
FRENCH-LANGUAGE CHINESE STATE MEDIA

STRATEGIES
AND SOCIAL MEDIA
ACCOUNTS ANALYSIS

EU DisinfoLab

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Executive summary

- Building on recent studies on the use of state-controlled media in several countries as both producers and amplifiers of online disinformation, this report focuses on the activities of Chinese state-controlled media in France. In doing so, the report aims to shine a light on suspicious activities that we identified around some of their social media accounts.¹
- Several French-speaking social media accounts belonging to Chinese state media outlets have an impressive number of followers. At the same, they generate very little engagement.
- Among the clues that make us suspect inauthentic activities, we noticed:
 - The view count on videos posted on Twitter by the Chinese media outlets is extremely low compared to the number of followers, suggesting many of the accounts' followers are not engaging with the content proposed.
 - Performances of some specific Facebook posts analysed through CrowdTangle are excessively high compared to the normal engagement generated by most of the Chinese media's posts, suggesting a possible artificial promotion of some posts on Facebook pages that usually do not generate much engagement.
 - We noticed a marked discrepancy between the traffic on the websites of the French-speaking Chinese outlets and the number of fans or followers on their social media accounts.
- Similar discrepancies were also noticed by an investigation by Le Monde, which is available [here](#).
- Clearer definitions and data related to Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour released by online platforms would allow civil society to better assess this kind of online manipulation of information. At this stage, EU DisinfoLab can only take note of these discrepancies and renews our call for an obligation for transparency on these matters.
- Dubious authenticity and limited or possible artificial engagement of its social media accounts render the success of China's media strategy in French difficult to assess.

¹ See for example this [study](#) from the Oxford Internet Institute (June 29, 2020), by Katarina Rebello et al., "Covid-19 News and Information from State-Backed Outlets Targeting French, German and Spanish-Speaking Social Media Users: Understanding Chinese, Iranian, Russian and Turkish Outlets".

- If Chinese state-controlled media focus on promoting a favourable image of the country abroad and often present themselves as a positive tool to improve the understanding between China and the rest of the world, they are also regularly used to defend more directly the political positions of the country, and more importantly those of the Party (CCP).^{2,3,4}
- This double messaging often lacks subtlety. For example, we discovered a network of bloggers/video producers linked to Chinese media outlets in French who slip coarse messages of political or strategic interest into the middle of a series of cultural or lifestyle-themed articles about China.
- In contrast with Russian state-controlled media in the French-speaking world, which can extensively cover polarising issues in France in a provocative tone, a narrative study shows that French-speaking Chinese state-controlled media tend to focus more on promoting a positive image of their country and defending China's global geopolitical narratives (especially in a logic of confrontation with the US), rather than amplifying existing divisions in France. Consequently, the lack of coverage of French issues by Chinese media and their editorial policies, though less controversial than Russian state media, seem for now to generate little engagement on social media in France.

² Following recommendations by academics and civil society leaders, Twitter started implementing on 19 August 2020 a [new policy](#), using the expression state-controlled media instead of state-owned media. We follow this categorization that reflects the editorial independence of the outlets and not only its ownership.

³ In his congratulatory [letter](#) for the creation of CGTN in 2016, the Chinese president Xi Jinping said for example: "China needs to know better about the world and the world needs to know better about China." In the [description](#) of its French Facebook page, Xinhua News says: "We are here to make you discover a, evolving China and a multifaceted world". Similarly, Radio Chine Internationale states: "RCI talks about everything related to China: politics, economy, culture, tourism and society. It wants to be a window on China for you!".

⁴ Edward Wong, *The New York Times* (22 February, 2016), [Xi Jinping's News Alert: Chinese Media Must Serve the Party](#).

Introduction

China invested heavily in its state-media to promote its strategic communication objectives around the world, both in its close neighbourhood and in areas where it seeks to defend its interests. In *China's Media Go Global*,⁵ Dr. Anbin Shi (Tsinghua University), explained how China's notion of cyber governance includes the development and promotion of an alternative to the Western hegemonic model. Indeed, as Dr. Anne-Marie Brady (University of Canterbury, NZ) highlighted,⁶ the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) allocated large resources to increase the influence and outreach capacities of Chinese media abroad since 2003. This strategy involves the recruitment of foreign journalists, having pro-China newspaper supplements being published by some respected international media or buying stakes in local media⁷.

China's state-controlled media are not only intertwined with the organs of the State but are directed by the CCP and at the service of its external communication. Chinese President Xi Jinping, at the 19th CCP Congress in October 2017, described the investment in these bodies as follows: "We will improve our international communication capacity in order to tell China's story well, to present a panoramic, true, and multidimensional vision of China, and to strengthen the cultural "soft power" of our country."⁸

The role of these media, whose rise in power was accelerated by events such as the extensive coverage of Tibetan demonstrations around the relay of the Olympic flame through Europe in 2008⁹, is all the more visible when the official Chinese positions are challenged. An analysis in the Chinese Journal of Communication has shown, for example, the role of these state-sponsored media as a PR tool to influence international media coverage of the Hong Kong Protest in 2014¹⁰.

More recently, during the coronavirus pandemic, these outlets have again been used to defend the CCP's views on the outbreak, trying to exonerate China from any critics and promote the country as a potential provider of solutions for the world against COVID-19. A study published by the *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*¹¹ stated that "the Chinese government leverages its state media apparatus to shape narratives worldwide" and noticed three recurring behaviours of the English-language Chinese state media: "sharing positive stories and promoting the Chinese Communist

⁵ Daya Kishan Thussu, edited by, Hugo de Burgh and Anbin Shi (2017), *China's Media Go Global*, London & New York, Routledge.

⁶ Brady, A.-M., *Journal of Democracy* (2015), "China's Foreign Propaganda Machine". 26. pp. 51-59. 10.1353/jod.2015.0056.

⁷ *The Guardian* (December 7, 2018), "Inside China's Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign".

⁸ Quoted in Simon Leplâtre, *Le Monde* (March 22, 2018), [Pékin crée un super-média d'Etat pour porter la « Voix de la Chine »](#).

⁹ *Asia News*, (September 4, 2008) [Beijing's media war against Dalai Lama](#).

¹⁰ Tianduo Zhang, Liudmila Khalitova, Barbara Myslik, Tiffany L. Mohr, Ji Young Kim & Spiro Kiouis, *Chinese Journal of Communication* (2018), "Comparing Chinese state-sponsored media's agenda-building influence on Taiwan and Singapore media during the 2014 Hong Kong Protest", 11:1, 66-87, DOI: [10.1080/17544750.2017.1386694](#).

¹¹ Molter, V., DiResta, R. *The Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review* (2020). [Pandemics & propaganda: how Chinese state media creates and propagates CCP coronavirus narratives](#). <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-025>.

Party's (CCP) pandemic response, rewriting recent history in a manner favourable to the CCP as the coronavirus pandemic evolved, and using targeted ads to spread preferred messages."

The authors noticed that "Chinese state media Facebook Pages used paid amplification - ads - to grow followers and increase the audience for their content. Both the volume and tone of the ads changed when the outbreak began".

The authors of the Harvard study added the following:

*"Given evidence that the CCP has amassed over a hundred million followers on its state media accounts, our findings suggest that although platforms such as Facebook are primarily behaviourally-focused when it comes to taking down misinformation, there is still a need to consider whether affording governments the ability to use ads to push misleading content is a policy gap in counter-misinformation efforts. We believe it is, and that social media platform ad policy requires an update. Some platforms, such as Twitter, have already elected to no longer accept paid state media ads that boost highly slanted coverage; this action was taken in response to Chinese state media promoting tweets misrepresenting events during the Hong Kong protests of 2019."*¹²

In a recent essay¹³, the political scientist and China expert Maria Repnikova, analysed some narrative tricks used by the Chinese state media in its coverage of the pandemic:

"Turning the stories of ordinary people into a narrative of national unity and resilience isn't a new strategy for China... showcasing individual stories of bravery or solidarity is an attempt by state media to generate what Mr. Xi has referred to as "positive energy": Promoting this, the president has argued, should be a top priority for journalists so as to create "a sound environment for public opinion."

As previously mentioned, the global media strategy was described by President Xi at the 2018 National Meeting on Ideology and Propaganda, "We should improve our international communication capability, tell China's stories well, disseminate China's voice, show an authentic and comprehensive China to the world, and raise the country's soft power and the influence of Chinese culture."¹⁴

¹² Molter, V., DiResta, R. (2020).

¹³ Maria Repnikova, *The New York Times* (April 2020), [Does China's Propaganda Work?](#). Maria Repnikova is the Director of the Center for Global Information Studies and an Assistant Professor in Global Communication at Georgia State University (USA).

¹⁴ Quoted in Larry Diamond, Orville Schell (ed.) (2019), *China's Influence and American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance*, Hoover Press.

The efficiency of this strategic communication campaign was tested when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out.

In Italy, for instance, a report from the journalist Gabriele Carrer¹⁵ suggested that the coverage from the local public television channels of the assistance provided by the Chinese government to the coronavirus-ravaged country has been “three times bigger than the coverage of U.S. aid”.

One of the end-goals of Chinese state media is to contribute to the establishment of a new global offer on the global information market, as explained by the president of Xinhua agency, Li Congjun, in an op-ed published by the *Wall Street Journal* in 2011: "The flow of information is basically one-way: from West to East, North to South, and from developed to developing countries (...) In our interdependent world, the human community needs a set of more civilized rules to govern international mass communication."¹⁶

This "new world order" openly challenges established patterns of information flow but also journalism standards. Reporting on the release of a report by the NGO Reporters without borders on China, *Le Monde* journalist François Bougon states: "Western-style journalism - seen by the [Chinese] authorities as a counterweight and a means of imposing universal values and democracy - is perceived as a threat."¹⁷

¹⁵ Gabriele Carrer, *Formiche* (August 4, 2020), [Beijing speaking. How the Italian public broadcasting Tv fell in love with China.](#)

¹⁶ Xinhua Li, *The Wall Street Journal* (June 1, 2011), [Toward a New World Media Order.](#)

¹⁷ François Bougon, *Le Monde* (Mars 23, 2019), [La Chine cherche à imposer un nouvel ordre mondial de l'information, s'inquiète RSF.](#)

1. China's state-controlled media in French

1.1 Xinhua

Presentation:

Xinhua News Agency (sometimes also called directly in French *Chine Nouvelle*, "New China") is one of the two major state-owned Chinese news agencies (the other being China News Service). Founded in 1931, Xinhua News Agency reports directly to the CCP and is subordinated to the State Council. It is the largest news agency in the world by its number of staff. It also runs approximately 20 newspapers in China. It publishes in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Japanese, Russian and Spanish. Its traditional news agency activities merged with its online media operations in 2010.

Xinhua News Agency moved to a central district of Paris in 2013 to gain access to a showcase gallery.¹⁸ In a similar way, its New York bureau occupies offices in Times Square.

In Africa, Xinhua News Agency finds itself in head-on competition with Agence France Presse (AFP) and is accused of "dumping" practices,¹⁹ i.e. being subsidized by the Chinese State to provide low cost and biased content to local media that have limited means.²⁰

More generally, the Chinese agency concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Associated Press in 2018. An AP spokesperson described the MoU as a way "to allow it [AP] to operate inside China and has no bearing on AP's independence"²¹.

