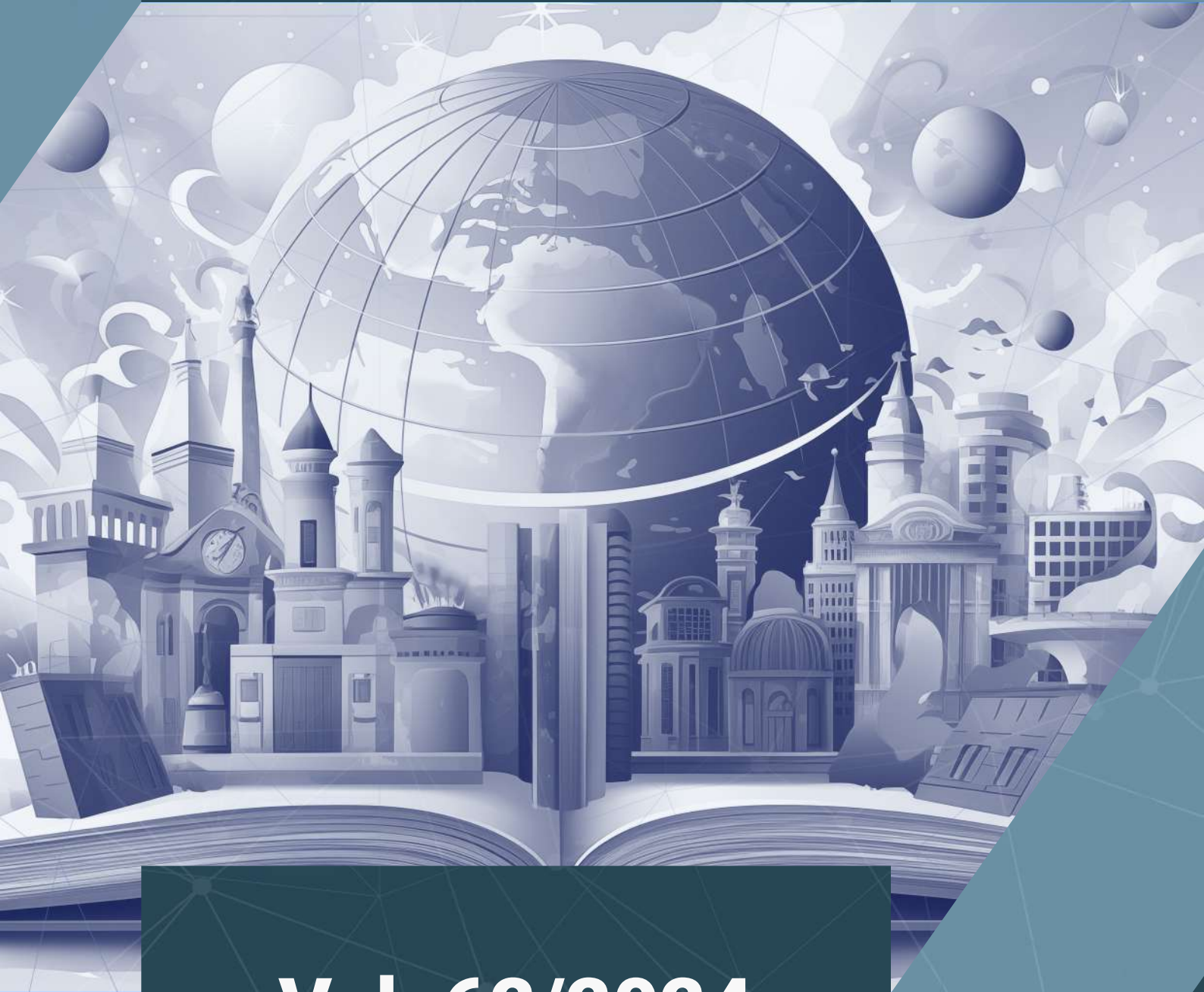




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## **Digital Walls and Global Bridges: The Paradox of China's Internet Censorship and Its International Cultural Exchange**

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**Abstract.** The document "Digital Walls and Global Bridges: The Paradox of China's Internet Censorship and Its International Cultural Exchange" extensively explores the contradiction between China's strict internet censorship and its global cultural exchange efforts. It investigates the impact of China's digital governance on global perceptions of its culture, diplomacy, and soft power through qualitative interviews with individuals from Iran, Romania, and Spain. The study reveals widespread criticism of China's social media platform censorship, noting a significant decrease in trust in the Chinese government among participants. The research calls for further interdisciplinary studies to understand the complex dynamics between media censorship, public confidence, cultural representation, and international diplomacy, highlighting the necessity for China to reassess its policies toward openness and cultural exchange.

