Title Page

Title: Two International Propaganda Models: Comparing RT and CGTN’s 2020 US Election Coverage

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Abstract

Recent transformations in the media and communications environment have prompted states to invest heavily in external communications to pursue inter-state competition. Among authoritarian countries, Russia and China have invested particularly heavily in international news, through outlets like RT and CGTN. However, few comparative studies have examined the differences between authoritarian states’ use of international news for geopolitical purposes.

This article conducts a comparative, mixed-method, multi-platform content analysis of RT and CGTN’s 2020 US election coverage. Based on multiple differences between the outlets’ content, it argues that they adopt two distinct international propaganda models. RT operates a ‘partisan parasite’ model, imitating a partisan outlet in the US’ media ecology, while CGTN employs a ‘surface neutrality’ model, which cloaks pro-China propaganda with a superficial impression of impartiality. Explicating these models using original empirical evidence, the paper advances theory on the evolving use of international news media as a geopolitical tool.

Keywords
RT; CGTN; News; Propaganda; China; Russia; Social Media; Journalism; Political Communication; United States; election.
Two International Propaganda Models: Comparing RT and CGTN’s 2020 US Election Coverage

Introduction

There is increasing belief that geopolitical influence in the 21st century will be as much about influencing the information space as about material superiority (Ronfeldt and Arquilla, 2020). ‘We are moving’, Hinck et al. write, into ‘a new age of global communication contestation’ in which states compete to promote different perspectives in pursuit of national goals’ (2020:7). This competition has led multiple states to increase investment in their external communications. Authoritarian states have led the way, most notably Russia and China, but also Venezuela, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and North Korea (Carter and Carter, 2021). Russia’s efforts have received most attention after evidence emerged of attempts to influence the 2016 US presidential election (Jamieson, 2018; US Senate, 2020). However, its estimated $1.5bn budget for state-sponsored media activities (EUvsDisinfo, 2020) is dwarfed by China’s investment. This was estimated at $6bn in 2009, but the scale of such activities has grown so much since that Anne-Marie Brady suggests that ‘it would be impossible to come up with an accurate total budget’ (Brady, 2015:52).

Based on the extent of their activities, their high level of expenditure and their publicly expressed ambitions, the Russian and Chinese governments aim to instrumentalise international media and communications in order to reshape the global geopolitical environment to their advantage. As Rutland and Kazantsev (2016) write, soft power has become, since 2013, an ‘integral feature of the drive to restore Russia’s great power status’. Similarly, China has expressed its ambition to gain ‘international discourse power’ and to create a ‘New World Media Order’ (Marsh, 2018; RSF, 2019). Russia’s international political communication has received widespread criticism from democracies, which accuse it of
undermining democratic processes, institutions, and norms (DiResta et al, 2019; Jamieson, 2018). It is therefore important to understand how these authoritarian states are pursuing their ambitions, and what role their international media plays in their attempts to reshape global politics.

Central to Russia and China’s public efforts are their state-sponsored news outlets. These outlets, such as Russia’s RT, and China’s CGTN, have been variously described as instruments of propaganda, strategic communication, public diplomacy, political war(fare), information war(fare), hybrid warfare, nation branding or image laundering (Carter and Carter, 2021; Fridman, 2021; Galleotti, 2019; Miazhevich, 2018; Rawnsley, 2015). Each descriptor reflects a widespread belief that the outlets are intended to advance their parent state’s political goals. Accordingly, and drawing on Jowett and O’Donnell’s definition, we consider such outlets instruments of propaganda, in that they engage in ‘deliberate, systematic attempts to shape perceptions.. to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist’ (2012:7). We are specifically interested in how they function as international state propaganda, as they are instrumentalised by states to influence international audiences.

While research is growing into the propaganda methods of states such as Russia and China, research comparing their leading outlets’ aims, output and effects remains limited (DiResta et al., 2020). Russia’s state-sponsored outlets, such as RT, have received growing attention since 2016 (Elswah and Howard, 2020), with China’s leading international outlet, CGTN, only receiving systematic research attention more recently (RSF, 2019; Liang, 2020). Based on a detailed literature review, however, no articles have combined analysis of the content, style and voice of these outlets, and drawn inferences from these about what is theoretically distinct about their methods.

Our research seeks to help address this by asking three questions. What are the similarities and differences between the content, style and voice of RT and CGTN? Based on
their output, how is each outlet instrumentalised to pursue geopolitical ends? To what extent does their coverage reflect distinct approaches to international state propaganda?

To answer these questions, this paper employs content analysis to compare the content and style of RT and CGTN during the 2020 US election. Our analysis innovates by examining each outlet’s coverage across four different platforms - their websites, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube – both quantitatively and qualitatively. This allows us to demonstrate not just what news content they cover but how they cover it, across different distribution channels.

Our findings reveal significant differences between what RT and CGTN choose to cover, how they frame it, their rhetorical and visual styles, their editorial voices, and their partisanship. So dissimilar are their approaches that, this paper argues, they represent two distinct propaganda models. To clarify, these are not propaganda models in the sense employed by Herman and Chomsky (1988), who identified a mass media system based on the determinative filters of political economy. Rather, our models represent distinct modes of operation through which specific international news outlets can be instrumentalised for geopolitical ends.

RT’s corresponds to a ‘partisan parasite’ model, which seeks credibility by impersonating a partisan media outlet within another country’s media ecology. CGTN’s corresponds to a ‘surface neutrality’ model. This provides a superficial impression of impartiality when covering other countries’ politics, but this superficial impartiality cloaks persistent pro-China propaganda.

This research advances the literature in four ways. First, studying the content, framing, style, and partisanship of RT and CGTN provides greater insight into the key instruments of these two authoritarian states’ external communications efforts. Second, this is the first study to our knowledge to compare in depth the style and voice of RT and CGTN’s coverage. This
enables us to provide a fuller picture of how they cover other countries’ politics, and to contrast the propaganda strategies underpinning them. This more comprehensive picture matters because the credibility of news, and the persuasiveness of propaganda, are shaped not just by content but by the style in which it is delivered, and by the credibility of those voicing it. Third, examining RT and CGTN’s coverage of US politics across multiple digital platforms produces broader empirical analysis than most studies of digital media, which tend to focus on a single platform. Fourth, by identifying two distinct international state propaganda models, the research provides new conceptual frameworks for further analysis.

