

# Investigating China's Social Media Presence

**Hacking Diffusion: Unveiling China's Online Strategies**  
A comparison of Chinese state media Twitter accounts in Western and non-Western countries

Adel Mousaappi, Khusnul Nagla, Jeffrey Zhou

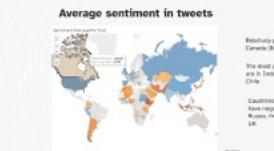
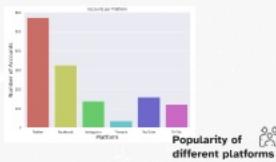
**Introduction**  
**The Rise of China**  
(Over the past few decades, China has emerged as a major global economic and political power, accompanying this has been an increasing desire to influence and interfere with global affairs to further external interests.)



**Foreign Interference**  
- Covert activities carried out by a foreign state  
- Are deceptive & detrimental to Canadian people  
- Conducted with the intention of advancing its own interests.  
- Aimed at undermining Canada's national interests.



**Dangers of Foreign Interference**  
- Threatens Canada's democracy and security  
- Palms unsuspecting citizens - Interferes with Canadians rights to vote  
- Undermining the public's ability to make free and informed decisions  
- Weakening Canada's military defense systems



**Implications**  
It is evident that China's strategy is working, being displayed in Western media through spreading disinformation.

Rapid measures must be put in place to combat this growing threat.

**Recommendations**  
- Implement educational programs to increase digital literacy and teach citizens how to spot disinformation campaigns.  
- Stringent regulations on social media platforms are needed to identify and remove disinformation campaigns and state-sponsored propaganda.

Thank You for Listening!

# **Hashtag Diplomacy: Unraveling China's Online Strategies**

A comparison of Chinese state media's Twitter presence  
in Western and non-Western countries

Adel Muursepp

Khushil Nagda

Jeffrey Zhou

## *Introduction*

# The Rise of China

- Over the past few decades, China has emerged as a major global economic and political power.
- Accompanying this has been an increasing desire to influence and interfere with global affairs to further national interests.



# Foreign Interference

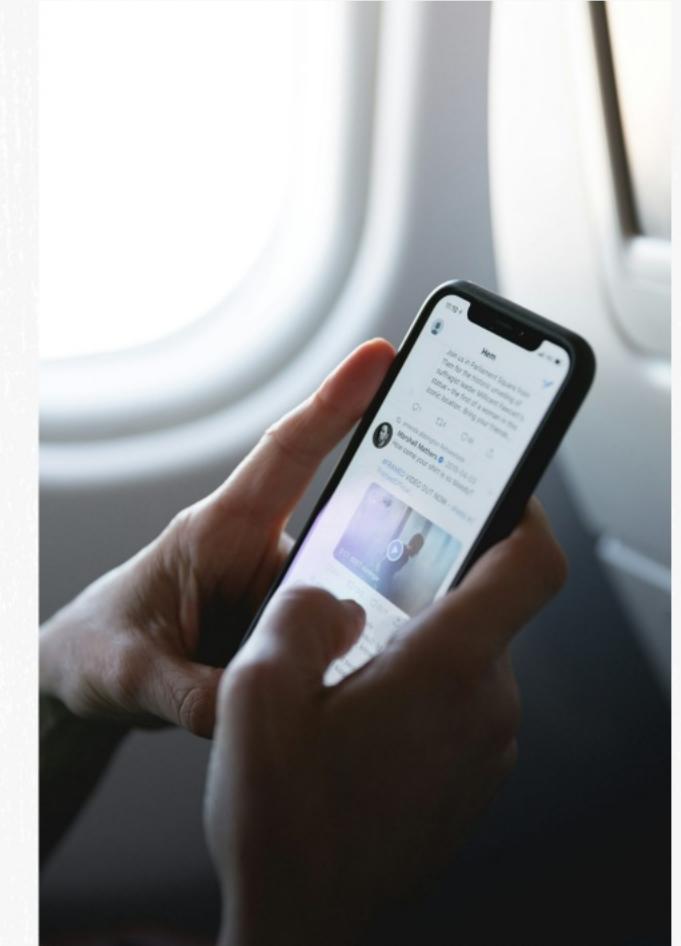
- Covert activities carried out by a foreign state
- Are deceptive & detrimental to Canadian people
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## Examples

