

“Cry ab it”: An examination of China’s use of YouTube influencers and commenters in nation branding efforts around the 2022 Winter Olympics

Abstract

This study examines the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) nation branding efforts via YouTube around the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. We identified eight channels with alleged affiliations to the PRC and collected 27 videos along with 21,958 corresponding comments. Drawing from extant research, we identify the foci of nation branding antecedents and strategies used by YouTube creators to promote the PRC. Furthermore, we examine behavioral characteristics of commenters across videos to differentiate between account types and evaluate engagement and semantic utilization differences between account types. Results from the analysis of YouTube videos identified two broad functions of nation branding, served by six categories of strategies. Using various behavioral characteristics of commenter data, we differentiate between account types (“potentially state-sponsored accounts” and “likely average users”) to evaluate differences in engagement rates and semantic utilization between accounts. Theoretical and practical implications are addressed.

Olympic skier Eileen Gu, a United States citizen born and raised in San Francisco, garnered considerable media coverage for her decision to compete for her mother's native country of China during the 2022 Winter Olympics. In spite of China's ban on dual citizenship, there is no U.S. government documentation of Gu renouncing her American citizenship in order to meet the International Olympic Committee's requirement of holding citizenship with the country for which she competes (Peng, 2022). Gu's decision brought criticism from American supporters; one of whom inquired on her TikTok profile why she chose to represent China. Gu's response was direct: "Cry ab it." Eileen Gu's decision to compete for China as a U.S. citizen not only highlighted a widening rift between the two countries but also provided an opportunity for the People's Republic of China (PRC) to engage in nation branding by capitalizing on a positive story leading up to the 2022 Winter Olympic games in Beijing.

Public relations scholarship is well suited to grapple with the various considerations associated with nation branding via sports. Prior research has already sought to identify how public relations theory and practice have been applied to better understand how countries promote their images across an array of relevant subject areas including public diplomacy (Rasmussen & Merckelsen, 2012), soft power (Pamment, 2014), and social media (Boatwright & Pyle, 2023; Li & Feng, 2021). Despite increased scholarly attention on the subject, the subfield largely remains in its infancy. The current study seeks to extend the field's understanding of nation branding from a public relations framework by exploring a relatively new concept - *sportswashing* - on a relatively understudied social media platform - YouTube - using China's nation branding effort during the 2022 Winter Olympics as a backdrop.

In particular, this study will examine videos about the Olympics posted by influential YouTube channels allegedly affiliated with the Chinese government (Seitz et al., 2022; Meaker,

2022; Mozur et al., 2021). The use of YouTube influencers, in particular, offers opportunities to consider the PRC's nation branding efforts for three reasons. First, most research on strategic efforts to manipulate discourse on social media revolves around Twitter and Facebook. Yet, YouTube is the second largest social media platform, with nearly 2.5 billion active users – dwarfing Twitter's 619 million users (Dixon, 2024). YouTube is not only more ubiquitous but its affordances and video-based content provide opportunities for richer nonverbals and strategic presentation of materials through editing and production – enhancing its ability to cultivate communities among users and connection with content creators (Cranmer et al., 2023). Second, targeting and using influencers in branding efforts is a means of leveraging their audiences and accessing the benefits of a third party to help construct a desirable brand or image (Benoit, 2015). These benefits may be especially beneficial when those influencers share cultural or demographic features with foreign audiences who are the target of nation branding. Finally, the antecedents that inspire national branding efforts and the strategies employed in addressing those antecedents offer insight into the national priorities of the PRC and means of differentiating and evaluating branding efforts.

The purpose of this study is to investigate an alleged PRC-coordinated YouTube influencer campaign around the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics from a nation branding perspective. As part of this effort, the national branding antecedents and strategies employed by the identified influencers within their YouTube content will be considered and reveal which issues and communicative approaches to national branding are germane to the context of international sporting events. Additionally, the employment of a coordinated effort among users in the comment sections of these videos will be investigated using social network analysis to identify the different account types within the broader network of users and subsequently

considered in explaining differences among users' comments. The combined approach of this manuscript illustrates the complex structure of the PRC's nation branding efforts on YouTube around the 2022 Winter Olympics via the involvement of state-sponsored influencers and international audiences.

Review of Literature

Nation Branding and Sportwashing

The concept of nation branding has garnered considerable scholarly attention over the last two decades and spans multiple academic disciplines including marketing, international relations, political science, and human geography. Simon Anholt, a British independent policy advisor, is credited with coining the term “nation branding” which, as he explained in a 2005 issue of *The New York Times Magazine*, encourages countries to “consider their reputations carefully - because...in the interconnected world, that's what statecraft is all about” (Risen, 2005, para.3). Szondi (2010) extended the concept of nation branding to public relations by proposing that relationship building should be the central concept and ultimate goal of nation branding instead of image creation and management. Indeed, the concept of nation branding is central to the origins of public relations with Edward Bernays' work for the Lithuanian National Council to generate support for Lithuania in and receive official recognition from the United States (Szondi, 2008).

Broadly, nation branding involves the creation of a country's identity and reputation by using people, symbols, slogans, and other communicative mechanisms to create a distinctive personality (Barr, 2012). Much of the existing literature exploring intersections of nation branding and public relations has taken a functionalist approach, focusing on the external image that countries project to the world (Miño, 2023). Indeed, the field of public relations is

particularly well suited to explore how various nations enact international branding efforts. This is especially true with the advent of Web 2.0 and its consequent effects on globalization, particularly within the context of social and digital media. Manor and Segev (2015) coined the term “selfie diplomacy” to describe a nation’s attempt to “draw its own self-portrait” (p. 89) through digital channels that result in more global visibility. Boatwright and Pyle (2023), for example, examined how Ukraine’s X (formerly Twitter) account enacted digital public diplomacy to brand itself throughout the beginning of the war with Russia.

