EXPLORATION OF THE INTERACTION MECHANISM BETWEEN THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT AND GENERAL PUBLIC OVER SOCIAL MEDIA, REGARDING CHINA'S SELF-IMAGE AND THE SINO-US RELATIONSHIP

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This research is aimed at achieving an initial understanding of the mechanism of interaction between the Chinese public and Chinese government/CCP, on the important issues of China's self-image and on Sino-US relationship. The project attempts to:
- Understand China's government social media initiative and their effects on public opinions on China's self-image (CSI) and on Sino-US relationship (SUSR), including agenda setting and opinion leading;
- Understand the Chinese public's social media reactions to and impacts on the Chinese government's rhetoric and policy intention on the above issues;
- Understand the impacts of social media infrastructure, regional economic development level, user education level, and other factors that could moderate or mediate the above interactions.

The study will look into the matter from the frameworks of the following theories:
Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974), and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Chinese government's (including the government departments themselves, government-controlled media, and extensive "satellite/peripheral entities" which will be studied in this research) leveraging factors/tools related to the above theories will be observed and analyzed, with actions/methods/mechanisms such as:

1. selecting and emphasizing certain topics, issues, and events while ignoring or downplaying others;
2. conducting agenda setting and framing in the age of social media employing not only the social media accounts of government departments/branches but also **many social media accounts under government control or heavy government influence**;
3. Leveraging gain-frame and loss-frame messages;
4. Establishing and enforcing to "hardening" social identity of the intended audience;
   o Promoting/enhancing/strengthening in-group favoritism;
   o Amplifying/strengthening/hardening intergroup differentiation;
5. Leveraging social comparison to achieve the above "4".

Attempts will be made to develop measurements of related constructs, which can help future research in this very important arena. Tools/methods such as linguistic analysis and sentiment analysis will be employed to conduct the analysis on the effect of the above government initiative and actions.

It is anticipated that the proposed study will help to advance the understanding of not only the important issue of Chinese government's influence on the Chinese public's self-image (the people of Chinese and the country of China) and the Sino-US relationship, but also hopefully the furthering of the related theoretical areas of agenda setting, framing theory, and social identity.

References are available from the author upon request.