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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Buzz Across Borders: Analyzing the Global and Local Dynamics Shaping the ChatGPT Media Hype in China

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ABSTRACT

ChatGPT ignited a global AI media hype. Surprisingly, China ranks as the leading country in online searches for "ChatGPT," despite the platform's limited accessibility there. In this study, we explore how the ChatGPT media hype was produced within a framework of international information flow and the localization of a global issue. We employ computational methods to investigate the inter-media and intra-media dynamics shaping the ChatGPT media hype in China. We built four corpora composed of news and social media data discussing ChatGPT: Chinese news (N=30,061), Chinese social media posts (N=226,374), global English news (N=71,457), and global social media posts (N=807,508). Results indicate that the volume of discussions on ChatGPT on global news, global social media, and Chinese social media all significantly influence that on Chinese ChatGPT news. Chinese media exhibit distinct topical interests compared to global media. Analysis of Chinese ChatGPT news coverage revealed that market-driven media are the primary contributors, and often relied on a narrow range of identical sources and adopted various strategies to increase visibility and audience engagement. The implications of these findings were also discussed.

KEYWORDS

Media hype; social media hype; transnational information flow; time-series modeling; intermedia influence; Chinese news media

The launch of ChatGPT by OpenAI on November 30, 2022, sparked extensive media and public attention about the novel opportunities and challenges presented by AI. As a generative AI model, ChatGPT has proficiently handled numerous tasks previously considered inconceivable, such as crafting essays, engaging in philosophical dialogues, performing mathematical calculations, and even coding and debugging. This capability has attracted an immense number of users in a short period. As of January 2024, ChatGPT boasts approximately 180.5 million users with 1.6 billion monthly visits (Mortensen 2024).

Despite its widespread adoption in Western countries, access to ChatGPT was restricted in China. Nonetheless, Chinese users have shown significant enthusiasm for the technology, actively discussing ChatGPT and related technologies on social media. This paradox—lack of public access yet high popular interest—can be attributed to extensive global and domestic media coverage of the technology. The media plays

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a crucial role in informing the public about new technologies. Previous research shows that traditional media and internet usage shape public perceptions of AI in China (Cui and Wu 2021). Despite the growing global information flow, there is scant research on how domestic and international media coverage of emerging technologies influences public discourse on Chinese social media.

To address this gap, we draw on insights from media hype and hybrid media system theories to analyze the intense media and public focus on ChatGPT in China. Media hype, as defined in scholarly literature, involves a sudden increase in coverage about a specific topic (Boydstun, Hardy, and Walgrave 2014; Vasterman 2005). The hybrid media system theory (Chadwick 2017; Waldherr 2018) suggests that various media forms coexist and interact dynamically, from traditional to digital and citizen-driven media. Integrating these theories, we crafted a framework to analyze media hype within a glocalized news landscape and hybrid media context. Our study first examines the inter-media influences of global and Chinese social media on domestic ChatGPT media hype. We then explore intra-media dynamics within the Chinese ChatGPT media hype.

Our study makes significant theoretical and methodological contributions to the media hype literature. Theoretically, we frame media hype as a transnational phenomenon, expanding beyond traditional national contexts and considering external influences on media dynamics. We also view media hype as a hybrid phenomenon influenced by both news and social media, broadening the scope of its study. Methodologically, we offer insights into the internal dynamics of media hype, such as topical interests and sourcing practices, by employing computational analysis of large-scale digital trace data.

Literature Review

Media Hype and Social Media Hype

Media hype is characterized by an excessive and sensationalistic focus of media coverage on particular issues (Vasterman, 2018). The term "hype" often refers to the excitement generated around impending matters. According to Vasterman (2005), media hype involves news waves propagated by the media, marked by self-reinforcement—intra-media forces driving the coverage—and disproportionality—where media focus does not correspond to actual events. Thus, media hype emerges from news making beyond merely reporting events (Vasterman 2005). For instance, Boydstun, Hardy, and Walgrave (2014) analyzed the size, explosiveness, and duration of media hype, proposing that its most notable feature is the prolonged high level of attention following an initial peak. It is crucial to differentiate media hype from related concepts such as "news waves" and the "issue attention cycle." Specifically, while media hype represents a type of news wave, not all news waves are fueled by media hype. Additionally, media hype differs from the "issue attention cycle," which emphasizes the total attention span allocated to an issue or event over different phases, rather than the short-term intensity highlighted by media hype.

Research on media hype has examined various aspects, including the volume, tone, and nature of media discourse on specific issues. One prominent topic is the

intersection between media hype and finance. Jang (2007), for example, conceptualized two aspects of media hype in the context of media's influence on stock prices: the sheer volume of coverage and the positive sentiment associated with a company. More recently, Banerjee et al. (2024) found that media hype of COVID-19 could impact commodity futures prices. Also, media hype has been applied to the science and health domains. Partridge et al. (2011) noted that media hype can manifest as uncritical coverage of medical topics. Along this line, Roberson (2020) cautioned that science-related media hype, albeit its capacity in raising public awareness, often simplified and sensationalized science, which contributes to the distortion of scientific facts.

Moreover, the advent of social media has expanded the concept of media hype to encompass social media platforms (Roese 2018). Pang (2013) defined "social media hype" as a phenomenon initiated by a significant event, driven by online users, and perpetuated by a self-reinforcing pattern of engagement. Subsequent research has explored social media hype in diverse social and political incidents, such as the mobilization of social movements (LeFebvre & Armstrong, 2018), and online firestorms, or negative word-of-mouth dynamics on social media (Johnen, Jungblut, and Ziegele 2018). This body of work indicates that media hype has evolved into a more complex and multifaceted phenomenon within today's information ecosystem.