Website:

www.french.xinhuanet.com

The site is described as "non-secure" by browsers because the domain does not run a SSL certificate.

According to SimilarWeb, the traffic generated by the website was limited during the past 6 months (only 250 k visits in February and a maximum peak in March of around

¹⁸ François Bougon, *Le Monde* (June 14, 2013), "[Quand l'agence Chine nouvelle ouvre une galerie à deux pas de l'Élysée](#)".

¹⁹ Philippe Larroque, *Le Figaro* (April 10, 2013), "[Hoog: Chine nouvelle, un concurrent sérieux de l'AFP](#)"; Strategies.fr (June 6, 2014), "[L'AFP face à la menace signée Chine nouvelle](#)".

²⁰ Quote from a report by Renée Diresta, Carly Miller, Vanessa Molter, John Pomfret, and Glen Tiffert, *Stanford Internet Observatory* (2020), "Telling China's Story: The Chinese Communist Party's Campaign to Shape Global Narratives". Full quote: "PRC state media also successfully competes against established Western wire services to supply content to local media around the world. While generally uncontroversial, this content often repeats crude propaganda and disinformation on matters closely tied to PRC national interests."

²¹ Quoted in Josh Rogin, *The Washington Post* (December, 2018), "[Congress demands answers on AP's relationship with Chinese state media](#)".

1,15 M visits). Still, as you will see, this was the most visited French website of a Chinese outlet during this period.

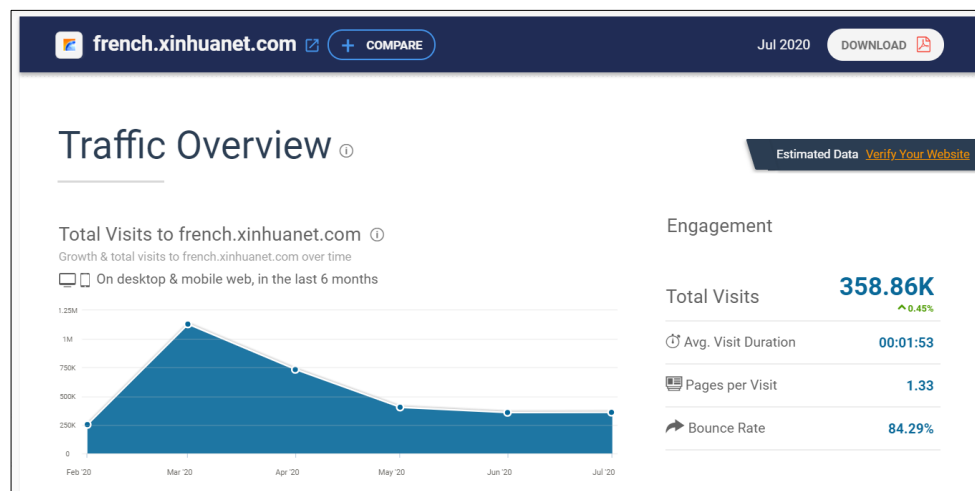


Figure 1: Traffic overview of French.xinhuanet.com website over the last six months (source: similarweb.com).

1.2 CGTN-Français

Presentation:

CGTN-Français has been operating since 2016, when it took over from CCTV-Français. CCTV-Français was itself created in 2007 after the break-up of the CCTV-E&F channel, which had been broadcasting in both French and Spanish since 2004.

CGTN-Français belongs to a global group of six international TV channels owned and operated by China Central Television (CCTV), registered under the State Council of the People's Republic of China and affiliated with the CCP. Its generalist TV channels broadcast in English, Spanish, French, Arabic and Russian. CCTV also runs specialized channels in English: CGTN Documentary, CGTN Africa, CGTN America and CGTN Europe. CGTN is also considered as a subsidiary of China Media Group, founded on 21 March 2018 with the merger of China Central Television (CCTV), China National Radio and China Radio International. Its social media accounts are the flagship of the whole Chinese state media apparatus in French with a very wide audience.

As per European law, the UK's broadcasting regulator Ofcom is responsible for monitoring CGTN's adherence to rules on the impartiality of reporting.²² In summer 2020, CGTN was investigated and found guilty of breaching British impartiality rules by Ofcom for its biased coverage of the Hong Kong protests and the airing of a forced

²² The [Council Directive](#) "Television without Frontiers" (TVWF) of 1989, along with the [European Convention on Transfrontier Television](#) of the Council of Europe, lays down the basis of laws governing TV broadcasting in Europe, including a principle of submitting extra-European programmes to the control of a single European authority. More information [here](#) on the website of the French regulator CSA (in French).

confession by a former British journalist.²³ This has led to mounting political pressure on the UK government from opposition politicians to revoke CGTN's broadcasting license.²⁴ As Britain prepares to leave the EU, it remains unclear what consequences this will have for the oversight of CGTN's activities.

Website:

<https://francais.cgtn.com/>

According to SimilarWeb, CGTN's French website generated very modest traffic during the past 6 months (only 65k visits in July 2020 and a maximum number of visits reaching 110k in April 2020).

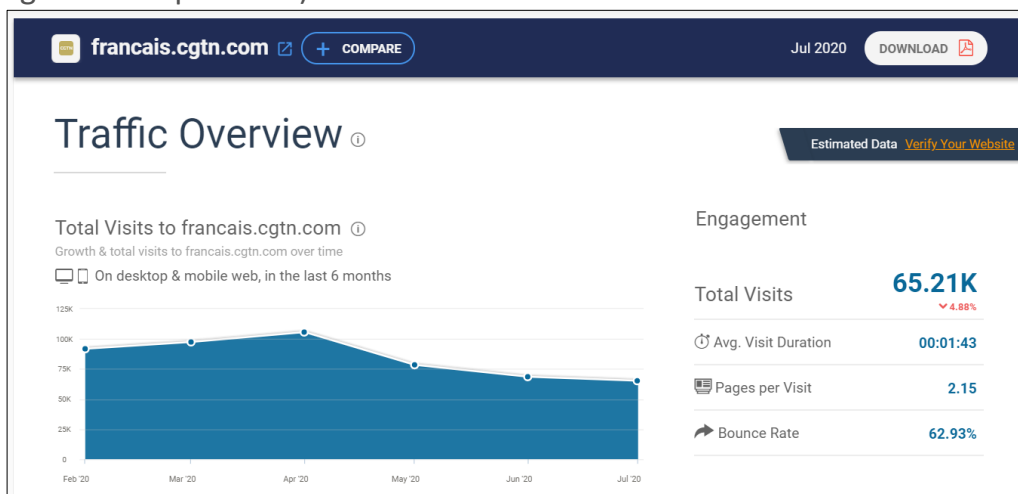


Figure 2: Traffic overview of francais.cgtn.com website over the last six months (source: similarweb.com).

1.3 Radio Chine Internationale

Presentation:

Created in 1941 under the name Radio Peking, the Chinese radio has now been operating under the name of Radio Chine Internationale since 1978. It is best known by the English acronym CRI. The outlet has been broadcasting in French since 1958. Its directors are members of the Political Bureau of the CCP. It broadcasts in 44 languages and set up a subsidiary in Paris in July 2012 via a production company.

China Radio International (CRI) is today the international radio arm of the China Media Group, following the first session of the 13th National People's Congress in March 2018 which led to the creation of the China Media Group.

Website:

²³ Simone McCarthy, *South China Morning Post* (September, 2019), "[Chinese broadcaster CGTN's Hong Kong protests coverage probed by UK watchdog](#)"; BBC News (July 6, 2020), "[Chinese TV channel breached rules with 'forced confession'](#)".

²⁴ Michael Savage, *The Guardian* (July, 26 2020) "[China's TV channel faces UK ban as complaints mount](#)".

<http://french.cri.cn>

The traffic on this website is so limited that no data is available on SimilarWeb.

1.4 Le Quotidien du Peuple

Presentation:

Le Quotidien du Peuple is the French edition of the People's Daily, the largest media group in China and the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the CCP.

In addition to its main Chinese-language publication, People's Daily has editions in English, Spanish, Japanese, French, Russian, Portuguese, Arabic, Tibetan, Kazakh, Uyghur, Zhuang, Mongolian, and other minority languages in China. According to Xinhua,²⁵ the foreign version of People's Daily has a circulation of 600,000 copies in 86 countries and regions. However, it is likely that most of its circulation is happening online and no longer printed.

Website:

french.peopledaily.com.cn

The site promotes the WeChat messaging app to follow its new publications. The site is unavailable using some VPNs and requires completing a captcha on Tor.

According to SimilarWeb, the website also receives a very modest traffic with only 70k in June 2020 and a very limited peak of 150k visits in March 2020.



Figure 3: Traffic overview of French.peopledaily.com.cn website over the last six months (source: similarweb.com).

²⁵ Xinhuanet.com (May 21, 2015), "[Xi Jinping souhaite que le Quotidien du Peuple diffuse la voix chinoise](#)".

1.5 Comparison between the Chinese state-controlled media websites' audience and the traffic generated by other French media

The traffic on the Chinese media websites is limited or very limited, in line with the fame of these outlets in France: they are not widely known by the French public, rarely shared by influencers and barely quoted by traditional media or in press reviews.

By comparison, over the last 6 months, Le Monde's website audience fluctuated between 85M and 140M visits per month. For Le Figaro, the audience was between 80M and 115M visits per month.

