brands advertising followers engagement revenue small business

Topic 7: Oracle cloud computing servers infrastructure hosting tech giants partnership data centers algorithm API

Topic 8: viral challenge meme controversy ski resort social media trend backlash community ethics censorship

Topic 9: acquisition sovereign wealth fund investors bid valuation shareholders merger negotiation ownership billionaires

Topic 10: AI models Grok DeepSeek ChatGPT Elon Musk algorithm innovation competition training infrastructure

Through topic modeling analysis of 14,884 news articles containing the keyword “TikTok” from three major Western media outlets—the Associated Press, The New York Times, and CNN—the ten most salient themes in the corpus were identified, each characterized by ten keywords. Using these ten themes as a framework, further analysis of news corpora reveals that these themes can be systematically grouped into four overarching categories, reflecting American mainstream media’s primary concerns regarding TikTok-related discourse: First, Legal Litigation and Constitutional Disputes, encompassing Theme 1 and Theme 3. Second, National Security and Geopolitical Risks, comprising Theme 2, Theme 5, and Theme 7. Third, Content Governance and Platform Accountability, incorporating Theme 4, Theme 6, and Theme 8. Fourth, Technological Innovation and Capital Dynamics, which includes Theme 9 and Theme 10. Specific thematic configurations are detailed in the accompanying table.

Table 2: Topic classification of TikTok news in U.S. mainstream media

Theme Category	Theme Description	Corresponding Keywords
Legal Litigation and Constitutional Disputes	Multi-level Judicial Gaming	Supreme Court ban constitutional lawsuit injunction legal challenge First Amendment ruling appeals court enforce
	App Shutdown and Rights-Liability Litigation	restore app store users service relaunch download access outage liability agreement
National Security and Geopolitical Risks	Presidential Elections and Delays in Government decrees	Trump executive order administration delay national security deal presidency election campaign authority
	Cross-border Data Monitoring	data security China ByteDance surveillance risk encryption compliance cybersecurity espionage geopolitical
	Cloud Computing Technology Gaming	Oracle cloud computing servers infrastructure hosting tech giants partnership data centers algorithm API
Content Governance and Platform Accountability	Manipulation of Public Opinion	Romania election meddling content moderation EU lawmakers propaganda influencers platforms investigation misinformation
	Commercial Interest and Content Accountability	creators content income monetization brands advertising followers engagement revenue small business
	Social Controversy over the Platform's Content	viral challenge meme controversy ski resort social media trend backlash community ethics censorship
Technological Innovation and Capital Dynamics	Sovereign Capital and Strategic Acquisition Rivalries	acquisition sovereign wealth fund investors bid valuation shareholders merger negotiation ownership billionaires
	The "Threat" of China's Rising Technology	AI models Grok DeepSeek ChatGPT Elon Musk algorithm innovation competition training infrastructure

5. Framing conflicts and escalation logic in Chinese and American media discourse

The analysis reveals that mainstream media narratives about "TikTok" in China and America share certain commonalities while addressing similar core issues. Through LDA topic modeling, this study identifies four macro-level thematic clusters in both media systems: legal disputes, national security, social impact, and technological governance. However, significant differences emerge in specific thematic distributions and semantic associations. Regarding application scenarios, both reporting systems cover multiple dimensions including policy-making, judicial control, and platform governance, yet demonstrate fundamentally divergent narrative frameworks and value orientations. The specific characteristics manifest as follows.

5.1. Defensive vs. offensive: the distinction of narrative frames

Chinese mainstream media constructs a defensive narrative centered on "technological sovereignty" and "anti-hegemony," employing policy discourse and collectivist value orientation. Thematic analysis shows high-frequency terms like "Ministry of Commerce" and "Sino-American cooperation" frame the TikTok ban as a violation of international rules by U.S. unilateralism, emphasizing China's role as a guardian of international order. The interconnection between "Legal and Policy Responses" (e.g., "unconstitutional," "Ministry of Justice") and "Government Actions and National Security" (e.g., "executive order," "market strategies") elevates commercial disputes to the level of global digital governance system reconstruction, replacing conflictual discourse with

inclusive concepts like "multilateral cooperation" and "fair business environment." Simultaneously, the "Platform Ecology and Technological Governance" theme (e.g., "cultural export," "algorithm recommendation") binds technical features with soft power projection, serving the macro-narrative objective of "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind" [9].

