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Depictions of Europe and the European Union in Chinese Media: Similarities and Differences in
the Self-Media and State-Owned Media

Master's Thesis

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DEPICTIONS OF EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION IN CHINESE MEDIA: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE SELF-MEDIA AND STATE-OWNED MEDIA

I have written this master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

Abstract

This paper investigates the European Union (EU) and Europe's depiction in Chinese state-owned media and Chinese self-media, which provide a different perspective from two kinds of Chinese media. The analysis samples are collected from the Chinese social media platform WeChat. The study used the quantitative analysis method so the researcher could compare and analyse the differences and similarities between Chinese state-owned media and Chinese self-media. The analysis demonstrated that the Chinese self-media appears to have stronger emotions about the EU on both positive and negative sides. This study added the diversity by the self-media in the treatment of the EU in the Chinese public sphere. Further research is needed to identify other factors for this study.

Keywords: China, Europe, European Union, State-owned media, Self-media, social media

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1. Introduction

According to the EU's statistical office (Eurostat), China had become the EU's largest trading partner in 2020 (Tu Lei, 2020). The Chinese government believes that China has the same strategic interests as the European Union (EU) and European countries. At the same time, this collaboration partnership comes with opportunities and challenges. Men (2006) mentioned that the economic interest is the goal of China's collaboration with the EU. International trading between the two regions is the primary strategy to achieve the purpose of sustainable development. With fast-growing globalisation, China also wants to improve its international reputation, seeking more multipolarity cooperation with the EU and European countries.

Analysing Chinese mass media is one way to understand the EU and European countries in the Chinese eye. The function of mass media can be interpreted as representing the public. In China, state-owned media and self-media are the primary channels for the Chinese to get their news. Professionally trained reporters provide the state-owned media content. And self-media reflects the social media content created by citizen journalists and citizens. The gap difference can help navigate the understanding of the Chinese people and the Chinese government. From the Chinese perspective, the depiction of the EU and Europe is a valuable indicator for further collaboration and development in both regions.

In recent years, China-related topics have been discussed in the economy, politics, and academia. However, professionals are still facing the challenge of the new communication environment. Scholars have discussed Chinese media in different areas. Examples include Chaban and Elgström (2014) studied the research topics of the EU image from China, India, Russia, and the United States; European Union on Chinese online news content, and specific Chinese state-owned media

Xinhua net(Lifen CHENG et al., 2010). Zhu and Chen (2015), Li et al. (2019), Wu and Wall (2019) have also investigated the impact of Chinese self-media among the Chinese media trends. Yet, there is a lack of literature comparing Chinese self-media and state-owned media. This new field of research should be noticed and discovered. It is necessary to focus on various Chinese media resources, such as the Chinese self-media. The study can be used as the image studies of the EU and Europe in interactions with China.

This paper analyses the different media content from the voice of citizens and the voice of the Chinese government in social media. The author believes that consistent contemporary study can provide a new understanding of the Chinese perspective on the EU. This thesis outline is as follows:

Chapter 2 Reviews relevant literature.

Chapter 3 Introduces the current Chinese media background.

Chapter 4 Discusses the method and data.

Chapter 5 Presents the analysis and the interpretation of results.

Chapter 6 Concludes the thesis, revisits the contribution, and discusses future work.

Keywords: China, Europe, European Union, State-owned media, Self-media, Social media

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2. Literature Review

As the global media environment has changed with the internet and social media development, Chinese media has also adopted a new era (Jin & Ye, 2019). This media environment change complicates the relationship between traditional media and social media. It also implies a faster pace influence between traditional media and social media (Conway, Kenski, & Wang, 2015; Conway-Silva, Filer, Kenski, & Tsetsi, 2018; Shehata & Stromback, 2013; Vargo, Guo, & Amazeen, 2018; Tiago, Jorge & Helder, 2019). The contemporary rise of mass media started at the beginning of the 20th century (Habermas, 1989). Information has been delivered by different channels, such as newspaper, radio, and television, which are considered traditional media. In the 1990s, with traditional media organisations switching to the internet media and taking more share in the news market, the old media channel started losing a substantial share of the news market (Tiago, Jorge & Helder, 2019). Even though the traditional media can be a faster influence the highlighting issues in social networks (Conway, Kenski, & Wang, 2015; Conway-Silva, Filer, Kenski, & Tsetsi, 2018; Shehata & Stromback, 2013; Vargo, Guo, & Amazeen, 2018; Tiago, Jorge & Helder, 2019), social media still brought the new definition to challenge the capacity of traditional media (Boynton & Richardson, 2015; Meraz, 2011; Neuman et al., 2014)

With a faster-growing internet environment, media need more material diversity and citizen content resources than before (Nikki, 2017). Since 2005, the user-generated content channel has been introduced by different media institutions and social media platforms, which brought the power of citizen content into the newsroom routine (Nikki, 2017). Yet, the media content in China needs to follow Chinese government media regulation rules. Social media creates a freer space to express and share thoughts and emotions. Compared with professional journalists, citizens and

citizen journalists content struggles with quality and verifiability (Carlsson & Nilsson 2015). Blaagaard (2013) raised the questions of whether citizen journalists hold the opposite position to the mainstream media (Blaagaard 2010, 2012) and keep the objective opinions (Nip 2009; Salter 2009; Blaagaard 2013), which clearly can enhance the affectivity of journalism. Blaagaard (2013) claims that citizen journalists need to consider the emergence of the new media environment. Still, citizen journalists could not replace professional journalists. Chinese Internet Network Information Center shows that 81% of Chinese internet users use the internet to get their news. Tencent, the leading Chinese social media company, takes second place in the “top 5 most social leaders”, which shows us that we cannot ignore the impact of the citizen.

Chinese state media represents the traditional media. A quantitative content analysis studied how the European Union has been depicted from the Chinese perspective (Lifen CHENG et al., 2010) by using framing theory. Lifen CHENG et al. (2010) broke the framework into three parts as manifest framing devices (agenda), manifest or latent reasoning devices (attributions), and an implicit cultural phenomenon. Lifen CHENG et al. (2010) used 675 Chinese online news articles as the analysis object. The study shows that XinhuaNet (a Chinese state-owned media institution) reflects a negative attitude (29.3%) towards European Union is slightly more than the positive (23.7%). However, the neutral attitude (47%) takes most of the analysis result. Lifen CHENG et al. (2010) believes that The XinhuaNet represented European Union as the economic-political body backed by Great Britain, France, and Germany.

Later Chaban and Elgström (2014) also used the quantitative content analysis method, three different Chinese traditional media organisations under the observation for the research: The people’s Daily, International Finance News, China Daily. Different results have shown that

unfavourable attitudes reduce to a 15% to 20% level. Compared to Lifeng CHENG et al. (2010) study, China had a lower percentage of unfavourable EU evaluations. Chaban and Elgström (2014) studied the EU's role in the perspective of its three potential competitors: China, India, and Russia. They found that reportage of the EU's interactions with China, India, and Russia were vague. Meanwhile, the EU and the United States of America (USA) relations were more visible than China, India, and Russia. Even though the EU was not described as wholly positive, the image still could be considered primarily neutral.

Chaban and Elgström (2014) also point out that the national media profiled its own country's interaction with the EU in general discourse. That makes the information more visible and salient for the readers. China has considered itself a global player on par with Europe and America. These specific self-perceptions of the emerging powers reflect the images of the respective country's interaction with the EU (Chaban and Elgström, 2014). Men used different study methods by the qualitative and quantitative research. Four various academic journals used in his research, *Xiandai guoji guanxi* “现代国际关系” (Contemporary International Relations), *Guoji wenti yanjiu* “国际问题研究” (International Studies), *Ouzhou yanjiu* “欧洲研究” (European Studies), and *Qiushi* “求实” (Seeking Truth). Mass media can use the academic journal as a resource, even if it is just used for small specialised audiences, but they can be powerful in their impact when many members of the social elite read the journals. Men (2006) discussed the EU-China bilateral relationships by analysing the leading Chinese journals. He finds that the Chinese researcher focused on integrating the EU, developing security and defence policy, and economic integration to political integration. He points out that China considered European Union as a reliable ally. The EU-USA relationship model inspires China, leading China to change its interest from “fighting against hegemonism and maintaining world peace into peace, development,

and cooperation” (Men 2006). European Union studies' high interest in Chinese academia provides more resources and opportunities for China and European countries. However, the Chinese version of the multipolar coalition system with the EU would bring up conflict between the EU and the USA relationships (Men 2006). China needs to be cautious of its concept of equality power development. The complex relationship between China, the United States, and the EU could be difficult to maintain the relationship with each other.