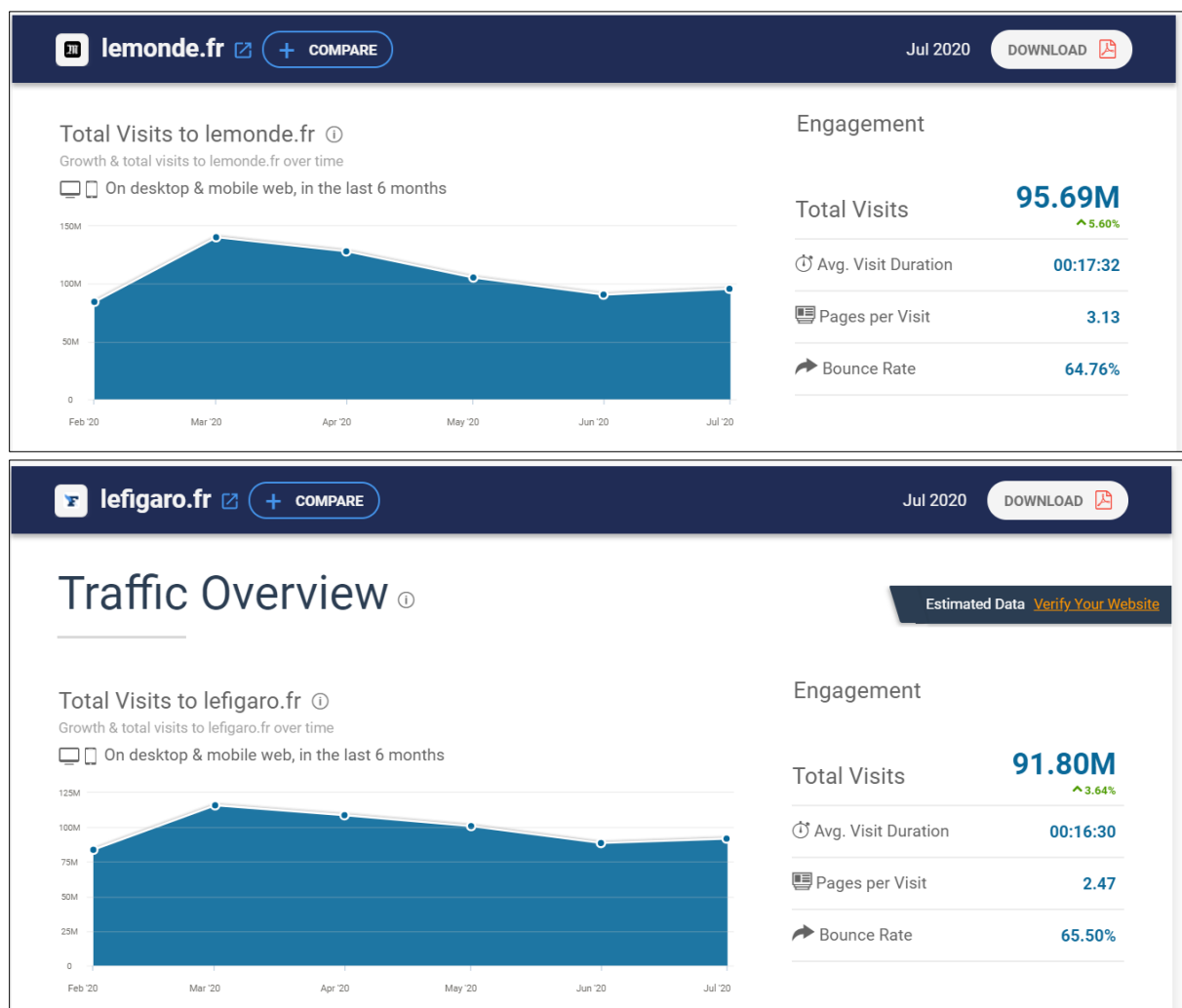


Figure 4: Traffic overview of Le Monde and Le Figaro websites over the last six months (source: similarweb.com).

For further comparison, the websites of Sputnik France and “RT en français” obtained a traffic between 3,7M to 5,55 M visits/month for RT France and between 15 and 29,5 M visits/month for Sputnik France, in a period covering the last six months. This is far superior to the reach of Chinese-state media websites in France.

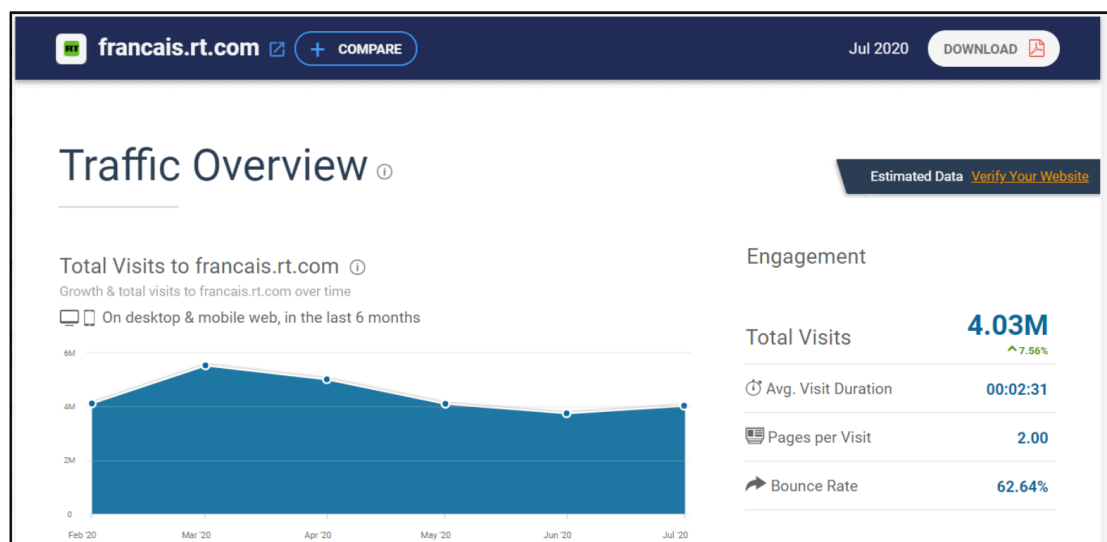
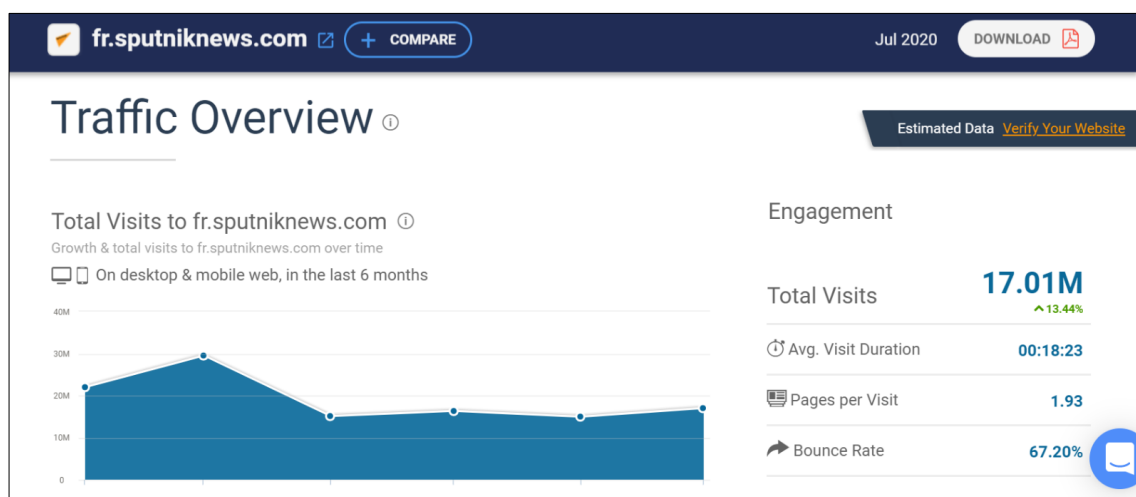


Figure 5: Traffic overview of Sputnik France and RT en français websites over the last six months (source: similarweb.com).

1.6 A new strategy: a network of female YouTubers

In addition to clearly identified Chinese state-controlled media, we identified during our study a small group of news bloggers/YouTube broadcasters who have seen their content being regularly reshared by French-speaking Chinese media. They are all young Chinese women, some of them using French pseudonyms, who produce videos in French and upload them on several social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Weibo). For the purpose of the study, we will focus only on the Facebook pages.

Although all the Facebook pages are recent, their apparition does not seem to be linked to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus since the oldest one was created at the end of 2019, before the outbreak of the virus in early 2020.

The subjects they deal with are often light (culture, tradition, cooking, lifestyle), but they also produce more political content, praising the attractiveness of the country or lauding the management of the pandemic by the Chinese government.

Created in November 2019, the [Facebook page Tiantian Studio](#) uses as description: "News anchor / journalist •China Story•"

Her biography as well as her email address suggest that she is not a regular YouTube user but works at CGTN.

Videos she produces are shared on the CGTN-Français' Facebook page, Twitter account and YouTube channel associated with the hashtag #TiantianStudio.

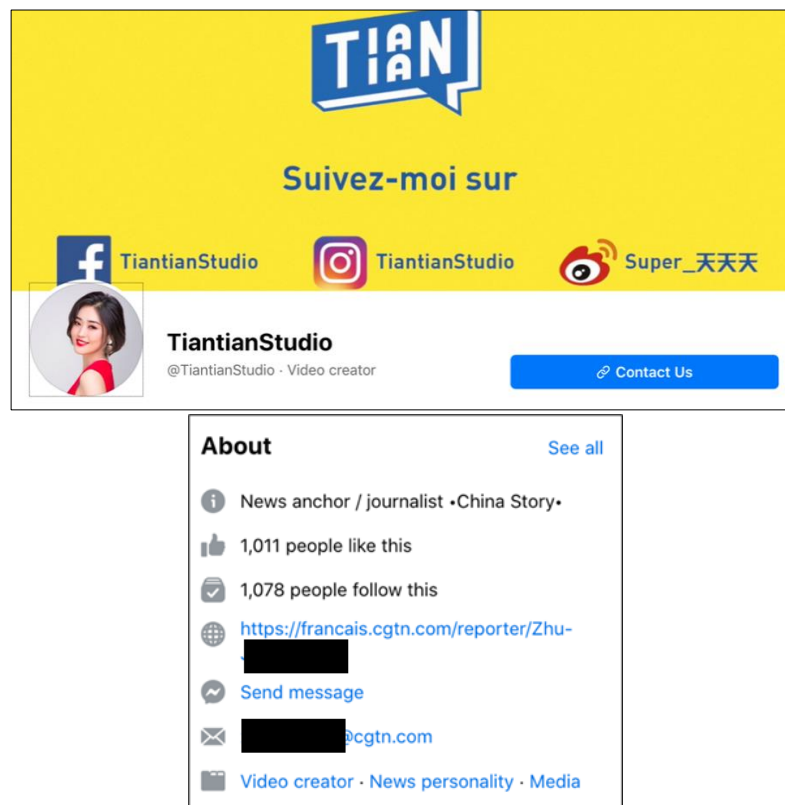


Figure 6: Facebook banner for Tiantian studio.

Created in January 2020, the [Facebook page Coco studio](#) presents itself as: "Chinese journalist, passionate about music, dance and the beauty of life. Here I share with you the latest news from China, I make you discover the life of Pekingese, and show you the latest trends in Chinese fashion."

The content she produces is also shared on CGTN-Français' Facebook page, Twitter account and a YouTube channel associated with the hashtag #CocoStudio.

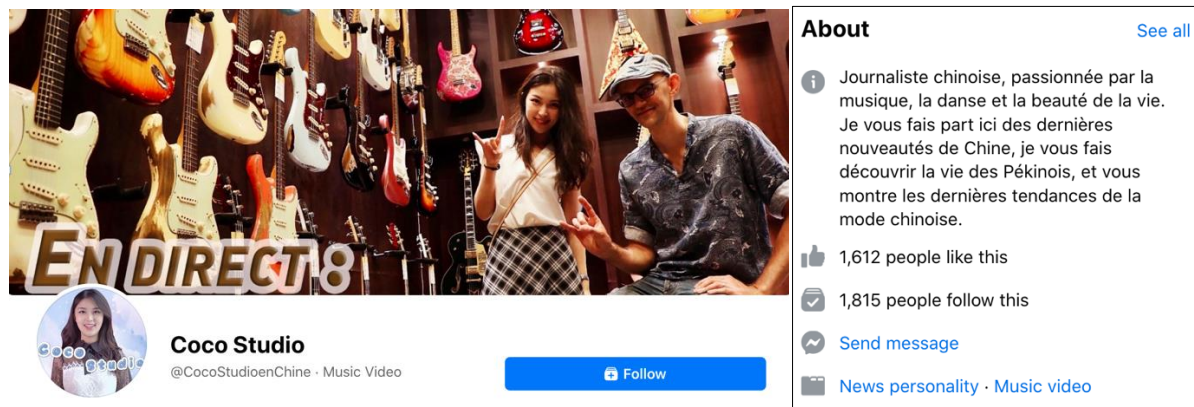


Figure 7: Facebook banner for Coco Studio.