Disinformation campaigns (predominantly on Social Media)

Cyber Attacks

Illicit Financing



# Dangers of Foreign Interference

- Threatens Canada's democracy and security
- Polarises unsuspecting citizens - Interferes with Canadians' rights to vote
- Undermining the public's ability to make free and informed decisions
- Weakening Canada's military defensive systems





## *Key Differences*

# **Foreign Influence ≠ Foreign Interference**

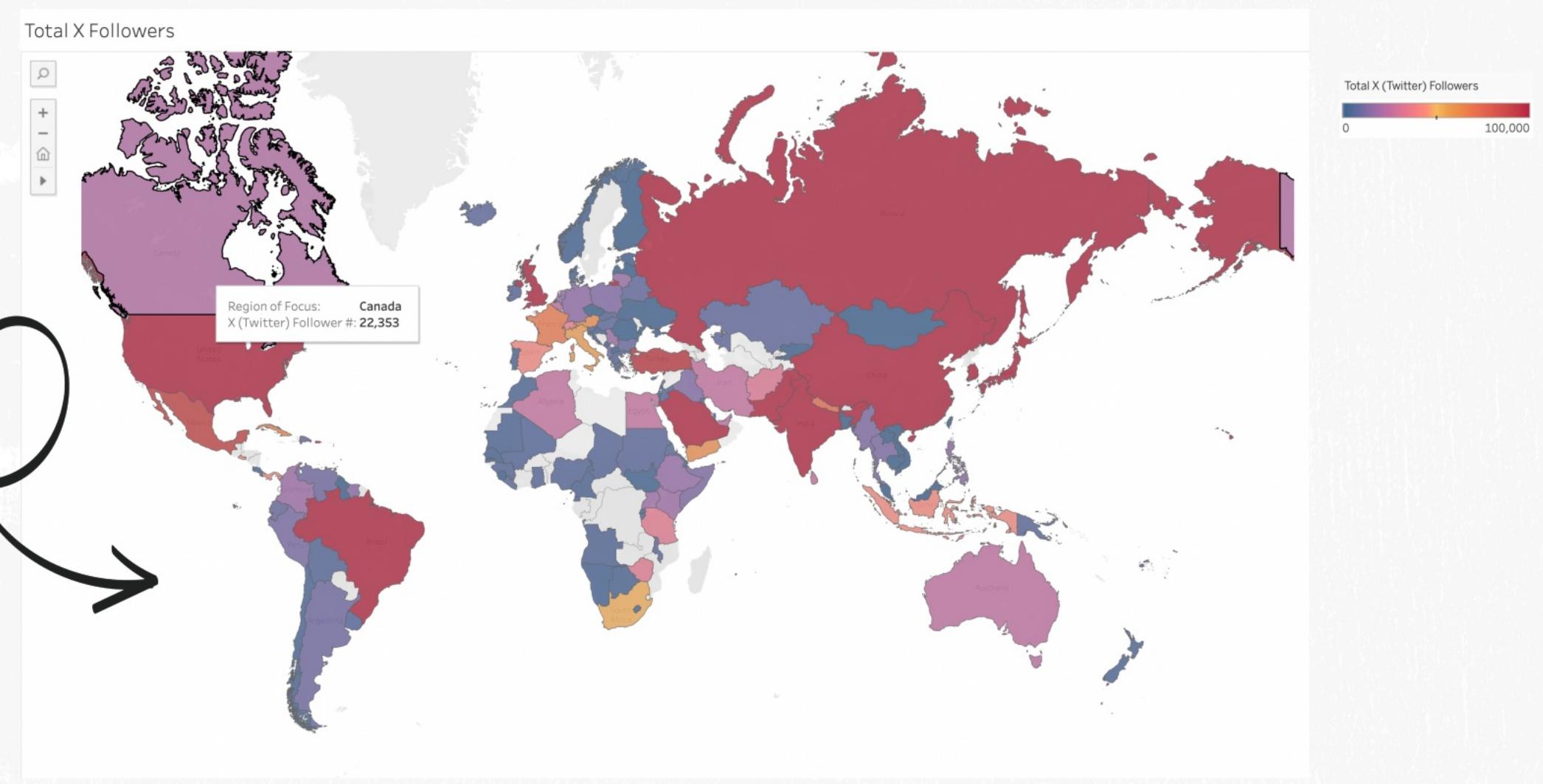
Overt, transparent actions, normal part of diplomatic relations between countries.