Chinese traditional media, the Chinese National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA), is often considered the Chinese government's main channel for its political goal (Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011). The organisation is a ministry-level executive agency directly under the State Council of the People's Republic of China. The task of NRTA is managing, directing, developing, and examining the media content in China. Chinese TV news, contents, and firms follow the rules under the NRTA. The State-owned news institution needs to follow the publishing policy made by the NRTA. However, the article style on social media would be less formal and free from state-owned media policy structure, presenting more ordinary people's thoughts.

As an opposite to the traditional state-owned media, the self-media represents the citizens' voice. In China, the We media/Self-media is used as synonyms for Chinese social media. WeChat official account, Weibo, is the most popular Chinese social media platform. F. Wu (2020) mentioned that Chinese We media covers a broad field of content and masters the right of speech for content distribution. In other words, the booming of Chinese We media shows the Chinese voice. The background analysis chapter defines and describes We media/self-media and social media. F. Wu (2020) introduces the development of Chinese We media with its market demand. Multiple platforms launched different campaigns to encourage people to create content to feed

their eager audience, diversifying the depth of information. The citizen journalist and regular citizens are the main writers who make the content for Chinese We media. The difference between these two types of content creators is that citizen journalists are more likely to accept the professional values of journalism (e.g., following the code of ethics). Understanding how ordinary Chinese citizens think about the European Union is also worth discussing in the study.

Research questions in this study are as follows:

- What are the similarities and differences of Chinese state-owned and self-media in the depiction of EU and Europe?
- What kind of connections can be detected between Chinese state-owned and self-media in comparing their contents?

3. Chinese Media Background and Conceptual Framework

Both individual writers and organisations can use media content to express their thought on a subject. By analysing the European Union from a Chinese perspective, the first step is to dig into the Chinese media content. The media content can be the government's official news and citizens' content. Analysing both resources provides a complete picture of the European Union in the Chinese media. To understand the media content in China, we need to discuss Chinese media systems. The current types of Chinese media include **traditional media, social media, content aggregators** (Jiang Tao, 2019).

Traditional media can be considered the mainstream media, which includes print media (newspaper, magazines), broadcast media (TV, radio), outdoor to out-of-home (OOH) media. The professional institution or agent provides this type of media content with stationary channels and

schedules, such as Chinese TV shows, China Central Television (CCTV), People's Daily, etc. The benefit of traditional media is the content created with clear structure and speciality. On the opposite side, the audience can not directly participate or give feedback to the content.

Social media is defined as a technology that allows or facilitates sharing thoughts through the internet. In other words, everyone could participate in media creation and make comments or thoughts on a social media channel. The contents in social media created by individuals are based on personal experience and knowledge. For the audience, they can participate in the social media topic. The disadvantage is that not all the content created on social media has professional background and training. However, due to social input and response popularity, the social media platform has strong user stickiness. According to the 47th China Statistics Report on Internet development, by 2020, the Chinese internet user number was 0.989 billion, and the mobile phone internet user number was 0.986 billion (The 47th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development, 2021). Almost all (99.7%) of the internet users in China are mobile phone users ((The 47th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development,2021). Therefore, the mobile social media platform plays a vital role as a media channel.

The major platforms for Chinese social media are WeChat, Weibo, and internet forums from different websites. The contents have solid and diverse characters due to their many users from the platforms. Among all the other platforms, Tencent's WeChat metamorphosis into a super-sticky mega-platform from 2011 to 2017 (Chen et al., 2018).

WeChat is the leading communication platform in China. The platform functions as a combination of Facebook and WhatsApp. Unlike the traditional communication tool, WeChat not only can send messages, make phone calls, it also has different features such as payment, mini-

game, e-commerce, and content share channel “WeChat Official Account” (WOA). WOA is a common channel used for Chinese social media articles. Data published by Statista notes that there are 1.2 billion monthly active users on WeChat in 2020, and 0.36 billion users would read articles posted on WOA. The publication of these articles is from a wide range of creators, including individual civilians, private companies, mass media institutes, and state media institutes.

Content aggregators can push information to the audience using internet algorithms based on platform user behaviour and personal interests. In China, the popular platform of content aggregator includes Toutiao (今日头条), Chinese Tik-Tok (抖音), Kuaishou (快手) and others. Social media and content aggregators are not precisely the same level concepts. Both operate based on the algorithms, but the content aggregators can be treated only as search instruments for internet users. A content aggregator doesn't produce original content (nevertheless, a content aggregator can aggregate content created by individual users like bloggers, social media posts etc.). In a content aggregator, individuals are the audience.

The 2019 Chinese Media Marketing Report from CTR Market Research shows that the development trend for traditional media is to merge into social media. The number of social media accounts from the Chinese mainstream media in 2018 is 6,000 to 8,000, including China central media, T.V. stations, etc. However, the million-level accounts only take up 8.4% due to the account management method.

The million-level account stands for accumulating more than one million subscribers or article views or website visitors from the different platforms of Weibo, WeChat, news websites, short video mobile phone applications, and other third-party channels.

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Figure 1 2020 Chinese Internet User Map

Source: CTR Market Research

According to the 46th China Statistics Report on Internet development, Chinese internet users were 8.5 billion in 2019. In comparison, the attention of the mainstream media on social media was low. However, the number of Chinese mainstream media accounts changed in 2020. The 2020 Chinese Media Marketing Report notes that the measurement unit changed from one million to ten million. The number of articles reviewed increased 48% on WeChat, and subscribers increased 54% for the short video from the Chinese mainstream media. By the end of 2020, Chinese internet users grew to 9.8 billion, making China the most significant internet user country. From this, 7.43 billion users use the internet for news, equating to 75.8% of the total.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 show that social media plays an essential role in Chinese media. Besides TV, social media has large active user numbers than other mainstream media (radio and print media). As mentioned before, individuals can be the audience and the creator of social media, making it a powerful tool for ordinary people to express their feelings and understanding. In this study, content from social media is used as the research subject and the resource for analysing the Chinese image of the European Union and Europe. The following describes in more detail the different media in China.



Figure 2 2019 Chinese Internet User Map

Source: CTR Market Research

3.1 Chinese State-owned Media

From the organisation structure system perspective, **Chinese State-owned Media** is part of the Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs). The contents published by state media follow the Chinese National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA) structure and the Chinese National

Radio and Television Administration (NRTA). Both NPPA and NRTA are part of the national level institution in China. The NPPA and NRTA include providing the guideline, evaluating the content, drafting the law and regulations, and other strategies for the media industry in China. According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the state media includes Beijing Review *北京周报*, Xinhua net *新华网*, People.cn *人民网*, China.com.cn *中国网*, China plus *国际在线*, China Daily *中国日报网*, CCTV.com *央视网*, Ecns.cn *中新网*, Cnr.cn *中国广播网*, and so on. In general, people working for the state media have strong professional skills, which means they need to have a high educational background in media-related programs. And most employees have life-long employment relationships with their employers. State media has an almost perfect system structure based on the target audience, and different departments only focus on their topic. For example, the political news department focuses on published articles or videos related to politics.

3.2 Chinese Non-State-owned Media

In general, **Non-State-owned Media** in China needs to follow the law regulations made by NPPA and NRTA and refers to the group of individuals or private companies. However, the Chinese non-state media has different structures compared with state media. Non-state-owned media has high inner diversity; it consists of different channels and outlets that are not integrated under one institutional umbrella. For example, the content creator for non-state media is not employed by the state's media.

Many of these creators are freelancers or self-employed. “Social Media” is part of the Chinese non-state media. In China, “We Media/Self-Media” considered as the same concept as social media, but “We Media/Self-Media” is more commonly used term. In this study, we will

keep using the term of “We Media/Self-Media”. “We Media/Self-Media” is one of the most popular channels for individuals to participate in the media industry. There are different platforms offer the media content solutions such as blog, video and radio.

3.2.1 We Media (Past)

“We Media” represents the individuals who create the content and shares it on social media, which means every citizen can make the content. The Media Center at American Press Institute published a research paper called “**We Media**,” written by Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis in 2003. According to the report, the embryonic form of “We Media” has been mentioned as “The Daily Me” by Nicholas Negroponte in his book *Being Digital*, published in 1995. Negroponte predicted that the influence of individuals’ participation in the internet news industry could shake the traditional media. The new technology and audiences from conventional media become competitors with professional journalism. The online audience becomes active participants in creating and disseminating further information. This audience is also considered participatory journalism. The definition of participatory journalism is the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and information. (Bowman & Willis, 2003) The blog is the first content form that appears in We media, with different blog topics attracting larger circles of its target audience. For example, the reader could filter the content by their interests through the internet.