**Literature Review**

Russian and Chinese propaganda methods have long shared common characteristics. The Soviet Union’s media system was ‘the main model for China’s propaganda and thought work’ since the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) founding (Brady, 2008). The Soviet approach, as conceptualised in Siebert et al (1956), centred on the exclusive use of mass communications for ‘propaganda and agitation’ (Siebert et al, 1956: 121). Within the Soviet Union, this translated into acting as the voice of the Party, and ‘as a propaganda machine for the power elite’ (Pasti, 2005). Similarly, in China, since the CCP gained power in 1949, the media has been ‘owned and operated by the Communist Party and government’ and its ‘primary function… is still to be the mouthpiece of the party and the state’ (Hong, 2011).

Where they have differed historically is in their international output and aims. The Soviet model was more subversive, seeking to destabilise other political systems during the Cold War through disinformation campaigns and ‘active measures’ (Rid, 2020). The CCP sought to be less revolutionary and disruptive internationally, preferring to interpret propaganda as national publicity, and the media’s role as ‘publicising the government’s activities and educating the population’ (Brady, 2002). The two countries’ political and media
models diverged at the end of the twentieth century as Gorbachev, and subsequently Yeltsin, experimented with a more liberal approach to media, characterised by glasnost and perestroika (Ostrovsky, 2017). The CCP rejected this approach, concerned that it contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union, instead seeking to maintain centralised control of the media and emerging Internet technologies (Brady, 2008).

Both China and Russia evolved their international media and communications strategies significantly in the first two decades of this century. From 2009, the CCP started ‘a new and costly “going-out” policy’, aiming to increase China’s voice overseas (Hu and Ji, 2012). This included relaunching its Cold War international television outlet, China Central Television (CCTV), as China Global Television Network (CGTN) in 2016 (Varrall, 2020). Putin’s government established Russia Today in 2005 (subsequently renamed RT), video-platform Ruptly.tv in 2013 and Sputnik in 2014. Yet, until the discovery of Russian interference in the 2016 US election, Russia’s external communications activities attracted ‘largely journalistic attention… with little academic analysis’ (Yablokov, 2015). Since then, research has illuminated the propaganda activities of Russia’s various intelligence agencies, and the Internet Research Agency (DiResta et al., 2020; Rid, 2020; Xia et al., 2019). Analysts have also examined the role of Russia’s main international news platform, RT, in spreading disinformation (Elswah and Howard, 2020; Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2018), nation-branding (Miazhevic, 2018), using humour as legitimation (Crilley and Chatterjee-Doody, 2020), and in paralleling the narratives of US right-wing media (Oates et al., 2020). There remains, however, limited cross-platform content analysis of RT’s output, or comparative research to assess similarities in the content and style of other countries’ outlets.

Similarly, while researchers have examined China’s various propaganda methods (DiResta et al., 2020), few have studied in combination the content, style and voice of its international news outlets. Researchers have examined the CCP’s investments in international
communications infrastructure, Confucius Institutes, foreign media organisations, foreign thinktanks and research institutes, along with China’s expansion of international media – notably Xinhua, The People’s Daily/Global Times, CGTN and China Radio International (Brady, 2015; Hartig, 2015; Hu and Ji, 2012; RSF, 2019; Thussu et al, 2018; Varrall, 2020). Much of this research has focused on policy, investments and infrastructure; formal empirical analysis of the content of specific Chinese state news outlets has only emerged relatively recently (Liang, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021; Zhao and Xiang, 2018). Research on CGTN itself has outlined its evolution and expansion (Hu, Ji & Gong, 2018), how it has promoted the Belt and Road Initiative (Liang, 2020), its aims in Africa (Marsh, 2018), how it operates internally (Varrall, 2020) and how it fits in China’s media ecology (DiResta et al., 2020). But there is little discourse or content analysis research on how it covers other countries’ politics, or how its content and style compare to other states’ media outlets.

Uncertainty about the extent to which Russian and Chinese propaganda methods are similar reinforces the benefit of more theoretically developed, comparative research. Prior research suggests that contemporary Russian state-sponsored outlets such as RT aim to subvert other countries’ political systems, covering ‘anything that causes chaos’ (Elswah and Howard, 2020). Contrastingly, research finds CGTN focuses on framing China positively (Brady, 2015; RSF, 2019). The few comparative studies of Russian and Chinese international news draw similar conclusions – that China prioritises ‘telling its story well’ while Russia’s outlets prioritise fighting ‘a new information Cold War with the US’ (Rawnsley, 2015: 284). More recent research, however, has suggested a growing similarity between their methods. Charon and Jeangène Vilmer argue that there has been a ‘Russification’ of Chinese international state propaganda, whereby China is increasingly imitating Russia’s more subversive approach (2021:15).
As Russia and China’s flagship international news outlets, RT and CGTN are ideal for comparative analysis of how similar or distinct each country’s methods are. They were established at broadly similar times for similar reasons, and claim similarly large global audiences. RT claims to have a weekly audience of 100 million viewers in 47 of the over 100 countries where its broadcasts are available (rt.com/about-us). CGTN claims to have over 150 million followers online (cgtn.com/about-us). Both were established to break Western news outlets’ dominance of global news. Vladimir Putin told RT’s staff that he expected them to ‘break the monopoly of the Anglo-Saxon media’ (Rawnsley, 2015). Xi Jinping told CGTN staff that state media ‘must have the Party as their family name’ (RSF, 2019).

Since these outlets’ international coverage is explicitly intended to challenge Western news outlets, democratic elections provide useful events through which to compare their coverage. US presidential elections attract worldwide attention due to the country’s status as a leading proponent of liberal democracy, and its lengthy, media-focused campaigns (Hinck et al., 2020). Comparative research of the 2016 US election has also shown that Russia and China covered it extensively, and that their coverage reflected similar geopolitical aims: to denigrate the US system while promoting themselves (Hinck et al., 2020). The 2020 election promised a further opportunity to do this, given concerns about how far Donald Trump had undermined the US political system, and because of global anxiety about the decline of democracies and the rise of authoritarianism (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). With Russia and China potentially having overlapping geopolitical interests in covering the election, it represents an ideal event to compare how they used their news media for international state propaganda purposes.