Despite growing bodies of scholarship exploring nation branding, there has been a general lack of consensus around what it actually entails. Rojas-Méndez and Khoshnevis (2022) conducted a systematic literature review of studies related to nation and country branding from multiple academic disciplines and developed an integrated model of nation branding which contends that nation branding is influenced by six main antecedents: (1) business and marketing concepts (e.g., perceived quality of products, market diversification, etc.), (2) political concepts, (e.g., foreign and domestic policy, political stability), (3) social and cultural concepts (e.g., customs, cultural diversity, ethnic networks, stereotypes), (4) economic and labor concepts (e.g., economic stability, infrastructure, working conditions), (5) international concepts (e.g., globalization and global competition, global awareness), and (6) environmental concepts (e.g., natural characteristics, geography, regions). They also provided an expanded definition of nation branding which aligns with functionalist approaches used in previous public relations scholarship:

Nation branding is a systematic strategic process of involving public and private sectors to design a branding strategy for a nation, communicate the nation’s core values and national identity, and apply branding strategies and tactics to promote a nation’s image, improve the country’s reputation among different audiences, differentiate a nation from other nations, and reach economic, social, political, business, and international competitiveness. (p. 114)

This definition offers a valuable framework for examining nation branding efforts by countries across various subjects. One area that has recently garnered considerable interest within the context of nation branding is sports. Li and Feng (2021), for example, investigated stakeholder engagement on social media in The PRC's nation branding efforts by examining interactions and narratives generated by pro-government stakeholders and citizens surrounding the 2018 FIFA Men's World Cup and the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. Their findings, in part, supported the view that state actors often exploit soccer for ideological goals and propaganda aims (Spaaj et al., 2018).

This strategy represents an emergent subcategory of nation branding commonly referred to in popular press as *sportswashing*. Skey (2023) offered a comprehensive overview of the recent evolution of the term. He describes sportswashing as a neologism that, while it has gained momentum as a term in the press, has received relatively little attention in academic scholarship. Prior to 1989, there were 108 published studies that centered around sport and propaganda or diplomacy; however, since the early 1990s, thousands of journal articles with the keywords of sport and propaganda (4,698) and sport and diplomacy (3,144) have been published (Skey, 2023). A cursory search of "sportswashing" AND "nation branding" on Google Scholar, however, only yields 134 results at the time of this writing - all of which were published *since* 2020.

Nevertheless, meaningful strides have been made to position sportswashing within the context of nation branding, soft power, and public diplomacy. Boykoff (2022) defined sportswashing as "a phenomenon whereby political leaders use sports to appear important or legitimate on the world stage while stoking nationalism and deflecting attention away from chronic social problems and human-rights woes on the home front" (p. 324). Operating under

this definition, some contemporary examples of sportswashing include Russia and Qatar's hosting of the FIFA World Cup in 2018 and 2022, respectively, Saudi Arabia's recent push to attract high-profile athletes to participate in Saudi-backed sports leagues and competitions (e.g., LIV Tour), and China hosting the 2022 Winter Olympics. The latter serves as the impetus for this study and will be outlined in greater detail in the subsequent section.

Sportswashing is not a new phenomenon and can be traced back to Nazi Germany hosting the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin or the 1978 World Cup in Argentina where the military had seized power two years prior and was engaged in systematic human rights abuses (Frommer, 2023). Drawing from these examples, among others, Boykoff (2022) argued that while there is no one-size-fits-all model to sportswashing, it is primarily predicated on two central factors: the political context of the mega-event host (i.e., authoritarian or democratic) and the intended audience (i.e., international or domestic). The PRC's sportswashing effort via the 2022 Winter Olympics and YouTube is emblematic of an authoritarian host using sport to address a global audience, as the Chinese populace does not have access to the social media platform.

Sportswashing in the PRC

Sport is a central component of the PRC's nation branding efforts, as sports bolster its reputation and further its international goals with foreign audiences. Critics note that the PRC's sporting successes are used to obscure its oppressive treatment of laborers in its manufacturing industries, destructive environmental impact (e.g., leading the world in greenhouse gas emissions, marine debris and pollution, and deforestation) (US Department of State, 2021), and poor human rights record (e.g., the genocide of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang province or erasure of LGBT individuals from public life) (Amnesty International, 2021). Sports are employed and leveraged toward the PRC's nation branding in three distinct ways: (a) borrowing legitimacy

from sporting successes, (b) pressuring sporting entities to validate its policies and systems, and (c) controlling and strategically using the discourse around sports.

Much like other authoritarian regimes of the 20th century (e.g., the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic; Dennis & Grix, 2012), the PRC heavily invests in and relies upon international sporting events for legitimacy (Cha & Lim, 2019; deLisle, 2020). The underlying rationale for these efforts is that through successful athletic performance and fulfilling hosting duties efficiently, legitimacy among the international community is achievable. The Chinese sports system – *Juguo tizhi* – invests immeasurable resources to identify and train athletes, with the goal of validating the Chinese systems through victories in elite athletic competitions (Wei et al., 2010). The PRC also values the hosting of sporting mega-events (Chen, 2012), including the 2022 Winter Olympics. It also hosted the 2008 Summer Olympics at which it fostered an image of a rising superpower on the global stage through awe-inspiring spectacles (e.g., the bronze Fou drum performance at the opening ceremony) and feats of engineering that defied the expectations of experts (Berkowitz et al., 2007; Chen, 2012; Ren, 2008). The attendance of other nations at these events aids such constructions as endorsements of or acquiescence toward a host government and its policies; this logic stems from politically fueled boycotts throughout the 20th century (e.g., 1980 & 1984 Olympic Games). Such understandings informed the United States' diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics – largely a symbolic gesture (Mather, 2022).

Unlike the authoritarian regimes of the 20th century, however, the PRC leverages the world's third-largest consumer market to influence public rhetoric, silence criticism, and project a positive image through its relationships with Western sporting and entertainment entities (Cha & Lim, 2019; O'Connell, 2022). In principle, access to the Chinese populace and the economic

benefits that stem from their viewership and consumption are restricted to entities approved by the government. Notably, the PRC uses basketball (i.e., China's most popular sport; Huang, 2013) and the credibility assigned to the National Basketball Association (NBA) and its stars. For example, the PRC has exerted extreme pressure on the NBA in response to then Houston Rockets' General Manager, Daryl Morey's support for Hong Kong's autonomy (Perper, 2019) and former professional basketball player, Enes Kanter's criticism of its human rights violations (Deb, 2022). O'Connell (2022) documented how this process unfolds, as rhetoric contradicting the PRC's interests is censored or threatened with censorship, which holds significant economic implications for the revenue generation of sporting leagues. In the Morey affair, the Houston Rockets' games were banned, merchandise removed from Chinese stores, and team sponsorships were canceled. To mitigate economic damages, offenders often reverse or walk back their positions (e.g., Morey subsequently expressed regret for offending Chinese friends) and others distance themselves from the offender (e.g., LeBron James referred to Morey as misinformed or uneducated). These acts inform others' choice of rhetoric and use of self-censorship, as well as establish expectations and norms around discourse that benefit the nation brand and political objectives of the PRC (Cranmer et al., 2024; O'Connell, 2022).