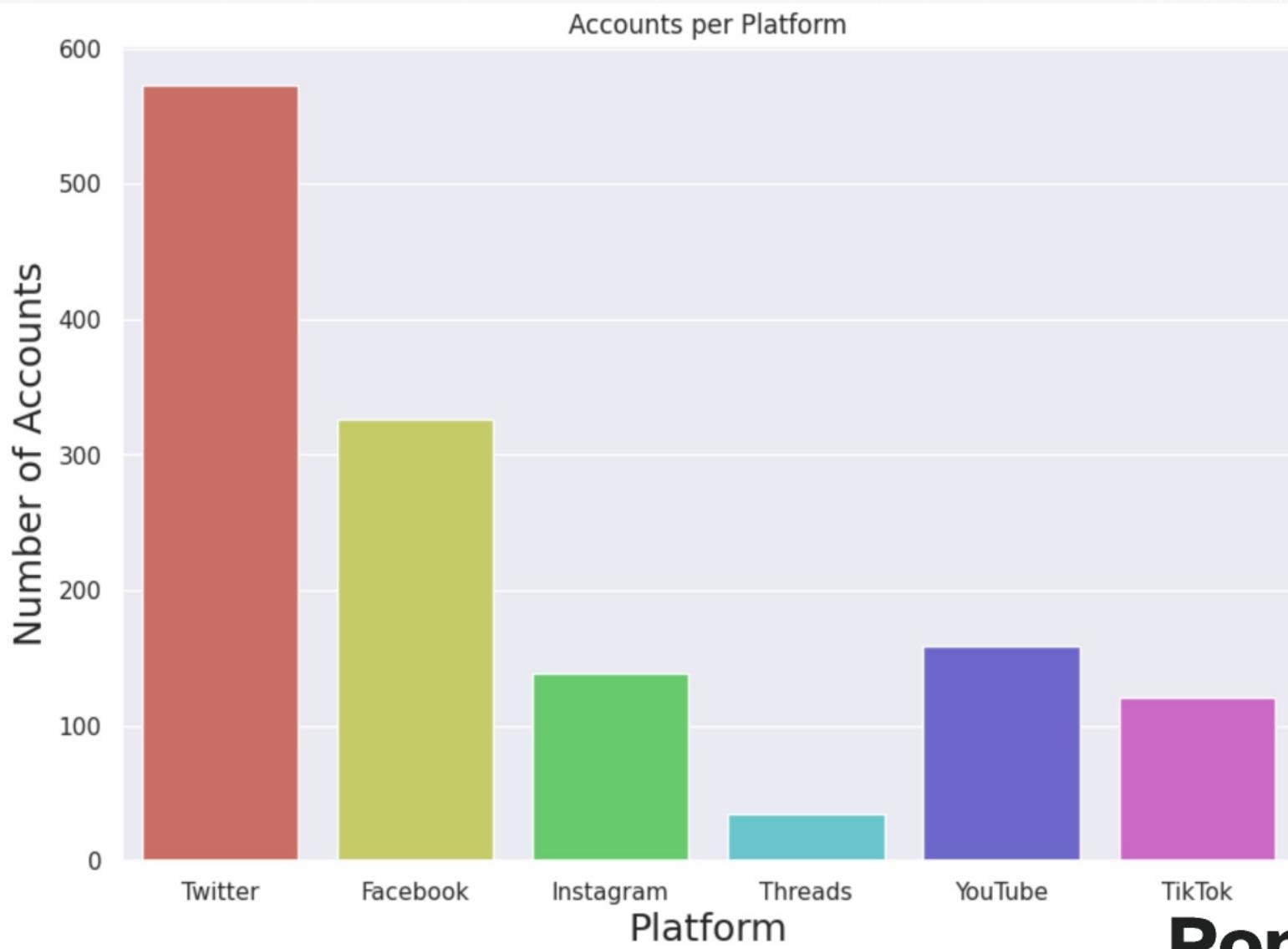
Respects Canada's sovereignty, focuses on shaping the environment in which decisions are made