Shaping Media Hype: Transnational Influence within Hybrid Media System

While existing studies predominantly examined media hype within the national boundaries, we posit that a transnational perspective is essential for analyzing media hype on topics that traverse borders. AI technologies are inherently transnational, crossing geographical and cultural boundaries with their development and influence, echoing the concept of media globalization and transnational information flow. Transnational information flow refers to the movement of information across borders, enabled by advances in communication technology and the internet (Thussu, 2007). This flow plays a crucial role in fostering global consciousness and a shared awareness of issues, including the development and application of AI technologies such as ChatGPT (Van Dijk 2013). The rapid dissemination of information contributes to the escalation of media hype by providing a constant feed of news and updates that sustain public interest and media attention.

Global English Media

The globalized media landscape is particularly relevant, as news outlets compete within the same geographic space while drawing influences across borders. This dynamic is significant for understanding the influence of global English media on Chinese media practices. As English-language media outlets extensively cover developments like ChatGPT, Chinese media, observing these trends, may begin to mirror this coverage to maintain their competitiveness and relevance in the global information flow. However, the landscape may be complicated when considering the dependency and independency of Chinese journalism in reporting ChatGPT, especially under the background of Chinese techno-nationalism surge. On one hand, it is important to

acknowledge that Chinese media may exhibit considerable independence in reporting on ChatGPT, inspired by the recent growth of domestic large language models (LLMs) over the past two years. Models such as Wenxin Yiyan and Kimi exemplify China's significant progress in AI technology, driven by a techno-nationalistic agenda that highlights domestic innovations prominently in Chinese media. In the realm of AI and technology—a sector where Western countries like the U.S. traditionally lead in development—the significant strides made by China in developing multiple LLMs suggest that Chinese media is likely to emphasize these domestic advancements. This highlights a form of media sovereignty and suggests a more balanced narrative between Western influences and Chinese innovations. On the other hand, the influence of global English media coverage on ChatGPT on Chinese news media can be further understood through World System Theories (Wallerstein 2011), which categorizes countries into three groups: core, semi-periphery, and periphery. Empirical studies have shown that global news media typically devote the most attention to a small number of "core" countries, such as the U.S. and U.K., and that international news flows from core to semi-periphery (e.g., China) and periphery countries (Guo and Vargo 2017). Despite claims of the U.S. news media's declining influence (Tunstall, 2008), empirical studies demonstrate that countries like the U.S. and the U.K. continue to wield significant influence over the global media landscape (Guo and Vargo 2017). Their findings further indicate a broad spectrum of the U.S. influence on Chinese media across different continents, whereas China's impact on the U.S. coverage tends to focus on issues concerning its neighboring countries, such as South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia. Against this backdrop and given the focus on AI and technology—a domain where Western nations such as the U.S. lead in development and dominate media discourse—it is plausible to anticipate that global English media will significantly shape Chinese media's reporting on these topics. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H1: *The volume of Chinese ChatGPT news is influenced by the volume of ChatGPT news on global English news media.*

Global Social Media

Beyond the influence of the global news media, we anticipate that the media hype in Chinese news media could also be influenced by the volume of discussions on global and domestic social media platforms. Economically linked to social media and its user base, news organizations often depend on these platforms to guide their content decisions. When a topic trends on global social media, it often indicates a broader public interest that signals a news value, prompting media outlets to cover the story to align with audience interests and expectations. This alignment is particularly crucial in China, where international trends can quickly permeate domestic discussions, thereby influencing public opinion and, subsequently, media coverage. To capture more attention and attract advertisers, they frequently select trending stories from social media to report on. This strategy not only boosts their visibility but also amplifies existing media hype (Roese 2018). Empirical research indicates that neither the media nor the public alone can transform a social issue into a hype (Chung 2018). Instead, it is the consequences of "interaction between the media and

social actors" (Vasterman 2005, 515–516). However, when extensive media coverage captures significant public interest, and in turn, this concern fuels further media attention, the issue can be amplified. This mutual reinforcement between media coverage and public interest can escalate the issue, resulting in a more pronounced and enduring media hype (Chung 2018).

In the case of the ChatGPT, despite limited access to the product among the Chinese public, "bridge" influencers potentially play a pivotal role in transplanting global hype into local contexts (Pang et al. 2018). These influencers, who maintain significant presences on both international and domestic platforms such as Twitter (now as X) and Sina Weibo (hereafter as Weibo), act as cultural and informational conduits. They adapt and translate global trends for the local audience, often determining what becomes a focal point in local media. Their activities not only reflect but amplify global discussions, making them crucial in shaping what Chinese news outlets report. Research on global-China information flow revealed that social media also played an important role in transmitting information from global to Chinese digital spaces (Lu et al. 2022). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H2: *The volume of Chinese ChatGPT news is influenced by the volume of discussions about ChatGPT on international social media.*

Chinese Social Media

Third, the concept of intermedia logic-which describes the impact one medium or platform exerts over another concerning content, framing, or focus—plays a vital role in shaping and reinforcing the media hype surrounding ChatGPT. News organizations, social media platforms, and blogs often reference and build upon each other's content, creating a chorus of voices that amplify the hype. This dynamic interplay between different media forms is a driving force behind the sustained attention that GPT receives. The intermedia logic also noted the "reversed agenda-setting" phenomenon (Brosius and Weimann 1996), where the public's concerns and discussions, often initiated on social media or other grassroots platforms, influence the topics and issues that traditional news media choose to cover. This process marks a shift from the traditional agenda-setting theory, where the media typically dictates which topics are considered important and discussed by the public. In the case of Chinese GPT news hype, the influence of social media trends on Chinese news media is evident within the country, originating from Chinese social media platforms. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H3: *The volume of Chinese ChatGPT news is influenced by the volume of discussions about ChatGPT on Chinese social media.*

Comparing ChatGPT Coverage between Global and Chinese News Media

In addition to examining the influence of global media on Chinese coverage of ChatGPT, it is equally important to identify in-context distinct characteristics unique to the Chinese context (Chen and Koo 2022). The interaction between global trends and local narratives often yields a media landscape where universal themes are interwoven with region-specific issues, reflecting unique socio-political and cultural dynamics. This complex interplay may result in Chinese media emphasizing aspects of