**Research Design and Methodology**

To address our research aim of comparing how Russia and China utilise international news for propaganda purposes, our research design is comparative and multidimensional. It involves mixed-method, content analysis of RT and CGTN’s 2020 US election coverage across
four platforms: their news websites, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Comparative analysis helps in concept formation and in exploring causal inference, as it ‘sensitises us to variation and similarity’ (Hallin and Mancini, 2004:2). Consequently, it can be more fruitful than studies with a singular focus (Ibid.). Both outlets distribute news across multiple platforms, including the main US social media services (Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram). Examining their coverage across different platforms enables us to build a more comprehensive and subtle picture of the propaganda strategies underpinning their news coverage.

For data analysis we combine quantitative and qualitative content analysis, recognised as a flexible method to analyse a variety of communication formats, such as the mixture of text, image and video across our four-platform dataset (Lilleker and Surowiec, 2020). Quantitative analysis enabled us to identify which topics, individuals and organisations each outlet chose to cover, and how they framed these. We coupled this with a close textual analysis to assess rhetorical style and voice, in order to assess how RT and CGTN tried to communicate with their audiences. By combining these methods we could draw stronger inferences about the character, strategy and intent of the outlets.

For our data set, we collected all of Russia and CGTN’s news articles, and their Twitter, Facebook and YouTube content on US politics for six weeks, from 29th September to 10th November 2020. This included the campaign’s final five weeks before election day on 3rd November, and the week afterwards. We chose six weeks of data to enable us to cover the time period in which the election achieved greatest international attention, and to cover the campaign’s evolution across the campaign’s three presidential debates. Six weeks also enabled us to achieve a balance between breadth of analysis and manageable data for manual coding. We included the week following the election because of the delay in declaring Joe Biden as the winner, and because this period saw widespread fraud claims by the Trump campaign.
For RT and CGTN’s news websites, the authors reviewed all articles published during the period studied, identifying and downloading all those that referenced US politics - broadly interpreted - and discarding those that did not. This left 739 articles published by RT and 515 published by CGTN (see Table 1). We then coded these 1,254 articles thematically, identifying the issues, (e.g. electoral fraud, the economy, foreign policy etc.) individuals (politicians, celebrities etc.) and groups they covered, (Democratic Party, the Proud Boys etc.). Similarly, we coded articles as news items, opinion pieces or explainers based on their titles, authors and content. Explainers were articles which were explicitly aimed at informing readers about aspects of the election without passing editorial judgment – for instance explaining how the Electoral College worked. For Twitter, we harvested RT and CGTN’s tweets with Tweet Archivist, manually coding the sample to identify the sub-segment covering US politics.

Consistent with recommendations to enhance the trustworthiness of data for content analysis (O’Connor and Joffe, 2020), two researchers coded a sample of the datasets in parallel, and refined their coding through discussion over time. This was relatively straightforward for identifying whether articles referenced US politics or specific individuals or groups, as references to these were usually explicit and unambiguous (98.6% coding agreement on US politics). With article topics, two researchers identified topics separately, and then discussed how to refine these and ensure consistency (for example, collapsing distinctions between articles on ‘riots’, ‘protests’ into a theme of ‘civil unrest’). No limit was placed on the number of topics coded in each article. The result was that over the 1254 news article sample, we initially identified 209 codes for topics, individuals and organisations which, following discussion, was reduced to 113. We then re-coded the articles using the refined list. Assessing 10% of the news website articles for inter-coder reliability, there was 89.1% agreement on the topics researchers identified. While simple percentage agreement may sometimes overestimate agreement between researchers, these figures are consistent with prior content analysis research.
on Russian and Chinese media using similar methods (Hinck et al., 2020: 38). Given the large number of codes, the subsequent analysis focuses primarily on the most frequent (only the top 27 codes appeared in more than one per cent of the articles). Examining the most frequent topics reveals consistent patterns of what each outlet prioritised in its coverage (see Tables 2 and 3).

For Facebook we manually reviewed all RT and CGTN Facebook posts during this period, identifying 379 RT posts and 235 CGTN posts on US politics. We then used Facebook’s analytics tool, CrowdTangle, to quantify user engagement. For YouTube, we archived 149 relevant RT videos and 178 relevant CGTN videos for qualitative analysis.

For the qualitative analysis we undertook a close textual reading of each news item, noting consistencies and differences in style, tone, voice and imagery across platforms and outlets. This included examining the use or absence of formal language, slang, emojis, humour, references to popular culture, platform-specific language (e.g. hashtags), and visual differences such as or the use of stock photographs or memes, and the use of crowd-sourced or official video content. We then combined these findings with the quantitative analysis to build a robust and detailed picture of what content was covered and how it was covered. From this we drew inferences about consistent methods or strategies used by each outlet. Six weeks of coverage across four platforms generated a large body of data, only a fraction of which we can reproduce here.

**Insert Table 1 Here**

**Content Analysis: Topics and Partisanship**

Although both RT and CGTN were covering the same US Presidential campaign, their output differed along five critical dimensions: (A) Partisanship; (B) Legitimacy of the electoral process; (C) Civil unrest; (D) Culture versus policy, and (E) Representation of the parent state.
Tables 2 and 3 compare the 15 most prominent themes in RT’s and CGTN’s news website articles, and are key reference points for the quantitative element of the analysis.

**INSERT TABLE 2 HERE**

**INSERT TABLE 3 HERE**

**A. Partisanship**

The first distinction between the outlets’ coverage concerns partisanship. RT’s election coverage was anti-Biden and pro-Trump, while CGTN’s was relatively impartial. RT’s overt partisanship was clear across both its standard news articles and its op-eds, the latter comprising 151 of 739 articles (20.4% - see Table 1). RT systematically selected news that deprecated Biden. It amplified the Trump campaign’s unfounded claims that Biden was the head of a corrupt ‘crime family’ (RT, 23 October). 51 RT articles promoted allegations against Biden’s son, Hunter, accusing him of corrupt business deals in China and Ukraine, and possessing pictures of underage girls (RT, 21 October). RT heavily promoted these accusations, especially once Twitter restricted access to the *New York Post* article breaking the story. RT published 12 times more articles on the Hunter Biden scandal than CGTN.

RT also covered Biden’s health extensively. It repeatedly questioned his fitness for office and reproduced claims that he was hiding physical and mental frailty. This included unfounded rumours he could only debate competently by wearing earpieces and/or using performance enhancing drugs (RT, 28 September).