**Keywords.** China's Internet Censorship, Cultural Exchange, Global Perception, Soft Power, Qualitative Research, Public Sentiment, Media Censorship, Digital Governance

### **Introduction**

The contrast between China's strict internet censorship and its efforts to engage in global cultural exchange represents a clear paradox in the age of digital globalization. "Digital Walls and Global Bridges: The Paradox of China's Internet Censorship and Its International Cultural Exchange" aims to elucidate the complex correlation between the stringent Internet regulation imposed by the Chinese government and its influence on the worldwide perception of Chinese culture, traditions, and societal norms. In China, where most internationally recognized social media platforms are blocked, a significant obstacle hinders the free exchange of cultural and societal information between China and the rest of the world. This study contends that these limitations not only obscure the dynamic panorama of Chinese culture from international viewership but also result in a diminution of the degree of confidence and worldwide acknowledgment of the Chinese government and its populace. Moreover, it explores the idea that China's attempts to control public communication through censorship could unintentionally diminish its reputation and impact on the international arena, especially in terms of being recognized as a prominent global power.

This study aims to investigate the wider consequences of these policies on international relations and worldwide public opinion, with the goal of enhancing conversations on global digital governance, cultural diplomacy, and the politics of information management. This study

will utilize a qualitative research design to conduct semi-structured interviews with individuals from Iran, Romania, and Spain. These countries were selected due to their diverse cultural, political, and media landscapes. The aim is to obtain comprehensive insights into the global viewpoints on

China's internet censorship and its impact on cross-cultural comprehension.

The research aims to examine the perspectives of adults in specific countries to gain insights into their experiences in the digital world. Additionally, it seeks to compare how China's internet governance is perceived in different geopolitical contexts. The technique employed in this study provides a strong basis for investigating the intricate interconnections at play, facilitating a comprehensive investigation of the impact of internet filtering on global cultural contacts and relationships. This analysis aims to make a substantial contribution to the ongoing discussion on digital governance, cultural exchange, and the narrative of international relations in light of China's increasing global influence.

### **Literature review**

The academic field concerning China's internet censorship and its wider global implications is vast and varied, offering a complex body of research that combines technological, political, and cultural assessments. Esteemed researchers like King, Pan, and Roberts (2013) have extensively recorded the methods and extent of censorship in China, highlighting its crucial function in maintaining internal social order and safeguarding the regime. Their work, which is fundamental in nature, offers essential insights into the diverse technical and political tactics employed by the Chinese government to regulate and manipulate internet discussions. This research is crucial for comprehending the role of the state's internet monitoring and censorship in upholding the Communist Party's authority, showcasing the intricate structure of China's strategy for controlling information.

Building upon this basis, scholarly research conducted by Han (2015) and MacKinnon (2012) explores the consequences of these censoring techniques on civil society in China. Their findings compellingly argue that these policies greatly hinder the unrestricted flow of ideas and information. These analyses reveal the significant influence that government-imposed limitations have on the liveliness and inclusiveness of the public domain, suppressing opposition and promoting a climate of self-restraint among individuals. The findings provided by these research are essential for comprehending the wider impact of censorship on civil liberties and the articulation of opposing viewpoints within an ever-expanding digital public sphere.

In the realm of international affairs, scholars have extensively examined the implementation of soft power, a notion introduced by Nye (2004), and its exploitation by the Chinese government through cultural outreach efforts like the Confucius Institutes. The work, as demonstrated by Hartig's contributions in 2016, showcases China's deliberate endeavors to promote its cultural values and norms internationally, with the goal of enhancing its global reputation and impact through non-coercive methods. These studies illuminate China's strategic emphasis on cultural diplomacy and soft power as means to bolster its global influence. Nevertheless, this study also highlights a fundamental paradox—the effort to exert soft power internationally is contrasted with the presence of strict internet restrictions domestically, prompting inquiries about the consistency and effectiveness of China's worldwide communication strategy.

This literature study highlights the intricate and multifaceted nature of China's internet censorship, demonstrating how these practices are intricately connected to the country's

domestic goals and its ambitions on the international level. The research conducted by King, Pan, and Roberts (2013), in addition to the scholarly input of Han (2015) and MacKinnon (2012), establishes a crucial basis for comprehending the intricacies of China's digital governance.

Furthermore, the examination of soft power dynamics, as elucidated by Nye (2004) and Hartig (2016), presents opportunities for additional investigation into the relationship between domestic censorship policies and international cultural diplomacy endeavors. The literature in question provides a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the strategic reasons behind China's internet censorship and its impact on worldwide communication and cultural interchange.

