

# The Political Economy of Social Media in China

Guided Reading

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## 1 What is the question?

What role does social media play under an autocratic regime (Communist Party of China, CPC)? And what is the economic outcome derived from the involving of social media? Author examines the outcome in three areas: organizing collective action, government surveillance and government propaganda.

## 2 Why should we care about it?

Since the role of social media under the authoritarian regime is debated: Some people believe that social media could play a positive role by increasing the access to information and opportunities of attending public speech, which could limit the autocratic government; while others think that government is relatively convenient for using social media to prevent disagreement. Nevertheless, these debates lack the precise analysis, author aims to derive a correct and persuasive result under this study.

## 3 What is author's answer?

The posts on Weibo are truly informative and predictive, implying that collective action events can be predicted based on the posts before the events happen; while the topics covered by newspapers does not predict the event.

Author also finds the evidence that government appears frequently on social media, showing that social media can be a useful tool for government's surveillance and propaganda.

Social media under autocratic government truly plays a positive role on increasing access to information; on the other hand, government's surveillance and propaganda also truly exists, such as, the negative post discussing the leader of China is muted by government. Briefly to say, CPC regulates social media to balance its stability, which will offset the benefits of utilizing information.

## 4 How did the author get there?

The dataset used by author is 13.2 billions posts which are published on Sina Weibo.

To estimate the degree of surveillance and propaganda, author uses machine learning to investigate and identify government's appearance in social media.

For information's predictability, author use an indicator for whether a specific event happen as the dependent variable; the independent variables are the number of Weibo posts that mention the event, the number of newspaper posts and the number of Weibook posts. The result of regression is showed on the table in the article.