Often has malicious intent, aiming to undermine or damage the target country's interests.

Directly targets the internal affairs of a country, aiming to change political outcomes

# Reach Across the Globe





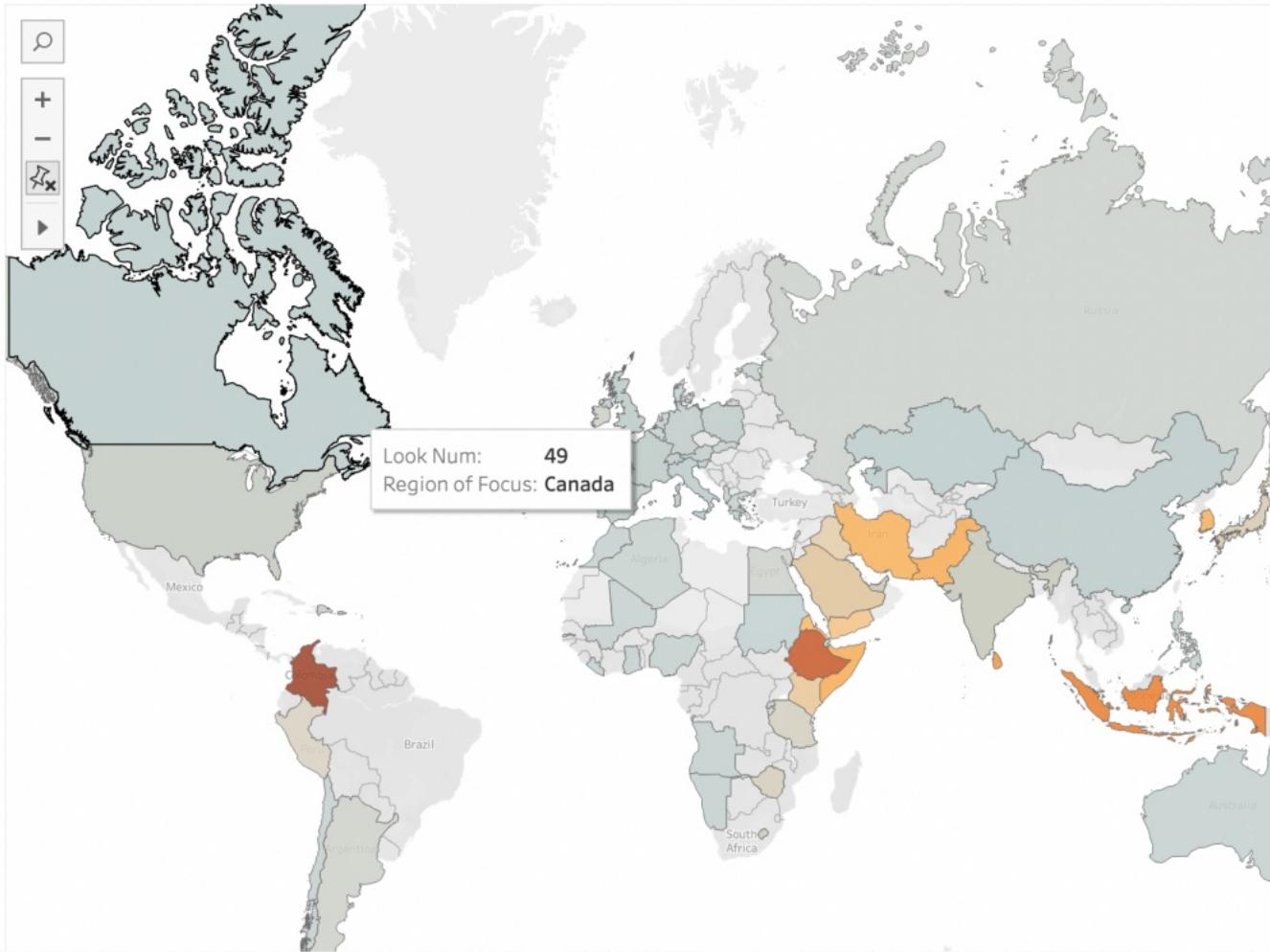
**Popularity of  
different platforms**





# Where is China's Online Presence Most Effective?

Looks Average Per Post on X



Note that on average a tweet on X in Canada receives 49 views, similar to the rest of the world

There are some countries where, on average, a tweet on X receives a high number of views, such as Colombia (14 800) and Ethiopia (11 000)

This most likely indicates that China is focusing a lot of diplomacy efforts in these countries because of economic or political interest

# Deep Dive: Twitter's role in spreading disinformation

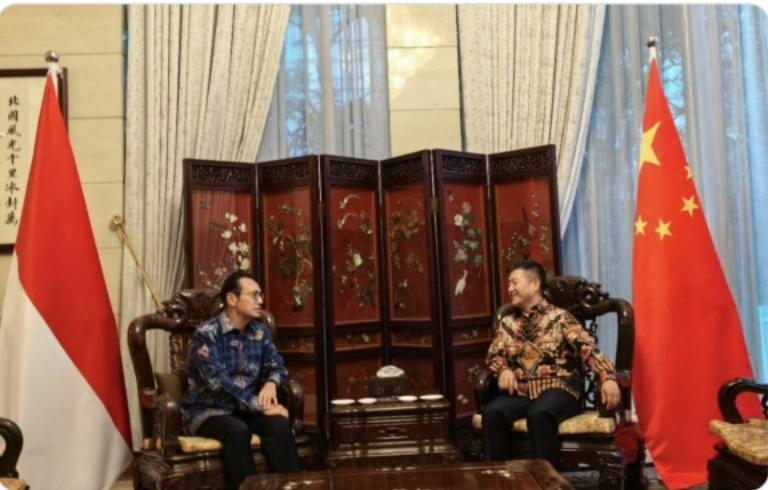
- 600 out of the approximately 750 Chinese state actors from our dataset use Twitter
- Hence, we chose it as our platform of focus and performed our analysis of tweets put out by Chinese twitter accounts.
- Our Process
  - Webscraping data from Twitter capturing tweet content and engagement metrics such as Likes & Retweets
  - Employing the nltk library to assess the polarity and subjectivity of tweets
    - Polarity scale: -1 to 1 where -1 indicates negativity and 1 indicates positivity
    - Subjectivity scale: 0 to 1 where 0 represents high objectivity tweets while 1 represents highly subjective tweets

# Sentiment Analysis of Tweets

X ← Post

⚙️ 陆慷 LU Kang ✅  
@Amb\_LuKang

Very happy to receive Ambassador Kanasugi Kenji at my residence this afternoon. I wish you all the best in your next tenure in China.