Created in February 2020, the [Facebook page named Emilia ChinaTube](#) describes itself as "News Anchor, Chinese, vlogger, french-speaking, sharing interesting things about China."

The content she produces is also recirculated on CGTN-Français's channels: Facebook, Twitter, and a YouTube channel associated with the hashtag #EmiliaChinaTube.

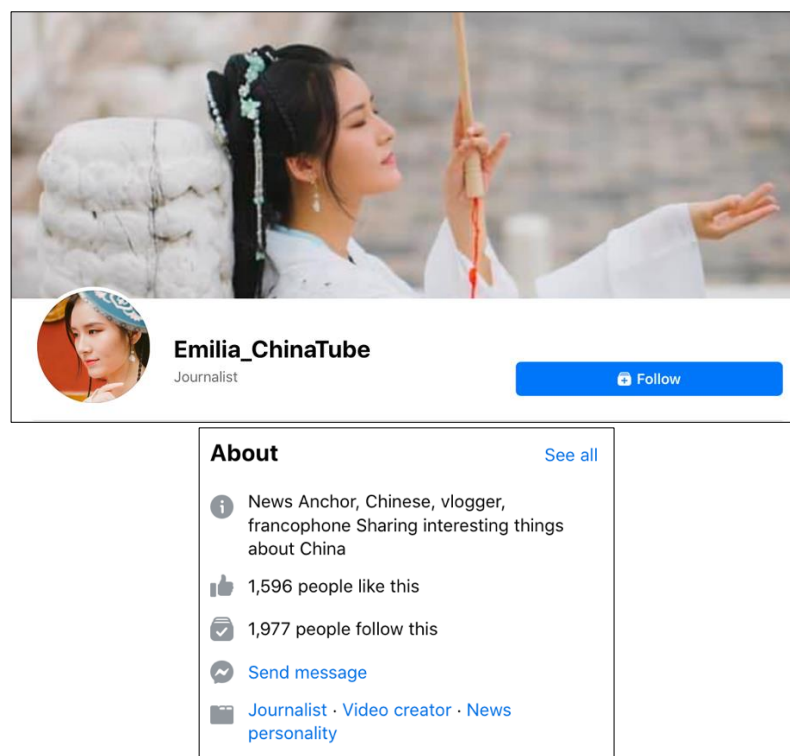


Figure 8: Facebook banner for Emilia ChinaTube.

Created in February 2020, the [Facebook page Mon Pékin Express](#) teases her channel: "Everything you want to know about China 😊"

The content she produces is also shared on the Facebook page of CGTN-Français, its Twitter account and a YouTube channel associated with the hashtag #MonPékinExpress.

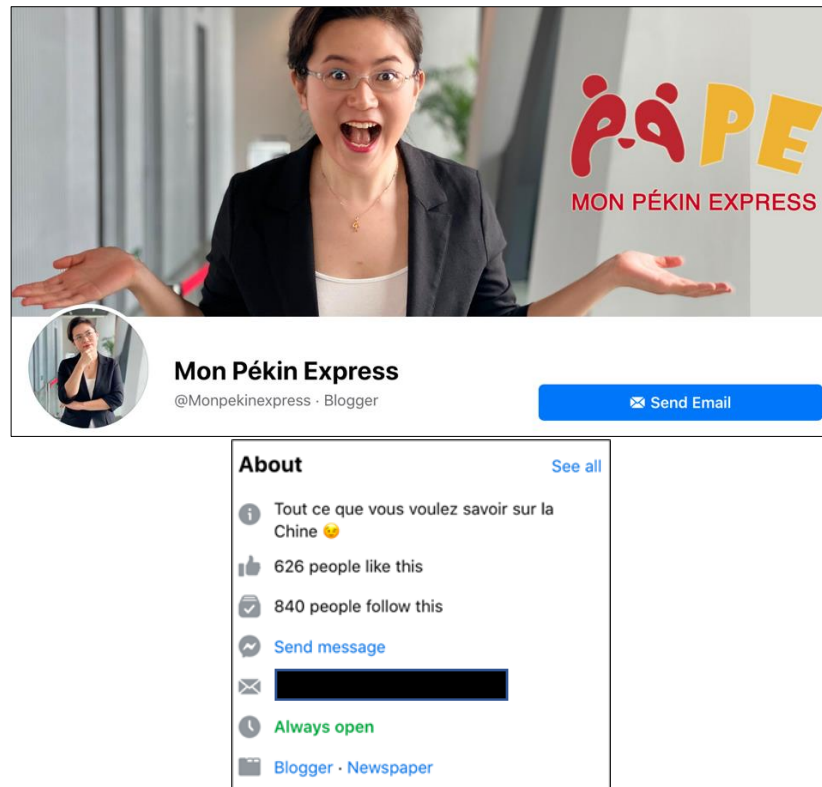


Figure 9: Facebook banner for Mon Pékin Express.

Created in April 2020, the Facebook page "[J'Y Pense](#)" ("I think about it") presents its owner as "a Chinese woman who speaks French, English, having a traditional Chinese family... to share the best moments of life and my views on the world..."

The content she produces is shared via the Facebook page of CGTN-Français, as well as on a Twitter account associated with the hashtag #JYPense.

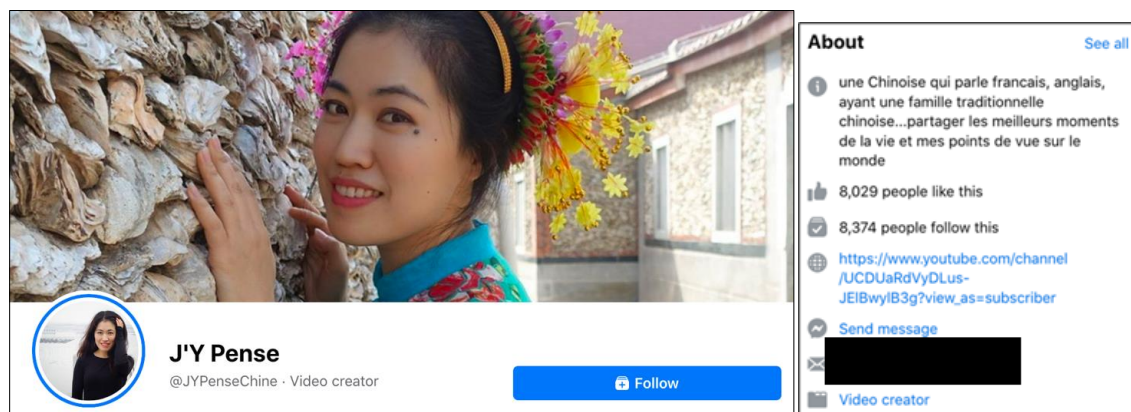


Figure 10: Facebook banner for J'Y Pense.

Created in March 2020, the [Facebook page Jie Lynn](#) presents her owner as a "Journalist in love with her job, passionate about the flavours of the world, enthusiastic blogger :)".

The content she produces is shared via the CGTN-Français' Facebook page and on the CGTN's Twitter account associated with the hashtag #LynnAvecVous.

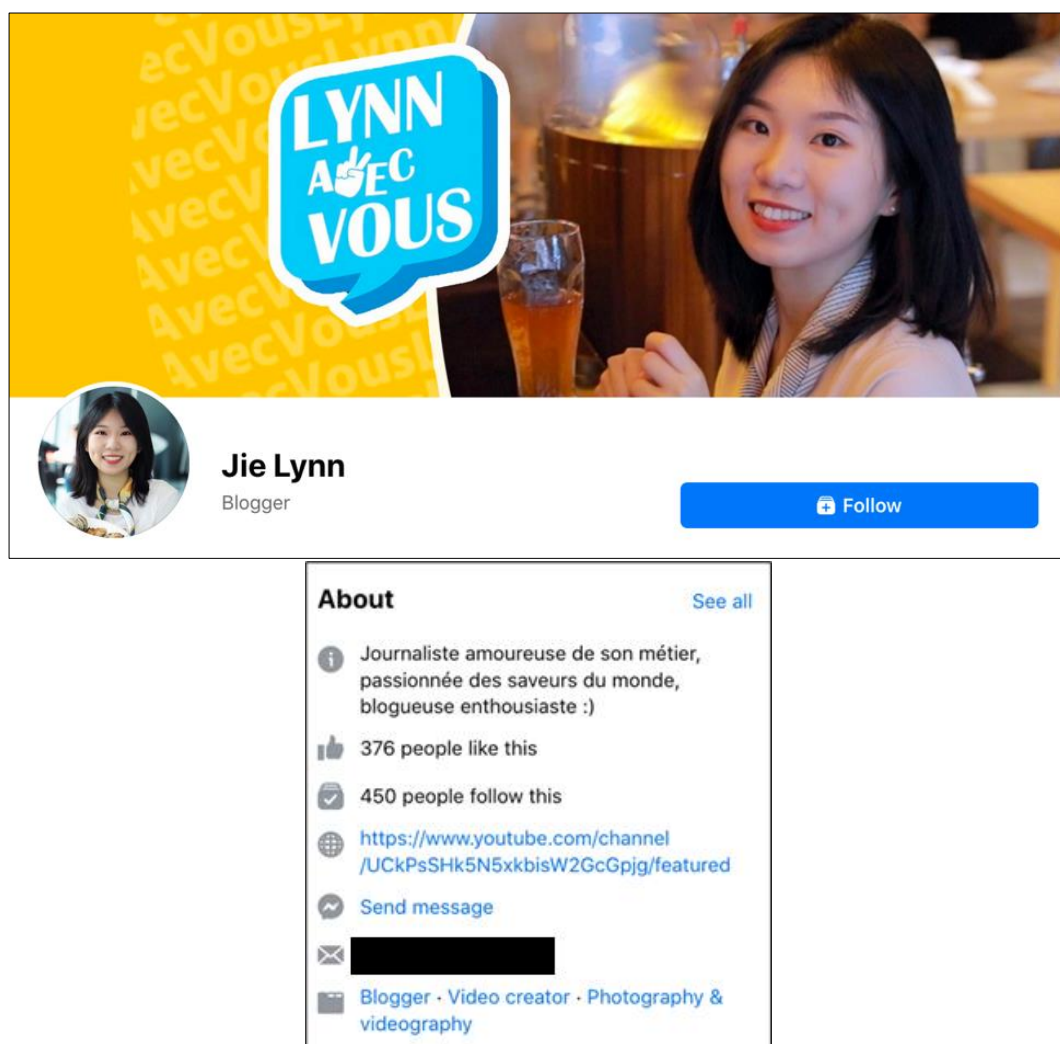


Figure 11: Facebook banner for Lynn avec vous.

Created in April 2020, the [Facebook page Le chinois avec Xu Li](#) presents her owner as "Media professional, Chinese teacher and spicy food lover Xu Li. YouTube : Le chinois avec Xu Li Instagram : mllesmile_xuli Twitter : Xu Li".

The content she produces is shared on the Facebook page of CGTN-Français and CGTN-Français' Twitter account associated with the hashtag #LeChinoisAvecXuLi.

