How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts
for Strategic Distraction, not Engaged Argument: Supplementary Appendix

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On 5/21/2016, the *Global Times* -- a newspaper published by the *People's Daily,* the chief Chinese Communist Party (CCP) mouthpiece -- ran an editorial in Chinese about our paper. The primary purpose of the editorial is to defend CCP policies and practices on the internet, including the activities of CCP-directed and organized online commentators, often colloquially referred to as the "50c party". Implicit premises of the editorial (which may be jarring to some readers unfamiliar with China) include that the accepted goal of the regime is to remain in power in perpetuity, that ensuring stability of control in this way is good for and agreed to by the people, and that the will of the government is equivalent to the will of the people. As a result, the Chinese regime is not embarrassed by their massive censorship organization or other information control mechanisms, such as the 50c party or the Great Firewall, which may help it accomplish these goals. The editorial talks about how the regime faces the challenging task of ensuring stability of control and shaping public opinion, while trying to avoid annoying people too much with these information control mechanisms that many do not like. The regime is especially concerned with the rise of social media, its frequency of viral messaging, and its ability to spark or fuel collective action; it feels so justified in its decision to respond to these challenges with newer, more intrusive, mechanisms to control public opinion that its appropriateness is assumed without seeing any need to defend or even mention its normative appropriateness.

As we explain in the Appendix included with our paper, the editorial, which was published only in Chinese, was addressed primarily to their people, rather than the international press (or us). Then, in the course of their main goal of essentially defending themselves before their people, the editorial appears to be a rare admission to the existence of the 50c party, the veracity of our leaked archive, and confirmation of our empirical results.

Understanding what is meant by this editorial requires translation -- which we offer below a sentence at a time in English, followed by the original Chinese -- as well as some contextual knowledge and explanation [which we offer in square brackets]. The original editorial was published at http://j.mp/ChinasResponse.

Global Times, 5/21/2016

Editorial: Harvard Team's Superficial Knowledge of the So-called "50 Cent Party"
社评：哈佛团队对所谓"五毛党"一知半解

A research team from Harvard University has recently published a report on the "Fifty Cent Party" of the Chinese internet; this report claims that they have read more than two thousand sealed emails leaked from a regional government's internet propaganda department in the city of Ganzhou, Jiangxi Province, in addition to verifying information on nearly 43,800 "50 Cent Party" posts. 哈佛大学一个研究团队日前公布一份针对中国网络"五毛党"的分析报告，该报告宣称查阅了两千多封从江西赣州一个区政府的网宣部门泄露出来的电子邮件，并且自称确认了将近约43800条"五毛党"发布的消息. This report goes further and estimates that China's government posts more than 480 million messages on social media each year, 53% of them on government websites. 该报告进一步估算中国政府每年在社交媒体上发布的信息约为4.8亿多条，其中53%的信息发布在政府网站上. [This is a reasonably accurate summary of some of the empirical results in our paper. The editorial does not take issue with these results or others in our paper; it also does not deny the veracity of the leaked archive we used in some of our analyses.]

The Harvard team's report has been actively promoted by the mainstream American media, [more than 5,000 news outlets worldwide, not only in America, published articles about an early draft of our paper over the few days before this editorial appeared; see Footnote 7 in our paper] seriously befouling China's name in Western circles. 哈佛团队的这一报告受到美国主流媒体的积极传播，在西方语境下狠狠"黑"了中国一把. However, it is obvious that the team doing this research has only the most superficial knowledge of China's national circumstances, muddling the distinctions between official authoritative information, the official news media, and ordinary online statements; they also fail to understand the legitimacy of "public opinion guidance" within the Chinese system. ["Public opinion guidance" is an official term referring to CCP policies and practices designed to influence or control public opinion. In China, this includes what they call below "traditional" guidance, such as their control of the press, as well as newer types of guidance designed for social media and the internet that includes censorship, 50c activity, the Great Firewall, etc. Our paper does not address the "legitimacy" of this activity one way or the other, but many news media reports on our paper attacked these normative issues head on.] 然而做此研究的哈佛团队显然对中国的国情一知半解，他们既混淆了官方权威信息、官方媒体消息以及普通网上发言之间的区别，也不了解"舆论引导"在中国体制中的正当性. They take the structures and mechanisms of the Western media field as the standard, summing up all the ways in which the Chinese media structures differ as the "Fifty Cent Phenomenon." [Our paper distinguishes between 50c posts written under direction by the Chinese government, which we study, and others, such as those written by volunteers or on behalf of business groups, which we do not; see Footnote 1 in our paper.] 他们把西方舆论场的结构和机制当做了标准，中国舆论格局与之不同的地方都被他们归入了"五毛现象".