ChatGPT that are either less pronounced or differently framed compared to global English media outlets. Therefore, a comparative analysis is crucial not just to identify commonalities but also to highlight the distinctive focuses that characterize Chinese reporting on ChatGPT. Such an analysis will reveal the extent to which Chinese media narratives align with or diverge from global discourse, offering insights into how global technology narratives are localized within China. This leads us to pose:

> ***RQ1:*** *How does the topic distribution of ChatGPT coverage differ between global English news media and Chinese news media?*

China's ChatGPT Media Hype in Context

Key Media Outlets

In China's news media landscape, the coverage of GPT is shaped by a diverse array of media outlets and platforms. This includes state-owned media, we-media, and private news organizations (Lian et al. 2024). Each of these entities plays a distinct role in the discourse surrounding emerging technologies like GPT. Specifically, state-owned media often present a nuanced view, highlighting GPT's advanced capabilities and notable advancements in AI while also addressing its potential inaccuracies, ethical dilemmas, and societal impacts. This discourse emphasizes the necessity for prudent regulation and a measured approach to the expectations of GPT's transformative potential. Conversely, we-media and private news entities often adopt a more varied and sometimes sensational perspective. They tend to accentuate the novelty and commercial opportunities offered by such technologies, potentially underplaying the subtler implications that are emphasized by state media (Lian et al. 2024). These platforms often prioritize engaging content and capture the audience's interest, which can sometimes result in a portrayal of AI advancements like GPT models that is less critical and more sensational. In this regard, we proposed two research questions to be inquired:

> ***RQ2:*** *What are the most prominent Chinese media outlets engaged in reporting ChatGPT?*

Imitation

Boydstun, Hardy, and Walgrave (2014) identified two complementary mechanisms of imitation that shape media hype: inter-media imitation and intra-media imitation. At the inter-media level, news outlets tend to imitate each other's selection of stories, leading to simultaneous coverage of the same topics across various outlets. Hardy (2018) conducted qualitative research by interviewing news staff to examine how imitation functions during media hypes, revealing that this is not a new phenomenon. On a daily basis, directly competing outlets closely monitor each other's news selections. However, during a media hype, such competition intensifies, resulting in a more pronounced imitation effect. At the intra-media level, there is a lowering of the gatekeeping threshold. According to Hardy (2018, 135–136), this lowering means that media hype allows "events that in different circumstances would not have been salient enough to make it into the news do now pass the media

gates and get coverage." This is manifested when media outlets start covering similar past events that occurred before the key event or provide more content on related issues.

To explore the imitation among Chinese news outlets and within individual outlets, we specifically focus on two components: the selection of news sources and the use of Weibo hashtags. The selection of news sources is fundamental to understanding the originality and diversity of reporting; when multiple outlets rely on the same individuals or organizations for information, it indicates content convergence and inter-media imitation (Hardy 2018). This reliance can lead to homogenized narratives, with identical viewpoints reiterated across platforms without independent verification, thereby amplifying a topic's perceived importance during media hype (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2008). The use of Weibo hashtags serves as a strong indicator of intra-media imitation and plays a crucial role in propagating media hype on social media platforms (Yu & Asur, 2014). Hashtags act as organizational tools that cluster related content, enhancing accessibility for users interested in specific topics (Zappavigna, 2015). In contrast to Twitter hashtags, which are often short and serve primarily as simple tags or labels, Weibo hashtags are typically longer and resemble brief news headlines, conveying substantive information about the content. This characteristic makes Weibo hashtags a stronger indicator of imitation, as the repeated use of identical, lengthy hashtags suggests that media outlets may be mimicking each other's news narratives rather than independently tagging content. When media outlets employ identical hashtags—such as those related to the development of a Chinese version of ChatGPT—they not only increase the visibility of their posts but also contribute to a collective narrative by synchronizing content around the same themes. By examining these components, we aim to uncover the mechanisms through which imitation escalates media hype. Therefore, we pose the following research questions:

RQ3: *How do Chinese news outlets imitate each other's news sources (individuals/organizations)?*

RQ4: *How do Chinese news outlets imitate news narratives through the use of identical Weibo hashtags?*

Nationalistic Roots

In addition to the previously mentioned factors, the media hype surrounding ChatGPT and related technologies in China is propelled by and mirrors a multifaceted array of elements, including political motivations (H. Zeng 2020; Mallapaty 2023), nationalistic emotions (Na and Pun 2023; van Noort 2024), ideological perspectives (Cheng and Zeng 2023; Cohen and Lee 2023), and market-driven influences (Zeng, Chan, and Schäfer 2022), among others. Within the Chinese discourse on LLMs, technology often assumes an ideological role, perpetuating a tendency toward politicized reporting on AI advancements. For example, AI technologies are often contextualized within a framework that emphasizes state power and authoritative influence. Moreover, market forces significantly amplify the media excitement around ChatGPT and LLMs in China. Technology firms, financial investors, and entrepreneurial ventures are eager to leverage the AI trend, a fervor reflected in media narratives (Olcott 2024).

For example, AI technologies like ChatGPT are frequently contextualized within a framework that emphasizes state power and authoritative influence. Media outlets may tend to highlight the importance of developing a Chinese equivalent to ChatGPT, reflecting a desire for technological self-reliance and independence from Western innovations. This nationalistic drive is evident in the spotlight on domestic companies like Baidu working on their own advanced AI models, which are portrayed as efforts to assert China's leadership in the global tech arena. Furthermore, the media-generated excitement around ChatGPT and LLMs in China is significantly magnified by market forces. Technology firms, financial investors, and entrepreneurial ventures are eager to capitalize on the burgeoning AI trend, and this enthusiasm is mirrored and amplified in media narratives (Zeng, Chan, and Schäfer 2022). The convergence of national pride and economic opportunity creates a potent mix that intensifies the hype. Media narratives often emphasize how China's advancements in AI could challenge or surpass those of Western counterparts, reinforcing a narrative of competition and national achievement.