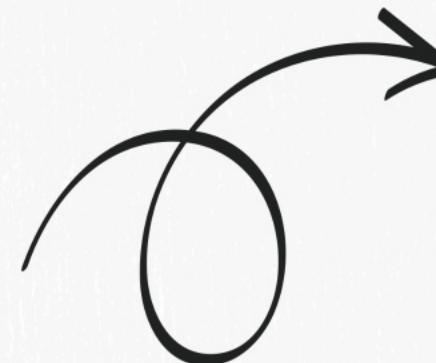


5:41 AM · Nov 16, 2023 · 19.9K Views

20 Reposts 5 Quotes 132 Likes 3 Bookmarks

*Sentiment Score*

**0.897** (very positive)



*Subjectivity Score*

**0.433** (not too subjective)

# Tweets Data

*Total number of tweets scraped*

6465

*Average Subjectivity Score*

0.293

*Average Sentiment Score*

0.244

*Overall*

*Western  
Countries*

0.301

0.267

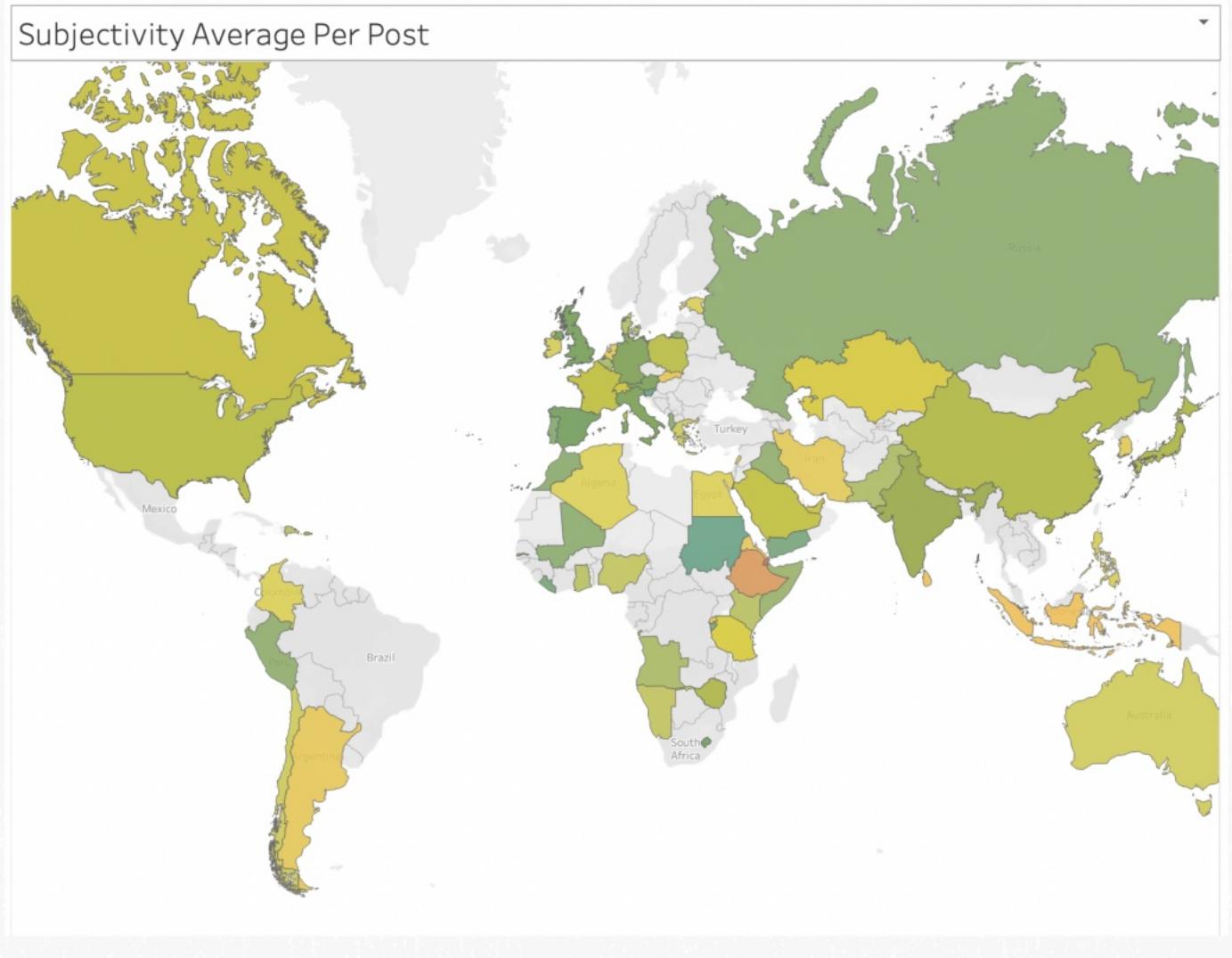
*Non-Western  
Countries*

0.289

0.232



# Average subjectivity in tweets



Low subjectivity in Russia and some African countries

Highly opinionated tweets in Chile, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran

Quite high expression of opinion in tweets with region of focus in the USA and Canada