In its comment pieces, RT published multiple op-eds and videos that promoted Trump, and none that promoted Biden. For example, RT’s conservative commentator, Wayne Dupree, described Biden as ‘liar-in-chief’, with Trump ‘by far the most competent and capable leader’, with ‘beyond remarkable’ foreign policy achievements (RT, 2 November). During Trump’s COVID-19 illness, RT published a Facebook video entitled ‘Donald Trump may have COVID-
19, but he’s also got supporters, and the president didn’t get where he is today by letting a little thing like a highly contagious disease get between him and his people’ (RT, 5 October). The day before the election, RT’s Twitter feed included a video addressing all the reasons different voters were voting for Trump (RT, 2 November). It made no effort to balance this with why voters were choosing Biden.

By contrast, CGTN’s election coverage was not outwardly partisan towards the election candidates in either its news articles or op-eds (the latter comprising 107 of 515 articles – 20.8%). CGTN provided equal coverage to Democrats and Republicans (23 and 22 articles), expressing no clear opinions on their campaigns or policies. It mostly ignored allegations of Biden family corruption, and only three CGTN articles referenced Hunter Biden (compared to 51 RT articles). One of these even sought to denounce the allegations against him as anti-China disinfection by Trump (CGTN, 1 November).

CGTN did criticise Trump for his administration’s ‘anti-China campaign’ and its ‘abysmal response to COVID-19’ (CGTN, 20 October; 2 November). While this suggests an anti-Trump perspective, it was not clear that CGTN was pro-Biden. Rather, its coverage often presented the candidates as just as bad as each other. An opinion piece suggested both candidates are ‘competing to prove who’s more anti-China’, and that US foreign policy is unlikely to change whoever was elected (CGTN, 8 November). Only once Biden’s victory looked likely did more positive articles appear, suggesting he might bring greater ‘stability’ and a ‘new détente’ in U.S.-China ties (CGTN, 8 November; 9 November).

Overall, RT’s overt one-sidedness and CGTN’s more neutral coverage illustrated highly distinct strategies on partisanship: RT fought in the election; CGTN observed it.

B. Legitimacy of the Electoral process

The second major content difference was the way in which RT and CGTN presented the electoral process, whose legitimacy the Trump administration questioned repeatedly
months before the election (Spring, 2020). Although both outlets covered the electoral process extensively, RT promoted Trump’s claims that it was fraudulent; CGTN did not.

RT amplified electoral fraud claims wherever possible – of its 146 articles on the voting process, 61% (89 articles) referenced fraud claims (see Table 4). CGTN covered these claims in 24.5% of its voting process articles, but very differently. It ignored many of the claims that RT covered, and unlike RT it published articles debunking them, such as ‘Trump's voter fraud rhetoric takes a beating on several fronts’ (CGTN, 6 November). CGTN even published articles to support the legitimacy of the electoral process, such as ‘How the U.S. city Denver manages to run the election correctly’ (CGTN, 11 October). This gave the impression that CGTN was endorsing the efficacy of the US system, in contrast to RT’s attempts to undermine it.

Instead of prioritising fraud claims, CGTN preferred to cover the electoral process through ‘explainers’, which constituted 8.7% of its election coverage and 32.3% of its voting process coverage. Examples included ‘Election 2020: How is a U.S. president elected?’, and ‘U.S. electoral college explained’ (CGTN, 19 October; 4 November). Other explainers outlined different voting blocs’ perceptions, including Colombian Americans, Latinos, suburban women, ‘Jewish Americans’, voters from ‘coal fields’, ‘border cities’, swing state voters, and even US voters in China (CGTN, 12 October; 22 October; 24 October; 29 October; 31 October; 3 November). These employed ‘vox-pop’ interviews by CGTN journalists on location, providing balanced coverage of Republican and Democrat voters.

RT published no explainers. When it covered the electoral process, it was usually to claim that it was dysfunctional, fraudulent or futile. Thus, while CGTN published an explainer outlining ‘The importance of the African American vote’ (CGTN, 14 October), RT published the op-ed ‘Why I, as a black man, am voting for Trump, along with a large number of people who consider themselves Democrats’ (RT, 2 November).
Again, the distinctiveness of the outlets was stark. RT consistently and uncritically promoted the Trump campaign’s claims of electoral illegitimacy. CGTN combined neutral explanations of the process with coverage highlighting the lack of evidence underpinning the claims.

C. Civil Unrest

The third key distinction was in the outlets’ coverage of civil unrest during the campaign. RT covered civil unrest far more than CGTN (82 RT articles vs 13 CGTN articles), reinforcing prior research about its preference for portraying ‘anything that causes chaos’ elsewhere (Elswah and Howard, 2020). RT covered the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement eight times more than CGTN, and RT’s coverage was overwhelmingly negative. It repeated US right-wing claims that the media and Democrats downplay the threat of BLM and Antifa, and that they exaggerate the threat of right-wing militias and far-right extremists (RT, 30 September; 1 October). RT op-eds framed BLM and Antifa as ‘the riotous American Left’ (RT, 12 October), or framed Antifa as anarchists, intent on destroying the government ‘no matter who wins’ (RT, 2 November). In contrast, RT framed right-wing extremist groups and militias as ‘misunderstood’. A feature article on the far-right Proud Boys group claims they are just ‘good husbands’ who ‘care about freedom of speech and democracy’ that are being misrepresented by ‘biased information’ (RT, 3 October). Concerns about these groups are supposedly because of ‘liberal overreactions’, rather than their actual political extremism (RT, 1 October). RT published no such corresponding article empathising with supporters of BLM or Antifa.

CGTN covered US civil unrest in only 13 news articles (2.5%), compared to 89 RT articles (11.1%). Unlike RT, neither CGTN’s news articles nor op-eds took sides; nor did they politicise the unrest further by framing it as part of an American ‘culture war’. Only three CGTN articles referenced the BLM movement. Two were explainers about election issues for African Americans, which covered both Trump’s and Biden’s perspectives and policy agendas.
dispassionately (CGTN, 13 October). Antifa was not mentioned in a single CGTN headline or tweet.

D. Culture versus policy

A fourth major difference between RT and CGTN was in the extent to which each outlet covered culture-related issues versus policy issues. RT covered issues associated with the US ‘culture wars’ extensively. CGTN largely ignored these, and instead prioritised policy issues, especially foreign policy, COVID-19, and the US economy (see Table 5).