American mainstream media develops an offensive narrative around themes like "national security threat" and "freedom crisis." Through metaphors such as "surveillance" and "geopolitics," TikTok becomes semantically linked to the Chinese government, imbuing technological tools with regime attributes to construct national security threats. The semantic association between "National Security and Geopolitical Risks" (e.g., "surveillance," "geopolitical") and "Technological Innovation and Capital Competition" (e.g., "AI models," "sovereign wealth fund") implies that technological iteration equates to geopolitical power shifts, reframing commercial competition as ideological confrontation. The citation of judicial cases and anonymous sources reinforces fear narratives about "algorithmic infiltration" while avoiding substantive evidence, ultimately serving the logic of maintaining technological hegemony and free market superiority.

5.2. From technical compliance to policy legitimacy: the upgrading of narrative network

5.2.1. Logical differences in subject classification

Thematic classification in Chinese reporting demonstrates policy interconnectivity, exemplified by cross-topic associations between "unconstitutional" in "Legal and Policy Responses" and "Foreign Ministry responses," forming closed-loop arguments through governmental authoritative discourse. In contrast, American themes exhibit judicial instrumentalization tendencies, as seen in "Supreme Court" and "First Amendment" within "Legal Litigation and Constitutional Disputes," amplifying "freedom crisis" through individual cases to obscure geopolitical competition essence.

5.2.2. Adversarial construction of semantic networks

Chinese semantic networks emphasize symbiotic relationships between cooperation and sovereignty. Terms like "Sino-American cooperation" and "technological sovereignty" form a "defense-development" chain within the "Platform Ecology and Technological Governance" theme. Conversely, American keywords like "surveillance" and "espionage" construct narratives around threat and control, implying political permeability of technological tools. Moreover, China's "User and Social Impact" theme (e.g., "cultural influence," "user feedback") integrates individual behaviors into collective value systems, while its American counterpart (e.g., "creators," "content income") emphasizes conflicts between commercial interests and individual rights, reflecting fundamental opposition between collectivism and individual freedom[10].

5.2.3. Metaphorical functional differentiation of keywords

Chinese high-frequency terms demonstrate inclusivity and development orientation, such as "fair business environment" and "multilateral cooperation," using policy terminology to legitimize rule reconstruction. American keywords employ militarized metaphors like "competition" and "espionage," stigmatizing technological issues as "addictive threats" or "covert attacks," amplifying security anxiety through emotional rhetoric. For instance, the association between "geopolitical" and "surveillance" in the "National Security and Geopolitical Risks" theme directly anchors data monitoring within geopolitical competition while avoiding discussions on technological neutrality.

The narrative divergence between Chinese and American media stems from contests over rule-making authority and values: China emphasizes technological sovereignty and multilateral cooperation to reshape global digital governance rules, whereas the U.S. reinforces technological hegemony and unilateralism under the guise of "national security threats." Comparative analysis of thematic associations and semantic networks reveals that technological and commercial issues have become vehicles for ideological confrontation, while micro-narrative structures further expose the zero-sum dilemma in "discourse power competition" within international communication.

6. National interest and ideology: narrative discourse construction under market rules

The narrative divergence between China and the United States essentially manifests the concrete contestation of national interests and ideologies. Both parties construct diametrically opposed discourse systems through source selection, metaphorical rhetoric, and framing strategies, embedding technological disputes into the framework of global market rule restructuring via discursive tactics[11]. This process simultaneously pursues economic interests and seeks to consolidate their respective rule-making authority in the digital economy era.

6.1. Discourse binding strategies for policy interventions and market rules

The source citation patterns in Chinese and American media directly serve their respective national interests and objectives of market rule restructuring. Chinese reporting heavily relies on authoritative sources, such as Xinhua News Agency's frequent citations of the Data Security Law and Ministry of Commerce statements. By anchoring events to political terminology like "fairness in international economic and trade rules" and "global digital governance rules," it criticizes the U.S. for "abusing national security concepts" to justify unreasonable suppression, essentially politicizing market transactions. This strategy centers on policy documents and think tank perspectives, forming a closed-loop of institutional discourse argumentation. Individual cases of forced corporate sales are elevated to the level of global market order, simultaneously safeguarding Chinese enterprises' overseas interests and legitimizing developing countries' claims to digital economy rule-making authority.