Finally, the PRC uses mass communication and social media discourse around sports to forward its political agenda and brand. Domestically, sporting broadcasts and print media are imbued with state-approved rhetoric and collectivistic frameworks (Bie & Billings, 2015; Billings et al., 2009), which promote blind nationalism and empower the government by equating support for it with patriotism (Koch, 2013). Likewise, the PRC employs a group known as the *50 Cent Party* – nearly two million social media users – to promote its accomplishments and policies to its own citizenry (King et al., 2017). Abroad, social media is a central tool for the

PRC's efforts to shape perceptions of its domestic policies, including the treatment of Uyghur Muslims (Linvill & Warren, 2021), against whom they are accused of committing genocide. Google-owned cybersecurity company, Mandiant, coined this international effort, *Dragonbridge* (Kagubare, 2022), which it credits with maintaining fake social media accounts on every significant Western platform (Mozur et al., 2021; Myers et al., 2022). The strategies utilized by Dragonbridge vary from fostering pro-PRC astroturfing campaigns; flooding conversations with low-quality messages to disable hashtags, dilute authentic voices, or alter search results; to recruiting YouTube influencers to espouse favorable propaganda, including around the 2022 Olympics (Seitz et al., 2022; Meaker, 2022; Mozur et al., 2021).

Previous literature on PRC's use of sport for its statecraft or image-related efforts has highlighted two concerns. First, the PRC prioritizes environmental antecedents, especially around its territorial sovereignty and *One China policy*, which asserts that all territories culturally and historically part of China (e.g., Taiwan and Hong Kong) belong under the oversight of the PRC (Cha & Lim, 2019; Cranmer et al., 2024; O'Connell, 2022). Second, the PRC is mindful of political antecedents around human rights issues, including its treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, the LGBT community, journalists, and dissidents¹. Previous literature and news reports document that the responses to such antecedents can vary. For example, patterns around facework (*mianzi kung-fu*; Huang, 2003) and image construction demonstrate cultural preferences for avoiding threatening topics or redirecting discourse, but also the use of bolstering, evading responsibility (e.g., claiming provocation), or relying on others' statements and third-party appeals (Hu & Pang, 2018; Yu & Wen, 2003). However, on social media Dragonbridge is associated with large volumes of hostile and poorly constructed messages (e.g.,

¹ The PRC issued a 122-page response to a United Nations report outlining human rights abuses in the Xinjiang province as crimes against humanity entitled, [Fight against Terrorism and Extremism in Xinjiang: Truth and Facts](#).

personal insults and threats; Cranmer et al., 2024). The specific context of sports also complicates how the PRC might approach discourse around the Olympics, as the value of hosting sporting events for national branding is in directing and keeping attention on the successes of its athletes, infrastructure, and culture – even if attention on unfavorable antecedents can be anticipated, responding to them may amplify their salience among foreign audiences. With this in mind, the following research questions are forwarded:

RQ1: What are the antecedents to the nation branding efforts within the PRC's YouTube influencer campaign around the 2022 Olympics?

RQ2: What are the nation branding strategies utilized within the PRC's YouTube influencer campaign around the 2022 Olympics?

While the branding effort and strategies contained within the videos themselves will reflect the PRC's broader campaign around the 2022 Winter Olympics, further exploring the comments to those videos might yield valuable insight into the responses from and effects on different audiences. For example, Cranmer et al. (2024) documented Dragonbridge's prominence, coordination, use of image-directed strategies, and effects on likely genuine users within Twitter discourse in the wake of Daryl Morey's Tweet of support for Hong Kong. However, they also note how little academic effort has been devoted to identifying the PRC's social media campaigns, diagnosing its motives, documenting its strategies, and exploring its effects on broader discourse. Consequently, this study advances three complementary research questions that seek to explore (1) the composition of commenters across the PRC's YouTube influencer campaign, (2) the extent to which other users engage with different types of video commenters, and (3) the different topics of conversation commenters emphasize in their responses to the videos:

RQ3: What is the composition of accounts (i.e., potentially state-sponsored or likely average users) within the network of commenters responding to the PRC's YouTube influencer campaign?

RQ4: Do engagement rates (i.e., number of likes, comments) vary between account types (i.e., potentially state-sponsored or likely average users)?

RQ5: What are the differences in semantic utilization of prominent keywords between account types (i.e., potentially state-sponsored or likely average users)?

Method

Sample & Procedure

The data for this study comprised 27 YouTube videos and their corresponding 21,958 comments. The videos were identified through multiple investigative reports that identified Chinese state-sponsored YouTube channels (e.g., Seitz et al., 2022; Meaker, 2022; Mozur et al., 2021). The examined YouTube videos were created and posted by eight different influencers, who – with one exception (Li Jingjing) – were White men from the Five Eyes Nations (e.g., the United States, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Canada). Likewise, most of the influencers lived in China at the time of the filming and several revealed they had spouses who were Chinese citizens within their content. The influencers' channels averaged 283,800 followers during data analysis. YouTube Data API v3 was utilized to extract comments from each video. A script was developed in Python using the `google-api-python-client` library to collect comments and corresponding metadata (i.e., titles, descriptions, likes, and comments) from the respective videos. The examined videos were posted during the planning of the Beijing Olympics 2022 Olympics through the conclusion of the athletic events (9/24/2021 through 2/21/2022). The

videos averaged roughly 7 and a half minutes ($M = 459.96$ seconds), 71,614.81 views, and 4,859.22 likes.

Data Analysis

To identify the antecedents (RQ1) and nation branding strategies (RQ2) of the YouTube influencers, two researchers engaged in qualitative coding of the contents of the 27 videos. The researchers transcribed and verified the transcriptions of the contents of the videos with assistance from the YouTubeTranscriptApi module in Python. Afterward, the two researchers watched the videos and read the transcriptions multiple times to develop an intimate understanding of the data. Given that the antecedents and strategies were rarely utilized independently and not inherently mutually exclusive, a qualitative approach was utilized and videos were treated as the unit of analysis. Analytic memos were utilized throughout the analysis process to note researchers' impressions of potential codes, inform the construction of categories, and strategize the presentation and discussion of findings.

To answer RQ1, researchers utilized *provisional coding*, which is a first-cycle coding technique that starts with a preliminary scheme established from past literature (Saldaña, 2021). Rojas-Mendez and Khoshnevis' (2023) typology of nation branding antecedents was employed in this effort: (a) *business and marketing*, (b) *political*, (c) *social and cultural*, (d) *economic and labor*, (e) *international*, and (f) *environmental concerns*. Researchers found this scheme to appropriately encompass the antecedents both inferred and referenced within data.