Apart from Trump and Biden, RT’s most frequent topic in its website news articles on the US was criticism of US legacy media for being biased, hypocritical and anti-Trump (204 articles, 28.7%). RT’s second concern was that US ‘Big Tech’, especially Facebook and Twitter, are stifling free speech. Decrying them as ‘Woke Tech’, RT accused them of skewing algorithms in favour of Democrats, ‘Soviet-style thought-policing and ‘censoring the government’, notably over the Hunter Biden allegations (RT, 15 October; 20 October; 23 October; 29 October).

RT also featured US celebrities extensively in its political coverage. Typically, it would criticise celebrities expressing liberal sentiment, and defend those expressing conservative sentiment from ‘overreactions’ by social media ‘woke mobs’ (RT, 10 November). Liberal celebrities are infantilised for being excessively emotional; that they ‘can’t cope’, ‘lose it’, ‘melt down’ or have ‘tantrums’ at any perceived slight (RT, 19 October; 2 November).

CGTN largely ignored US domestic media and celebrities, choosing instead to focus on policy issues and geopolitics. 18.6% of CGTN’s articles were on foreign policy - five times more than RT, and 11.6% of CGTN articles covered the economy - ten times more than RT (1.2% - 9 articles). Much of this was dry and abstract, reporting on GDP, oil prices and COVID-19 case rates. Indeed, beyond Trump and Biden, CGTN barely covered specific individuals in
US politics. Similarly, it rarely reported on US mainstream media or social media. When it did, its criticisms were not cultural but geopolitical, such as the US decision to designate six Chinese media companies as foreign propaganda outlets (CGTN, 26 October).

The outlets’ coverage of Trump’s COVID-19 diagnosis illustrates their differences strongly. CGTN published articles on how the diagnosis affected postal ballots, and whether it ‘dashes hopes of a V-shaped recovery’ (CGTN, 6 October; 4 October). RT instead used COVID-19 to fight the culture wars. The president’s illness was a chance to criticise ‘Trump haters’, with articles highlighting that some Democrats were ‘happy’ and ‘excited’ at Trump’s diagnosis (RT, 3 October). RT promoted Trump’s preference for more relaxed lockdown measures while criticising calls for stricter measures by figures such as the Mayor of New York, Andrew Cuomo (10 articles), and Anthony Fauci (6 articles).

That RT regularly covers figures that would not be well known outside the US suggests an attempt to provide an insider’s perspective on US politics. This impression is reinforced in its presenters’ pronoun choices, especially in its YouTube footage and op-eds. RT presenters, some of whom previously worked in US right wing media outlets, frequently refer to US media as ‘our media’, and suggest that ‘our society’ is being ‘ripped apart (RT, 30 October; 8 November). This strengthens RT’s attempt to appear as an authentic domestic US voice rather than a foreign news outlet. CGTN uses non-Chinese voices too, its op-eds sometimes using Western expatriates living in China to criticise the US and praise Beijing. However, these write as external observers, referring to ‘the US’ and ‘they’ rather than positioning themselves as insiders (CGTN, 10 October).

In this way, RT attempts to present an insider’s perspective on US politics and culture; CGTN attempts to present itself as detached, external, policy-focused observer.

E. Representation of the parent state
The fifth and final major difference was how each outlet represented its parent state. RT’s coverage of US politics was highly US-focused and rarely referenced Russia, which is consistent with its attempts to convey an insiders’ perspective on US politics. CGTN, meanwhile, repeatedly referenced China in its coverage of US domestic politics, even when the relevance was tenuous, largely to compare China positively with the US.

To recap, with RT and CGTN’s Twitter coverage, we harvested all their tweets during the election period. This enabled us to code those on US politics and compare this with those on Russia and China. We found that only 8.1% of RT’s tweets on any topic referenced Russia, whereas 37.1% referenced the US. This reinforces previous findings that the platform prioritises (critical) coverage of the West over Russia coverage (Elswah and Howard, 2020). Contrastingly, CGTN devotes similar levels of its overall news coverage to China and the US, with 22.7% of its tweets about China, vs 24.6% about the US. CGTN’s greater interest in comparing the US and China is corroborated in their website coverage; CGTN’s US politics articles mentioned China four times more often than RT’s US articles mentioned Russia.

Unlike CGTN’s desire to compare the US and China, RT seemed disinterested in comparing the US and Russia. Half of RT’s US coverage mentioning Russia sought to ridicule ‘Russiagate’ (15 out of 30 articles, 2.0%) (see RT, 15 October). This leaves 15 further articles on US politics in which Russia is mentioned. That this is such a small fraction of RT’s coverage again shows its apparent aim to disassociate itself from its parent state, and give American audiences the misleading impression that it is an authentic domestic voice in US politics.

In contrast, CGTN’s coverage of US politics contained frequent and uniformly positive references to China. This is congruent with the CCP’s commitment to ‘tell China’s story well’ (DiResta et al., 2020:2). Articles made positive comparisons with China even when the topic was only tangentially relevant. For instance, CGTN framed the controversy about Trump’s tax returns not as a reflection of his lack of integrity, but instead that ‘Trump's taxes show the
shallowness of “America first” and anti-China policy’ (CGTN, 22 October). CGTN’s positive comparisons occurred mainly in its foreign policy coverage, which was scathingly critical of the US. These 96 articles (18.6%) claimed that the US ‘is the greatest threat to global strategic security, stability’, and that there is ‘No stopping the US from turning over the international order’ (CGTN, 11 October). The US is supposedly a ‘sham democracy’, a ‘plutocratic’ ‘oligarchy’ ruled for elites not ordinary citizens, with no right to lead the world (CGTN, 24 October, 31 October). Conversely, China is framed as the key to the world’s future stability and prosperity (CGTN, 10 October), and other countries should listen to it more (CGTN, 28 October).

Many of these articles supported the CCP’s line almost verbatim, though CGTN distanced itself by publishing them as op-eds by international commentators rather than authored by the outlet itself. Alongside critiques of US foreign policy we found examples of blatantly pro-China propaganda. There was, for example, a sustained Twitter campaign using the hashtag #AmazingXinjiang, linked to articles portraying it as a beautiful tourist destination in which poverty is being eradicated (e.g. CGTN, 30 September). In these ways, CGTN’s foreign policy coverage resembles a poorly-disguised nation branding campaign.