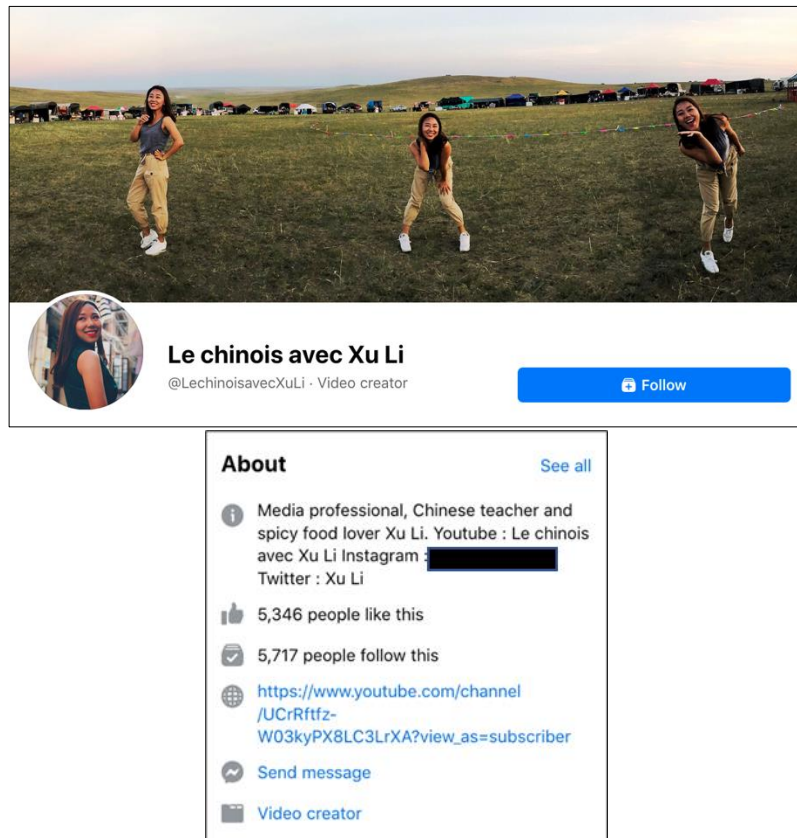


Figure 12: Facebook banner for Le chinois avec Xu Li.

Created in April 2020, the [Facebook page Chloe Zhou](#) presents her owner as a "French-speaking journalist based in Beijing."

Her email address shows that she works at CGTN.

The content she produces is shared on the Facebook page of CGTN-Français Facebook and via CGTN Français' Twitter account associated with the hashtag #StudioDeChloe.

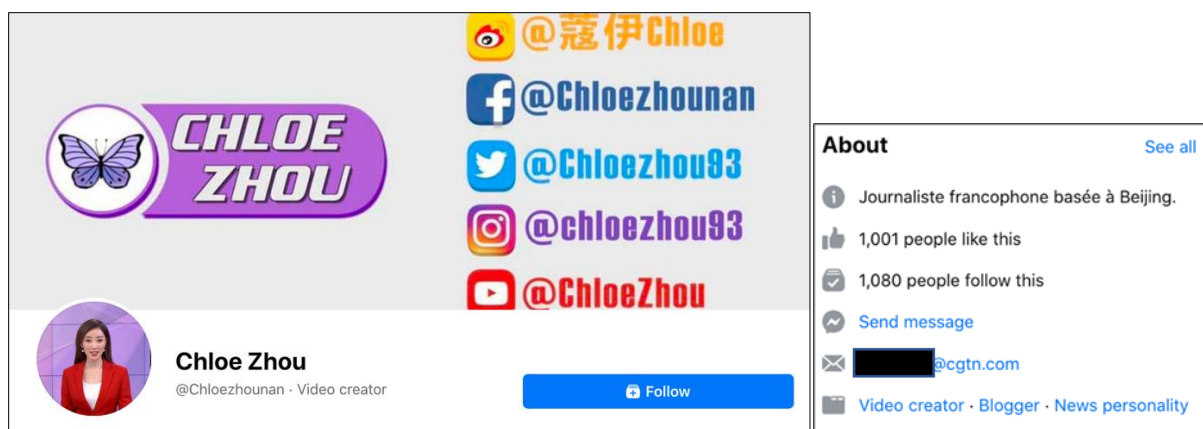


Figure 13: Facebook banner for Chloe Zhou.

Created in May 2020, the [Facebook page LenaStudio](#) teases its channel: "Welcome here! I'm Lena, I'm streaming videos and photos about China~"

The content she produces is shared on the CGTN-Français's Facebook page, its Twitter account and YouTube channel associated with the hashtag #LenaStudio.

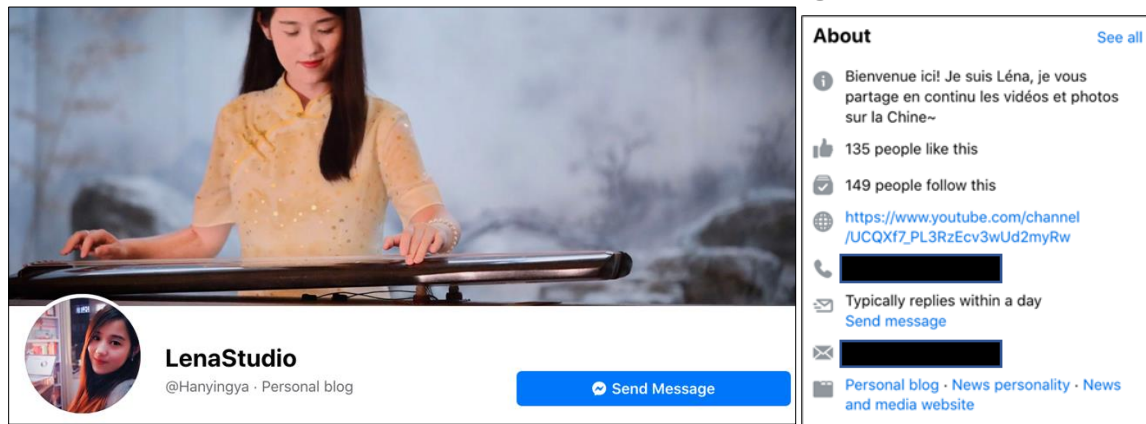


Figure 14: Facebook banner for LenaStudio.

We also found on the CGTN-Français' Facebook page some content produced by "Ondes sur Seine" (Waves on the Seine). It appears to be a production company referred to "Senna Listen Studio" in Chinese on its own Facebook page (phonetic for 塞纳听涛工作室) that produces video reports from Paris. The Facebook page of "Ondes sur Seine" was created in June 2020 and its audience is still very limited, 121 followers at the time of the report. No company under this name is listed in the French register of businesses. At least one article on the CGTN website presents "Ondes sur Seine" as a program of the Chinese state-controlled media.²⁶

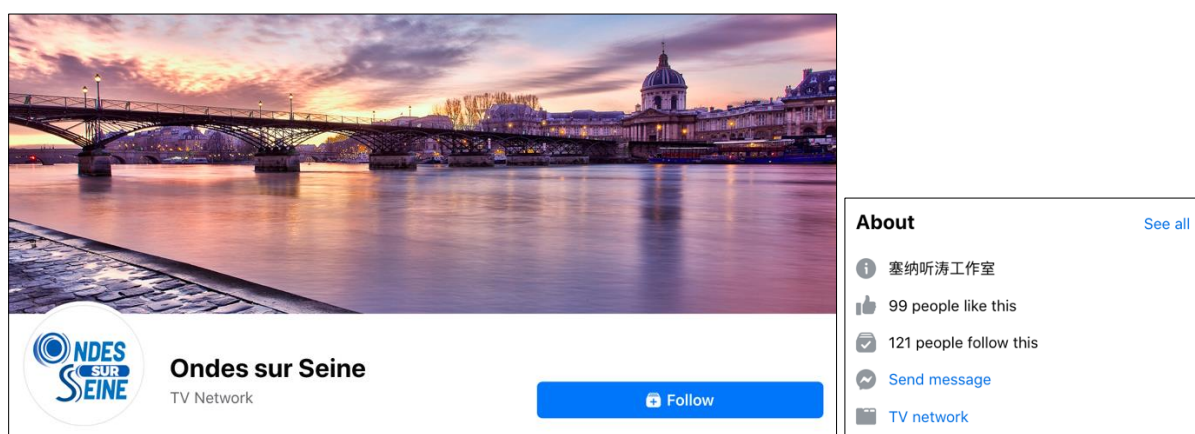


Figure 15: Facebook banner for "Ondes sur Seine".

²⁶ See here: <https://archive.is/wmXIR>.

1.5.1 Double messaging strategy

The particularity of these profiles is that they take the form of cultural or lifestyle channels, but regularly address much more "serious" subjects, concerning major Chinese issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, but also economic sovereignty issues such as Huawei or the BeiDou satellite launches (a competitor to GPS or Galileo).

For example, the Coco Studio Facebook page claimed in a post published at the end of June (after six months of activity) to have already produced 20 videos about the COVID-19 pandemic and other topics linked to China:

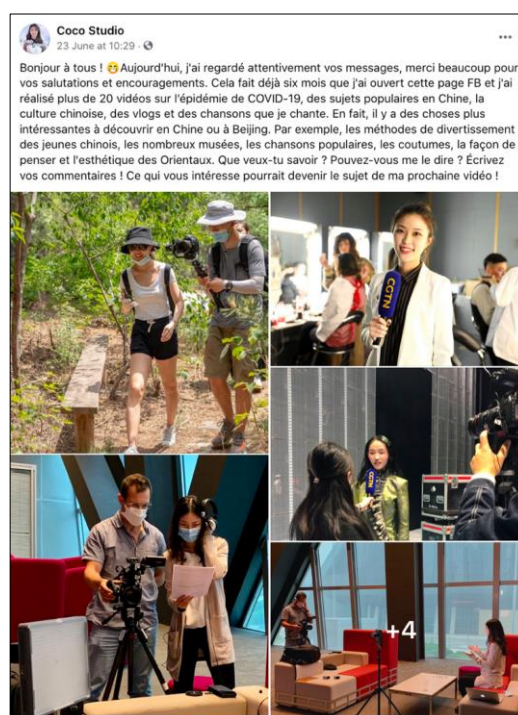


Figure 16: Screenshot from Coco Studio Facebook page.

"Hello, everyone! Today, I've looked carefully at your messages, thank you very much for your greetings and encouragement. It's already been six months since I opened this FB page and I have made more than 20 videos on the COVID-19 epidemic, popular topics in China, Chinese culture, vlogs and songs I sing. In fact, there are more interesting things to discover in China or Beijing. For example, the entertainment habits of Chinese youth, the many museums, popular songs, customs, way of thinking and Oriental aesthetics. What do you want to know? Can you tell me? Write your comments! Your interest could become the subject of my next video!"

On July 9th she posted a video about the launch of a satellite in China with the comment: "Beidou! What can it bring to the world?"



Figure 17: Screenshot from Coco Studio Facebook page.

She had already posted a video on the same subject on 23 June 2020.



Figure 18: Screenshot from Coco Studio Facebook page.

She also posted a message in a more scientific style with patriotic overtones, on 24 June 2020, concerning the testing against the novel coronavirus in Beijing:



Figure 15: Screenshot from Coco Studio Facebook page.

About

[See all](#)



Journaliste chinoise, passionnée par la musique, la danse et la beauté de la vie. Je vous fais part ici des dernières nouveautés de Chine, je vous fais découvrir la vie des Pékinois, et vous montre les dernières tendances de la mode chinoise.