F. Wu (2020) points out in *The Content Production Logic of Chinese We-Media Driven by the Platform Economy* that We media source could be considered the right of speech for ordinary Chinese people. In China, We media (自媒体 *zì méiti*) refers to independently operated accounts on platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and other venues - usually run by individual users (Ivy Yu, 2018). There are various forms of We media, such as videos, pictures,

and articles. Some of We media created by individuals or private companies are government official channels, and some are professional teams. The contents of this type of accounts are generally trusted and supported by the ordinary audience. Bowman & Willis (2003) use participatory journalism for We media creators, which refers to citizens providing information on wide-ranging topics and creating content to share with other people. The start level of entering We media is low. For instance, people do not need professional skills or work in the media field. As long as the internet is available, everyone could be the content creator for We media.

3.2.2 Self-media (Current)

Self-media is a direct translation of the Chinese word “自媒体,” the concept of self-media is very similar to “We Media.” However, let's separate self-media from We media. Unlike We media, **Chinese Self-media** is a development result of vertical integration from We media. Chinese self-media is not only for ordinary people to express their thought but has also merged into the mainstream media, becoming an industry and career option. According to the China Business Industry Research Institute (中商产业研究院) report, the marketing industry derived from self-media in China is worth 258 billion yuan in 2021. From Figure 3, we can see that since 2002, there are four stages included in the development of Chinese self-media: discover period, infancy period, growth period, and development period.

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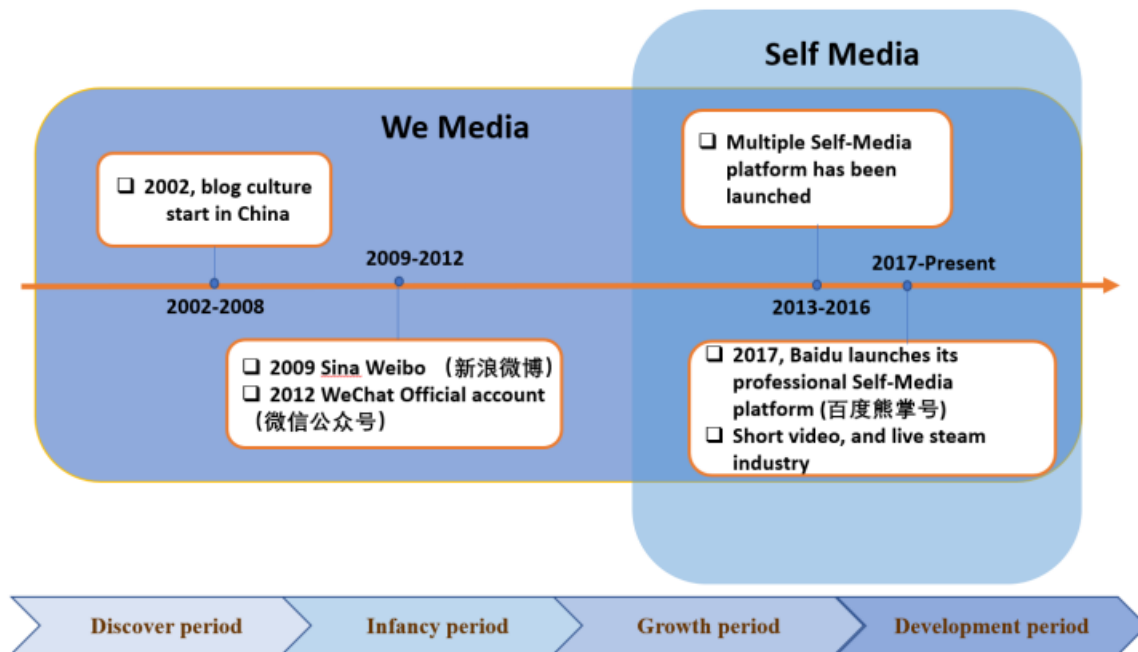


Figure 3 Road Map of Chinese Self-Media Development

Source: Business Industry Research Institute

- *Discover period:* Blog was the beginning form of self-media in 2002; some people started to build websites to write story contents or share their thought in the internet chat forum.
- *Infancy period:* With the development of self-media, the technology companies with a sense of the future trend created third-party platforms for people to share their content, which made it easier than personally building a website. The infancy period is when Weibo and WeChat accounts start to be commonly used.

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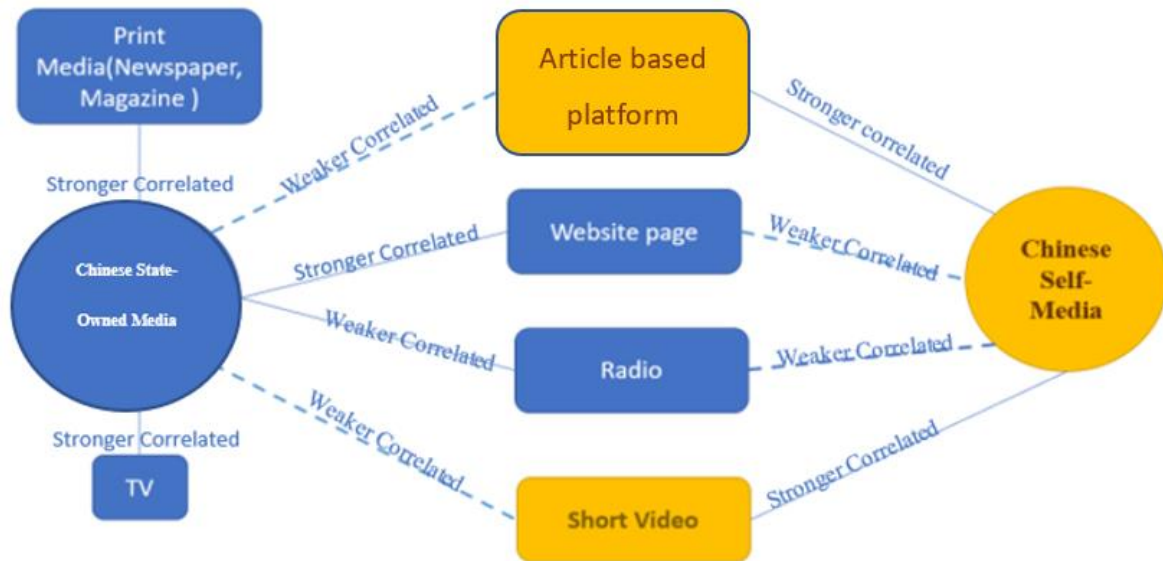


Figure 5 Correlation State-Owned Media and Self-Media

Source: Author's drawing

According to CRT market research, WeChat is one of the most popular self-media platforms with 1.2 billion users, which means more than 85% of Chinese citizens use the platform. More than 10 million WeChat official accounts exist, with 3.5 million actives in the platform, which helps information reach the audience wider and quicker than traditional media. In this study, we use the contents from WeChat as an analysis sample.

Even though state media has expanded its operation in the major self-media platforms, significant differences still exist. One of the biggest differences would be the identity of the content creator and the channel of the content. Figure 5 shows the similarity and differences between state media and self-media. For instance, Chinese self-media started and developed from the article based platform and short video platform, later it gradually moved into the website and radio area. Chinese state-owned media controls the Chinese TV and print media sector, while the website and radio are used as major communication channels. In recent years, Chinese state-owned media started to operate in self-media platforms.

In China, the traditional media are in an unequal position compared with the self-media because they are under the authority of the Chinese government, so they get more policy and financial support from the government. Traditional media can also use other sources for financing their activities, such as the advertising charge from merchants. Traditional media has a large audience, attracting merchants to approach the traditional media institution. Thus it could bring more financial support. However, the citizen journalist managed self-media needs to try much harder to compete the same quantity audience with traditional media.

Even though Chinese self-media does not operate in the TV or print media field, it takes a large market share of non-state-owned media. Self-media content is still the leading media for the audience because the platform and system are easy for ordinary users. Meanwhile, the mature content creator gradually expands their channel into websites and radio. At the same time, state-owned media cannot avoid developing its operation method onto the same platform used by self-media due to many internet users being mobile users. If state media does not expand into social media, they would need to face the challenge of losing their audience. When the state-owned media

merged onto the platform used by social media, they noticed that the account was identified as the state-owned media.

To summarise, Chinese state-owned media and Chinese self-media are essential influencers of the Chinese media. To understand the impressions from Chinese citizens and the Chinese government towards specific topics, an analysis of the different media resources is necessary.

4. Method and Data

Both EU and Europe are involved in the topic because these two concepts are similar in the Chinese perspective. Dong li sheng (2012) studied that the Chinese see Europe as a popular destination to visit, but most Chinese still consider themselves not familiar with the EU and Europe. According to Dong li sheng (2012), the most interesting topics about Europe for the Chinese are perfume, soccer, and car. And the most interesting topics about the EU are economy and culture(art). In general, ordinary Chinese citizens have less understanding of the EU and Europe than Chinese scholars, government officials, media workers, and other elite groups. To make the Chinese audience understand those articles, most Chinese media and academic articles usually mix the concept of the EU and Europe. Unless the author wants to emphasise the EU, Europe or certain European countries. Based on this information, this study used articles involving the EU and Europe as examining samples.