**Qualitative Content Analysis: Style**

**Textual News Style**

CGTN and RT’s styles are very different. CGTN’s news is written in what is known in rhetoric as the *plain style*. The text is measured, deliberate, careful, and lacking rhetorical flourishes. The language is restrained; few adjectives and superlatives are used. Punctuation in social media posts is generally limited to commas, colons and question marks. Exclamation marks are rare, and emojis rarer. When a question is posed it is open rather than leading. There is no jargon, or slang, or social media acronyms. Social media posts are written more in the manner
of an instruction manual than a news headline, in keeping with Cicero’s advice that the *plain style* is best suited to teaching (Cmiel, 1990). Hyperbole is almost entirely absent. There is minimal humour. There is little effort to tailor content to different platforms; social media posts are mostly identical to the headlines of CGTN’s news articles.

CGTN’s plain style is evident in its descriptions of the first US Presidential debate. Observers worldwide characterised the debate as noisy, rancorous, unproductive and a poor reflection on America (DePetris, 2020). Yet a post-debate CGTN tweet stated simply: ‘Trump-Biden: Messy debate features anger, controversy and few winners #Debates2020 #2020USelection’ (CGTN, 30 September). After Donald Trump tested positive for COVID-19 CGTN avoided drama and exclamation, tweeting ‘White House: Trump to travel to Walter Reed military hospital after COVID-19 diagnosis, remain for ‘few days’ on advice of doctors’ (CGTN, 2 October). This was then followed the next day with the open and unadorned: ‘Trump’s hospitalized with #COVID19. What next? #2020Uselection’ (CGTN, 3 October).

Despite being labelled as news, CGTN social media posts often communicate little new information. A Facebook post on election day read: ‘The 2020 U.S. Election Day kicked off on Tuesday as voting enters the last stretch in a battle between incumbent President Donald Trump and his Democratic challenger Joe Biden. #2020Uselection’ (CGTN, 3 November). During periods of acute electoral tension, extensive fraud claims and high public demand for information, CGTN preferred to publish electoral process explainers rather than feeding the demand. The day after the election, when the result remained uncertain, the outlet posted a civics lesson on Facebook: ‘While votes are still being counted for the #2020election, both the Biden and Trump camps are hoping to gain a victory on the U.S. electoral college. See how it works and why it’s still used today’ (CGTN, 4 November).

RT’s news articles and posts, by contrast, are not written in the plain style. Where CGTN is dry and measured, RT is discursive and uninhibited. Where CGTN is restrained and
deliberate, RT is provocative, impulsive and satirical. RT’s textual news content appears improvised and as having passed through few pre-publication filters. Social media posts are peppered with acronyms, symbols, and cultural references (such as ‘ngl’, \_\_\_\(\cup\)\_/\_/\_\_, ‘UFC’). Exclamation marks, ALL CAPS, gifs and emojis are casual and frequent. Hyperbole and superlatives are common. Questions are deliberately leading, for example ‘Who put the kids in cages, Joe?’; ‘Deplorables’ sequel? Biden slammed for calling Trump supporters ‘chumps’ at campaign stop’; ‘What could go wrong?’ Former FBI assistant director suggests bipartisan committee ‘VETTING’ candidates – to prevent another Trump’ (RT, 1 October; 23 October; 25 October).

The rhetorical style of RT is self-consciously colloquial and conversational. Where CGTN posts are written in the literate style, RT’s are in the oral tradition (Ong, 1982). Tweets start with ‘Oh sure’ or ‘Um…’, or ‘Yeah Joe’. Facebook posts are short, snarky and satirical (‘Biden the definitive answer master’; ‘They left out WHICH readers’ time they care about... *cough* liberals *cough*’). Across social media RT adopts the persona of a friend, a buddy, a confidant. Its Presidential debate posts are written as though the poster is sitting next to you in a bar, providing a droll running commentary (‘“S*it show’. Wow. That is one way to describe this debate’”), proposing dares (‘Take a shot every time Susan [the debate moderator] says ‘Thank You!’”), making in-group jokes (‘Kamala Harris must have just watched the Dave Chapelle's sketch “2Pac is still alive”’), anticipating the next contest (‘Grab some popcorn, because Rogan & Kanye is going to be SOMETHING, that's for sure!’) and cracking jokes about the referee (‘Disappointed in Chris Wallace for not asking Trump and Biden about whether they prefer the PS5 or the Xbox Series X’). Politics, as presented by RT, is equivalent to any other TV entertainment, complete with jeopardy (‘Tensions high in Nashville as Trump & Biden supporters face off ahead of final debate’) surprises (‘What a twist!’), characters (‘Oh,
yeah, @kanyewest is still running for President’), heroes and villains (‘Big Tech burying Biden-Ukraine story’), all eventually judged by ratings (‘Let the rating wars begin...’).

RT’s textual news style may best be described as social media vernacular – informal, dialogic, networked and highly referential. The posts have a knowing camaraderie, an insider’s familiarity. CGTN’s style shares none of these characteristics. It is the formal, broadcast style more symptomatic of a mid-twentieth century BBC radio announcer.

That RT’s style is deliberately provocative, and CGTN’s is deliberately unprovocative, may explain why RT receives so much more engagement per follower on Facebook (see Table 6). Remarkably, RT followers are 79.5 times more likely to comment on its posts than CGTN’s. Differences in engagement practices do vary by country, so without more detailed knowledge of each platform’s audiences, causation cannot be determined definitively. But such a large difference suggests that RT’s conscious effort to provoke engagement are more effective.

INSERT TABLE 6 HERE

Visual news style
Photographs feature regularly in CGTN news and social media posts, though most are generic stills, available from news photo libraries like the AP or Alamy – Donald Trump outside the Oval Office, Joe Biden wearing a COVID-19 mask. Photo captions are baldly descriptive (‘The stage is set for the debate’ beneath a picture of the Presidential debate set (CGTN, 29 September). The visual style is flat and staid, neither provocative nor attention-grabbing.