To answer RQ2, researchers first identified similarities and differences within the data via *initial coding*, which is inductive and open to all theoretical directions (Saldaña, 2021). This first cycle procedure resulted in 22 initial codes. Since first-cycle coding often concludes with abundant and overlapping codes, the analysis was further refined and organized through second-

cycle procedures. In particular, pattern and process coding were utilized, and employed after analytic memos noted functions and similarities between YouTube influencers' nation branding efforts. *Pattern coding* groups existing codes into categories based on broader similarities and differences, whereas *process coding* denotes specific actions or functions within the data (Saldaña, 2021). These procedures yielded six categories of codes (i.e., attack the source, deny the claim, unify people through sport, minimize acquisitions of foreign athletes, bolster PRC, and appeal to others) that served two functions: (a) addressing undesirable aspects of PRC brand and (b) building a desirable PRC brand.

In order to address RQ3, social network analysis was employed to examine the links between commenters and videos. Specifically, researchers sought to identify out-degree values (i.e., the number of times a commenter posted on any of the videos) for each node (i.e., commenter) within the network. Prior research has shown that social network analysis has proven to be a useful tool for identifying state-sponsored accounts, as they often demonstrate higher out-degree centrality values paired with lower in-degree centrality (Jacobs & Carley, 2023). Additionally, because account creation dates of the various commenters were not available (another potential indicator of inauthentic activity [Strick, 2021]), researchers adopted Cranmer et al.'s (2023) process of using updates (i.e., comment frequency) as a proxy identifier for inauthentic account recognition. Consequently, the researchers labeled accounts with higher out-degree values as "*potentially* state-sponsored accounts." Alternatively, accounts with smaller out-degree values were labeled "*likely* average users." However, it is essential to note that while this process is not perfect (e.g., some average users may simply post more frequently than others), these behavioral patterns warrant further examination.

RQ4 sought to examine the extent to which engagement rates differed across two variables: likes and comments. In order to address this question, YouTube comments from potentially state-sponsored accounts were separated from comments by likely average users. Two independent-sample t-tests were used to evaluate the difference between likes and comments.

Finally, RQ5 sought to identify the semantic differences in keywords used in comments by potentially state-sponsored accounts and likely average users. Keyword frequency analysis was employed using WordStat, a third-party data analytics tool, using case occurrence (i.e., the number of comments that contained a particular word) to determine the top 150 words used in the dataset. Each word was then converted into a binary variable (present, not present) across the comments. A series of Chi-Square tests were then used to determine semantic differences between keywords used by potentially state-sponsored users and likely average users.

Results

Antecedents

Research question one sought to identify the antecedents to YouTube influencers' nation branding efforts. All six of Rojas-Mendez and Khoshnevis' (2023) antecedent concepts were identified within the data. Some of these antecedents were inferred via the topical focus of the YouTube influencers. However, most were identifiable via influencers' direct references to comments made by Western politicians, human rights groups, or Western journalists, especially American reporters who were both female and of Asian heritage (e.g., Melissa Chan, Sui-Lee Wee, and Amy Qin). The most common antecedent was political concepts ($n = 21$), especially concerning domestic policies around the Uyghurs and human rights, Covid-19, green energy, and censorship of citizens or journalists. Social and cultural ($n = 9$) and international concepts ($n = 7$)

were moderately common and focused on athlete accommodations and Chinese hospitality, the valuing of winter sports, and the ethics of Eileen Gu's switching of national team memberships. Taken together, the reliance on others for directing reputational efforts suggests that the PRC is a known commodity among the international community and the nature of the antecedents reveals its brand is associated mainly with negative qualities (e.g., human rights violations, pollution, censorship, and restrictive treatment of citizens). See Table 1 for a full detail regarding the antecedents of YouTube influencers' nation branding.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

Strategies

Research question two sought to identify the strategies employed by YouTube influencers in their nation branding efforts on behalf of the PRC. Coding processes revealed two broad functions served by six categories of strategies. The most common function of the YouTube influencers' nation branding strategies, unsurprisingly, was *building a desirable brand for the PRC*, which was observed in all 27 videos. This function was observed through two categories of strategies. First, 23 videos bolstered or featured an emphasis on the positive qualities of the PRC. The specific qualities often highlighted that China performed its hosting duties well (e.g., has a hospitable culture, built comfortable accommodations, served quality food and drink, and provided an enjoyable experience to Olympic athletes), as well as effectively managed the COVID-19 pandemic through their zero-Covid and the Olympic bubble policies (e.g., testing and quarantining requirements, restricting access to events and the village, and using precautions like personal protective equipment with staff). Other qualities were also mentioned, like its historical uniqueness (e.g., Beijing is the first city to host the Summer and Winter Olympics), technological advancements, rising power (e.g., economic), unity among its

populace (e.g., the beehive), and successful athletic performances. Appeals to others were identified in 15 videos and often supplemented attempts to bolster through validating the qualities of the PRC. For instance, testimonials from athletes, especially Americans, about their enjoyment and appreciation of the amenities in the Olympic Village were commonly utilized, and IOC President, Thomas Bach's praise of the efficiency of the games was also noted. The use of Tweets from random accounts and emphasis on the lack of impact of the U.S. boycott were also utilized to reinforce that the PRC is unified, perseverant, and destined for greatness.

A second function of nation branding strategies focused on *addressing undesirable aspects of the PRC brand*, which was observed in 21 videos. This function was accomplished via four categories of strategies. First and most commonly, influencers attacked the source associating the PRC with undesirable qualities. Attacks often took the form of personal insults (e.g., bozo, lazy, liar, or stupid), disparagement of the West (e.g., points of hypocrisy or failure), and propositions of alternative motives (e.g., destabilizing the PRC). Second, the rationale and information underlying negative points about the PRC were called into question and denied as untrue or lacking support, especially around claims about the Uyghr genocide. Additional efforts focused on leveraging the notion of sports as an apolitical context or an opportunity to unify people and the downplaying of the ethical concerns around acquiring foreign-born athletes for the PRC national team.

These two functions worked together to replace the pervasive negative views of China among Westerners with an emphasis on its positive qualities and the experiences of others. Indeed, many of the YouTube influencers referenced the untrustworthiness of what Westerners think they know about the PRC and the need to gain first-hand experience or trust the

experiences of those featured in testimonials. See Table 2 for a full accounting of the strategies employed by YouTube influencers within their nation branding.

[Insert Table 2 Here]

Network of YouTube Commenters

Results from the social network analysis identified 14,390 unique commenters in the network. Out-degree values were calculated for each commenter. Adapting Cranmer et al.,'s (2024) technique for identification of inauthentic account activity, out-degree values were charted using a scree test. See Figure 1. A noticeable elbow began at an out-degree value of 4. Consequently, accounts that commented four or more times were then labeled as “potentially state-sponsored accounts,” while accounts that commented three times or less were labeled “likely average users.”