China's political system is different from that of the West, so it is only natural that the media ecology would be different as well. 中国的政治体制与西方不同，舆论生态自然也不会一样. The Western media has its own guidance rules, adapted to its political forms and socioeconomic landscape. [E.g., in the West, child pornography is routinely censored, as are critical comments on some corporate web sites.

Also, politicians, public officials, and government programs participate in social media, issue press releases, and give speeches. Of course, only rarely do Western governments use forms of public opinion guidance that are kept secret from the public, at least so far as is known.] 西方舆论有他们自己的引导规则，与那里的政治形态和经济社会面貌相适应. China's media system cannot emulate the West, and those who work in China's media can be proud of this principle. [I.e., China's public opinion guidance policies should be viewed as legitimate even though they are different from Western government practices because Western social media and Western political systems differ from China's.] 中国的舆论体系不可能向西方看齐，中国舆论工作者对这个原则完全可以理直气壮.

Indeed, Chinese society is generally in agreement regarding the necessity of "public opinion guidance," [This is an empirical claim which, as we show in our paper by analyzing social media posts discussing this editorial, turns out to be incorrect.] and Chinese people are also aware of the fact that the media in different countries around the world is subject to different forces and different degrees of guidance. 其实对于"引导舆论"的必要性，中国社会总体是认同的，对于全世界的舆论都受到不同力量和不同程度的引导，中国人对此也是知道的. What people frequently debate is just how this "public opinion guidance" is to advance with the times, accurately gauging the pulse of the internet and improving the positive results with less wasted efforts. ["Positive results with less wasted efforts" refers to removing, redirecting, or distracting the public from information viewed by the regime as false or harmful.] 人们争论的往往是"舆论引导"应当如何与时俱进，摸准互联网上的脉搏，多收获正面效果，少做无用功，Especially undesirable is courting mockery through improper guidance. [The government is expressing the difficulty of its political position, where it is trying to guide public opinion as it desires, while trying to make sure the public does not get too upset in the process and spark collective action, which most government guidance is designed to urgently prevent or stop. Not all Chinese people agree with CCP activities in censorship and public opinion guidance, and they know that a way to influence the government is to engage in collective action and on-the-ground protest.] 尤其应避免不当引导造成"高级黑".

The "Fifty Cent Party" [people directed by the Chinese government to post in social media in specific deceptive ways] and the "American Cent Party" [those who choose to post on social media in ways favorable to the US government] debate has been around a long time. "五毛党"与"美分党"的争论很早就有. Whether the "Fifty Cent Party" exists, or who they might be, are most certainly not prominent questions in the online Chinese media. "五毛党"到底存不存在，他们是些什么人，这绝非中国网上舆论场的突出问题. When Chinese people talk jokingly about the "Water Army" [astroturfers operating surreptitiously, i.e., "underwater", usually on behalf of commercial firms], they're usually not referring to the "Fifty Cent Party"; sometimes they're talking about the "American Cent Party," sometimes they're talking about business promotion teams, and sometimes they're talking about groups that use all kinds of forces within the borders and beyond to "manufacture momentum." [The government is very concerned with any nongovernmental group with the ability to make ideas go viral, from which collective action is sometimes generated.] 中国人说到"水军"时，多数时候也不与"五毛党"划等号，它们有些时候指向了所谓"美分党"，有些时候指向了商业炒作团队，还有时是指境内外形形色色力量雇佣的声势制造团队. This is a point the Harvard researchers either got wrong or deliberately generalized about. 这一点哈佛的研究者也搞错了，或者是他们成心以偏概全. [The editorial is correct that many ideas go

viral in ways that are not controlled by the government, either openly or secretly through the 50c party. Of course, our paper distinguishes among these sources; see Footnote 1 in our paper.]