# Tweet characteristic of Canada's average subjectivity score

X ← Post

 刘晓明Liu Xiaoming  
@AmbLiuXiaoMing

...  
We have been upgrading the industrial structure, shifting from old drivers of growth to new ones & opening up new areas and new arenas in development. IMF said that China remains the single largest contributor to global growth and accounts for one-third of it.

3:15 AM · Nov 9, 2023 · 137 Views

2 Likes

*Subjectivity Score*

**0.296** (not too subjective)

Note that external sources are referenced

However, there is some expression of personal opinion that shows that the tweet is not completely objective

# Contrast it with highly opinionated tweet



*Subjectivity Score*

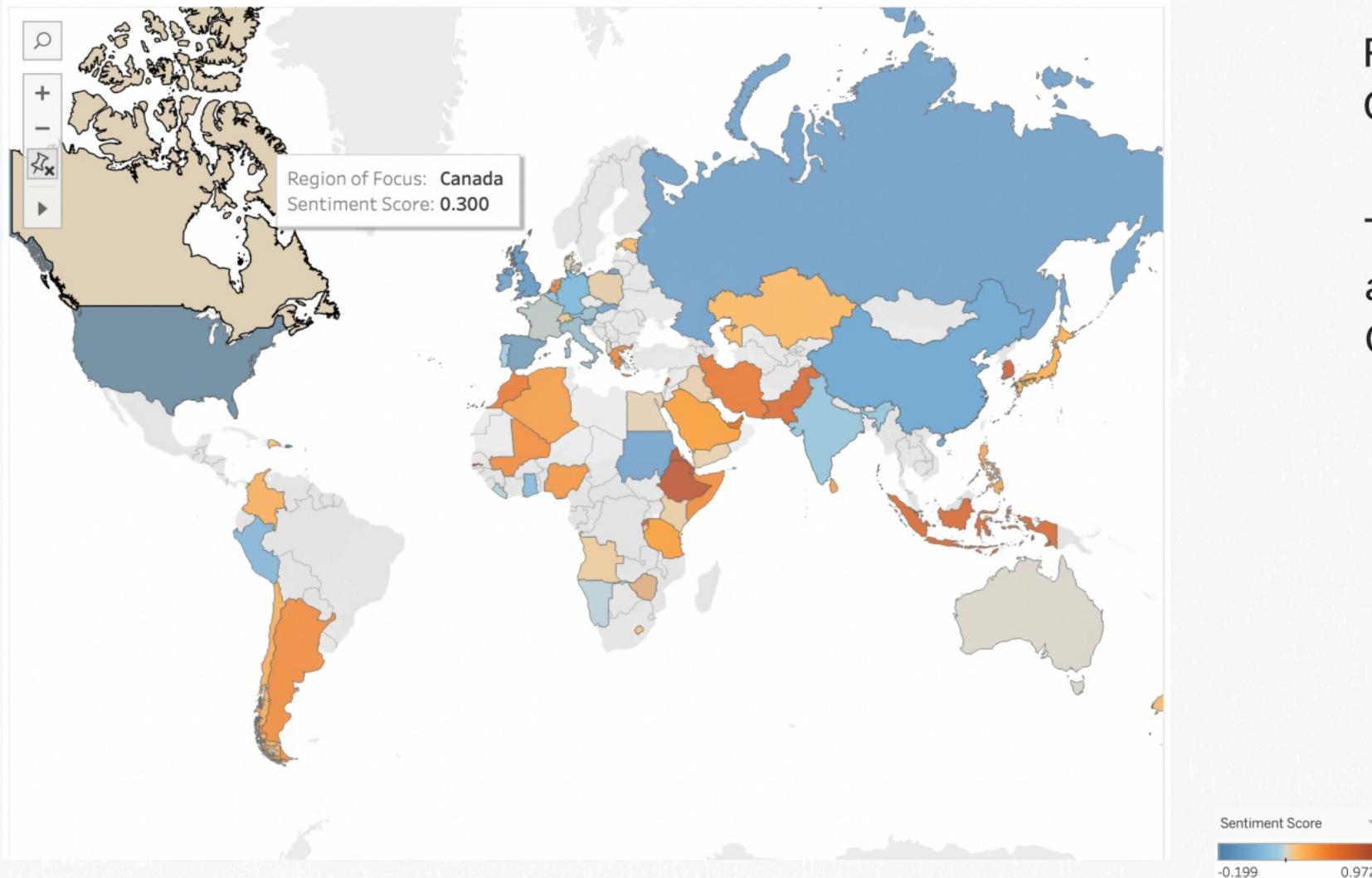
0.9 (very subjective)