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

Engagement

Account type was then included as a binary variable in the overall dataset. In order to evaluate the difference in engagement rates between potentially state-sponsored accounts and likely average users, two independent sample t-tests were conducted. Potentially state-sponsored accounts generated more likes ($M = 9.26, SD = 38.32$) than likely average users ($M = 6.15, SD = 45.65$), $t(8705) = 4.73, p < .001$. Alternatively, likely average users generated more comments ($M = .56, SD = 4.02$) than potentially state-sponsored accounts ($M = .45, SD = 2.87$), $t(10298) = -2.04, p < .05$.

Prominent Word Usage Between Account Types

To evaluate the semantic differences between different accounts, the presence of the top 150 words occurring in the overall dataset was compared by account type. A series of Chi-

Square tests revealed significant differences across 83 of the top 150 keywords (55%). Because the assumption of minimum cell counts was unmet, we used Fisher's exact test to interpret the two-tailed significance level between each word and account type. Table 3 identifies terms that were used by potentially state-sponsored accounts with greater frequency than likely average users. Of note, many of these keywords are directly related to the Olympic games (e.g., "Olympic," "Athlete," "Medal," "Success."). Table 4 identifies terms that were used by likely average users with greater frequency than potentially state-sponsored accounts. Many of these keywords suggest more critical responses to the videos and their subject matter (e.g., "Propaganda," "Genocide," "Communist," "Brainwash").

[Insert Table 3 Here]

[Insert Table 4 Here]

While it is essential to highlight the differences in semantic usage between accounts, it is also helpful here to identify several keywords that were *not* statistically significant. For example, words like "News", "Lie", and "Fact" did not result in a significant difference between account types. This is noteworthy as it points to the contestation around truth by commenters across the dataset.

Discussion

Results from the current study shed light on the PRC's use of YouTube as a strategic tool to promote a positive brand using the 2022 Winter Olympics as a backdrop against accusations of severe labor and human rights abuses. Findings from this project help to further articulate the various intersections of nation branding, social media, and public relations.

Antecedents & Strategies of Nation Branding

The analysis of the content produced by YouTube influencers revealed that nation branding on behalf of the PRC is reactionary and often connected to statements of Western governments, journalists, and organizations. Although beyond the scope of this study, we would be remiss if we failed to note potential intersections of identity and nation branding in this context. The particular targeting and harassment of American reporters who happened to be Asian and female were notable and consistent with the PRC's past social media operations (Coalition for Women in Journalism, 2023). Such patterns suggest the PRC is especially sensitive to critics who may be female and perceived as familiar with or ethnically associated with its society. Identity also likely informed the selection of YouTube influencers – who were primarily White males from the Five Eyes Nations of the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand – to appeal to individuals who share nationality with its Western critics (Benoit, 2015).

Among the antecedents, the primacy of the political concept antecedent (i.e., addressed in nearly 78% of the examined videos) and the widely held negative sentiment toward the PRC's domestic policies (e.g., human rights, green energy, COVID-19, and censorship) reveals branding on behalf of the Chinese is a challenging endeavor. The PRC is a known entity in the West and is commonly associated with negative qualities (e.g., authoritarianism). As such, branding on its behalf must both address the established, negative associations that many Westerners hold *and* replace those associations with more favorable ones. Unsurprisingly, YouTube influencers attacked those reinforcing negative aspects of the PRC's brand, denied or minimized their claims, and reinforced the efficacy of the PRC's management of the Olympic Games from policy and cultural perspectives. The latter efforts parallel classical strategies of sportswashing, as efficiently hosting sporting mega-events is a means of gaining international

legitimacy (Berkowitz et al., 2007; Chen, 2012; Ren, 2008). However, the cultural and physical distance between the PRC and much of the West – moderating factors of the success of nation branding attempts (Rojas-Mendez & Khoshnevis, 2023) – were also clearly leveraged to sway the perceptions of social media users. Indeed, influencers encouraged ignoring Western media reports in favor of testimonials from Western athletes or having first-hand experience before drawing conclusions about the PRC. Given that the PRC has heavily restricted access to the country since COVID-19 and the cost and logistics of travel, first-hand experience is arguably unlikely for many Americans (Gan, 2024) – underscoring the cleverness of this tactic.

There are some notable connections with previous scholarship on PRC social media operations and Chinese-related reputation efforts. A noticeable distinction is that the focus of this particular campaign was on foreign perceptions of domestic and cultural issues, rather than advancing the PRC's territorial sovereignty and the realization of the One China policy. Previous literature has highlighted chiefly the PRC's focus on issues surrounding Hong Kong or Taiwan, noting it as a means of correcting the Century of Humiliation (i.e., referencing a 100-year-period of Western colonization and military conquest of China) or fulfilling its national defense concerns (Cha & Lim, 2019; Cranmer et al., 2024; Goldstein, 2020; O'Connell, 2022). This study is distinct in focus, with the performance of hosting duties and athletic successes of athletes, like Eileen Gu, taking center stage. Such findings confirm the value of nation branding as a framework and sportswashing as a branding strategy. While the topical focus in this manuscript is distinct, the nation branding strategies of YouTube influencers do parallel the image repair strategies utilized in previous studies on PRC Twitter campaigns: (a) attacking accusers, (b) bolstering, (c) denial, (d) barnacle (i.e., similar to appealing to others), (e) minimization, or (f) redirection (e.g., accomplished through the disparagement of the West's own

flaws or rendering sport as a-political) (cf., Cranmer et al., 2024; Linvill & Warren, 2023). Thus, the YouTube influencers considered in this study mirrored patterns of image construction that have previously been associated with the PRC's social media campaigns, including some that are specific (i.e., indigenized) to Chinese culture (Hu & Pang, 2018). Moreover, this overlap suggests that image repair strategies might have broader uses as brand-building strategies; however, given the reactionary nature of the observed branding and that many of the topics associated with the PRC's brand are potential crises (e.g., genocide of Uyghurs or global pollution), such a notion requires further exploration.