The Chinese internet media's largest problem is not being dominated by the "Fifty Cent Party," [i.e., The largest problem the Chinese government or, equivalently, its people have with the media is not that the internet is dominated by the "Fifty Cent Party,"…] but rather the amplification of negative and alternative information [i.e., viral memes generated by sources other than the CCP] on Chinese domestic issues caused by opinion formation mechanisms that have been a part of the Internet since it was invented in the US [i.e., ideas that go viral due to forces other than the regime]; Chinese society, in the midst of a transformation, does not have the hedging [risk mitigation] mechanisms to deal with this amplification, so traditional public opinion guidance systems don't seem to be pulling their weight when it comes to overcoming these problems. [In other words, controlling state-owned media content no longer controls what people read and so does not influence their public opinion as much as it did before the advent of new participatory social media.] 中国互联网舆论场的最大问题恐怕不是所谓"五毛党"主导了它，而是互联网在美国被发明时自带的舆论生成机制发酵出来，它放大了中国国内的负面及另类信息，转型中的中国社会却缺少对这种放大的对冲机制，传统的舆论引导体系对克服这个问题似乎又有些使不上劲.

The Internet media space has an infinite capacity but its borders and its core are unclear [i.e., unlike a physical or geographic boundary, which is easier to defend], so some grassroots social issues are always able to suddenly attract the attention of the entire Internet, creating one hot button issue after another in the online Chinese media; its overall impact simply cannot be compared with that of the Western internet media. 互联网舆论空间有无穷的容量，它的边缘和中心并不清晰，一些基层社会事件总能突然冲到全网关注的核心位置，造成中国网上舆论场高潮迭起，其总的冲击力令西方互联网舆论场不可同日而语. The Harvard team's report gives the impression that the "Fifty Cent Party" is a shadowy, omnipotent group with government support, citing individual cases that we have been unable to verify but that when woven together give a false idea very far from the actual situation of the internet in China. [To some extent, this appears to be intentionally vague, with "false idea" having no clear referent. However, inferring this in context from of the rest of the editorial, they are saying that the 50c party exists but has a minor influence over social media compared to other forces described above. Throughout, instead of disagreeing with any empirical findings or claims in our paper, the editorial focuses on the normative justification and, from the perspective of the regime, the need for their system of public opinion guidance.] 哈佛团队的报告给人以政府支持的"五毛党"神出鬼没、无所不能的印象，他们举出我们无从验证真假的个别例子，编织出来的却是与中国互联网实际情形有很大差距的不实面貌.

Various permutations in the relationship between the internet and social governance around the world are derived from the marvelously rich and complex range of human phenomena [i.e., They are claiming that different countries with different political systems are justified in having different rules for public opinion guidance], and the Harvard team's arrogance and naiveté is like using arithmetic to solve complex calculus problems. 互联网与世界各地社会治理的排列组合衍生出极其丰富复杂的人间万象，哈佛团队的傲慢和幼稚就像是要用算数去解微积分的高难课题一样. I have to say, they are either nerds who lack experience, or opportunistic scholars who know how to use the Western public's biases to get

attention. 不能不说他们或者是一些缺少见识的书呆子，或者是一些知道如何顺着西方公众价值偏好来博取眼球的市侩学者.

The issue also tells us how complex an internal and external environment China's media workers are faced with; China's media is no longer independent and closed, and Western media forces have a huge interest in communicating and interacting with us. 这件事也告诉我们，中国的舆论工作面临何其复杂的内外环境，中国舆论场再也不是独立、封闭的，西方舆论力量有着巨大兴趣找上门来与我们掰扯、互动，A grassroots issue in China can become a hot topic on the domestic internet in a heartbeat because of this, and can even resonate through the international media. 中国基层的事可能瞬间成为国内网上热题，还很可能在国际舆论场上引起回响. This makes brand new requirements for us, and we may have no choice but to build up our internal strength in order to face all these changes. 这为我们提出了全新的要求，我们或许别无选择，唯有加强内功，以应万变. [In other words, in order to stay in power, the regime feels it must bolster "internal strength," which seems to refer to more stringent forms of public opinion guidance, such as 50c party activity controlled by the regime, so it can stop issues from going viral on the web and potentially on the ground.]