

Winning Hearts and Minds over the Internet: China's Digital Diplomacy towards Africa

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Outline

- Public diplomacy 2.0
- China's public diplomacy
 - Overview of activities
 - Africa as China's "public diplomacy sandbox"
- China's Online PD in Africa
 - Structure
 - Audience
 - Messages

Public diplomacy

«a government's process of communication with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies»

(Tuch 1990: 3)

Listening

Advocacy

Cultural Diplomacy

Exchange Diplomacy

International Broadcasting

Public Diplomacy in Transition

Monologue



Dialogue



Collaboration

(Cowan & Arsenault 2008)

Online public diplomacy

- Digital diplomacy or Public Diplomacy 2.0 brings offline practices to the Internet and takes advantage of new forms of engagement.
- New challenges emerge for practitioners:
 - Proliferation of new actors;
 - Information overload;
 - Convergence of audiences and channels.

China's public diplomacy

- China has a long history of state-sponsored engagement with foreign audiences (particularly in Africa).
 - Artistic troupes [cultural diplomacy];
 - Political exchanges [exchange diplomacy];
 - Medical training [exchange diplomacy];
 - Radio Peking [international broadcasting];
 - Magazines and book publishing [advocacy].

China's (New) Public Diplomacy

- In its quest for a bigger role internationally, China has been willing to increase its discursive power, it has fully adopted the concept of (cultural) soft power, although not so successfully:
 - It has implemented new public diplomacy strategies;
 - It has expanded its mediated public diplomacy;
 - It has begun to explore with online platforms.

China's Online Public Diplomacy



The image shows a screenshot of the Facebook page for 'Xi's US Visit'. The page features a cover photo of Chinese President Xi Jinping with the hashtag #XiUSAVisit. The profile picture is a logo with the text '2015 XI'S US VISIT' and stylized Chinese characters. The page has 1,109,562 likes and a post from September 30, 2015, about Xi's UN visit.

Xi's US Visit 

Comunitat

[M'agrada](#) [Comparteix](#) [...](#)

[Cronologia](#) [About](#) [Fotos](#) [M'agrada](#) [Videos](#)

Agrada a 1.109.562 persones

Convida amistats a la pàgina

 **Xi's US Visit** ha afegit 3 new photos.
30 / setembre / 2015 · 

Xi's UN visit breathes new life into intl ties
Chinese President Xi Jinping's first appearance at the UN headquarters
breathed new life into the development of international relations, for the

Research Questions

- Africa plays a central role in China's online outreach activities. What about online?
 1. What is the structure of China's online public diplomacy towards Africa?
 2. Who is CCTV-Africa's audience online?
 3. What are CCTV-Africa's messages online?

Africa as sandbox

- Africa concentrates the largest number of Chinese media ventures overseas:
 - CRI opened a local FM station in Nairobi;
 - China Daily has an African edition;
 - CCTV has its own broadcast centre in Nairobi;
 - Xinhua has more correspondents than any other organisation;
- China has ‘experimented’ in Africa
 - Online – several projects have been launched

Structure

	Diplomatic Missions	Central media	Other media	State Agencies
Listening	✓	✓	x	x
Advocacy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cultural Diplomacy	x	✓	x	✓
Exchange Diplomacy	x	x	x	x
International Broadcasting	x	✓	✓	✓

Structure



The image shows a Facebook post from the page 'CCTV AFRICA'. The post features a large banner with a red background. On the left, there is a faint image of two hands shaking. In the center, the text reads 'FORUM ON CHINA-AFRICA COOPERATION' in large white letters, with 'JOHANNESBURG DEC. 2015' below it. To the right of the text is a stylized map of Africa and a portion of the Chinese flag with yellow stars. On the far right of the banner is a photograph of three construction workers in red uniforms and hard hats (two blue, one white) working together on a metal structure. Below the banner, the Facebook interface shows the 'CCTV AFRICA' profile picture and name. To the right of the name are statistics: 'TUITS 32,2m', 'SEGUINT 478', 'SEGLIDORS 36m', 'AGRADAMENTS 28', and 'LLISTES 1'. A blue 'Segueix' button is located to the right of these statistics. Below the statistics, there are tabs for 'Tuits', 'Fotos i vídeos', and 'Pàgines web', with 'Tuits' selected. A search bar is partially visible at the bottom right.