Translated in our analysis  
with translate API:

*President Xi's speech elicits enthusiastic reactions  
from US figures #XiJinping*

# Average sentiment in tweets

Sentiment Average Per Post



Relatively positive tweets in Canada (0.300)

The most positive tweets are in Indonesia, Ethiopia, Chile

Countries where tweets have negative sentiment are Russia, the USA, France, the UK

# Tweet characteristic of Canada's average sentiment score

X ← Post

CGTN Radio  @CGTNRadio

#TheBeijingHour The Chinese president has proposed a plan for promoting cooperation between Beijing and Washington.



radio.cgtn.com

8:15 AM · Nov 16, 2023 · 372 Views

*Sentiment Score*

0.361 (quite positive)

Note the calm and rather positive tone

# Contrast it with very negative tweet

X ← Post

Andy Boreham 安柏然 ✅  
@AndyBxxx

Stop lying, Anna. You haven't documented ANY evidence of pro-Beijing violence, but there is ample evidence the other way around.

Watch this video of a group of anti-China thugs bashing a lone woman.

CONTENT MAY UPSET SOME VIEWERS.



*Sentiment Score*

**-0.91** (very negative)

Note the strong language and negative attitude

None of the countries have such negative scores but most negative are the US (-0.094) and Russia (-0.020)

# \*INSIGHTS

- Western countries tend to be targeted with more opinionated and more positive tweets, while the opposite happens for non-Western countries.
- Canada targeted with more opinionated and more positive tweets than other Western countries
- Suggests that China wants to subtly sway Western (democratic) audiences with opinionated messages masked positively, while attempting to use blunt, negative messaging to sway non-Western, less democratic audiences.



# **Implications**

It is evident that China foreign interference tactics are working, sowing distrust in Western democracies and polarizing unsuspecting citizens

Rapid measures must be put in place to combat this growing threat

## **Recommendations**

- Implement educational programs to increase digital literacy and teach citizens how to spot disinformation campaigns
- Stricter regulations on social media platforms are needed to identify and remove disinformation campaigns and state-sponsored propaganda.



**Thank You for Listening!**