The self-media platform WeChat Official Account (WOA) is used as the resource for the data collection. The content on WOA includes video, text, and pictures posted by the state-media outlets/channels, the self-media outlets/channels, and the citizens. We ask the following research questions:

- What are the similarities and differences of Chinese state-owned and self-media in the depiction of EU and Europe?
- What kind of connections can be detected between Chinese state-owned and self-media in comparing their contents?

The influence of the Chinese official media, history, and the value of Chinese culture has a significant impact on Chinese media. But the new media trend in China is self-media. Therefore, analysing Chinese self-media is valuable for depicting the EU in Chinese media both in the qualitative and quantitative methods.

This research uses a combination of methods for the analysis. The methods include content analysis, comparative keyword analysis, sentiment analysis, and cluster analysis. The combination of analysis provides multiple angle results for the study, which is suitable for comparing research, such as finding similarities and differences.

4.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis is a quantitative method for textual data studying. It compresses the message from many words into fewer content categories by a systematic and replicable technique. Content analysis is frequently used in media text analysis. Holsti offers a broad definition of content analysis as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti,1969). This analysis provides the method for discovering and observing the target items. "Content analysis research is motivated by the search for techniques to infer from symbolic data what would be either too costly, no longer possible, or too obtrusive by the use of other techniques." (Krippendorff,1980).

Content analysis can be used to examine the trends and patterns in the target document. Based on the researchers' interest and purpose, it correlates the frequency of nouns or function

words to help build a case study. According to Stemler (2000), at least three problems can occur during the content analysis. First, the missing of a substantial number of the documents. When that happens, the content analysis needs to be abandoned. Second, inappropriate records should be discarded. For example, the content does not match the requirement of the study. In this study, the video or image content can be considered an inappropriate document. Finally, some documents might fit the criteria for analysis but be encodable because they contain missing passages or ambiguous content (Delfico, J. F. et al., 1996). Word frequency is commonly used in the content analysis; the words mentioned most often reflect the most concern. However, it is not always the case. In this study, the content words are “Chinese language,” we would need to look into the meaning of the sentence instead of only these words.

Reliability of the content analysis, Weber (1990) notes: "To make valid inferences from the text, it is important that the classification procedure be reliable in the sense of being consistent: Different people should code the same text in the same way." As Weber further notes, "reliability problems usually grow out of the ambiguity of word meanings, category definitions, or other coding rules." The content analysis adopts a fairly standard model of research design. The researcher needs to define the relevant population of interest and draw an appropriate sample (Seale, 2012). The content of this study is how different kinds of Chinese media describe Europe and the European Union. Content analysis is about text word mining and combines other methods, such as the interpretive analysis of the text.

4.2 Comparative Keyword Analysis

Comparative keyword analysis (CKA) is used as a code to label groups of words for their content. “The assignation of words to categories requires investigation of the predominant way in which they are being used in the text concerned” (Seale, 2012). CKA makes identifying the key

area difference of the content possible; even large quantities of text can be scanned for investigation. The comparative keyword analysis could be used in different media types in this research. The result could provide information on the other focus between the Official Chinese State-owned Media and the Chinese Self-Media.

4.3 Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis provides useful indicators by categorising content into two groups: positive and negative; or into an n-point scale, e.g., very good, good, satisfactory, bad, very bad (Probowo & Thelwall, 2009). This method could be interpreted as a classification task where each category represents a sentiment. The indicators could help the decision-making authorities to analyse the public sentiment with respect to public opinion. The current work in sentiment analysis includes finding the sentiments of words (Hatzivassiloglou & McKeown, 1997), subjective expressions (Kim & Hovy, 2004; Wilson et al., 2005), subjective sentences, and topics (Hiroshi, Tetsuya, & Hideo, 2004; Nasukawa & Yi, 2003; Yi, Nasukawa, Niblack, & Bunescu, 2003).

In this research, the sentiment analysis used five measurements for the content categories: “very negative” (-2), “negative” (-1), “neutral”(0), “positive”(+1), “very positive”(+2). Content analysis results are used as the indicator for the sentiment analysis.

The article title and content with sarcasm, criticism, and questioning expression are negative. The article title and content with agree, compliment, and encouragement are positive. For example, the title “*欧盟又捅了英国一刀*” translates into English as “European Union stabbed British again,” which shows a negative attribute in the language. The content about the European Union allows the citizen to visit EU countries without a visa requirement, which shows positive attributes. In this case, the article evaluates as neutral. In another case, the article title as

“欧盟加拿大也来对香港说三道四?” translates into English as “Is EU and Canada come to make a judgment about Hong Kong?”, which expresses the questioning attitude. This article's content criticised that the EU and Canada have no right to interact with Chinese internal issues. The expression “中方对此表示强力不满和坚决反对” translates into English as “China strongly disagrees and against about this,” which shows the negative attributable. Therefore, this article is evaluated as negative.

4.4 Cluster Analysis

Rimburg's book *Cluster Analysis for Researchers* defined cluster analysis as a generic name for various mathematical methods, numbering in the hundreds that can be used to find out which objects in the set are similar (Rimburg, 2004). In other words, the method is used for finding out the similarity of the things with large numbers. For this study, the cluster analysis used for the state media and self-media is from their content text. The article described the similar way data is mathematically gathered into the same cluster. A “tree” diagram is formed in cluster analysis by the sequentially repeated content. Nowadays, we do not need to start the cluster analysis manually. Instead, technology can create a perfect cluster analysis graph for the researchers. In this study, NVivo is the tool used for cluster analysis.

4.5 Sample of articles

This study uses quantitative research to provide direct data on the Chinese self-media platform WeChat. A previous part discussed the popularity of WeChat. This part discusses how to manage the article from the WeChat platform. This paper also explains the tool used in the analysis besides the commonly used Microsoft Excel and Word.

In the article researching process, “欧洲” (Europe), “欧盟” (European Union) are used as keywords for article searching on the WeChat search engine, as seen in Figure 6. After the results

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come out from the search, the articles are collected and stored in Microsoft Word for analysis. During the collection process, the author noticed some of the articles published multiple times. In this case, the research only uses one copy of the article for the data collection.

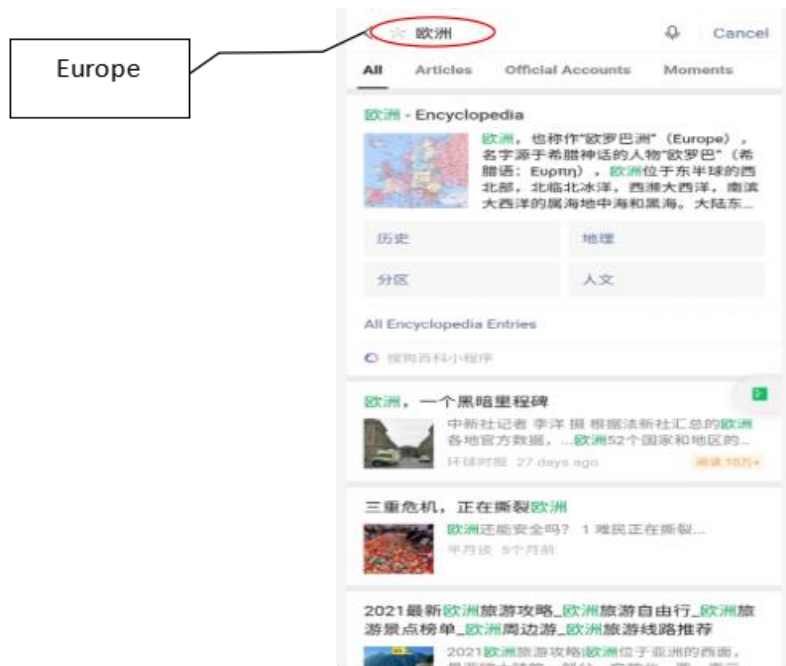


Figure 6 WeChart Search Engine

Source: WeChat

In the WeChat search engine, the search result could not filter from state media and self-media, so that a background check would be needed for the content creator. For the WeChat Official Account (WOA), the authors' background is easy to find in the account information. On the article page, the audience could access the author page and check the details of the account. And in the description section, the account entity is marked as individual, company, or media agency. As shown in Figure 7, the account “瞭望智库” (liaowangzhiku) is part of the Xinhua.net,

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which describes the account information, and the account entity offers as a media company.

Therefore “瞭望智库” is considered as the state-owned media.