CCTV AFRICA

FORUM ON CHINA-AFRICA COOPERATION
JOHANNESBURG DEC. 2015

TUITS	SEGUINT	SEGLIDORS	AGRADAMENTS	LLISTES
32,2m	478	36m	28	1

Segueix

Goals

«I don't think it necessarily came out much from Beijing but more from a local understanding.

CCTV Africa had been around for 3 years and they knew to reach African audiences, they had to do it digitally. They had to get their social media strategy sorted. None of this stuff exists in Beijing.

They couldn't get any guy from Beijing and they didn't know who to go to and they didn't know how to start»

Interview #6, Nairobi 2 March 2015

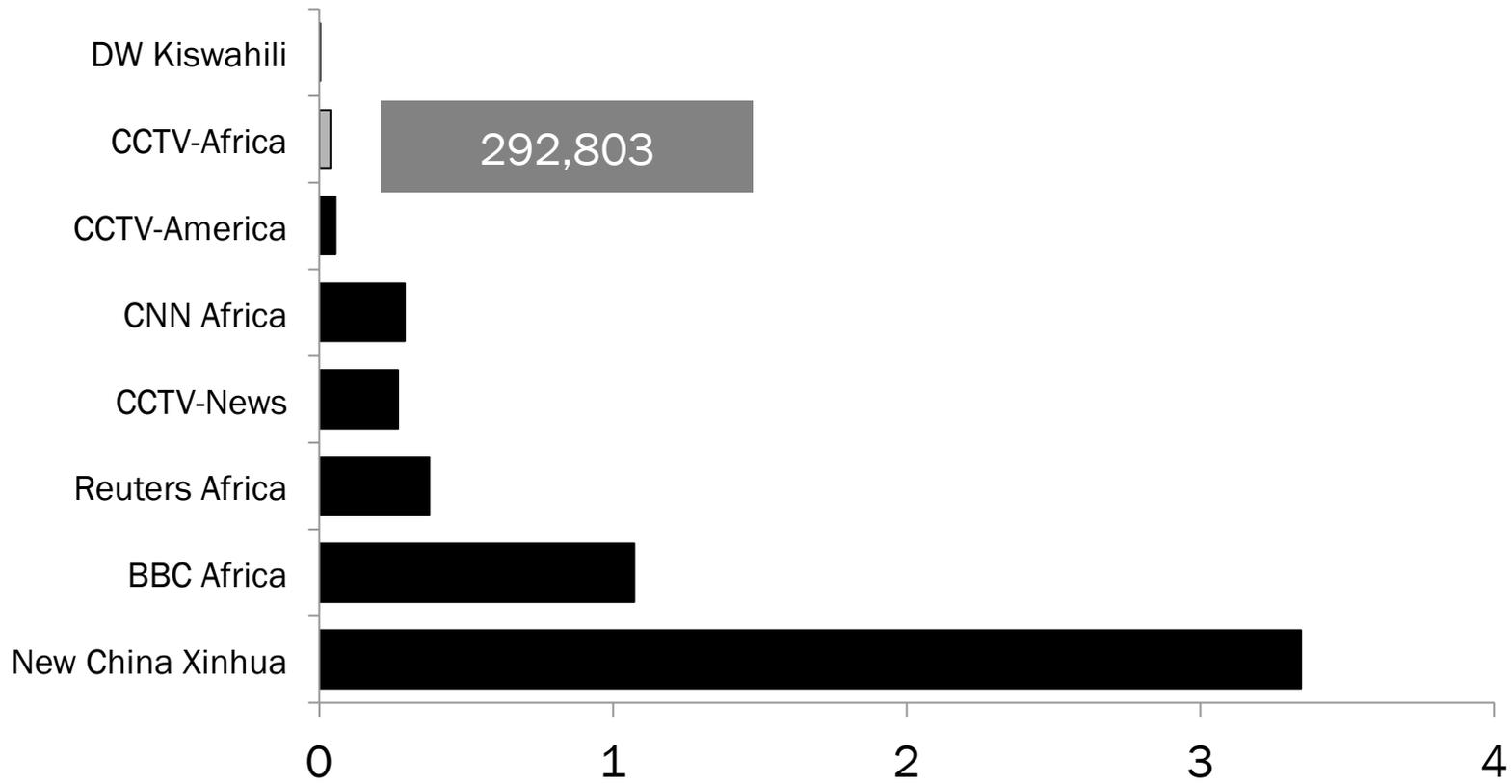
Goals

«To promote CCTV-Africa. It's not easy actually to access our TV channel in every country. But now Internet is more accessible. So we want to show our presence in those areas also. (...). [T]hat's why our new bureau chief is really stressing this digital department strategy. Even in Beijing, in the headquarters, they have established digital department. Not only in CCTV-News but also the the Chinese channels.»