Considering the diverse engagement of media outlets in China and the intricate interweaving of AI with political, economic, and ideological factors, we anticipate that the news narratives surrounding the ChatGPT hype will exhibit distinctive characteristics shaped by nationalist sentiment. Therefore, we pose the following research question:

> ***RQ5:*** *What are the salient narrative characteristics of Chinese hype news about ChatGPT, particularly regarding nationalist sentiments?*

Method

This study seeks to understand the formation of media hype around ChatGPT in China by examining both inter-media and intra-media dynamics. To address the RQs and Hypotheses, this study used computational methods (time-series modeling, semi-supervised topic modeling, Named Entity Recognition). To investigate inter-media influences, we employed time-series modeling to examine the impact of global news and social media (Facebook and Weibo) on the volume of Chinese news coverage about ChatGPT (H1, H2, H3). To explore the differences between Chinese news coverage and global news media coverage of ChatGPT (RQ2), we conducted semi-supervised topic modeling. This method allowed us to identify prevalent topics and themes in both Chinese and global news articles, facilitating a comparative analysis of the content and focus of reporting in different media environments.

For examining internal dynamics of the ChatGPT media hype within China, we first identified the period of "explosiveness" in reporting ChatGPT using the "bursts" R package (Binder 2014). We then analyzed which media outlets that contributed most news posts (RQ2), and how did Chinese news media imitate each other or themselves in terms of news sources (RQ3) and the use of Weibo hashtags (RQ4), where Named Entity Recognition was used to specifically investigate which entities (organizations, individuals) that were most frequently cited or covered in Chinese ChatGPT stories. Additionally, we selected the most reposted news posts as qualitative examples to analyze and demonstrate the narrative characteristics of Chinese ChatGPT news stories that contributed to the media hype (RQ5).

Data Collection

This study aims to investigate the formation and characteristics of ChatGPT media hype in China. Our analysis involves four datasets: Chinese news, Chinese public discussions, global news, and global public discussions around ChatGPT.

For the *Chinese news* and *public* discussions datasets, we first collected all Weibo discussions containing the keyword "ChatGPT" published between November 30, 2022, and November 30, 2023. Due to the limited API access, leveraging the advanced search function, we designed a web scraper with python to collect the related posts from Weibo and the associated user profiles. Based on the type of accounts associated with these Weibo posts, we separated this dataset into two: news posts ($N = 30{,}061$) by media accounts and public discussions ($N = 226{,}374$) by non-media accounts. We select Weibo for news data collection for two reasons: (1) Weibo is one of the most important ways for the Chinese public to access news and for Chinese news media to publish news[1]; and (2) compared to other existing databases (e.g., Duxiu, Media Cloud), the sample size on Weibo is significantly larger, allowing us to capture a more comprehensive landscape of Chinese news reporting on this case.

For *global news* data, we used Media Cloud to collect ChatGPT-related news published by media outlets in the Global English Language Sources, which include around 1,500 sources listed as "national" for every country in the ABYZ directory of online news sources, such as *The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, Reuters*, and *BBC*. Using keyword matching and setting the time frame to November 30, 2022, to November 30, 2023, we collected a total of $N = 71{,}457$ ChatGPT-related news articles.

For *global public discussions*, we gathered Facebook posts discussing ChatGPT using CrowdTangle. It should be pointed out that Facebook data by no means represent the global public discussion. Nevertheless, its large user base and rich content served as a proxy for the trends and features of ChatGPT-related public discussion. We gathered 807,508 Facebook posts containing the keyword "ChatGPT" between November 30, 2022, and November 30, 2023.

Time Series Analysis

We employed time series analysis to examine the impact of the volume of global news (H1), global public discussions (H2), and Chinese public discussions (H3), on Chinese news coverage related to ChatGPT. This analysis was executed in two main steps: Vector Autoregression (VAR) modeling and subsequent Granger causality tests. While the VAR model allows us to analyze multiple time series data that potentially influence each other, the Granger causality tests can be used to determine if one time series can be used to forecast another. This two-step approach for time series analysis has been proven effective in previous studies in cross-platform research (e.g., Lukito 2020; Peng, Yang, and Fang 2023).

We aggregated each of the four datasets on a *daily* basis. This choice was made because the dissemination of news, both internationally and from public domains to media outlets, occurs rapidly. Hence, we selected the "day" as the time unit for our time series analysis. To prepare the data for analysis, we ensured each time series was stationary—a prerequisite for VAR models—by differencing the series, which involves

calculating daily changes for each data point (Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2014). We tested lag structures ranging from one to ten days; the model with a five-day lag yielded the lowest Bayesian Information Criteria score (Ahelegbey, Billio, and Casarin 2016). After constructing a VAR(5) model, we explored bivariate relationships using Granger causality tests and assessed the impact of orthogonalized shocks using impulse response functions.

SeededLDA Topic Modeling

To examine the similarities and differences in topic distribution between global and Chinese ChatGPT news (RQ1), we employed a semi-supervised topic modeling approach known as seededLDA (Watanabe and Baturo 2024). The seededLDA method offers an advantage over traditional LDA as it incorporates expert knowledge through pre-defined seed words, thus enhancing the model's ability to identify relevant and distinct topics accurately. Additionally, by fixing the topic categories, seededLDA allows for a consistent comparison of topic distributions across two or more datasets.

In this study, we conducted seededLDA topic modeling following three steps: (1) two researchers independently reviewed the Chinese and global ChatGPT news and compiled lists of topics with associated keywords (seed words); (2) the two researchers then discussed their findings and identified common topics, and finalized the seed words for Chinese and English content; (3) we ran the seededLDA model on both the Chinese and global news data separately and compared the topic distributions between the two datasets. Five topics were identified from the Chinese and global ChatGPT news: *regulation/policy, concerns/risks, financial/economic consequences, education impact,* and *impact on tech industry/companies*. See Table S1 for example news for each topic.