Network Composition, Engagement, and Semantic Utilization

China has increasingly been accused of launching information operations using bot activity, puppet accounts, and other inauthentic means to amplify its messaging (Cranmer et al., 2024; Jacobs & Carley, 2023). Results from this study highlight the possible use of potentially state-sponsored accounts seeking to influence public perception of the PRC – similar to or part of the operations of DragonBridge. While our findings do not distinguish between bots, puppet/troll accounts, or other inauthentic activity, they do clearly demonstrate a difference in terms of behavioral patterns of YouTube users that warrant further exploration. It is evidenced in this study that YouTube influencers, including those classified by X (formerly Twitter) as state-sponsored media (e.g., Andy Boreman), created content that not only cultivated a desirable brand for the PRC through sportswashing but did so with strategies consistent with PRC's past social media campaigns and Chinese cultural practices toward image construction. As such, these influencers served as proxies for the Chinese government by building audiences of followers and actively engaging with them in dialogue. These efforts to build a brand through sportswashing were then echoed and furthered by accounts that commented on at least 4 of the 27 examined

videos. The reinforcement of many of the narratives advanced by influencers represents what Li and Feng (2021) consider to be a co-creational quality of nation branding. This amplification is also suspicious given YouTube is inaccessible in China, meaning a large contingent of active pro-PRC voices across videos and influencers would be most likely attributable to either a coordinated operation; although an organic pattern taken up by Chinese ex-pats in the West cannot be ruled out. It is useful to identify the multiple figures involved in the flow of nation branding related efforts across a dynamic and rapidly expansive digital and social media ecosystem.

This study raises important questions about the possible effects different account types and user groups can have on online conversations. Prior research suggests that bots and other inauthentic accounts demonstrate heterophilic behavioral tendencies (des Mesnards, et al., 2021). In other words, bots are more likely to engage with humans than other bots. This line of reasoning is supported by this study's findings which suggest likely average users received a greater number of comments on their initial responses to the videos. Furthermore, results from this study found that potentially state-sponsored accounts were more likely to receive a higher number of likes on their initial comments than likely average users. This is consistent with the emerging BEND framework within disinformation scholarship which posits that "influence campaigns are comprised of sets of narrative and structural maneuvers, carried out by one or more actors by engaging others in the cyber environment with the intent of altering topic-oriented communities" (Carley, 2020, pp. 371-372). Specifically, the tendency for bots, trolls, cyborgs, and other inauthentic accounts to support posts made by accounts promoting state-sponsored content is consistent with the "Back Maneuver" which builds support for a narrative by increasing the number of likes or engagements on a post (Ng & Carley, 2023).

Several previous studies have also sought to examine semantic or linguistic differences between commenters on YouTube (Inwood & Zappavigna, 2023; Jelodar et al., 2021), but they are seldom layered on top of the identification of different account types. This study utilizes a multi-methodological approach that helps to further contextualize distinctions between topics of conversation and who is discussing them. This is a fundamental approach that public relations scholars might consider when seeking to further study nation branding efforts on social media platforms. For example, potentially state-sponsored accounts relied heavily on sporting topics that were meant to distract users from other, less desirable aspects of a country's image, which is consistent with practices of nation branding and, in particular, sportswashing. Terms like "Olympic", "Athlete", "Winter", "Medal", and "Game" are meant to place the focus on the mega-event of the 2022 Winter Olympics. Interestingly, "Covid" and "Spread" were also frequently used by potentially state-sponsored accounts in order to reinforce message strategies enacted by YouTube influencers that championed China's zero-Covid policy and its Olympic bubble. Alternatively, comments by likely average users were more likely to focus on topics that are often associated with negative sentiment like "Propaganda," "Genocide," "Communist," "Uyghur," and "Bias." To be sure, while the semantic differences in this dataset are insightful, it is equally important to consider the terms that do *not* differ between account types. While topics like "News," "Fact," and "Lie" are not used with greater frequency by one account over another, it is possible that this points to higher levels of contestation around these subjects. Consequently, it stands to reason that countries may strategically choose to focus on specific topics that advance their own interests, while also actively pushing back against narratives by discounting the veracity of the claim (Uren et al. 2019; Phillips et al. 2022).

Limitations and Future Directions

This project is not without limitations. Videos were collected only from YouTube channels that were identified as having a direct affiliation with the PRC by a series of legacy news media (e.g., Seitz et al., 2022; Meaker, 2022; Mozur et al., 2021). The network of influencers is likely far more expansive and clandestine than the considered 8 influencers and 27 videos. This also means that there could be a more expansive network of potentially state-sponsored accounts actively engaging across additional channels. While the emphasis on the sports context is valuable and helps explain how the concept of sportswashing fits into nation branding efforts, it does limit the scope of what YouTube influencers have posted about and what topics commenters choose to focus on. Sport is clearly significant, but is not constitutive of a country's image on its own. Future research would do well to account for multiple topics which might prove to be an even more helpful approach to identify commenter accounts that cross-pollinate across topics and channels. Finally, several limitations exist within the YouTube API itself (e.g., the inability to extract a user's date of origin), which changes frequently (https://developers.google.com/youtube/v3/revision_history) and imposes possible limits associated with replicability.

Conclusion

This study sought to further examine the role of YouTube in nation branding around the 2022 Winter Olympics in China. Specifically, it establishes the importance of studying sportswashing as a nation branding strategy and positions it broadly within the public relations literature. It also establishes the value of studying these phenomena on YouTube which is largely an understudied platform despite its widespread popularity, unique structural features, and capacity for building and maintaining community. Results from this study illustrate the complex structure involving state-sponsored influencers, potentially state-sponsored accounts, and likely

average users. These distinctions are likely broad by nature, requiring further research to refine and develop with greater clarity. Nevertheless, these findings offer helpful entry points for public relations scholars exploring the intersections of nation branding, sportswashing, and social media.

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Table 1***Antecedents Addressed by YouTube Influencers***

Antecedents	Focus
<i>Political Concepts</i> – concerns around crime and terrorism, foreign or domestic policy, and political stability. (<i>n</i> = 21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uyghurs & human rights (<i>n</i> = 14) • COVID-19 (<i>n</i> = 12) • Green energy (<i>n</i> = 3) • Censorship of press or citizens (<i>n</i> = 2)
<i>Social & Cultural Concepts</i> – concerns about stereotypes, personal experiences, history, customs, ethnic networks, education systems, or technology. (<i>n</i> = 9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food, drink, hospitality, and accommodations (<i>n</i> = 3) • Appreciation/value of winter sports (<i>n</i> = 3) • Negotiating multi-ethnic populations (<i>n</i> = 2) • Hive mind/collectivistic thinking (<i>n</i> = 1)
<i>International Concepts</i> – concerns for globalization and competitions or global awareness. (<i>n</i> = 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics/Fairness of Gu (<i>n</i> = 4) • Poor record of success in winter Olympics (<i>n</i> = 2) • Comparative outcomes of 2022 Olympics (<i>n</i> = 1)
<i>Economic and Labor Concepts</i> – concern the robustness of financial systems, exchange rates, economic stability, working conditions, and demand conditions. (<i>n</i> = 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flourishing city centers, functionality (<i>n</i> = 2) • Capability of building infrastructure (<i>n</i> = 1) • Flourishing industries/production (<i>n</i> = 1)
<i>Business and Marketing Concepts</i> – concern for market diversification needs; perceived quality of products; firm strategy, structure, and rivalries; competitors; or core competencies. (<i>n</i> = 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitors in agriculture industries (<i>n</i> = 3)
<i>Environmental Concepts</i> – concerns for natural characteristics, geography, and regions/continents to which a country belongs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural beauty of China/Great Wall as backdrop to Olympics (<i>n</i> = 1)

Note. The identified antecedents nor the focus were mutually exclusive. Many videos addressed multiple antecedents or referenced multiple foci within a single antecedent. Unit of analysis was holistic videos.