In contrast, U.S. media predominantly employs anonymous sources and judicial cases to construct narratives. The article *Is TikTok a National Security Risk* utilizes phrases like "intelligence officials revealed" 12 times without providing substantive evidence. This "authoritative anonymization" tactic evades fact-checking while amplifying audience fears of "technological infiltration" through information asymmetry. The individual case of Montana users suing over the ban is framed as a "First Amendment crisis," whereas the court ruling dismissing the ban was deliberately omitted. Such discursive choices reduce complex geopolitical competition to a moral narrative of "freedom versus autocracy."

6.2. Economic cooperation vs. crisis defense: value-driven framing oppositions

The ideological conflict between collectivism and individual freedom shapes the fundamental opposition in Sino-U.S. narratives. Chinese media emphasizes technology, development, and responsibility, framing the TikTok incident within the "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind" paradigm. Platforms like China Media Group reconstruct TikTok's technical features as "digital public goods," citing cross-border e-commerce cases to demonstrate how "algorithms facilitate civilizational exchange," while leveraging Belt and Road cooperation cases to highlight its

global developmental utility[12]. This narrative downplays commercial competition, emphasizing collective defense of technological sovereignty and multilateral rule-building.

U.S. media constructs technological threat imaginaries through individual victim metaphors and freedom crisis rhetoric. CNN extensively cites House representatives to stigmatize TikTok's algorithm as "digital fentanyl," implying mental manipulation of adolescents. The Associated Press links California's ban to creator rights violations while obfuscating technical details of national security reviews. Such framing repackages geopolitical strategic competition as democratic life preservation, reinforcing the legitimacy of technological hegemony through freedom crisis discourse.

China positions TikTok as a symbol of technological autonomy and global cooperation via policy texts, multilateral collaboration, and collectivist rhetoric. The U.S. stigmatizes it as a vehicle of digital authoritarianism through anonymous sources, judicial cases, and freedom crisis narratives[13]. The discursive clashes over policies and declarations reveal the zero-sum dilemma in international rule-making, with media narratives naturally becoming battlegrounds for ideological confrontation.

7. Political gaming and economic intervention: the mechanism of narrative evolution in the TikTok banning incident

The policy game and media coverage surrounding the TikTok ban exhibit distinct phased characteristics, with narrative frameworks continuously adapting to policy shifts. This reveals how political agendas and economic interests jointly shape narrative construction. From policy testing to legislative game and technological sovereignty contests, bilateral narratives persistently revolve around "market rule restructuring" and "economic interest redistribution"[14], ultimately evolving into a complex of geopolitical-economic games.

7.1. Staged resonance of policy agendas with economic interests

Up to this point (May 26th, 2025), the narrative evolution of the TikTok ban incident can be divided into three core stages, each demonstrating deep intertwinement of policy-driven actions and economic rationales.

February 2023 – May 2023 exhibited policy initiation and market rule exploration. The Biden administration invoked "data security" to ban TikTok on federal devices via executive order. Chinese media criticized this as "abusing national security concepts to undermine fair market competition," citing the General Agreement on Trade in Services to argue that U.S. claims of "due process" and "domestic law" could not conceal its violations. U.S. media amplified narratives of "TikTok's algorithm threatening local small medium enterprises' competitiveness" and "data leakage risks," quoting anonymous officials alleging "TikTok could serve as a Chinese surveillance tool," yet provided no substantive evidence. This phase intertwined policy experimentation with economic anxiety, with media narratives constructing an initial oppositional framework around "technological threats" and "anti-hegemony."

March 2024 – December 2024 clearly demonstrates the intensification legislative escalation and capital games. The U.S. House passed the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act, mandating ByteDance's divestment of TikTok's U.S. operations. Chinese state media condemned this as "digital colonialism," asserting that "the U.S. suppresses competitive Chinese tech firms under the pretext of 'potential security threats.'" China Media Group criticized U.S. "judicial instrumentalization," accusing it of "suppression in the name of freedom," while

exposing the lack of evidence for alleged threats. U.S. media fixated on "algorithmic infiltration" and "data surveillance," with The New York Times quoting lawmakers stating the Act was "carefully crafted to prevent foreign adversaries from controlling TikTok to threaten national interests." CNN emphasized "national security review legitimacy," framing court support for government oversight as "necessary for safeguarding national interests," while avoiding discussions on alternative platforms' free speech implications. This stage saw legislative processes amplifying capital interests, recasting cross-border mergers as battles for technological sovereignty and legitimacy.