Named Entity Recognition

To identify prominent news sources (i.e., individuals, organizations) mentioned in the Chinese ChatGPT news (RQ3), we employed Named Entity Recognition (NER), an information extraction and word-tagging technique designed to locate and classify named entities in unstructured text (Nadeau and Sekine 2007), for analysis of the Weibo corpus. In our research, we used the ChatGPT-4o, to conduct the NER analysis to recognize mentions of a particular entity type for the random sampled 2,259 Chinese Weibo corpus during a period of explosiveness. Specifically, we focused on personal entities (e.g., Sam Altman, Elon Musk, Zhou Hongyi) and organizational entities (e.g., Microsoft, Google, Baidu) within the texts.

Results

The results section begins with descriptive analyses of the number of ChatGPT news items and social media posts from four sources: global news media, Chinese news media, global social media (Facebook), and Chinese social media (Weibo). We then present results from time-series modeling to examine H1 to H3, which focus on the influence of global news, global social media, and Chinese social media on the volume of ChatGPT news from Chinese news media. Following this, we investigate differences in news topics covering ChatGPT between Chinese and global news media based on

topic modeling analysis (RQ1). The analysis then narrows down to the dynamics within Chinese news media, specifically during the period of explosiveness. The concentration on the "explosiveness period" is crucial because it represents a peak in media coverage, offering unique insights into the intensity and spread of narratives during key moments of heightened media interest in ChatGPT. Specifically, we explore which news media contributed the most articles (RQ2), which entities were most frequently cited in their reporting (RQ3), and the narrative strategies that contributed to the hype (RQ4).

Descriptive Results

Figure 1 shows the volume of news coverage and social media discussions related to ChatGPT from November 2022 to November 2023, across Chinese news media, Chinese social media (i.e., Weibo), global news media, and global social media (i.e., Facebook). These time series plots reveal a general trend in the attention given to ChatGPT, showing an initial gradual increase following the product's release on November 30, 2022, which is followed by a sharp surge after January 2023, culminating in an early peak in February 2023.

Notably, global news and global social media (i.e., Facebook) began discussing ChatGPT shortly after its release, outpacing their Chinese counterparts, which did not engage significantly with the topic until late January 2023. Furthermore, the interest in ChatGPT persisted longer in global news media and social media than in Chinese media spaces. After the initial peak in February, discussions about ChatGPT on global platforms remained high, experiencing several additional peaks. In contrast,

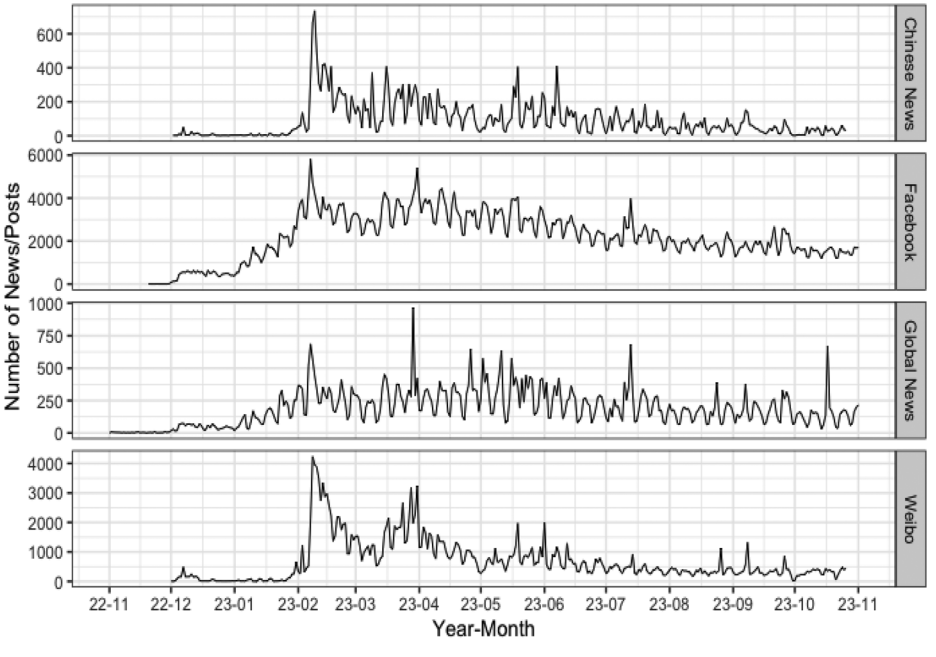

Figure 1. Daily number of ChatGPT news articles or social media discussions across different sources (Chinese news, Chinese social media, global news, global social media).

approximately four months after its February peak, Chinese media attention on ChatGPT declined to a consistently low level.

Transnational Influence on Chinese ChatGPT Media Hype

Time-Series Modeling

To test hypotheses H1, H2, and H3—which posited that the volume of ChatGPT news coverage in Chinese news media is influenced by global news media (H1), global social media (H2), and Chinese social media (H3)—we employed a time-series regression approach. We first fitted a VAR model using daily aggregated data from the four datasets. The VAR model is a statistical model that captures the linear interdependencies among multiple time series data. The VAR(5) model, which incorporates a 5-day lag, was selected as the optimal model based on the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC); the BIC is a criterion for model selection among a finite set of models that balances model complexity and fit.

Subsequently, we utilized the Granger Causality Test to examine the causal relationships posited by the hypotheses. Performing a Granger Causality Test after fitting the VAR model allows us to determine if past values of one variable can be used to forecast another, thus providing evidence of causality between the series. The results (see Table 1) indicate significant influences on the volume of ChatGPT news coverage in Chinese media from global news media ($p < .05$), discussions on global social media such as Facebook ($p < .05$), and activities on Chinese social media like Weibo ($p < .001$). Thus, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 were all supported.