Interview #3, 10 November 2015

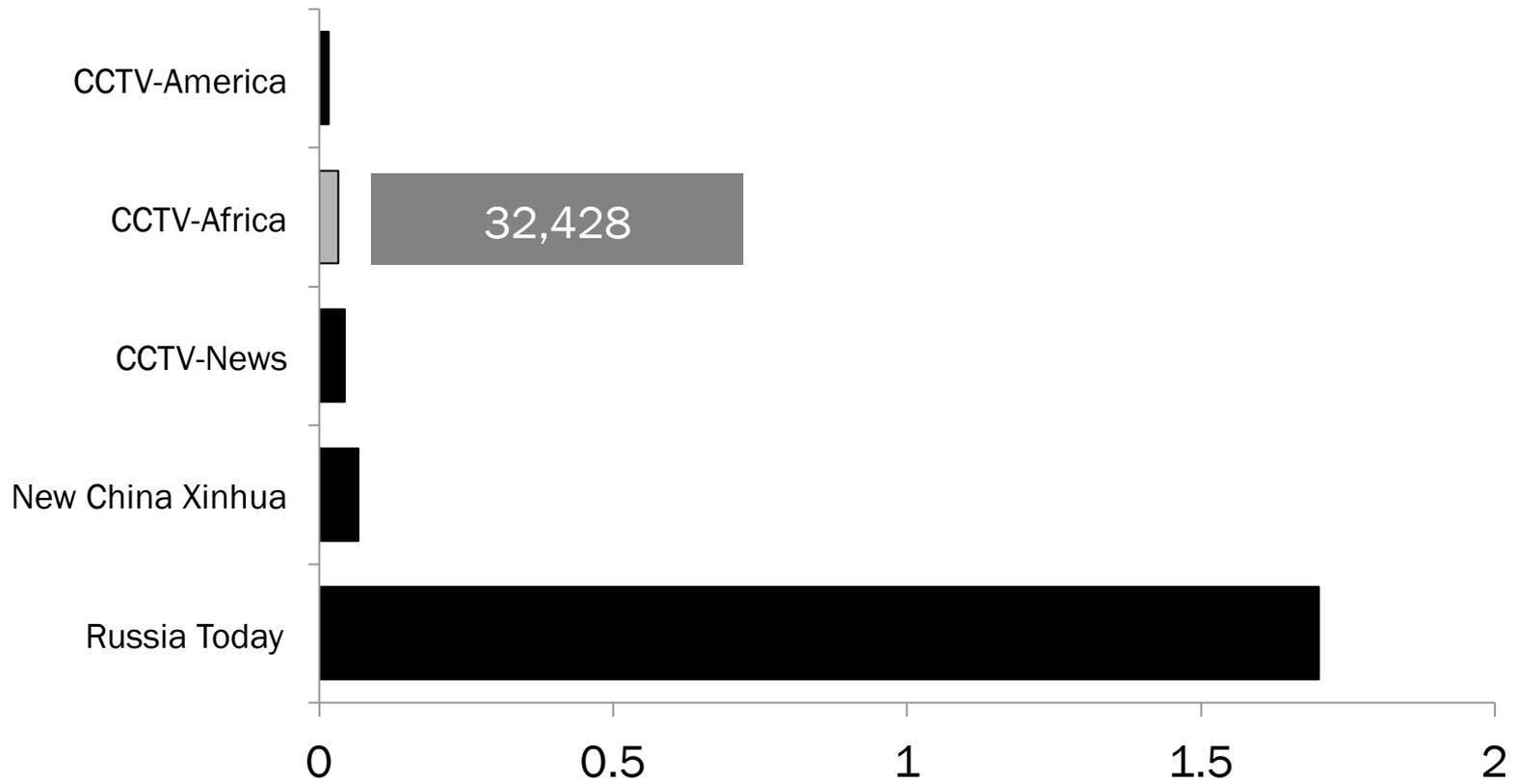
Audience

Twitter Followers (in millions) as