Table 2

Nation Branding Strategies

Function	Categories	Initial Codes	Exemplars
<p>Building a desirable PRC brand (n = 27)</p>	<p><i>Bolster PRC</i> – Strategy that emphasizes positive qualities of PRC. (n = 23)</p>	<p>Unique Great Host Effective management Technologically Advanced United</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Beijing will be the first ever city in the world to host both summer and winter Olympic games. The Beijing Summer Olympics of 2008 was a resounding success and put China firmly on the world stage to show that it can successfully host world-class sporting events. This time, however, there is an added challenge of hosting this event in the middle of a worldwide pandemic and so, to protect the safety of athletes, spectators and the general public a strict vaccination policy. It has been agreed additionally no tickets will be sold to overseas audiences. I personally think China will do a great job of hosting the Winter Games an international audience will be able to follow their favorite events and athletes as it will be broadcast to countries all around the world” ~ <i>Video 9</i> • (RE: IOC chief’s praise of games) “Considering all the uncertainties we had in the last two years, he’s right... They hosted the Olympics during a global pandemic bringing in thousands of athletes from more than 90 nations around the world and they pulled it all off smoothly without any problems, without a hitch. You know it’s a testament to China’s efficiency organization speed.” ~ <i>Video 16</i> • “Recently the Chinese government announced its plan to take the shortest time span in history to achieve the greatest carbon emission reduction.... Beijing 2022 will be the greenest and most sustainable Olympic games that we’ve seen yet ... with every new construction project optimized for maximum energy efficiency. Take for example the

		Differentiation	<p>national speed skating oval which is using the cleanest low-carbon refrigerant in the world.... China is also constructing the world's first four-terminal direct current power grid that will help deliver wind and solar power to all Olympic venues.... Finally, Beijing remains committed to improving the environment by introducing several new water conservation and energy projects to make the land greener the water cleaner and the skies clear” ~ <i>Video 5</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Opening ceremony, I must say quite frankly it was incredible. There was one part where there was a huge, massive ice cube and it melted, and the Olympic rings raised up and flowed into the sky ... I thought it was a nice touch that they had all the countries together to make up this massive snowflake. And the two athletes at the end who lit the torch, I believe one of them was actually a Uyghur athlete; so, that was kind of a nice touch to show all of China’s minorities are together, as one a big family.... There's a touching video of her family watching back in Xinjiang and they're crying you know obviously they're seeing their daughter up on their lighting the Olympic torch very proud mom.” ~ <i>Video 15</i> • “You already know China’s government enjoys massive support for keeping everyone here safe.” ~ <i>Video 23</i> • (RE: Final medal count) China has beaten the USA ... let me just reiterate for a second, China has beaten the USA in the Olympics. I'm confused the USA in fourth place? The United States of America, fourth place not first place? ... So, I want to congratulate China on their third-place finish which I believe is their best performance in the winter Olympics today. ~ <i>Video 16</i>
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	<p><i>Appeal to Others</i> – Strategy that uses third parties (i.e., not the critic, not the influencer) to refute info or build PRC. (n = 15)</p>	<p>Testimonials</p> <p>No one Cares</p> <p>Twitter Amplification</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (RE: Media reports on accommodations & featuring Clip of Aaron Blunck [US Freestyle Skier]) “Some pretty bad media and that is completely false. It’s actually been phenomenal. They everybody from staff to covet testers to accommodation, it’s probably honestly one of the better Olympics that we’ve been to so” ~ <i>Video 1</i> • “Does this diplomatic boycott make any difference to the Chinese people and the Chinese government? Well it doesn’t; they could give a rat’s ass if the American politicians or the Australian politicians show up in China ... they know in their hearts that this is going to be one of the most spectacular Winter Olympics in the history of all of the Olympics” ~ <i>Video 13</i> • (RE: Mari Saito’s tweet about Olympic employees serving food/drink in full PPE being dystopian) “Mari’s thread was completely swamped with replies criticizing her for her take ... (reading a reply from @stretch14tw) ‘people will see this and then two hours later argue that China’s covert numbers have to be fake. This is what an actual response to a pandemic looks like and it’s why when China has an outbreak it’s news rather than the norm.” ~ <i>Video 24</i>
<p>Addressing undesirable aspects of PRC brand (n = 21)</p>	<p><i>Attack the Source</i> – Strategy that undermines the credibility or standing of PRC critics. (n = 20)</p>	<p>Personal Insults or Threats</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (RE: Article on Eileen Gu) “It’s a little bit racist and you can send some Western fragility.” ~ <i>Video 1</i> • (RE: Belgian skeleton racer Kim Meylemans video from quarantine) “She just needs to work on her mental stamina.” ~ <i>Video 27</i> • (RE: Sophie Richardson’s [China Director at Human Rights Watch] accusation of Uyghur genocide) “There is not a hell hot enough for whoever thought this up. So, Sophie Richardson, you have revealed your true colors, as if you hadn’t already often enough times as with the rest of your ilk in Amnesty International, Ken Roth, and all the other so-called NGOs. There is no hell hot enough and as I