Comparing Topics of ChatGPT News: Global Media vs Chinese Media

To address RQ1, which asks how the topic distribution differs between ChatGPT coverage in global and Chinese news media, we initially employed topic modeling analysis to categorize each news story under a specific topic. It should be noted that, in this analysis, we focused on the entire corpus of 22,635 Chinese news articles and 58,360 global news articles. SeededLDA is particularly suited for comparing topic distributions as it integrates domain knowledge through predefined topics, ensuring the model concentrates on pertinent themes. Subsequently, we tested for statistical differences in the proportions of each topic category between the two datasets. We utilized a seededLDA model to label each news story in both datasets with a predefined list of six topics of interest: *regulation* (policies, regulations concerning ChatGPT), *concerns* (ethical, legal issues), *finance* (impact on the stock market, etc.), *Chinese tech industry*

Table 1. Granger causality test results (multivariate).

Hypothesis	F (d1, d2)	*P* value	Chisq (df)	*P* value
CN News <= Global News	2.24 (5, 356)	0.050*	11.20 (5)	0.048*
CN News <= Facebook	2.92 (5, 356)	0.013*	14.62 (5)	0.012*
CN News <= Weibo	13.73 (10, 356)	<0.001***	137.28 (10)	<0.001***

Notes. This table provides the statistical outcomes of Granger causality tests, assessing the influence of different media sources on Chinese news coverage in a multivariate setting. Hypothesis column specifies the direction of causality being tested, for example, "CN News <= global news" indicates testing if the number of ChatGPT news by global news Granger-causes that of Chinese News. We report both the results from both F tests and Chi-squared tests, and the results are consistent. *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05.

(responses from Chinese tech companies such as Huawei, Baidu, Alibaba), *US tech industry* (responses from US tech companies such as Meta, Microsoft, Amazon), and *education* (influence of ChatGPT on teaching, learning, exams, research, etc.).

The results, presented in Table 2, show significant disparities. While a cursory glance at the percentages for each topic might suggest minor differences, our statistical analysis underscores that these are, in fact, significant. This section elaborates on these disparities, supported by chi-square tests, to confirm their statistical relevance and provide deeper insights into the divergent editorial choices between the two media landscapes. Global news media were more likely to discuss topics related to regulation ($p < .001$), concerns ($p < .001$), financial impact ($p < .001$), and education ($p < .001$) concerning ChatGPT. Conversely, Chinese news media focused more on the reactions of Chinese tech companies ($p < .001$), as well as those from the US tech industry ($p < .001$), in their coverage of ChatGPT.

This variation suggests different cultural and economic priorities in reporting ChatGPT. Global media may prioritize broader societal impacts of new technologies like ChatGPT, while Chinese media appear more concerned with the competitive response of local and international tech companies, potentially due to the high stakes of technological advancements in their national economy. Additionally, the limited coverage of regulation, concerns, and the educational impact of ChatGPT in Chinese news media may stem from the product's restricted availability in China. This limited access could reduce public familiarity and interest in these aspects, promoting media outlets to concentrate more on topics with immediate relevance to the Chinese audience, such as the responses from local and global tech industries.

Into the Explosiveness of the Chinese ChatGPT Media Hype

To address RQ2 to RQ5, which concerns the media outlets (RQ2), imitation on news source2 (RQ3) and Weibo hashtags (RQ4), and narrative characteristics (RQ5) that contributed to the Chinese ChatGPT media hype, we specifically focused on the news coverage on ChatGPT during the period of "explosiveness", which refers to a concentrated time frame during which media attention on ChatGPT rapidly escalated. To capture this period, we employed the "bursts" R package (Binder 2014) to implement a burst detection method. The "bursts" package identifies periods of increased activity,

Table 2. Distribution of topics in Chinese and global ChatGPT news.

	Chinese news ($N = 22,635$)		Global news ($N = 58,360$)			
Topic labels	N	*p*	N	*p*	95% CI	Chi-square
Regulation	2,263	10.0%	6,650	11.4%	[−0.019, −0.010]	$\chi^2 = 32.358$***
Concern	2,940	12.9%	8,741	14.9%	[−0.025, −0.015]	$\chi^2 = 52.117$***
Finance	2,512	11.1%	8,047	13.8%	[−0.032, −0.022]	$\chi^2 = 103.91$***
Tech China	4,177	18.5%	8,730	14.9%	[0.029, 0.041]	$\chi^2 = 148.44$***
Tech US	3,957	17.4%	8,515	14.6%	[0.023, 0.034]	$\chi^2 = 102.57$***
Education	2,471	10.9%	9,457	16.2%	[−0.058, −0.048]	$\chi^2 = 362.72$***
Other	4,321	19.1%	8,220	14.1%		

Notes. These results were obtained from seededLDA topic modeling. To enhance the potential for meaningful analysis and interpretation, after constructing a Document-Feature Matrix (DFM) for each dataset, we removed short tokens (fewer than 2 characters); we removed terms appearing in more than 10% of the documents, and terms appearing fewer than 10 times across all documents were also excluded. These procedures yield output sizes smaller than the input sample sizes. *** $p < 0.001$.

or "bursts," in time-series data by evaluating changes in the frequency of events. The output are several distinct burst periods, with different levels (e.g., level 1 to level 5). These levels indicate the intensity of activity, with level 1 representing the lowest and level 5 the highest frequency of news articles. By combining the results from the burst detection with a visual examination of the time-series plot depicting the number of Chinese ChatGPT news articles, we identified the period of explosiveness as spanning from January 27, 2023, to February 9, 2023 (see Figure 2). During this interval, we observed a total of 2,259 news articles—a robust dataset suitable for both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Market-Driven Media Outlets Fuel China's ChatGPT Hype