of January 2016



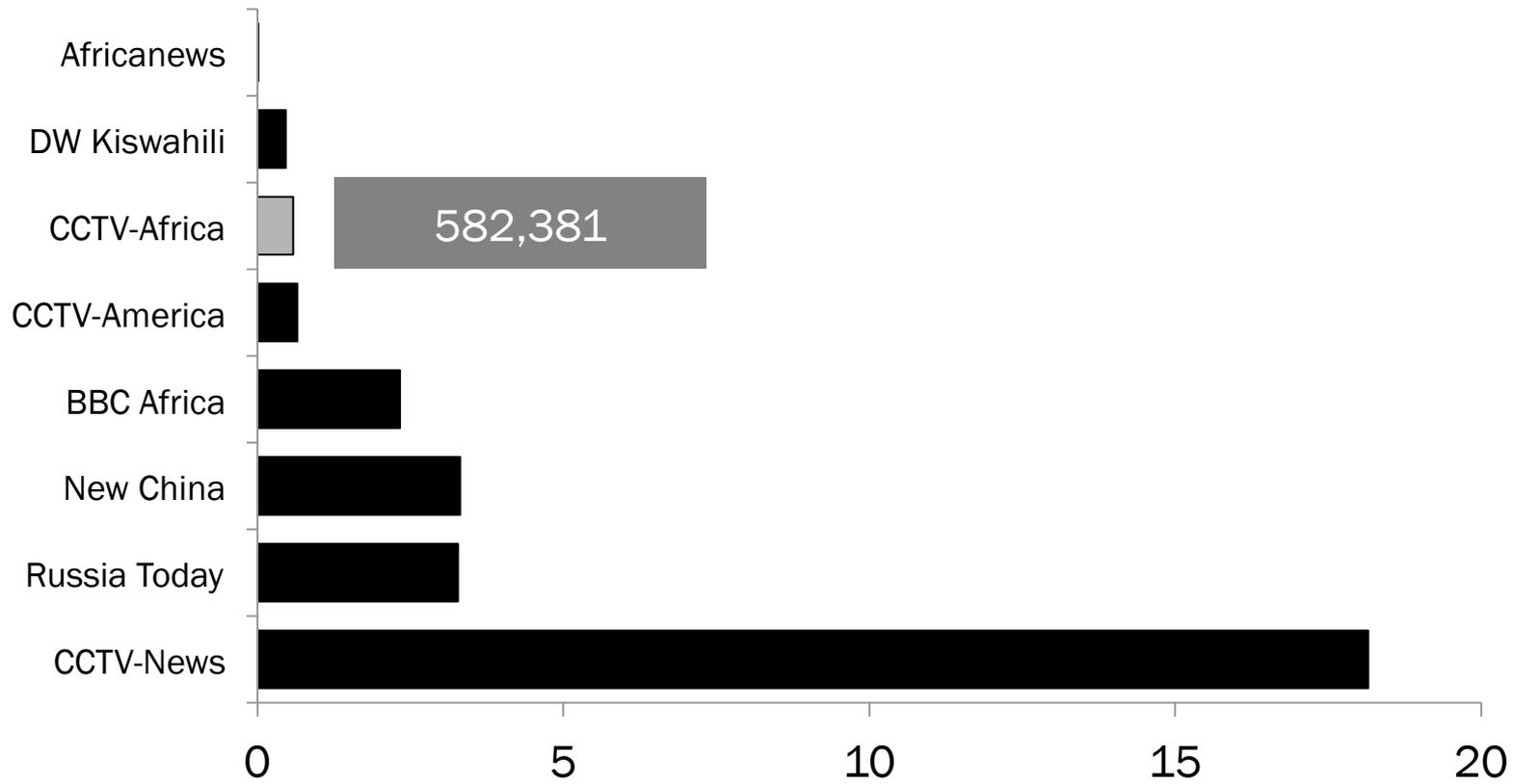
Audience

YouTube Followers (in millions) as of January 2016