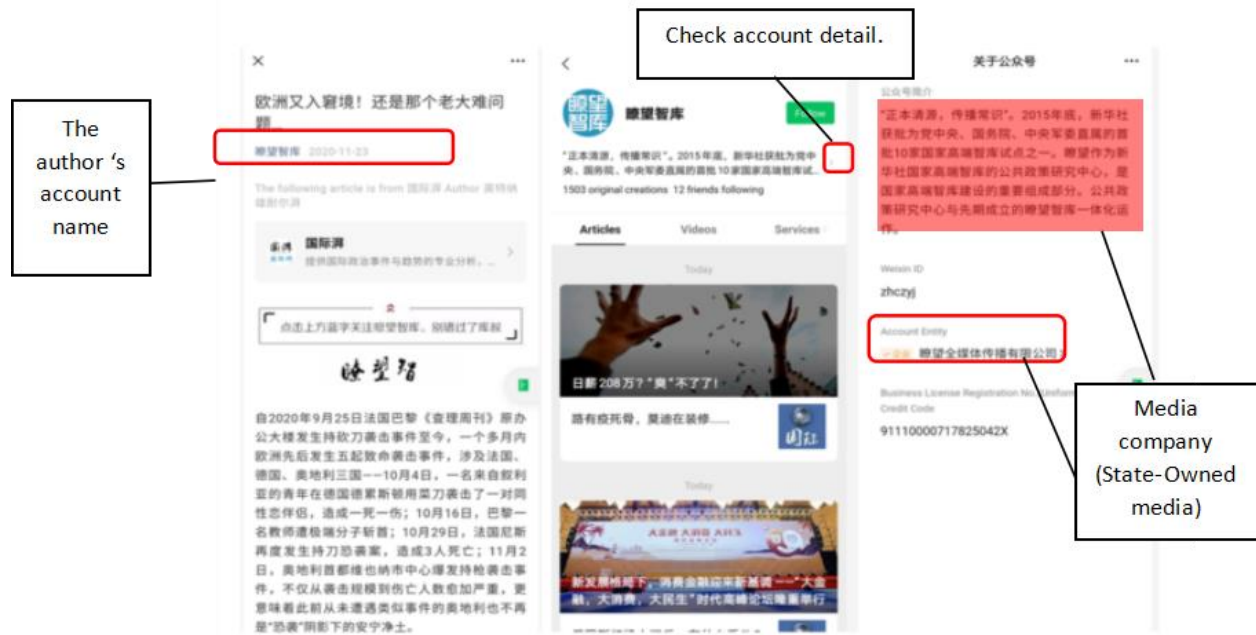


Figure 7 Chinese State Owned Media on WeChat

Source: WeChat & author's editing

In Figure 8, the account “盛唐如松” (Shengtangrusun) shows its account identity as an individual, which means the content creator is self-media.

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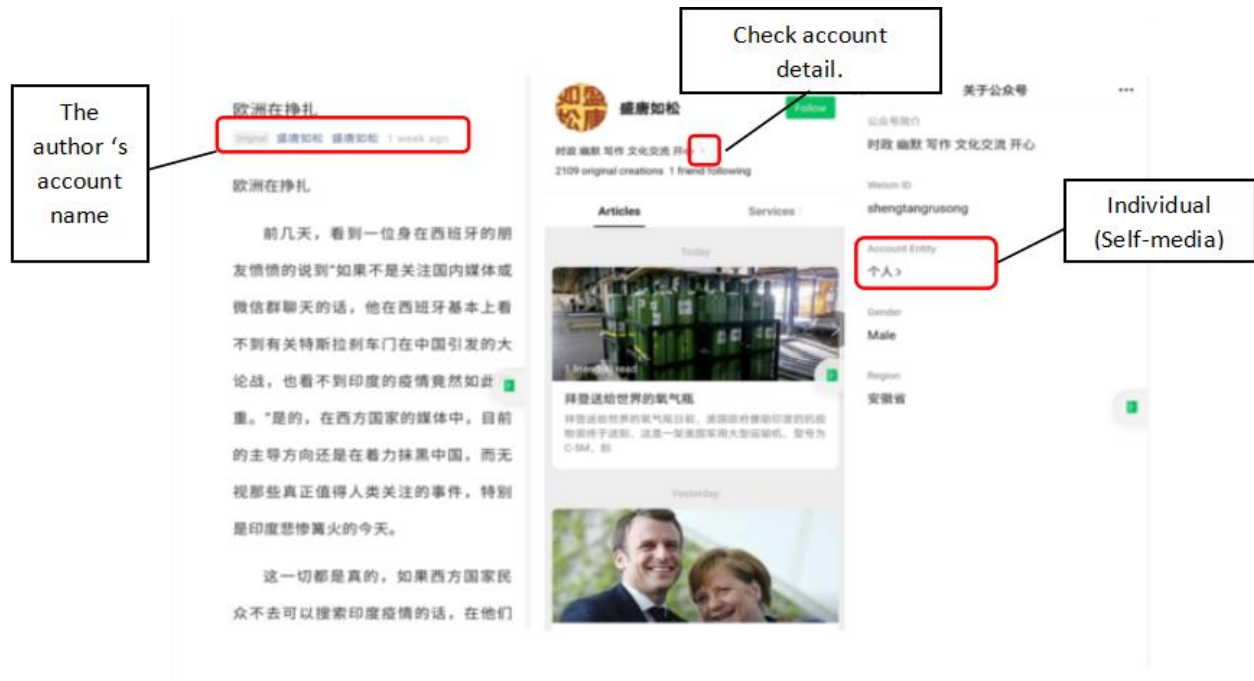


Figure 8 Chinese Self-Media on WeChat

Source: WeChat & author's editing

Besides the content creator information, the articles from WOA also provide information on how many readers have read the articles. See the example in Figure 10. The article is selected as data for the analysis only if the reading review number is more than 1,000. In the review counting, 1,000 will be marked as 1K, 100,000 will be 100K, and more than 100,000 will be 100K+. The article shown in Figure 9 has more than 100K reviews.

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Figure 9 WeChat Official Account Article Reviews Number

Source: WeChat & author's editing

After the articles saved are in the text file, the name classification falls into two different types:

- The article from the state media, the file's name in the order: publish date, reading times, resource. (For example, 20-08-02 R94.7K 环球时报)
- For the self-media article, the file's name is in the order: publish date and reading times. (For example, 20-09-09 R18.3K)

The article collection process is as follows:

- Using the keyword in the WeChat platform searching engine.

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- Author or resource background is checked from the WOA site.
- The matched articles are copied and pasted in the file with the name form explained above.
- Save the files into two different folders.
- List the articles on Excel with file, date, the number of the readers, resource, and extra information; see the example in Figure 10.

1	Date	Review(k)	Name	topic	rate	article name	extra information
2	15-11-15	100	凤凰网	politic	-2	欧洲到了最危险的时候	恐怖主义,“多元化”是欧洲的政治正确,问题再多也没人敢触碰,反恐措施非常松懈落后
3	15-11-22	50.4	环球时报	issues	0	欧洲再次进入最高戒备	事件描述,恐怖主义
4	16-04-04	59.9	环球时报	issues	0	欧洲国家刚刚爆发战争! 伤亡惨重	事件描述,恐怖主义
5	17-06-27	25.5	环球时报	business	-1	欧盟给了谷歌一记超级重击	事件描述,对美国科技巨头谷歌开出了一张天价罚单——24.2亿欧元
6	17-08-18	100	新华社	issues	-1	欧洲怎么了? 出路在哪里?	事件描述,恐怖主义

Figure 10 Article Data Example

Source: Author’s collection

Tools used in the study for analysis are AntConc and NVivo. Both of the tools are used for content analysis. NVivo is mainly used for cluster analysis diagram creation.

5. Results

Table 1 State-owned media and self-media Article Collection Data show the result of the article collection for both Chinese State-Owned Media and the Chinese self-media.

	Chinese State-Owned Media	Chinese Self Media
Resource	“共青团中央” (Central Committee of the Communist Youth League), “凤凰欧洲” (pcne.tv), “凤凰网” (ifeng.com), “南风窗”	More than 50 authors

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	(South Reviews), “参考消息” (cankaoxiaoxi.com), “央视新闻” (CCTV news), “央视网” (CCTV.com), “新华社” (Xinhua.net), “环球时报” (global times), “环球网” (www.huanqiu.com), “瞭望智库” (zhikuyun.xinhua.org), “观察者网” (guancha.cn).	
Article total review times	12.9 + million times	4.9+ million times
Article’s publication time period	2015 to 2020	2014 to 2020
Article numbers	173 articles	89 articles

Table 1 CSOM and CSM Article Collection data

Source: Author’s calculations

At the end of the article collection, only 89 articles from self-media and 173 pieces from the state-owned media matched the criteria and were collected for the analysis. In the study, 262 works have been collected. The result is different from the original expectation. The initial research plan was to find at least 400 European countries and European Union articles from the WOA platform, and the state media publish less than the self-media. But in the actual process, the result is the opposite. Even though self-media is prevalent among ordinary Chinese people, the topics related to Europe are not as popular as expected.