Figure 16: Screenshot from Coco Studio Facebook page presentation.

All the above publications contrast with the account's presentation, "passionate about music, dance and the beauty of life", which promises to "introduce the lives of Pekingese and show the latest trends in Chinese fashion."

2. A study of French-language media narratives linked to the Chinese state

Under normal circumstances, with seemingly genuine engagement, we would have first analysed the main narratives from the point of view of **user volume** (content, articles or videos that have obtained the most engagements and shares on social networks). However, we will see in the study of social network accounts that we find several anomalies that can cast doubts on the authenticity of the traffic around the Chinese state-controlled media. Under these circumstances, it also seems relevant to us to add to our report an analysis of the narratives based on the **production volume** (number of articles, hashtags, communication devoted to a topic produced by the Chinese state-media).

2.1 Production volume narratives analysis

The use of hashtags, through their aim to make a publication visible, or even to create a trend, helps to identify the main themes promoted by French-speaking Chinese state-controlled media on their Twitter accounts.

All three outlets (CGTN, CRI and People's Daily) make prominent use of hashtags; CGTN and CRI to a larger extent than the People's Daily. Using the accountanalysis.app tool, we extracted on 15 July 2020 the hashtags of the last 1,000 tweets from these three Twitter accounts.

We made the following observations:

- Most hashtags are names of locations, countries, cities, or provinces: #China, #Beijing or #Shanghai are among the most common hashtags.
- Some of these geographical hashtags match narrative priorities of the Chinese government: Hong Kong (while a bill modifying the status of the city was being passed), Wuhan (province of origin of the coronavirus pandemic), Xinjiang (province of western China where repression against the Uyghur Muslim community is ongoing). Outside of China, there is an interest in countries with which Beijing has conflicting relations. The hashtag #USA comes in 5th position and #India in 10th position in CGTN tweets. In comparison, the hashtag #France was only used four times by @french_renmin.
- Among the hashtags that are not location names, there are frequent occurrences of #COVID19 and #coronavirus by CGTN, #coronavirus by @CRIFrancais and #COVID by @french_renmin.
- #Huawei, a strategic economic interest and growing priority for China as an increasing number of Western countries block the company from deploying

their 5G network, appears in the hashtags used by @CRIFrançais (11) and @french_renmin. (4)

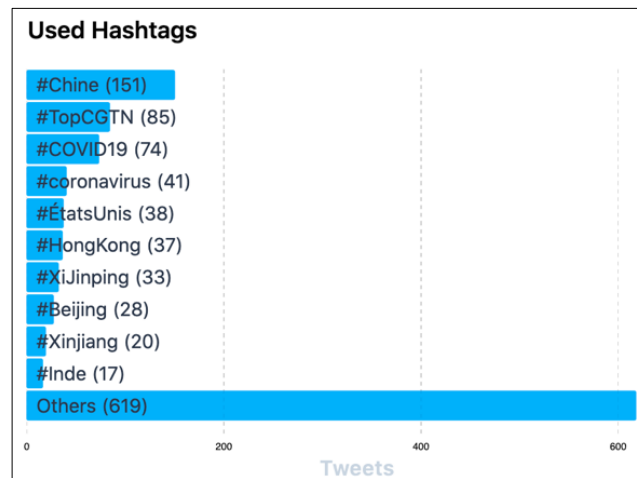


Figure 19: Hashtags used in the last 1,000 tweets published by @CGTNfrancais (source accountanalysis.app).

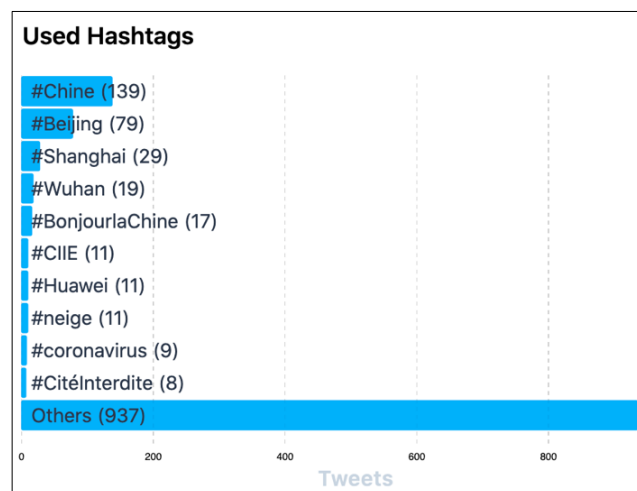


Figure 20: Hashtags used in the last 1,000 tweets published by @CRIFrancais (source accountanalysis.app).

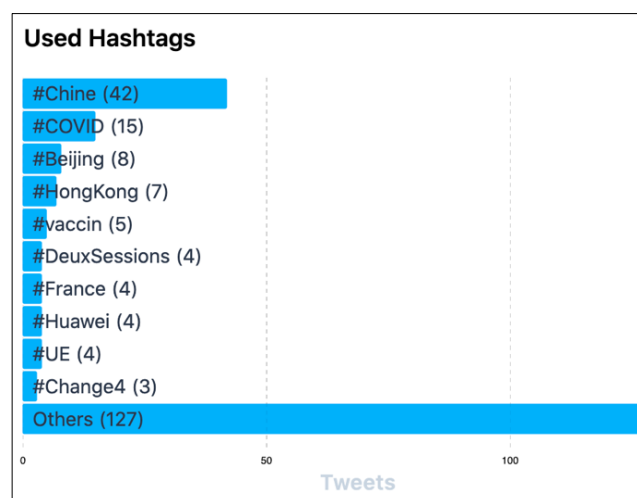


Figure 21: Hashtags used in the last 1,000 tweets published by @french_renmin (source accountanalysis.app).

2.2 Users volume narratives analysis

A study of the activity around the CGTN-Français Twitter account highlights how rarely the Chinese state media outlet's content is shared on French-speaking Twitter, especially given its number of followers (1 million followers for CGTN-Francais).

The table of the fifteen most shared tweets published by the CGTN-Français' Twitter account during the period from 15 June 2020 to 15 July 2020 shows that tweets barely managed to exceed 10 shares/retweets, a very modest figure, and that the most successful of them only reached 19 retweets.

This low engagement performance generates suspicions about the authenticity of the followers of the Twitter account linked to CGTN-Français and may reveal an interesting point about the Chinese state media's strategy: they seem to produce content according to Beijing's strategic priorities with an apparent disregard for engagement. The comparison with Russian state media, with its regular deployment of click-bait and polarizing messages to maximize engagement, is interesting.

CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	Magnifique ! Des artistes folkloriques exposent les "fleurs d'acier du dragon de #feix", une représentation du patrimoine culturel immatériel chinois pour les touristes dans l'est de la province chinoise du #Shandong. pic.twitter.com/KwsQ45Uac 27 jun 2020 19h00 18 total retweets 64 total likes	19 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	Des chercheurs de l'Université de Barcelone affirment avoir détecté le #coronavirus dans des échantillons d'eaux usées pris en mars 2019, neuf mois avant que la maladie ne soit découverte pour la première fois en #Chine. pic.twitter.com/wbyfqqgKy 30 jun 2020 11h08 21 total retweets 19 total likes	19 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	Des virologues espagnols ont trouvé des traces de #coronavirus dans des échantillons d'eaux usées collectés à #Barcelone en mars 2019. Soit neuf mois avant la découverte de la maladie de #COVID19 en #Chine. pic.twitter.com/Cytd9kEB 27 jun 2020 09h52 18 total retweets 17 total likes	17 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	#TopCGTN Dimanche, l' Avion ARJ21 a été officiellement intégré dans les flottes d'Air China, China Eastern Airlines et China Southern Airlines. Cet avion est conçu et fabriqué entièrement en #Chine. pic.twitter.com/mv97td6k8 29 jun 2020 17h00 14 total retweets 54 total likes	15 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	#TopCGTN Le 12 juillet 2020, "Ehang 216", le drone fabriqué par Guangdong Ehang a effectué son premier vol habité dans la province du #Shandong. #GuangdongEhang est un des leaders mondiaux dans le domaine de la #technologie des #drones intelligents. pic.twitter.com/Ph76NLIx9g 13 jul 2020 19h00 19 total retweets 46 total likes	15 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	L'ambassade de #Chine au #BurkinaFaso, a doté #Ouagadougou, capitale du Burkina Faso, d'un espace de fitness qui permettra à la population de pratiquer régulièrement le sport, surtout en cette période de #COVID19. CorrespondantsSpéciaux pic.twitter.com/hn8jYvU5Om 15 jun 2020 08h06 14 total retweets 33 total likes	14 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	#TopCGTN Le 15 juin 2020, la Colonne des forces de police armées du Hubei a organisé une grande cérémonie à Wuhan pour distribuer de nouveaux véhicules d'assaut anti-terroristes aux troupes. C'est la première fois que ce type de véhicule est installé dans la police armée. pic.twitter.com/wy1o3CpGcX 16 jun 2020 17h34 13 total retweets 21 total likes	14 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	Récemment, le #documentaire « Long Time No See, Wuhan » est devenu un succès sur Internet. Il s'agit du film d'une heure de réalisateur japonais Takeuchi Ryo sur la vie des 10 habitants de #Wuhan, la ville chinoise la plus touchée par le #COVID19. coronavirus pic.twitter.com/couwkqSLV 13 jul 2020 10h24 16 total retweets 73 total likes	14 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	Le respect des droits de l'homme est un sujet important. Le traitement des Ouïghours en Chine est depuis des années un thème récurrent dans l'actualité. Récemment, la gestion de l'épidémie de #COVID19 par la #Chine a aussi engendré un lot de critiques. JYPenseChine pic.twitter.com/19y1WDGfy 10 jul 2020 04h25 14 total retweets 18 total likes	14 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	#TopCGTN Le fil de fer ne pensait même pas qu'il pouvait devenir aussi beau ! Un petit morceau de fil de fer est transformé en œuvre d'art par les mains habiles d'une artisanne chinoise, c'est vraiment un miracle ! pic.twitter.com/3ZK10NoDDQ 11 jul 2020 19h00 13 total retweets 47 total likes	12 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	#TopCGTN Réputé être le deuxième "désert de sable mouvant" du monde, dans la région autonome ouïgoure du #Xinjiang, il est fendu par la plus longue route dans un "désert de sable mouvant" qui mesure 566 km et possède une ceinture verdoyante ayant une longueur de 436 km. pic.twitter.com/EY1AKybPue 18 jun 2020 17h00 10 total retweets 35 total likes	11 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	Un vaccin chinois contre le coronavirus disponible dès la fin de l'année 2020 ? Probablement oui ! Zhang Shanhua vous décortique cette course au vaccin en #Chine et dans le monde dans ce nouvel épisode de « Pourquoi la Chine ? ». PourquoiChine #COVID19 #MonPekinExpress pic.twitter.com/OOqQz9IVE 10 jul 2020 11h03 12 total retweets 22 total likes	11 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	Le 13 juin, le Shinkansen N700S , le nouveau train à grande vitesse, a été mis à l'essai à Obu, dans la préfecture d'Aichi, au Japon . Le N700S entrera en service le 1er juillet, il circulera sur la ligne principale Shinkansen , la ligne Tokaido entre Tokyo et Shin-Osaka. pic.twitter.com/ITyLshbTK 14 jun 2020 20h25 21 total retweets 85 total likes	11 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	#TopCGTN Un homme conduit un véhicule électrique très original à Bursa, en Turquie , le 1er juillet 2020. Hasan Duman a mis au point cet engin étrange, composé principalement de deux grandes roues reliées par un fauteuil. (Sergen Sezgin / Agence Anadolu via Getty Images) pic.twitter.com/ALIm0W6Ho 02 jul 2020 17h00 14 total retweets 30 total likes	10 (RE)TWEETS
CGTN Français @CGTNFrançais	#COVID19 Des experts de l'Université d'Oxford estiment que le #coronavirus pourrait ne pas provenir de #Chine, rapporte le "Daily Telegraph" britannique le 5 juillet. francais.cgtn.com/vBJAA-BcA-Bc... via @CGTNFrançais 07 jul 2020 09h49 9 total retweets 15 total likes	10 (RE)TWEETS