Audience

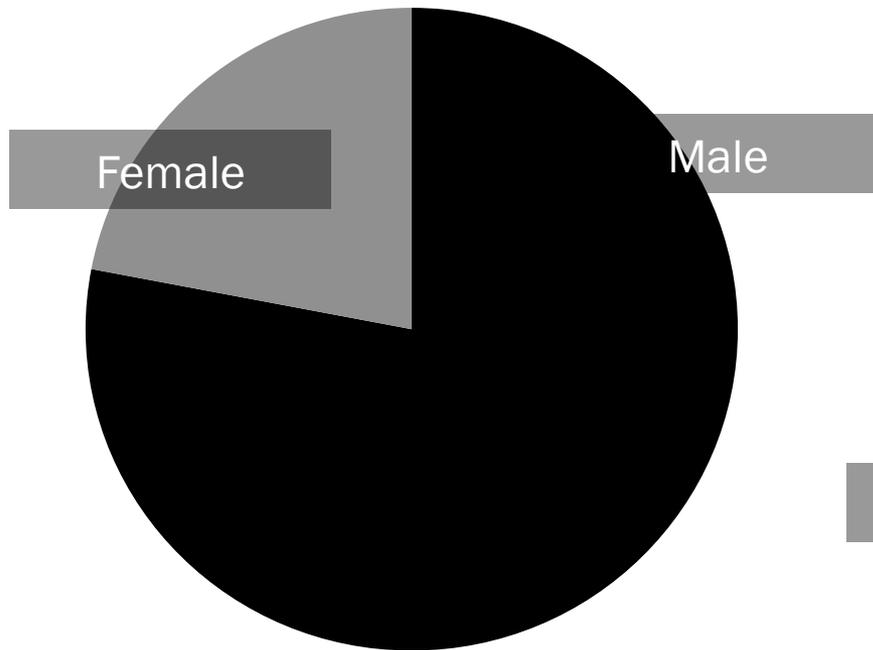
Facebook Likes (in millions) as of January 2016