The resource of Chinese state official media articles is from twelve state media on WOA, which are “共青团中央” (Central Committee of the Communist Youth League), “凤凰欧洲”

(pcne.tv), “凤凰网” (ifeng.com), “南风窗” (South Reviews), “参考消息” (cankaoxiaoxi.com), “央视新闻” (CCTV news), “央视网” (CCTV.com), “新华社” (Xinhua.net), “环球时报” (global times), “环球网” (www.huanqiu.com), “瞭望智库” (zhikuyun.xinhua.org), “观察者网” (guancha.cn). These WeChat official accounts are directly from the state media or partially related to the state media.

As a result, the Chinese self-media articles have been read more than 5.7 million times in the past, and the Chinese state-owned media articles have been read more than 14 million times; this is three times more than the self-media articles reading times. Therefore, we can see that state-owned media articles reached more readers than self-media articles. Self-media articles are from 2014 to 2020, and state-owned media articles are from 2015 to 2020. The reason is that self-media content was not as popular as mainstream media in the beginning. The state-owned media articles did not pay attention to self-media in the first place. After the WOA became more and more popular, state-owned media articles started to increase the content published.

5.1 Content Analysis finding

The content analysis shows that self-media articles discussed more topics than the state-owned media. Both media talked about business, trade, culture, politics, science, terrorist, and policy made by different European countries and European Union. The difference is that the article topic also touched the field of art, refugee, technology, finance, and travel for the self-media. See the Figure 11 and Figure 12.

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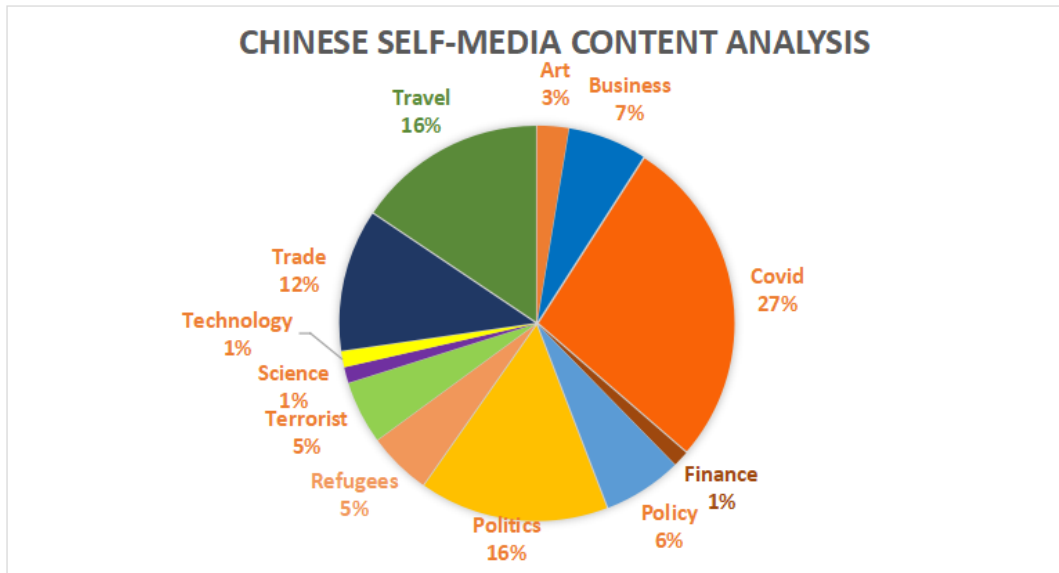


Figure 12 Chinese Self-Media Content Analysis

Source: Author's calculations

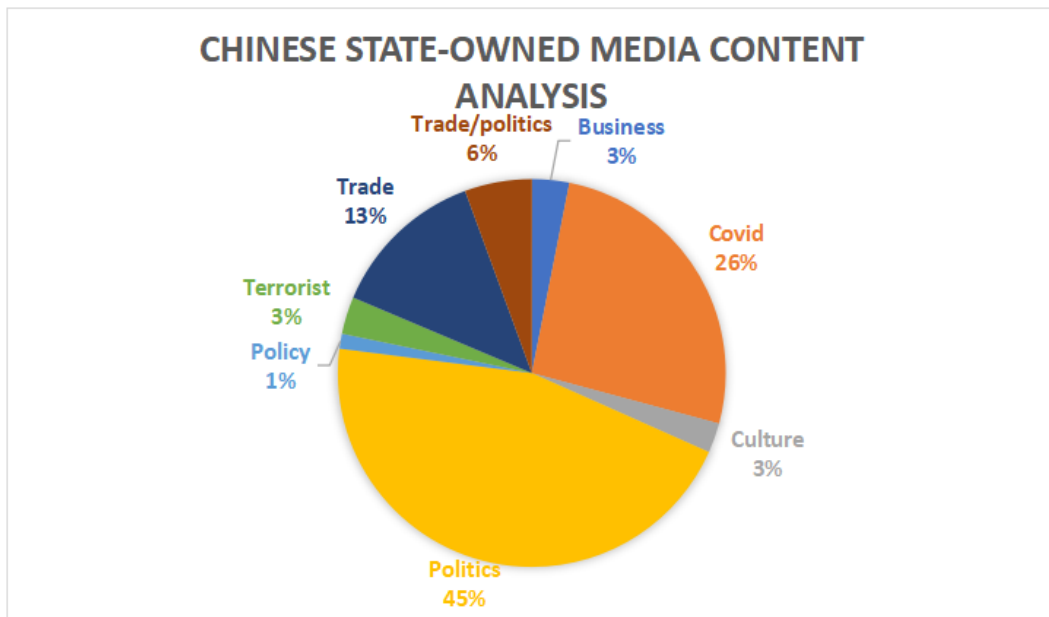


Figure 11 Chinese State-Owned Media Content Analysis

Source: Author's calculations

The COVID-19 pandemic strongly influences content selection, taking one-quarter of the content number in state-owned media and self-media. When we investigate all the collected articles, there are 63 articles related to the COVID pandemic. State-owned media shows 42 articles or 26% of the total, while self-media shows 21 articles or 27% of the total. Besides the COVID pandemic topic, Chinese state-owned media shows a considerable interest in politics and trade. Compared with self-media, the politics related topics in state-owned media is almost three times more.

The percentage of Chinese self-media articles is higher in the content related to travel and art, which we could consider as the culture sector. Both state-owned media (22%) and self-media (20%) express strong interest in the trade and business sectors. The difference is that some of the trade content from the state-owned media also covered politics, which shows “trade” and “politics” connected. In self-media, 5% of the articles discussed refugees and terrorists. In the state-owned media, only 3% discussed the terrorist topic. Overall, the data shows that self-media has more diversity than state-owned media, which is expected. The limitation of this content analysis is that the content resource only covered the articles from one platform. Therefore, the sample number could not represent the complete content resource. The omitted error exists in the study.

5.2 Keyword Analysis Result

AntConc was used for the word mining in this research. The keyword list result from state-owned media articles shows that “German,” “European Union,” “French,” “Brexit,” “Belgian,” “Internet freedom,” “Italy,” and “Spain” are frequently mentioned in the state-owned media articles. In the self-media, the most frequent mentioned words are “France,” “German,” “Italy,” “British,” “European Union.” Besides the European Union, both media are interested in individual countries in Europe. The keyword list from the state-owned media is longer than the self-media,

which shows the difference focuses between these two types of media. However, an unexpected result is that one of the most often appearing keywords is “The United States.” In state-owned media articles, “the United States” shows up in 109 articles out of 173, a rate of 63%. Unlike the self-media articles, only six pieces mentioned the United States, less than 6% of the self-media articles. The content includes the business, economy, cooperation, disagreement, and political issues between the European Union and the United States, clearly showing that the EU is closely connected with the USA. And the Chinese state-owned media pays close attention to the relationship with the USA and EU. Among these 109 articles, 53% shows negative sentiment.

5.3 Sentiment Analysis Result

The metrics used to evaluate the sentiment in this study combined the title and content evaluation. See Table 2 below.

Article	Content(Neutral)	Title(Neutral)	Title(Positive)	Content(Negative)
Content(Neutral)	0	0	1	-1
Title(Neutral)	0	0	1	-1
Title(Positive)	1	1	2	0
Content(Negative)	-1	-1	0	-2

Table 2 Sentiment Evaluation Metrics

Source: Author’s calculations

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In the sentiment analysis, we could see the result from Figure 13. The result of state-owned media articles shows that 0.5% (n=1) received “very positive,” 6.9% (n=12) of them were “positive,” 70.5% (n=122) were framed as “neutral,” 17.3% (n=30) were regarded as “negative” and 4.6% (n=8) shows “very negative”. The chart provides us with visualisation of the data. We could see that most state-owned media articles towards Europe are neutral and more negative than positive.

