

Chinese “Wolf Warrior” Diplomacy And Foreign Public Opinion

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Abstract : Through public diplomacy on social media, governments have attempted to influence foreign public opinion. What is the impact of digital public diplomacy? Public diplomacy research often relies on content analysis to study the strategies employed by communicators but has rarely examined its actual impact on the audience. In addition, we do not know if giving a communicator an explicit label, as Twitter does with “government account”, would change the effects of the messages. Can the government label reduce the percussiveness of public diplomacy messages by sending a warning signal? Using a 2 × 2 survey experiment, the present paper contributes to the study of public diplomacy by randomly exposing American participants to four types of tweets from Chinese diplomats. The stimulus materials vary in terms of the tweets’ content (“positive-china” vs. “negative-US) and Twitter government labels (with vs. without the labels). I found that positive tweets about China have a significant positive effect on Americans’ attitudes toward China, whereas negative tweets about the US have little effect on their opinions. Furthermore, positive-China tweets are effective only on China-related issues, which indicates that Chinese diplomats’ tweets have limited effects on shaping a foreign audience’s attitudes toward their own country. Lastly, I find that labels largely have no impact on a diplomatic tweet’s effect. These results contribute to our understanding of the effects of public diplomacy in the digital age.

Keywords : public diplomacy, china, foreign public opinion, twitter

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