To answer RQ2, which asks which media outlets contributed most to the explosion of ChatGPT news hype in China, we sorted the top 10 media accounts with the most ChatGPT coverage during the explosion period identified from the bursts identification above—January 27 to February 9, 2023 (see Table S2). During this period, various media platforms in China demonstrated notable levels of interest, with a clear dominance of market-driven media. Notably absent from the top contributors in the table are party media and central traditional news outlets. Leading the coverage was Cailian Press APP, a financial news platform, with the highest number of articles at 80, followed by Sina Tech with 64 articles. Other outlets, such as IT Home and Forbes China, which published 43 and 40 articles, respectively, also primarily focus on financial and technological news. This trend indicates a marked interest in the financial and technological implications of AI developments like ChatGPT. The prominence of these non-traditional, market-driven media outlets in reporting on ChatGPT highlights a trend where the narrative around emerging technologies like AI is shaped more by commercial interests and specialized audiences rather than by traditional central news outlets. This shift suggests a dynamic media landscape in China, where market forces play a crucial role in the dissemination of information on cutting-edge technological advancements.

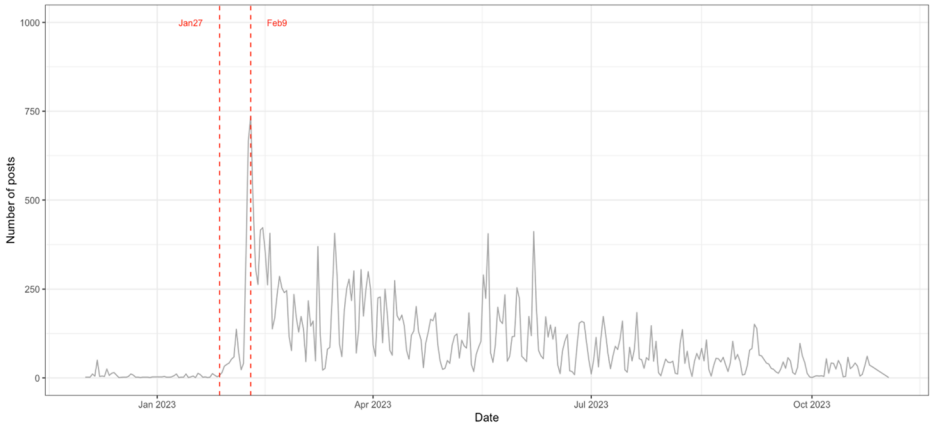

Figure 2. Detected period of "explosiveness" within Chinese ChatGPT news.

Intermedia Dynamics of Media Hype: Imitating News Sources

To address RQ3, which examines how do Chinese news outlets imitate each other's news sources (individuals/organizations), we conducted an analysis of the 2,259 relevant articles published during the explosive stage, utilizing Named Entity Recognition (NER) to identify key organizations and individuals prominently cited in the media hype. The findings are presented in Table 1 (refer to the third and fourth columns). Firstly, We found the most prominently cited organizational entities fall into two categories: global AI and information technology giants and unicorn technology companies, such as OpenAI, Google, Microsoft, as well as their Chinese counterparts like Alibaba, Baidu, Sina, Xiaomi. Secondly, the most salient personal entities cited frequently in discussing ChatGPT, which can be categorized similarly, include global technology leading figures such as Bill Gates, Sam Altman, Elon Musk, alongside their Chinese counterparts like Robin Li, Lei Jun, Zhang Yiming. Other types of personal entities identified in the ChatGPT discourse include AI scientists, entrepreneurs, and political figures, consistent with findings by Zeng, Chan, and Schäfer (2022).

The study reveals several implications concerning the repetitive use of similar sources in AI-related reporting amid the media hype around China's ChatGPT. Firstly, Chinese media outlets frequently lean on prominent AI figures and companies to shape the narrative of AI development and applications domestically. This heavy reliance underscores a unique form of transnational information flow, where international AI techniques are absorbed and reinterpreted within China's cultural and technological framework. This repetitive citation pattern characterizes the "medialization" of ChatGPT, showing a skewed picture wherein only renowned domestic organizations and individuals closely tied to techno-autonomy and national identity are highlighted, echoing state narratives. Secondly, the analysis indicates that media coverage often positions Chinese techno leaders and institutions against their U.S. counterparts, highlighting Sino-U.S. tensions and techno-nationalism. Furthermore, ChatGPT's portrayal in news coverage highlights its complexity, entwined with political, marketing, and technological factors, illustrating that AI advancements like ChatGPT are not merely technological milestones but part of broader socio-economic and political discourses.

Intramedia Dynamics of Media Hype: Imitating Hashtags

In addition to analysis of news sources imitation between Chinese media outlets, we also explored how they imitate news narratives through the use of identical Weibo hashtags (RQ4). Using hashtag detection techniques, we identified 150 distinct GPT-related Weibo hashtags in Chinese news articles during a period of intense media focus and public discourse. As shown in Table S3, we documented the frequency of each Weibo hashtag, the initiator (the first user to adopt it), and subsequent followers who propagated its use. We also identified the five most prominent followers for each hashtag—accounts or media outlets that significantly contributed to its reach and visibility. The results highlight explicit media hype surrounding Weibo hashtags. Certain hashtags, like "#Microsoft officially integrates ChatGPT into Bing#," gained significant traction, with some reaching up to 86 uses, indicating widely resonant topics within the media landscape. Prominent media outlets often acted as Weibo hashtag initiators.

They set the discourse around GPT technology and frequently initiated and reused specific hashtags, referring to the hashtag self-reinforcing and intramedia imitation phenomenon. This highlights intermedia hashtag imitation, where the initiator's hashtag is adopted by other users, and intramedia imitation, where the initiator repeatedly uses the same hashtag. For example, "Phoenix Technology" (凤凰网科技 in Chinese) frequently employed and initiated relevant hashtags, framing the discussion. This analysis offers insights into specific types of "media imitation"—Weibo hashtag contagions among different types of news media discussing ChatGPT.