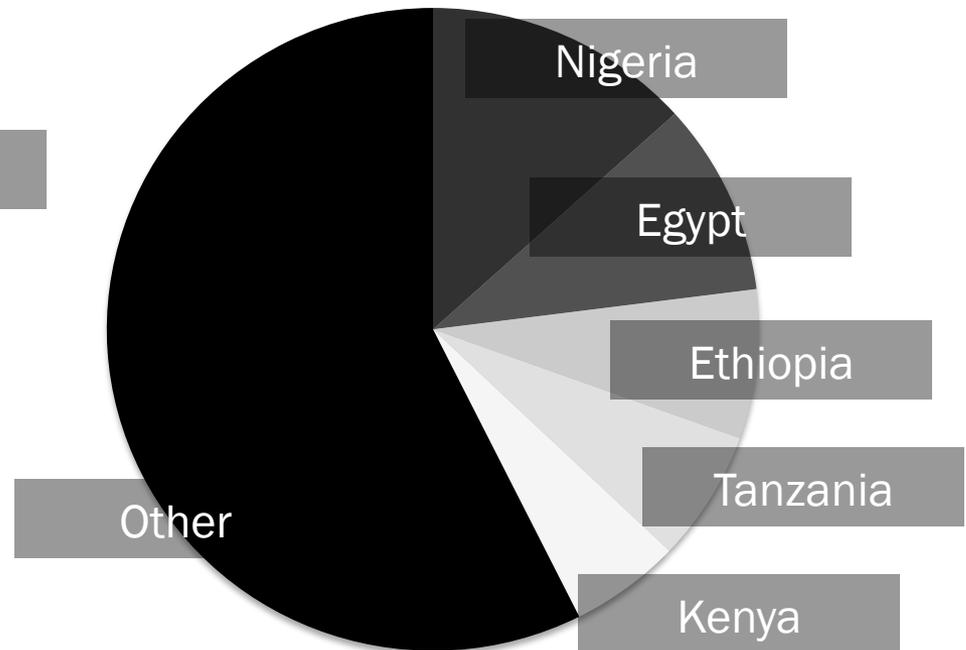
Audience

Facebook Analytics from January 6 to January 12, 2016

Gender



Nationality



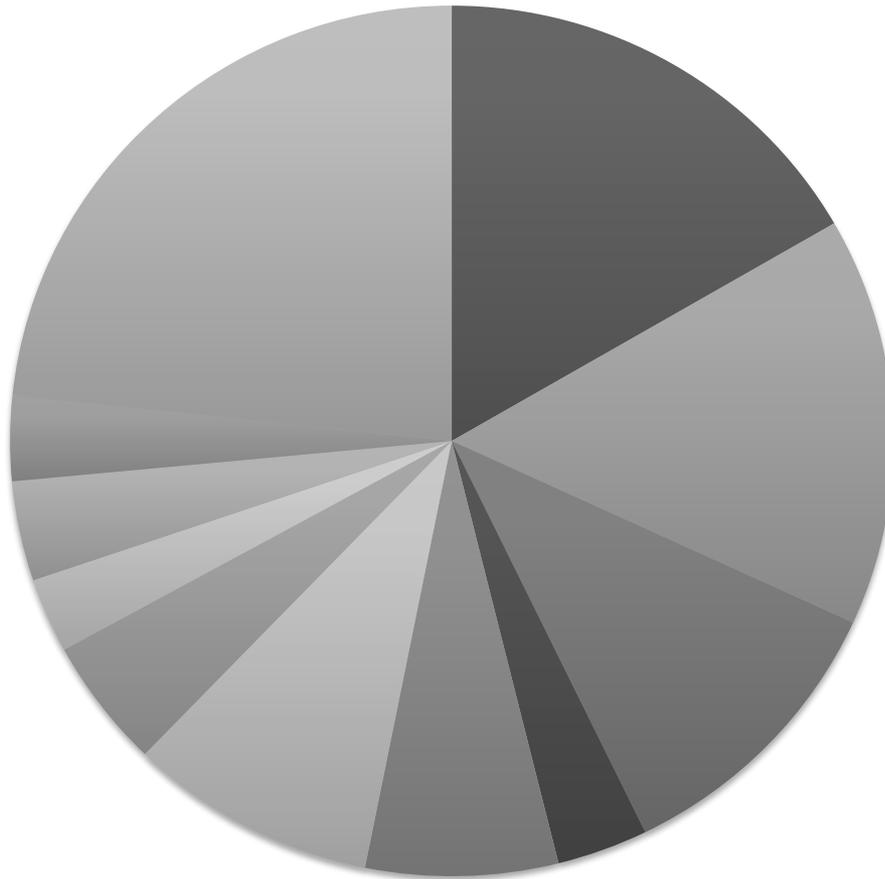
Data provided by CCTV-Africa

Messages

- YouTube data – based on 500 most watched videos as of January 2016 on CCTV-Africa's channel.