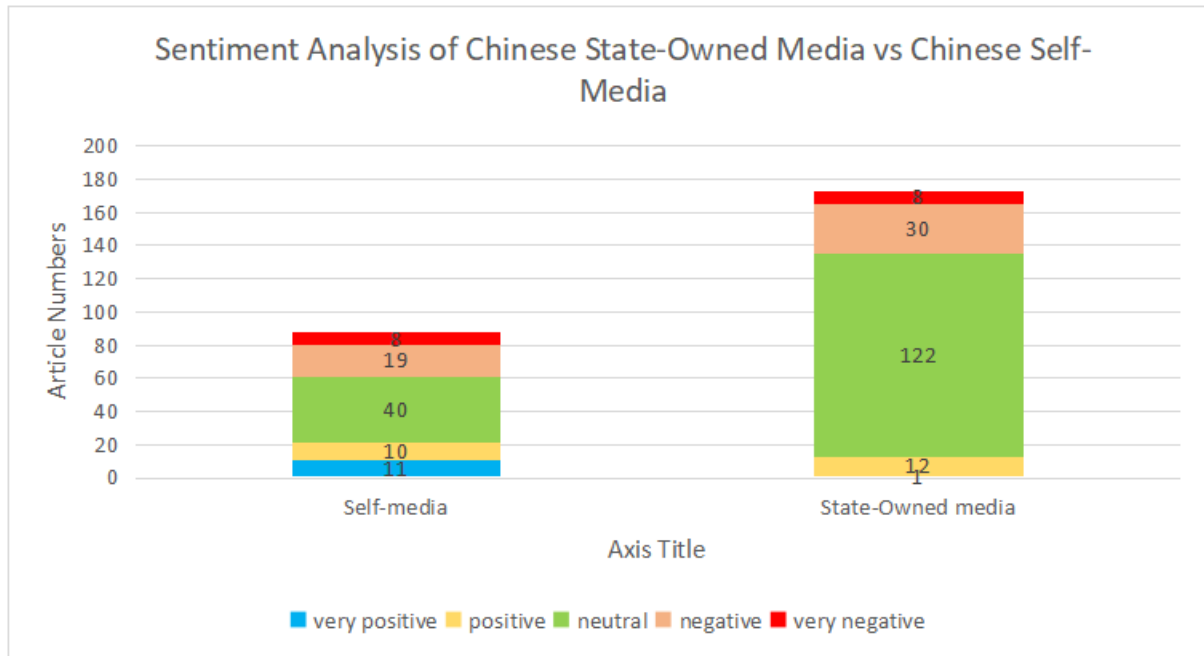


Figure 13 Sentiment Analysis of Chinese State-Owned Media vs. Chinese Self-Media

Source: Author’s calculations

The result of self-media articles shows that 12.6% (n=11) received “very positive”, 11.2% (n=10) of them were “positive”, 44.9% (n=40) were framed as “neutral”, 21.3% (n=19) were regard as “negative” and 8.9% (n=8) shows “very negative”. Unlike state-owned media articles,

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self-media articles show stronger emotions than state-owned ones. For instance, the neutral articles in self-media are around 1.5 times lower than the state-owned media.

In total, 16 articles were evaluated as “very negative.” In the state-owned media, 6 out of 8 very negative articles are related to politics, which takes 75% of the total negative articles. And four pieces covered the Hong Kong and Taiwan topic, which is expected from China foreign policy that the government would not allow foreign countries to interact with Chinese internal affairs. Different from the self-media, only 25% of articles related to politics. And the rest covered the topic of refugees, terrorists, and business.

The data confirms that self-media knowledge is more polarised. In this sense, the emotional atmosphere of self-media is very similar to social media’s. There are multiple reasons behind this result:

- Individuals receive most of the international news from the state media, so the content of the self-media is related to the state media.
- Individuals manage self-media by interests. The content does not have a boundary that shows more emotion of the author.

5.4 Cluster Analysis Result

Figure 14 is the cluster result for the article analysis, the graph made by the tool Nvivo, and sorted by word similarity of the articles. The Cluster analysis shows that many self-media articles have similar content words with the state-owned media. Meanwhile, some of the self-media do not have any similarities with the state-owned media.

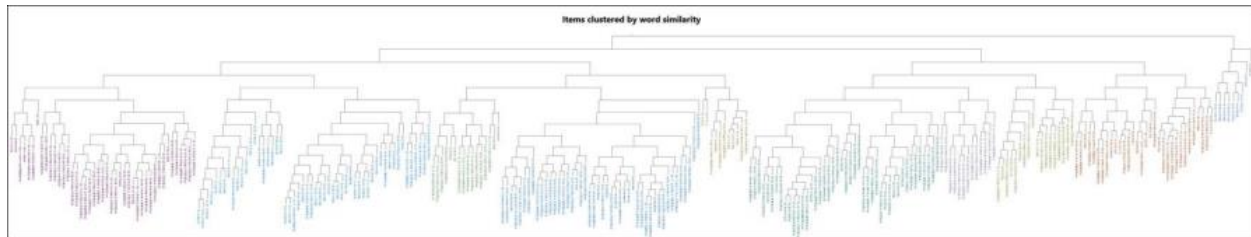


Figure 14 Cluster Analysis of Chinese State-Owned Media vs. Chinese Self-Media

Source: Author's calculations

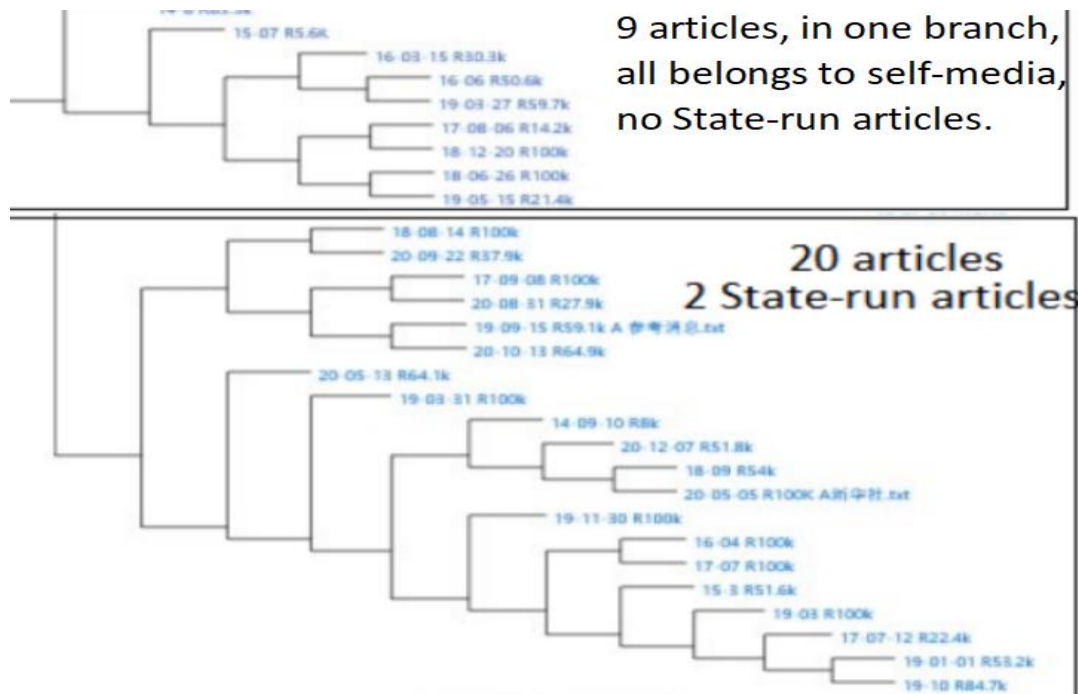


Figure 15 Zoom in Cluster Analysis of Self-Media Article

Source: Author's calculations

In the graph, 9 out of 89 self-media articles have no similarity to the state-owned media. See Figure 15. And 18 self-media articles have slight similarities with two state-owned media articles. We could consider that around 30% of the self-media do not have connections with state-owned media. In these 30% self-media articles, the topic was mainly related to culture, travel, and art. Most of the self-media shows some similarity with the state-owned media from the cluster analysis.

6. Conclusions

This study explores the depiction of EU and European countries in Chinese state-owned media and Chinese self-media using different data analysis methods. We asked the following research questions: What are the similarities and differences of Chinese state-owned and self-media in the depiction of EU and Europe? And what kind of connections can be detected between Chinese state-owned and self-media in comparing their contents? The various methods provide different angles for the analysis. The research process includes topic background search, article collection, content analysis, and data visualisation. The study explains the different Chinese media system methods, such as traditional media, social media, and content aggregator. A comparison of Chinese state-owned media and Chinese self-media is described in the background section. In addition, We media has also been discussed in the study as it represents the infancy form of Chinese self-media.