			<p>they go back to 1989, if you know what I mean. Soros gave 100 million dollars to human rights watch why for humanitarian concerns, to carry the banner of human rights? No he gave them a hundred million to say what he wanted them to say. They're a mouthpiece for the money” ~ <i>Video 11</i></p>
<p><i>Deny the claims – Strategy that rebuts the rationale or information of its critics.</i> (n = 10)</p>	<p>Appeal to lack or incorrect evidence</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (RE: Accusations of Uyghur genocide) “No proof as usual no proof just a statement just a bit of sensationalism” ~ <i>Video 11</i> • (RE: Melissa Chan’s accusations of Uyghur genocide and immigration to the US) “That is just not true. As a supposed journalist, Melissa should know that the US has not accepted a single Uyghur refugee in the past two years. So, she's either lying or she's stupid. Secondly, ... there is absolutely no evidence of systemic horrors and detention camps in China, even the US backed Uyghur tribunal admitted they had absolutely zero evidence of these claims” ~ <i>Video 21</i>
<p><i>Unify people through sport – Strategy that emphasizes removing politics and coming together over sport to silence critics.</i> (n = 7)</p>	<p>Decoupling politics</p> <p>Global harmony</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Politics should be 100 kept out of sport and the organizations and politicians pushing for boycotts should be ashamed of themselves” ~ <i>Video 10</i> • (RE: Boycott) “I’ll mention that there are organizations that are going against the spirit of the Olympic charter and wishing to take the chance away from athletes who have worked so hard for the past few years” ~ <i>Video 9</i> • “Imagine if the world's best skier wins gold at the Olympics and somehow brings the United States and China closer together that would be a gold medal for the future of our entire world everybody” ~ <i>Video 7</i>
<p><i>Minimize acquisitions of foreign athletes –</i></p>	<p>Nativizing Gu</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Eileen’s mother Yan is from Beijing.... she was a strong tiger mom. First introducing her daughter to skiing and

	<p>Strategies that rationalize or minimize concerns around changing national citizenship. (<i>n</i> = 2)</p>	<p>Diminish US's role</p> <p>Globalized future</p> <p>Growing sport</p>	<p>made sure her daughter never forgot her Chinese roots. One of the best examples of this is the flawless level of Mandarin that Eileen speaks" ~ <i>Video 7</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "No doubt American coaching and training have benefited Eileen.... However, coaching is only half of the equation the other half is raw talent. This is something that cannot be coached or developed. You were either born with it or you were not. And Eileen's talent in skiing is second to none.... Her training and lifestyle would have been different if she grew up in China but her raw talent would have been the x factor that brings her to the top of the skiing world; no matter what country she was born in." ~ <i>Video 7</i> • "The world is becoming more and more integrated we will see more and more multiracial multicultural people that cannot be defined by just one culture and as China the rising economy appear more often on international stages there's no surprise that we'll see more people joining China's citizenship in the coming years" ~ <i>Video 2</i> • (RE: Gu) "She single-handedly could inspire millions of young girls in China to take up a sport. Imagine Eileen sweeps and wins three gold medals for China. This would inspire an entire new generation of female skiers inside the country. 20 years from now China could become one of the most dominant countries in the world for female skiing and the next generation of female skiers would all say the same thing ... 'it all started when I was a young girl in China and I watched Eileen Gu come to our country represent China and win three gold medals.'" ~ <i>Video 7</i>
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Note. The identified strategies were not mutually exclusive. Many videos utilized multiple strategies. Unit of analysis was holistic videos. The videos featured eight influencers: (a) Li Jingjing, a Chinese National (Videos" 1 &2), (b) Stu/"The China Traveler," a United Kingdom National (Videos: 3 & 4), (c) Cyrus Janssen, an American National, who resides in Canada (Videos: 5-8), (d) Barret, a United Kingdom National (Videos: 9 & 10), (e) Barrie V/"Best China Info" (Videos: 11 & 12), (f) Gweilo 60, an American National

(Videos: 13 & 14), (g) Jason/“Living in China”, a United Kingdom National (Videos: 15-17), and (h) Andy Boreham/“Reports on China”, a New Zealand National (Videos: 18-27).

Table 3***Top Words Used With Greater Frequency by Potentially State-Sponsored Accounts (PSSA)***

Keyword	Frequency of Cases	Account Comparison
Olympic	n= 2,109	PSSA (n= 533, 11.3%); LAU (n= 1,576, 9.1%)
Western	n= 1,251	PSSA (n= 333, 7.1%); LAU (n= 918, 5.8%)
Athlete	n= 1,067	PSSA (n= 281, 6.0%); LAU (n= 786, 4.6%)
Winter	n= 823	PSSA (n= 230, 4.9%); LAU (n= 593, 3.4%)
Medal	n= 443	PSSA (n= 129, 2.7%); LAU (n= 314, 1.8%)
Game	n= 763	PSSA (n= 210, 4.5%); LAU (n= 553, 3.2%)
Beijing	n= 748	PSSA (n= 215, 4.6%); LAU (n= 533, 3.1%)
Gold	n= 436	PSSA (n= 129, 2.7%); LAU (n= 329, 1.9%)
Covid	n= 407	PSSA (n=124, 2.6%) LAU (n= 283, 1.6%)
Politician	n= 399	PSSA (n=106, 2.3%); LAU (n= 293, 1.7%)
Success	n= 379	PSSA (n= 100, 2.1%); LAU (n= 279, 1.6%)
Cry	n= 320	PSSA (n= 121, 2.6%); LAU (n= 199, 1.2%)
Spread	n= 269	PSSA (n= 72, 1.5%) LAU (n= 197, 1.1%)

Sig. 2-tailed <.05 using Fisher's Exact Test.

Table 4***Top Words Used With Greater Frequency by Likely Average Users (LAUs)***

Keyword	Frequency of Cases	Account Comparison
Chinese	n= 3,197	PSSA (n= 417, 8.9%); LAU (n= 2,780, 16.1%)
American	n= 1,580	PSSA (n= 288, 1.3%); LAU (n= 1,292, 5.9%)
Government	n = 1,065	PSSA (n= 138, 2.9%); LAU (n= 927, 5.4%)
CCP	n= 936	PSSA (n= 108, 2.3%); LAU (n= 828, 4.8%)
Propaganda	n= 649	PSSA (n= 110, 2.3%); LAU (n= 539, 3.1%)
Xinjiang	n= 594	PSSA (n= 73, 1.6%); LAU (n= 521, 3.0%)
State	n= 545	PSSA (n=93, 2.0%) LAU (n= 452, 2.6%)
Genocide	n= 542	PSSA (n= 78, 1.7%); LAU (n= 464, 2.7%)
Money	n= 516	PSSA (n= 72, 1.5%); LAU (n= 444, 2.6%)
Communist	n= 379	PSSA (n= 100, 2.1%); LAU (n= 279, 1.6%)
Brainwash	n= 360	PSSA (n= 24, 0.5%); LAU (n= 336, 1.9%)
Uyghur	n= 304	PSSA (n= 31, 0.7%); LAU (n= 273, 1.6%)
Camp	n= 297	PSSA (n= 28, 0.6%); LAU (n= 269, 1.6%)
Bias	n= 285	PSSA (n= 37, 0.7%); LAU (n= 248, 1.4%)
Taiwan	n= 259	PSSA (n= 29, 0.6%); LAU (n = 230, 1.3%)