Photographs feature less regularly in RT social media posts, but their form and purpose differ markedly from CGTN’s. All twenty RT photographs on US politics posted to Facebook in this period were designed to be memes – each having text overlay intended to prompt a reaction and to be shared. One had a photoshopped picture of Hillary Clinton, cackling like a witch while stirring a cauldron full of emails, with the text ‘Hillary cooked up Russiagate to
smear Trump’ (RT, 30 September). Another had a celluloid image of Rudy Giuliani lying on a bed with his hand down his trousers (a still from the movie *Borat 2*) with the text ‘Was Giuliani caught by Borat playing with little Rudy?’ (RT, 22 October). A third had a mocked-up image of a debate stage with Joe Biden but without Donald Trump (who was replaced by a ‘404 error’ image) (RT, 5 October). The text overlay read; ‘One man mass debates – Biden will turn up even if Trump doesn’t attend’. The *double entendres* in this and the Giuliani meme are consistent with RT locker-room humour elsewhere (Crilley and Chatterjee-Doody, 2020).

**INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**

CGTN news videos are, as with their text, carefully processed and edited. Many comprise a succession of video excerpts with a typed commentary or subtitles (Chinese and English language) and no voiceover, with ersatz background music. This approach limits participant voices and unwanted visual elements, suggesting significant editorial control. CGTN also publishes short US news video packages, presented by CGTN America correspondents. These are produced in the style of a CNN interview or BBC vox pop, with smartly dressed presenters on location, asking ordinary voters their perspectives.

RT’s social media videos are far less carefully produced. Many are of street mobile phone footage, with live ambient background noise, absent any commentary. Unlike CGTN these are deliberately raw and unpolished. There is a five-second phone video taken at night, for example, with the text: ‘#Portland police declare riot after mob topple Lincoln & Roosevelt statues during “Indigenous Peoples Day of Rage”’ (RT, 12 October). The short, immersive, ground-up video makes it difficult to contextualise the footage or assess its representativeness. The viewer necessarily relies, therefore, on RT’s framing. Other videos posted to RT have been produced by third parties, like the right-wing provocateur outfit, Project Veritas.
Stylistically, RT presenters on US politics have more in common with presenters from right-wing US Fox News or NewsMax than CNN or the BBC – hosting studio based talkshows rather than producing on-location packages. Ben Swann, who hosts RT show ‘No Bull**t’, was previously at Fox. Wayne Dupree, host of RT’s ‘Wayne Dupree Show’, was voted one of NewsMax’s 50 most influential African-American Republicans in 2017.

Voice

In terms of editorial voice, CGTN adopts what journalism scholar Jay Rosen (2010) calls ‘the view from nowhere’ – a disembodied editorial voice intended to convey neutrality and objectivity, for example: ‘U.S. President Donald Trump and former Vice President and presidential candidate Joe Biden arrive in Nashville, Tennessee, Thursday ahead of the final presidential debate’ (CGTN, 22 October). There is no first person in CGTN’s articles or posts, and no explicit expressions of opinion. News is most often derived directly from official, referenced sources, whether these be campaign officials, candidate statements (or tweets) or press releases: ‘The Biden campaign says’…; ‘an official with his campaign said’…; ‘Trump tweeted’…; ‘Trump's campaign manager said in a statement’.

Although CGTN’s website publishes its own perspective in a daily editorial column – First Voice – there were no First Voice columns focusing on the US election in the six-week period studied, though there were columns on US politics. At no point did CGTN explicitly express its own view on the candidates prior to the election. However, three short films provided an exception to CGTN’s editorial ‘voice from nowhere’ regarding the US: Partisan Politics Tears US Apart, Political Expediency Trumps US Good, and ‘A single tree cannot make a forest’. These 3-4 minute films, mixing animation with video footage, make little pretence to be anything other than propaganda, describing the US as a ‘failed state’ and a ‘so-called democracy’ that is operated at the people’s expense’ (CGTN, 23 October, 28 October). Political Expediency states that ‘Democracy is designed for the people but in the United States,
it is a rich man’s game’ (CGTN, 23 October). The third narrates a parable of two trees in a forest, one in the east and one in the west (CGTN, 3 November). The eastern tree is growing thanks to careful nurturing by a family of red cranes, while the western tree withers as it its inhabitants – a family of eagles (the US national bird) – squabble amongst themselves.

RT’s editorial voice is clear in its story selection, framing, language and format. Its style is populist, making appeals to ‘the people’ and denouncing ‘the elite’ (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). The ‘US Establishment’ - mainstream media, Big Tech, celebrities and ‘Washington elites’ - are framed as hating Trump and ordinary Americans, for example: ‘So we’re racist because Biden didn’t get a landslide victory? That just shows how much the elite and the media hate Americans’ (RT, 6 November). Evidence of voter fraud schemes is presented as credible even when dismissed by authorities. To direct its readers towards a given conclusion, RT uses ALL CAPS and quote marks. Social media ‘CENSORS’, Republicans warn of ‘VOTER FRAUD’, and voting memory sticks are ‘STOLEN’ in Philadelphia.

To summarise, the editorial voice of CGTN is mostly absent, except on issues that directly affect China, or when criticisms are levelled at the Chinese government. By contrast, RT’s editorial voice is loud, pervasive and partisan throughout its news and editorial content.

Discussion – Two International Propaganda Models

Based on our analysis, we conclude that RT and CGTN operate according to two distinct propaganda models for the use of state-sponsored international news (see Table 7). This is because, despite their parent countries’ shared objectives in using the media outlets to enhance their relative influence compared to the US, they adopt fundamentally different strategies. Both outlets were established to challenge dominant Western news narratives. As such, both need credibility, substantial international audiences, and to reach these audiences via media and communications channels which the audiences use regularly. Yet as our analysis has shown,
they go about achieving these ends in systematically distinct ways in terms of content, style and voice.

**INSERT TABLE 7 HERE**

**RT: Partisan Parasite Model**

We conceptualise RT as operating a *partisan parasite* propaganda model. It is partisan, in the sense that it self-consciously provides highly partisan coverage in favour of a specific candidate in another country’s election. It is parasitic in the sense that it deliberately seeks to imitate a domestic media outlet in another country’s media ecology. It functions like a brood parasite, such as a cuckoo. It enters the home of the host, adopts its character, style and mannerisms, hoping its output will be accepted and adopted as though it were one of the host’s own. Its content selection, partisan framing and vernacular style is similar to right-wing US outlets like Fox News, NewsMax and One America News Network (OANN). Propaganda works best when the intent of the propagandist is hidden (Ellul, 1973; Herman and Chomsky, 1988). The more successfully RT impersonates a US news source, the less it looks like Russian propaganda.