With the content analysis of 262 articles, the study finds that the topics discussed in self-media show more diversity than the state-owned media. Citizen journalists show minimal interest in political topics; instead tourism, technology, and art reflect significant interests among citizens.

The finding from this study is that the self-media articles related to Europe are surprisingly less than expected, which shows the lack of reporting about European countries in Chinese self-

media. The same result shows in studies from Chaban and Elgström (2014). Chinese state-owned media published more articles in the WeChat self-media platform than the Chinese self-media. In the content analysis, the frequency topic of the COVID-19 pandemic has been discussed frequently, with high attention of almost one-fourth in the total article percentage. Chaban and Elgström (2014) claim that the EU is primarily considered a commercial actor. We can see from this study that “trade” has a similar rate (12%-13%) in both Chinese self-media and Chinese state-owned media. From trade-related articles published by Chinese state-owned media are always connected with national politics and diplomacy matters. The state-owned media heavily focus on political topics from the European countries and the European Union.

The keyword analysis shows a new perspective of the study that the state-owned media shows a high number of the keyword “the United States” among the EU topic articles. We can consider that the state-owned media prefers to use “the United States” as a parallel comparison with the EU and Europe. According to Global Times Research Center 16th “World in Chinese Eye”, the ranking of the most influential bilateral relationship with China is Russia, EU and the USA. This is the first time the USA is not the number one in the ranking. In addition, more than half of the interviewer has negative sentiment towards the Biden government and the American value of freedom, democracy and human right (Zhao et al.2021), which matches the data of our study.

The characterisation of EU and European countries appears primarily neutral (70.5%) in the Chinese state-owned media. This result is similar to the study from Chaban and Elgström (2014). In the Chinese self-media, the sentiment is distributed between positive (23.8%), negative (30.2%), and neutral (44.9%), which matches the research from Cheng, Chen, and Pérez-Cheng

(2010). However, the previous study used two different resources. Chaban and Elgström (2014) used content resources from non-Chinese news agencies. Lifen CHENG et al. (2010) used XinhuaNet online news website from Chinese state-owned media. The thesis bridges the gap between these two studies, as demonstrated above.

The cluster analysis result provides evidence for strong word similarities between Chinese state-owned media and Chinese self-media. However, this can only be considered partially connected between state-owned media and self-media. As mentioned before, the Chinese self-media content creator might face the challenge of resource information shortage, which relates to the EU and European countries. Chinese state-owned media is one of the resources used by self-media, which could build on the connections between these two types of media. The selection of articles in this study was limited to one platform, and the content did not include video, image, or broadcast. These additional categories would need further research beyond what was discussed in this paper.

The small-scale number of article samples is one of the limitations of this study, which reduces the precise measurement of the data. Additional types of media that could have been used in the analysis sample is video and broadcast content. Even though the self-media platform is well used in China, due to the platform researching function, the study could not find articles posted before 2014. Since this research starts from 2020, the media articles from 2021 are missing from the analysing sample. Some of the data might have changed due to the COVID situation. This thesis recognises that the policy and media reports from the EU and European countries could influence the Chinese media, impacting the sentiment analysis for the study. This study focuses on Chinese media opinions towards depicting the EU and European countries, so the opposite viewpoints of

China from the EU and European perspective was not analysed. Another limitation is that the analysis is based on one author, i.e., it does not incorporate a second opinion or viewpoint. On the positive side, Chinese is the native language for the author, so the comprehension of Chinese data is precise since there is no language barrier. The lower number of article samples was caused by multiple reasons: the different language barrier could lead to less information about Europe and the European Union for the self-media; the content related to Europe and the European Union is not of interest to the general audience. Press freedom is also an important point that can be considered a limitation. According to Reporters Without Borders RSF (2021). In 2021, China ranks as No. 177 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index. RSF published "a report revealing the extent of the regime's campaign of repression against the right to information"(RSF East Asia Bureau / Cédric Alviani, 2021) . These controls may affect how Europe is portrayed in online media. However, Chinese media and commentators do not share the generally held view that the Chinese State controls online media(Hu Xijin, 2021). They believe there may be a Western bias against China. Determining the Chinese State's influence on the media is not within the scope of this thesis.

Understanding the Chinese language as fluently as native speakers is a required skill for this research. For example, the analyst should understand the Chinese language in different content environments, such as sarcasm and positive or negative expressions. Word mining skills are also part of the analysis. Therefore, basic knowledge of content analysis software is used in the process. Multiple methods were used in the study, such as content analysis, keyword analysis, sentiment analysis, and cluster analysis. These methods provide results from different angles. For instance, cluster analysis can show the word similarity for large-scale articles by a tree diagram, simplifying the analysis process. Content analysis can be used for the category's similarities and differences.

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Sentiment analysis shows the attitude of the Chinese media towards the EU and European countries. The combination of these analysis methods provides a more precise result.

Future studies could expand into video and broadcast content from the Chinese self-media platform. Another option would be to compare Western and Chinese media differences. Understanding the mindset of the Chinese at individual and national levels provides information for the EU or European countries to build strategies for the EU-China relationship. To conclude, Chinese state-run media delivers most of the impact on the overall image of Europe to Chinese citizens. In contrast, the Chinese self-media reflects personal opinions in politics, trade, and business.

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Resümee

Euroopa ja Euroopa Liidu kujutamine Hiina meedias - sarnasused ja erinevused enesemeedia ja riiklikult rahastatud meedia vahel

Selles artiklis uuritakse Euroopa Liidu (EL) ja Euroopa kujutamist nii Hiina riiklikus meedias kui ka Hiina enesemeedias, mis mõlemad pakuvad erinevat vaatenurka. Enesemeedia on levinud väljend hiina keeles, aga kuna eesti keeles puudub sobiv vaste enesemeediale, siis töö autor määratleb enesemeediana üksikisikute poolt juhitud ja sõltumatult tegutsevaid kontosid mitmel Hiina sotsiaalmeedia platvormidel nagu Weibo, WeChat jne. Töö analüüsivalim koguti Hiina sotsiaalmeedia platvormilt WeChat. Uuring kasutas kvantitatiivset analüüsimeetodit, mis võimaldas töö autoril võrrelda ja analüüsida erinevusi ja sarnasusi Hiina riikliku meedia ja Hiina enesemeedia vahel. Uuringu tulemused näitasid, et Hiina enesemeedia on emotsionaalsem kui ELi positiivseid kui ka negatiivsete külgi puudutavate teemade osas. Samas näitasid uuringutulemused, et riiklik meedia mõjutab ELi kujutamist Hiina enesemeedias. Lisaks andis antud uuring lisateavet Hiina enesemeedia mitmekesisest ELi käsitlemisest. Selle uuringu muude mõjutegurite tuvastamiseks oleks tulevikus vajalik teha täiendavaid uuringuid.

262 artikli sisuanalüüsist selgub, et enesemeedias käsitletud teemad on mitmekesisemad kui Hiina riigile kuulvas meedias käsitletatavad teemad. Vabatahtlikud ajakirjanikud on sealjuures minimaalselt huvitatud poliitilistest teemadest, selle asemel peegeldavad hoopis turism, tehnoloogia ja kunst kodanike olulisi huve. Sellest uuringust selgub, et Euroopaga seotud enesemeediaartikleid on oluliselt vähem kui oodati, mis näitab, et Hiina enesemeedias väga palju Euroopa riike ei kajastata. Artiklite valimi väikes arv on üks selle uuringu piiravaid tegureid, mis vähendab andmete täpset mõõtmist. Kuigi enesemeedia platvorm on Hiinas laialdaselt kasutusel, ei leidnud uuring tulenevalt platvormi otsingufunktsiooni puuduste tõttu enne 2014. aastat postitatud artikleid. Kuna käesolev uuring algab 2020. aastast, siis 2021. aasta meediaartiklid analüüsivalimist puuduvad.

Töö autori hinnangul võiksid tulevased teadustööd antud teemal pöörata tähelepanu Hiina enesemeedia platvormi video- ja ülekandesisule. Teine võimalus oleks võrrelda Lääne ja Hiina meedia erinevusi. Hiinlaste mõtteviisi mõistmine üksikisiku ja riiklikul tasandil annab EL-ile või

DEPICTIONS OF EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION IN CHINESE MEDIA: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE SELF-MEDIA AND STATE-MEDIA

Euroopa riikidele teavet EL-Hiina suhete strateegiate koostamiseks. Kokkuvõtteks võib öelda, et Hiina riiklik meedia avaldab Hiina kodanikele suurema osa mõjust Euroopa üldpildile. Seevastu Hiina enesemeedia peegeldab isiklike arvamus poliitikas, kaubanduses ja äris.

Appendix A

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