January 2025 – April 2025 descended into prolonged stalemate and rule-reconfiguration clashes. On January 17, Trump announced an extended ban grace period, pledging "negotiated resolutions." The Biden administration shifted responsibility to Trump, which Chinese media ridiculed as "political buck-passing." On April 4, Trump extended negotiations by 75 days, but ByteDance declared "no agreement reached," insisting compliance with Chinese laws—particularly algorithm export approvals—directly countering Trump's "50% equity transfer" proposal and underscoring China's firm stance on core technological sovereignty. The Wall Street Journal analyzed that "Trump's extensions balance voter pressure and capital interests," citing campaign data showing "youth approval ratings increased by over 10%." This phase highlighted policy contradictions through administrative interventions, with media shifting focus from technological threats to political calculus, further complicating narrative frameworks. Technological disputes became symbolic, centering narratives on market rule competition.

Current Phase (as of May 2025) reflects policy deadlock, with the TikTok incident transforming into a Sino-U.S. geopolitical battlefield. The impasse stems from irreconcilable structural contradictions: the U.S. insists on forced divestment to eliminate "national security risks," while China resolutely opposes this based on legal and technological sovereignty. U.S. media frames Trump's executive orders as a blend of "art of the deal" and "protracted attrition," anchoring technological issues within broader U.S.-China trade war contexts, downplaying legal-technical constraints to emphasize "theatricalization of strategic games"[15]. Chinese state media directly pointed out the self-contradictory nature of the US actions: "While loudly advocating 'free markets', it abuses long-arm jurisdiction; while flaunting 'the spirit of the rule of law', it tramples on the principle of contract - this double standard exposes the hypocrisy of the US rule system." At this stage, media narratives have completely shifted to geopolitics, with technical disputes becoming the vehicle for ideological confrontation.

7.2. Reconfiguring economic rules in the context of struggle for technological sovereignty

The essence of the game in the TikTok banning incident is a contest for dominance of the rules of the digital economy market. Through narratives of technological standards and capital controls, China and the U.S. bind platform attributes to economic value, driving global market rule restructuring. U.S. legislative actions to force TikTok's divestment, ostensibly for "national security," primarily serve domestic tech giants' capital interests. Post-PAFACA, Meta's Instagram Reels saw over 27% user growth, illustrating policy intervention's direct market impact. Conversely, China leverages Belt and Road digital cooperation cases to craft "technology-sharing" globalization narratives. People's Daily reported that "TikTok has driven 3 million small and medium-sized businesses in Southeast Asia to engage in cross-border sales", binding the platform's technical capabilities with the process of regional economic integration and vying for governance rights in the digital economy. Sino-U.S. media narratives anchor technological disputes within market rule reconfiguration, competing for immediate economic gains while shaping digital-era global governance paradigms[16]. The TikTok banning incident reveals that the geopoliticalization of

technological tools is essentially a zero-sum game over economic interests and rule-making power, and media narratives have become the legitimacy supply mechanism for this game.

This evolution reflects digital-era struggles for rule-making authority. As conflicts escalate, media narratives abandon technical-commercial discourse for higher-order policy confrontations. When technology and commerce become arenas for power rebalancing, each policy clash amplifies "multilateralism vs. unilateralism" oppositions, exposing ideological and interest-based tensions in global realignment. Media narratives dynamically adapt to state agendas, becoming symbolic tools for power reproduction. Their evolutionary logic provides a key perspective for understanding digital geopolitics and the economy.

8. Concluding remarks

This study, through comparative analysis of Sino-U.S. state media coverage of the TikTok ban, reveals narrative divergences rooted in technological sovereignty and market rule contests—extensions of strategic games and national interest clashes. Chinese media constructs collectivist frameworks around "multilateral cooperation" and "anti-hegemony," while U.S. media reinforces individualized antagonism via "technological threats" and "freedom crises." Policy interactions drive narrative evolution, with media legitimization mechanisms serving as pivotal battlegrounds for political-economic games.

Future research should expand media samples, incorporate more cross-national or social media cases to validate narrative frameworks' universality, and trace long-term interactions between technology and globalization rules to inform multinational compliance strategies. Notably, the Sino-U.S. TikTok dispute remains unresolved, warranting continued tracking. Additionally, causal relationships between new legislation, agreements, and media narratives require deeper exploration. These gaps indicate future research directions and offer fresh perspectives for understanding international communication competition in the digital age.

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