The Nationalistic Roots of China's ChatGPT Hype

To analyze the catalysts behind ChatGPT media hype in China, we reviewed the top reposted Weibo news posts about Baidu's AI chatbot, "ERNIE Bot" (文心一言), reflecting strong nationalistic sentiments in China's tech news (see Table S3). For example, a "Sina Tech" post from February 7, 2023, detailing ERNIE Bot's public testing, attracted 6,602 reposts and noted a nearly 6% rise in Baidu's stock post-announcement. Another post on February 8 emphasized CEO Yanhong Li's plans to integrate ERNIE Bot with Baidu's search products, marking a shift in search technology. These articles underscore technological progress and national pride, positioning Baidu's advancements as a challenge to Western giants like OpenAI and Google, and highlighting China's narrative of technological independence.

In our analysis of the top reposted news posts, we also identified noticeable imitation among media outlets. This imitation manifests in the repeated use of specific Weibo hashtags (#enclosed in double hash marks#) and the recycling of the same video attachment across different accounts. Notably, posts ranked from No. 8 to No. 10 were semantically identical, each also featuring the exact same video attachment but distributed by three different media outlets. Such uniformity reflects what Vasterman (2005) describes in his analysis of media hype, where a particular "news theme"—in this case, the development of the Chinese equivalent of ChatGPT—dominates coverage. The news threshold is lowered as outlets increasingly imitate each other to sustain audience interest and remain competitive. This self-reinforcing cycle leads to the amplification of specific topics, with media outlets replicating content to capitalize on heightened public interest surrounding domestic AI developments.

Discussion

ChatGPT has generated significant global media attention around generative AI. Despite limited access, there has been notable enthusiasm for this technology among users in China. This study examines the formation of ChatGPT media hype in China through a transnational information flow framework, underscoring how both international and Chinese media dynamics shape news production (Wallerstein 2011). Additionally, we analyze the internal dynamics of this hype, identifying key contributing media outlets, their tendencies to imitate one another, and how their narratives are shaped by Chinese techno-nationalism.

This study advances media hype research by employing a transnational, multi-level information flow model to analyze the ChatGPT media hype in China. We discovered

that Chinese coverage of ChatGPT was significantly influenced by global English media, along with discussions on global (e.g., Facebook) and domestic (e.g., Weibo) social media. These findings underscore the crucial role of global media dynamics in shaping national media narratives, supporting World System Theories on the prioritization of core countries by global news media (Wallerstein 2011) and confirming the directional flow of news from core to semi-periphery countries like China (Guo and Vargo 2017). Moreover, our research highlights the significant impact of global social media discussions in amplifying Chinese media hype about ChatGPT, thus enriching our understanding of international information flow dynamics.

We also found differences in ChatGPT coverage: global media focused on concerns and impacts, while Chinese media highlighted responses from tech giants, reflecting localization in media narratives. This focus aligns with Chinese techno-nationalism, portraying AI not just as technological progress but as a marker of international competitiveness and national advancement (Mallapaty 2023). Such narratives underscore China's pursuit of technological independence and superiority, connecting national identity and geopolitical strategies to AI developments, thereby bolstering nationalistic pride and the state's strategic use of technology (Na and Pun 2023).

Furthermore, this study provides a detailed exploration of the dynamics within Chinese media coverage of technological issues, offering valuable insights into the distinct approaches of these outlets. Our analysis reveals that market-driven media, especially those focusing on technology and finance, contributed most to the Chinese ChatGPT media hype. These outlets heavily relied on similar entities, predominantly tech companies and prominent individuals (Zeng, Chan, and Schäfer 2022). These findings highlight the market-driven nature of AI media hype, with outlets often mimicking each other's reporting on popular topics like ChatGPT due to limited resources. This provides empirical evidence for the inter-medium mechanism of media hype, proposed by Boydstun, Hardy, and Walgrave (2014), suggesting that media outlets tend to imitate each other's selection of news, sources, and subjects during AI media hype. This pattern suggests that quality can be compromised when outlets prioritize sensationalism over depth due to economic incentives, potentially skewing public understanding of AI and affecting how technology is perceived and adopted.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has limitations that suggest caution in interpreting its findings, primarily due to the restricted data set from Facebook and Weibo representing international and Chinese social media discussions. The challenges of accessing broader data sources are growing, as platforms like Twitter, Reddit, and Meta limit researcher access (Brown et al. 2024). We also recognize the limitations associated with using ABYZ for data collection from major news outlets, particularly the potential for missing or duplicated content due to paywall restrictions. We acknowledge that our dataset may not comprehensively represent all available articles, and future research could benefit from validating these findings through alternative platforms like LexisNexis. This study uses SeededLDA to compare topic distributions between Chinese and global news media's coverage on ChatGPT; however, we acknowledge the potential bias introduced by

the selection of seed words. Despite rigorous efforts to mitigate this through collaborative review and refinement, biases in topic modeling outcomes may still persist. Furthermore, we acknowledge that Facebook data, primarily in English, does not fully represent global social media discussions. Its user base disproportionately represents Western, industrialized, educated, rich, and democratic countries. Future research should include discussions in other languages and from diverse populations, and utilize platforms like Reddit, LinkedIn, and TikTok to enrich understanding of public discussions about ChatGPT.

Although this study provides insights about the intermedia dynamics of media hype such as the volume and topics between Chinese news media and global news media, grouping English news media as a single entity may lose the nuances. Future research may wish to parse the global news coverage data into different countries and tease out the differences and similarities of ChatGPT news coverage among them. Building on that, researchers could explore macro-level factors, such as socio-political contexts, press freedom, and journalistic cultures of these countries, in shaping the narratives surrounding ChatGPT and other emerging technologies.

Notes

1. See Weibo User Development Report 2020. https://data.weibo.com/report/reportDetail?id=456.

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