- Twitter data – based on 3,000 tweets published between October and January 2016 on CCTV-Africa's Twitter feed.

Messages - YouTube

Country



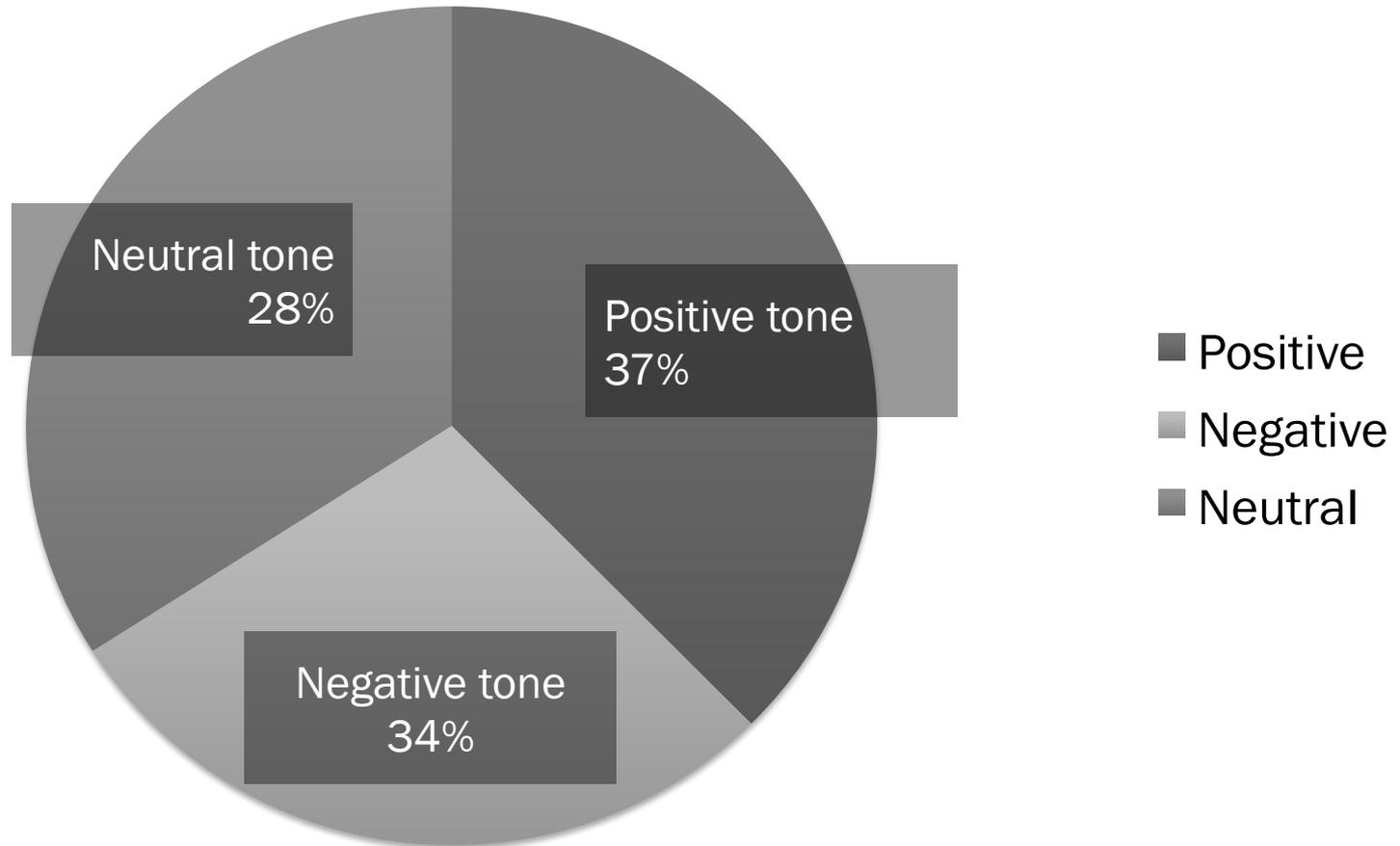
- Ethiopia
- Somalia
- South Africa
- Egypt
- Kenya
- Nigeria
- Multiple countries
- South Sudan
- Zimbabwe
- Uganda