RT uses various techniques to achieve this end in its US election coverage. It often covers topics and people that would mainly be familiar to US audiences, but which are of little international salience or relevance, such as US TV celebrities, sports stars, and less well-known politicians. It rarely covers its actual parent nation, Russia, except through the prism of US politics – and chiefly to ridicule ‘Russiagate’. It frames issues in a partisan way that mimics US right-wing news media, giving the impression it is a domestic participant in US culture wars, fighting against ‘woke’ liberal elites, rather than an external observer. It adopts a casual, vernacular style that suggests proximity to a US audience and tailors this to different US social
media channels. At the same time it tries to ‘punch upwards’ against ‘liberal elites’ on behalf of ordinary Americans, frequently using satire as a means to achieve this. Satire is a form of humour recognised as a means for the powerless to attack the powerful (Crilley and Chatterje-Doody, 2020). Cultivating an image as an insider in US politics is necessary for this satire to work. Otherwise, it would be too obvious that RT is an external product of the Russian state, not an authentic domestic news source.

**CGTN: Surface Neutrality Model**

CGTN, by contrast, adopts what we refer to as a *surface neutrality* model. This is because, superficially, the neutral, measured tone of much of its coverage appears to imitate international news outlets that aspire to impartiality, like the BBC or CNN. However, in its China coverage it strongly resembles a conduit for the Chinese Communist Party.

This surface neutrality is evident in its 2020 US election coverage. It consciously avoids expressing partisanship or framing US politics in an unduly biased or subjective way. The language, images and videos it publishes have an objective, reserved tone – and it retains this tone across its various media channels. It presents itself as an external observer, reporting on the US culture wars rather than participating in them. In this way it aims for equivalence with established Western international news services.

Yet, CGTN only adopts certain characteristics of Western international news outlets. It presents geopolitical issues affecting China differently from other topics, dropping its objective tone in favour of being enthusiastically pro-China, without exception. Its editorial stance becomes more vociferous and anti-US. It does not publish criticism or embarrassing content about the Chinese state. Unlike RT, it frequently frames issues (such as the revelations about Trump’s taxes) through the prism of the Chinese interest – even if the issues have no direct
bearing on China. These characteristics contravene journalistic norms of independence from government and impartiality (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001).

Why are RT and CGTN so different?

A limitation of our research is that while we can identify that RT and CGTN employed different propaganda models, we cannot establish definitively why they did so without access to the motives of those directing their coverage. Still, drawing on prior research, we suggest three reasons why they adopt different models. The first possibility is that RT was partisan because Russia wanted Trump to win, whereas CGTN was neutral because China was ambivalent about the outcome. Some authors support the idea that Russia and China wanted different sides to win the 2020 election (Sudworth, 2020). But this would not explain why the styles of each outlet were so different, why RT prioritised culture-related topics and CGTN prioritised policy issues, and why they covered their parent states so differently.

A second explanation is that each model represents an alternative strategy to enhance news credibility. Research shows that audiences can find news more credible if they believe the source supports their group and shares their partisan perspective (Lee, 2010). Since RT’s editorial line was explicitly pro-Trump and anti-Establishment, imitating US right wing outlets could help it appear more credible with conservative audiences, and appear less like Russian propaganda. The CGTN model may derive from an older idea of trust in news that associates the absence of persuasive intention with impartiality (Kohring and Matthews, 2007). The high global trust scores of the BBC and CNN may explain the appeal of this (Newman et al., 2020).

Another explanation may derive from historical development. The Russian government and security services have a century’s experience of seeking to destabilise and delegitimise foreign political systems (Rid, 2020). RT could be seen as a continuation of this approach. The CCP’s past efforts at international propaganda were more restrained. In previous decades, consistent with Deng Xiaoping’s suggestion that China should ‘hide its strength and bide its
time’, Chinese international propaganda less obviously sought to destabilise other political systems (Brady, 2008). CGTN may therefore be seen as a legacy of this restraint. Yet, recent research claims to have observed a ‘Russification’ of China’s international propaganda, with a hardening of the CCP’s approach and a willingness to try to coerce as well as persuade (Charon and Jeangène Vilmer, 2021). Such a Russification was not apparent in this analysis of RT and CGTN, which was limited to their methods during the US 2020 election. Further longitudinal research would help corroborate shifts in each country’s methods over time, and additional comparative research could help us understand whether their approaches are consistent across different countries and topics.

Similarly, how effective these models are at influencing audiences requires further exploration. Audience research on RT and CGTN is extremely sparse.1 While it is possible to gauge their popularity and engagement on Facebook and Twitter, this only partially indicates their effects and may not be representative or fully authentic. Properly assessing their effects requires further examination of who their audiences are, where their output fits within their audiences’ overall news consumption; research which is in its infancy (Madrid-Morales, 2021). Only when this is done will we develop a clearer view of the implications of these models for world politics.

How these outlets will evolve beyond Russia and China is unclear, though in principle both the partisan parasite and surface neutrality models are transferrable to other states and contexts. In February 2021, Al Jazeera launched a new news channel – ‘Rightly’ – to target right-wing US audiences, appearing to mimic RT’s partisan parasite model (Al Jazeera, 2021). Yet the channel’s existence was short-lived. It was shut down by Al Jazeera in January 2022 due to concerns that its partisanship would undermine the news organisation’s reputation for inclusive journalism, derived from its other coverage (Yang, 2022). The example of Rightly

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1 For an exception, see (Carter and Carter, 2021).
suggests that it would be hard for a given country or outlet to employ the partisan parasite model simultaneously with other models – as one would compromise the credibility of the other.

To conclude, this paper has examined a key issue in contemporary journalism: the increasing extent to which authoritarian states are instrumentalising their international news outlets to advance their geopolitical ambitions. Through comparative analysis we have identified two distinct propaganda models – the partisan parasite model operated by RT, and the surface neutrality model practised by CGTN. These models matter because they represent distinct ways in which authoritarian states are using news media outlets to enhance their relative influence at the cost of liberal democracies. Moreover, they challenge the normative ideals of news, and the perception, outlined by Hallin and Mancini, that the future may see ‘the triumph of the liberal model’ (2004:251). We now need further comparative research into the evolution of these models across countries and contexts. This will help us better understand the evolving contest between democratic and authoritarian systems of government, and the fast-changing digital communication channels through which this contest is prosecuted.
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