Figure 22: The 15 most retweeted tweets published by Chinese state media Twitter accounts between 15 June & 15 July, 2020

Among the most retweeted tweets from CGTN-Français's Twitter account is, unsurprisingly, information about the coronavirus, including two tweets (19 and 17 retweets) that put forward a highly controversial thesis about the presence of traces of the virus discovered in Barcelona's wastewater nine months before it appeared in the Wuhan, lending credence to the idea that the COVID-19 might have not originated

from China but Europe. Noticeably, another tweet includes a CGTN's article supporting the thesis of an Oxford professor (but not yet echoed by scientific consensus) of a non-Chinese origin of the novel coronavirus (10 retweets)

Among other noticeable topics, several articles concern technological successes: a photo of a new Chinese jet, which aims to eventually compete with Airbus and Boeing, obtained 15 retweets, as did a photo of an "uninhabited drone" (a kind of flying taxi) Ehang 216. Finally, Chinese culture and art are highlighted. In the first line of the ranking is a tweet containing a [set of photos of fireworks in China](#) (19 retweets). A tweet on a Chinese movie received 14 retweets and another one on artworks led to 12 retweets.

There is also a tweet on "counter-terrorism" in Hubei and another praising the respectful treatment of the Uighur community in Xinjiang. (both 14 retweets).

2.3 Comparison with narratives and strategies deployed by Russian state media

To conclude this section, it seems appropriate to summarize what appears for us to be the major differences between the Chinese state-controlled media in French and the Russian ones²⁷:

- The Russian state media follow a polarizing logic; they seek to amplify tensions and existing cleavages in French society. The Chinese media focus on CCP priority narratives about China (or major international conflicts, especially with the US) and seem to neglect engagement.
- Covering extensively French news, Russian state media outlets seem to focus more on the devaluation of Western societies. On the other hand, Chinese outlets cover more regularly what is happening in China and are very much aimed at promoting Chinese positions. They also seem to be constructed only to achieve some artificial statistical reach without real impact on public opinion being measurable, notably through a significant level of engagement.

These considerations are worth bearing in mind as our current analysis covers the strategy of Chinese state-controlled media in France. The picture may differ in other countries.

²⁷Kévin Limonier, Maxime Audinet *Herodote* (2017), "[La stratégie d'influence informationnelle et numérique de la Russie en Europe](#)" Edward Lucas, Jake Morris, Corina Rebegea, *CEPA* (March 15, 2021), [Information Bedlam: Russian and Chinese Information Operations During Covid-19](#)

3. French-speaking China's state media Facebook pages

The four French language Chinese state media of our study have their own certified page on Facebook. Below is a summary of Facebook's transparency and advertisement data for these pages.

Media	Followers	Currently running ads	Has run ads about social issues, elections or politics
Xinhua	81,7 M (regio.)	Yes	No
CGTN-Français	20 M	Yes	Yes
Radio Chine Inter.	2,6 M	Yes	Yes
Quotidien du Peuple	330 K	No	No

3.1 Xinhua News Agency



China Xinhua News •
China state-controlled media

This publisher is wholly or partially under the editorial control of a state. This is determined by a range of factors, including but not limited to funding, structure and journalistic standards. [Learn More](#)

Organisations that manage this Page

Confirmed Page owner: 新华通讯社
This is a business or organisation that has completed the business verification process and has claimed ownership of this Page.
新华通讯社
北京 北京, 100803 China
+861063071114

Page history

- Changed name to China Xinhua News
26 November 2015
- Changed name to Xinhua Chine Nouvelle
29 August 2015
- Changed name to Xinhua
19 August 2015
- Changed name to Xinhua Monde
3 September 2014
- Page created - Xinhua Chine Nouvelle
19 August 2014

[See Less](#)

People who manage this Page

Primary country/region location for people who manage this Page includes:
China (5)
France (1)
Not available (5)

Ads from this Page

This Page is currently running ads.

The [Facebook page of Xinhua News](#) has a total of 81.7 M followers. [It is regionalized](#), which makes it more complicated to evaluate the audience of its French section.

The French presentation of the page says: "Page of the French service of the news agency Chine Nouvelle, to help you discover a changing China and a multifaceted world."

The links posted on the page go through URL shorteners that slow down significantly internet connections and often block them even when the connection is transiting through some VPNs. <http://xhtxs.cn/xxxxxx> or xhne.ws/xxxx

Level of engagement on the French version of the Facebook page is noticeable: at least 50 interactions per post, sometimes several hundreds. Users interacting with this page seem to be often located in

Figure 23: Transparency information on the Facebook page Xinhua News Agency.

Africa, or in some other developing countries, especially from South Asian countries.

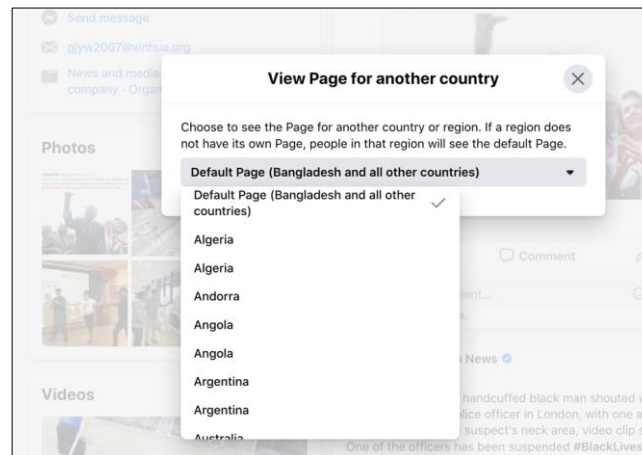


Figure 24: screenshot of the regionalization options on Xinhua's Facebook page.

Xinhua's Facebook page is regionalized and declines itself in no less than 187 different pages for dozens of countries or regions, sometimes in up to four different languages for the same territory.

3.2 CGTN-Français

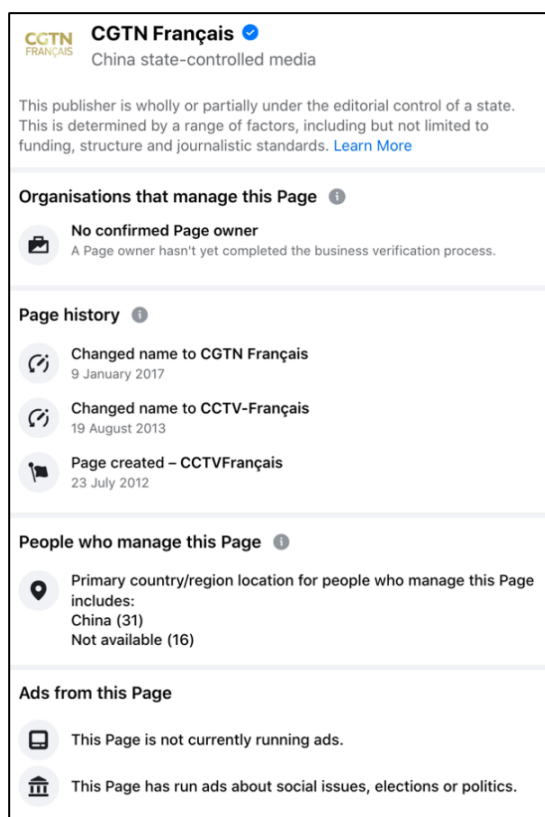


Figure 25: Transparency information on the Facebook page CGTN-Français.

The [Facebook page of CGTN-Français](#) has 20 M followers. Its counterpart in English reaches 100 M, the Spanish one 17 M and the Arabic one 15 M.

The CGTN description on Facebook says: "Broadcast in 87 countries and zones, CGTN-Français is a television and information channel with continuous programs 24 hours a day!"

3.2.1 Engagement abnormalities for the CGTN Facebook page

The French CGTN Facebook page shows relatively low levels of engagement: in general, a few dozen shares, likes or comments for every post. However, alerts configured on the CrowdTangle platform have allowed us to identify in recent weeks extremely abnormal high engagement scores for specific posts (almost only likes with a very limited number of shares or comments that could suggest inauthentic behaviours). According to CrowdTangle, these interactions are over 150 times higher than the average engagement received by other posts from the Facebook page (Generally speaking, it is rare, in our experience, for a post on any page to exceed an overperformance of x20 in terms of engagement).

One of these publications is a video on the Canton trade fair, exceptionally virtual this year due to a lockdown, presented as "a new impetus to world trade during the COVID-19 epidemic".

From the perspective of a French-speaking audience, no clear rational element explains the exceptional popularity of this post.



Figure 26: Screenshot of a CrowdTangle alert showing a 165x overperforming engagement for a post on CGTN-Français Facebook page.

The second most overperforming publication on Facebook (152x) seems quite trivial as it concerns the role of dopamine levels in the development of love feelings. This video received 41,000 likes despite only about 100 shares and 57 comments. Here again, we failed to find a rationale explanation for the success of this post.



Figure 27: Screenshot of a CrowdTangle alert showing a 152x overperforming engagement for a post on CGTN-Français Facebook page.

The third post concerns the Shanghai conference on artificial intelligence (226x). This video produced by the Paris-based structure “Ondes sur Seine” (see above) was viewed over 132,000 times in less than 24 hours after it was posted.



Figure 28: Screenshot of a CrowdTangle alert showing a 226x overperforming engagement for a post on CGTN-Français Facebook page.

The daily newspaper *Le Monde* published a recent article²⁸ about this offensive strategy of the Chinese state media in French that is in line with our observations, evoking a "likely manipulation" of the audience figures of the CGTN Facebook page in

²⁸ Damien Leloup and Harold Thibault, *Le Monde*, (July 28, 2020), [Comment la Chine impose sa propagande sur les réseaux sociaux en France](#).

French. "Analysis of the content published on its Facebook page shows that the videos are barely seen online - an average of a thousand views - and that its posts accumulate very few comments, a sign that its real audience is low," the authors noted. "The possible manipulation illustrates Beijing's desire to promote its vision around the world. On YouTube, CGTN-Français has just over 100,000 subscribers, a figure not very consistent with its number of Facebook subscribers." *Le Monde* sought comments from CGTN, which did not respond to its request, and contacted Facebook, which stated "not to have noticed any suspicious activity on the CGTN page in French."