Messages - YouTube

Topic	Count	Percentage
Security and terror	92	16,8%
Politics and diplomacy	84	15,4%
Economy	85	15,5%
Sports	49	9,0%
Infrastructure Building	40	7,3%
Culture & Entertainment	37	6,8%
Social issues	36	6,6%
Immigration	29	5,3%
Oddities and human interest	18	3,3%
Health (Diseases)	14	2,6%
Environment	14	2,6%
Technology	10	1,8%
Religion	9	1,6%
Accidents and Crime	6	1,1%
Other	24	4,4%

Messages - YouTube

Tone | Nature of news content



Messages - YouTube



Exclusive video footage on the Westgate attack

CCTV Africa
Subscribe 32,687
+ Add to Share ... More

5,344,103



2-year-old DJ AJ is a viral phenomenon

CCTV Africa
Subscribe 32,687
+ Add to Share ... More

544,069

1,064 129



Faces of Africa : The Hyena Men

CCTV Africa
Subscribe 32,687
+ Add to Share ... More

501,444

1,239 269



Meet South Africa's youngest millionaire only at 23

CCTV Africa
Subscribe 32,687
+ Add to Share ... More

351,104

1,323 67

14,693,472 views

Messages – On Twitter

1.	#XiJinping	188
2.	#Africa	90
3.	#Nigeria	65
4.	#SouthAfrica	65
5.	#XiUSAVisit	62
6.	#Kenya	60
7.	#XiUKVisit	56
8.	#BusinessNews	53
9.	#BurkinaFaso	45
10.	#Egypt	42
11.	#Burundi	40
12.	#GlobalBusiness	37
13.	#BREAKING	36
14.	#FOCAC	36
15.	#tanzaniadecides	34
16.	#China	33
17.	#Coted	33
18.	#Zimbabwe	32
19.	#Mali	29
20.	#SportsNews	26



Messages – On Twitter

- CCTV Africa retweets (12%) a lot more than would be expected – Sometimes from those media houses from which it is “expected” to offer an alternative view.
- Mostly for promotional purposes: announcing what is coming up and breaking news (2%).

Final ideas

- **Lack of a clear strategy** - China's online presence is rather chaotic, without a clear vision or strategy and, like other public diplomacy dimensions under-resourced and under-skilled.
- **Lack of dialogue** - Despite being one of its core reasons to be, China's online public diplomacy lacks feedback channels and audience engagement.
- **Lack of narrative** - Online, China offers its own take on China-related issues, but hardly deviates from existing narratives on Africa-related topics.

Final ideas

- **Lack of depth** – China has pushed for abundance of content rather than quality.
- **Lack of control** - There is a mismatch between official messages and strategies, and actual messages and actions.
- **Lack of capacity** - China is seeking short term results with long term strategies.

Final Thoughts



Xi Jinping's first Weibo
message
26 December 2015

Final Thoughts



The East African, 11
October 2014

Thank you.

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