A previous report²⁹ by the Mercator Institute for China Studies (Berlin based think-tank focused on China) already noticed the impressive audience of some social network accounts of the Chinese state media in English but acknowledged:

"How successful these accounts are is hard to gauge. The high number of followers suggests (though does not prove) that Chinese party-state media may have artificially inflated their followers and likes: on Facebook, China's international news channel CGTN has 87 million likes, Xinhua has 67 million, and the People's Daily has 70 million. By contrast, CNN "only" has 31 million and the BBC has 49 million. On Twitter, the English language version of Xinhua's principal news account @XHNews has 12 million followers, and the People's Daily has over 5.5 million."

Using SocialBakers platform, the Freedom House reported³⁰ that "three of the ten media accounts on Facebook with the largest number of followers were Chinese state media. In addition, from mid-November to mid-December 2019, four of the five fastest growing media pages on Facebook were Chinese state-run outlets: Global Times, CGTN, and two photo and culture pages run by Xinhua."

²⁹ Mareike Ohlberg, (December 5, 2019), MERICS, [Propaganda beyond the Great Firewall](#).

³⁰ Sarah Cook, (2020), Freedom House, [Beijing's Global Megaphone](#).

3.3 Radio Chine Internationale

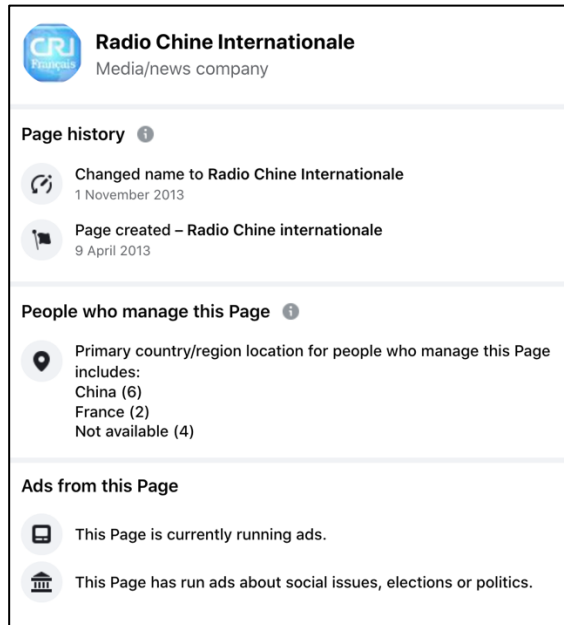


Figure 29: Transparency information on the Facebook page Radio Chine Internationale.

The [Facebook page of Radio Chine Internationale](#) has 2,6 M followers. Its counterpart in Spanish reaches 3,3 M, the Portuguese one 3,3 M and the page in Pashto 2,5 M.

Facebook presentation: " RCI talks about everything related to China: politics, economy, culture, tourism and society. It wants to be a window on China for you!"

The page shares a lot of content produced by CGTN-Français.

[A job offer for a French-speaking journalist](#) is pinned on the wall of the Facebook page.

3.4 Quotidien du Peuple

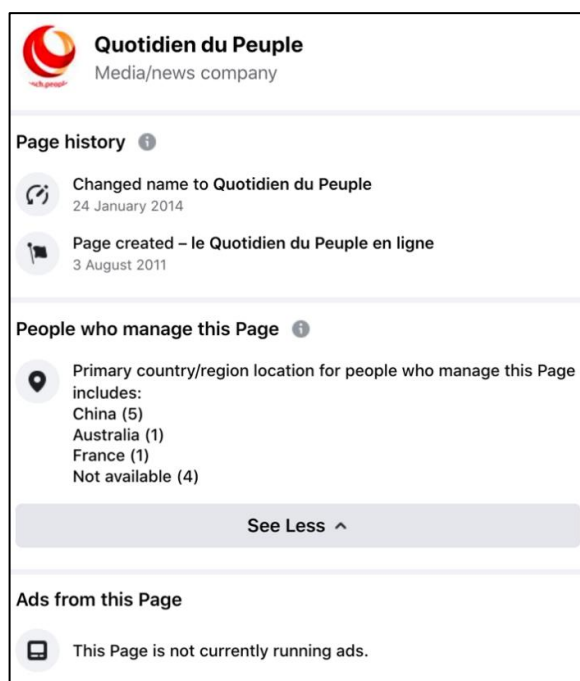


Figure 30: Transparency information on the Facebook page Quotidien du Peuple.

The [Facebook page of Quotidien du Peuple](#) has 327 K followers, while its counterpart in English reaches 84M. The latter may be oriented towards the United States as the email address provided is named: usa@people.cn.

Its Facebook presentation says: "Here the policies and points of view of the Chinese authorities + the news and positioning of the country related to international issues. I like and share!"

The page reaches very limited engagements (interactions usually do not surpass a single digit per post).

4. French speaking China's state media Twitter accounts - Engagement and audience analysis

4.1 Summary table

To evaluate the activity of Chinese state-controlled media in French on Twitter, we decided to compare them to two Twitter accounts of French public media in English that have a similar audience size and that can hardly be suspected of audience manipulation, namely those of France 24 (France 24 in English) and Radio France Internationale (RFI English)

	Followers	Following	% followers "normal activity" (Truthnest)	% "fake followers" (SparkToro)	Engagement score (SparkToro)	% tweets with engagement	Average RT/tweet	Average Like/tweet	Average tweets/day (since creation)	Average tweets/day (last 2,200 tweets)	Age (years)	Spark score
Xinhua Chine Nouvelle	17.500	96	91%	52,0%	13	53%	0,29	0,78	11	15	5,9	38
CGTN en français	1.000.000	156	91%	59,1%	9	97%	2,43	6,32	13	32	6,9	47
Radio Chine internationale	77.000	12	94%	54,6%	9	83%	0,67	3,37	1	2	4,4	45
Le Quotidien du Peuple	87.000	16	94%	49,6%	14	54%	0,24	0,7	4	6	8,9	35
France 24 English	250.000	1142	91%	27,5%	15	100%	7,6	10,7	69	59	11,3	58
RFI English	23.000	204	89%	35,5%	20	76%	1	1,3	12	19	11,6	44

Figure 31: Synthesis table of Chinese State media in French Twitter accounts, compared with two equivalent media accounts (source: EU DisinfoLab using SparkToro).

4.2 Tools available

Several tools can be found on the Internet to evaluate the authenticity of Twitter accounts and detect fictitious or non-human handled ones. The definition of an inauthentic account is complex and its detection even more complicated.

Truthnest.com is a familiar tool among social network researchers. One of its features provides a proportion of followers who have "normal activity". This figure is often quite high and does not seem interesting for our study since all the accounts we studied have results between 89% and 94% (the lowest figure being for RFI English).

We also used the SparkToro.com website, which offers two interesting tools:

- a SparkScore, which aims to detect the influence of an account, using the frequency of its publications, its number of followers and their level of engagement with this account;
- a Fake Followers audit.

The methodology of SparkToro to evaluate followers is described on its website as follows:

"This audit analyses a sample of 2,000 random accounts that follow the Twitter account, then looks at 25+ factors correlated with

spam/bot/low quality accounts. None of these, alone, indicate a spam/low quality account; but, when many factors are present, there's strong correlation with low quality."

On its website³¹, SparkToro states that "most Twitter account have significant numbers of fake followers (...) In our research, 5-30% of followers are fake – they're bots, spam accounts, inactive users, propaganda, or other non-engaged/non-real users".

The table in the previous section shows that the French-language Chinese state media have small to medium sized Twitter accounts (17,000 to 97,000 subscribers), with the exception of CGTN in French, which exceeds one million.

All accounts follow relatively few accounts. As this is common for institutional accounts, including media accounts, they do not rely on follow-backs strategies to build their audience and gain followers.

We note that the proportion of "fake" accounts detected by SparkToro is higher for Chinese media (between 49% and 59%) than for the other media in our comparison sample (27% to 35%). However, even if the highest proportion of fake followers (59%) concerns the account with the highest audience, this figure alone is not enough to conclude that the high number of followers for CGTN-Français Twitter account (more than one million subscribers) is only due to some online manipulation.

The engagement score is also low for our sample, and slightly lower still for the Chinese media. SparkToro explains this score as the number of interactions (likes, retweets) obtained by an account compared to the accounts of equivalent size generating the most engagement. The engagement score of 9 obtained by CGTN in French or Radio Chine Internationale indicates for example that these two accounts obtain only 9% of the interactions that the most active Twitter accounts of the same size obtain. But the non-Chinese media we have chosen for comparison also score relatively low scores (15 and 20).

A significant statistic, also provided by SparkToro, is the percentage of tweets getting engagement (at least one like, one retweet). We can see that 100% of France 24 in English's tweets receive at least one engagement (which can be explained by the size of the account: among the 250,000 people who follow it, it would be surprising if a tweet did not get one). On the other hand, this is the case for 24% of RFI's English-language tweets (a smaller account), of which only 76% of tweets get at least one engagement.

³¹ See here: <https://sparktoro.com/tools/fake-followers-audit>.

The 97% rate of CGTN in French is surprising: with a million subscribers, we would expect that no single tweet remains without any interaction.

With the average of retweets generated by a tweet produced, we can see the poor performance of Chinese state media accounts: each tweet from Xinhua Chine nouvelle is shared on average only 0.29 times, the ones from Radio Chine Internationale are retweeted only 0.67 times and the ones from the Quotidien du Peuple 0.24 times. CGTN's tweets in French are shared on average 2.4 times, but this figure remains quite low given its audience of more than one million followers. In comparison, a tweet from France 24 in English will be shared on average 7.6 times, whereas the account's audience is only a quarter of that of CGTN-Français (and the higher output since France 24 posts around 60 tweets per day when CGTN posts around 30).

Conclusions

Lessons learnt

In the course of this analysis, we encountered recurrent difficulties to analyse and verify parameters (engagement, authenticity...) connected to the online audience of Chinese media's social media accounts.

Indeed, independent researchers and civil society are dependent on the metrics provided by the platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, which are very often global aggregated figures. Most of the times, this is not enough to identify with certainty inauthentic behaviours or to have a clear view of the impact of narratives or disinformation items. Comments about platforms "not noticing any suspicious activity" are not transparent against what criterias have been checked on how these assessments are self-investigated by platforms.

Moreover, the proliferation of tools allowing to collect and cross-check some data with different methods and the inconsistency between, for example, how platforms count views do not allow you to have a complete and consistent picture of what is happening on social media.

For instance, to remove several platform limitations that currently hamper research on audience authenticity, we could imagine:

- on Facebook, adding a nonspecific "fan location" item to all Facebook pages would help researchers to identify inauthentic behaviours related to audiences. This would make more difficult for disinformation actors to build "audience farms", as it would require building a set of inauthentic accounts with different regions or language zones to stay under the radar.
- We also call for an obligation from online platforms to be transparent on the checks they conduct on "suspicious activity", the nature of their assessments and to allow external researchers and civil society to access this information.

On another plan, we do encourage a more regular use of the distinction, as described by Twitter between state-owned and state-controlled media³² on social media platforms, in research papers and in public speeches. This will raise awareness about the importance of editorial autonomy of public broadcasters and help depict more accurately the different types of relationship that exist between some media and their governments.

³² Twitter Support (August 6, 2020), "[New labels for government and state-affiliated media accounts](#)".