### **Research Gap**

Although there is a vast amount of material on the topic, there is still a notable lack of comprehension regarding the contradictory connection between China's strict internet control and its efforts to promote worldwide cultural exchange. There is a limited amount of research that specifically investigates the influence of censorship on the global perception of Chinese culture, as well as its effects on international relations and cultural diplomacy. Moreover, there is a lack of thorough investigation into the intricate perspectives of persons from various cultural and political backgrounds regarding China's internet governance and its impact on fostering cross-cultural comprehension.

This study aims to address this deficiency by conducting a comparative analysis of perceptions in various geopolitical contexts, providing a distinct contribution to the discourse on digital governance, cultural exchange, and the dynamics of international relations in light of China's increasing global influence. The research aims to explore the various impacts of internet censorship on global cultural interactions and trust by examining the experiences of individuals from Iran, Romania, and Spain. This will provide empirical insights into the relationship between digital barriers and global connections, contributing to the academic discourse.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This study utilizes a qualitative analytical framework to investigate the perspectives and behaviors of individuals who use social media in three geopolitically dissimilar contexts: Iran, Romania, and Spain. The selection of these countries was based on their ability to offer a wide range of political and cultural viewpoints on China, aligning with the study's focus on global dynamics. Iran is a representative of the Middle East, Romania represents Eastern Europe, and Spain represents Western Europe, providing a wide range of perspectives.

A total of 45 participants, with 15 individuals from each nation, were selected by a snowball sampling method. This allowed the inclusion of individuals who are actively involved on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, and have a strong connection with these networks. Participants were selected irrespective of age, gender, or educational background, although the educational level was taken into account to enhance the analysis.

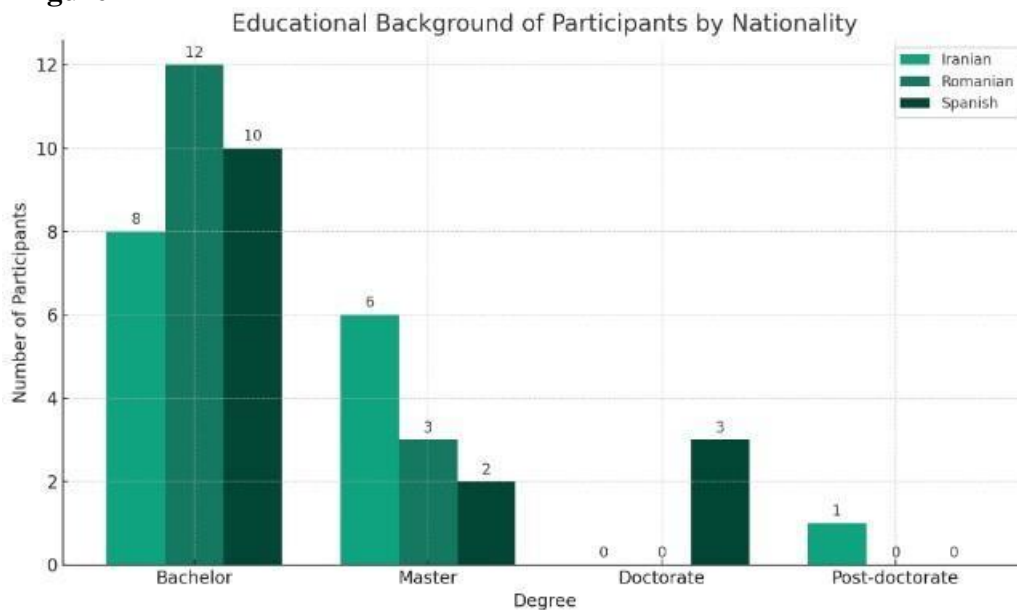
The organized interview approach revolved around seven primary subjects, each delineated by two specific questions, granting participants the autonomy to decline any uncomfortable queries. The study followed rigorous ethical guidelines, which included maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. To safeguard participants' identity, unique codes were provided to them based on their nationality. The interviews conducted in Persian and Romanian went smoothly due to the participants' language skills, however interviews in Spanish necessitated interpretation assistance to ensure accuracy.

Following the collection of data, the interviews were transcribed and coded in a comprehensive manner, enabling the identification of relevant themes and keywords. This allowed for a complete comparison analysis to be conducted across the three nations. This investigation revealed deep insights into the connection between social media activity and worldwide political processes.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the educational stratification of participants, while Figure 2 presents the structured interview questions. The majority of the Iranian group consisted of persons holding Bachelor's and Master's degrees, with only one participant having completed a postdoctoral program. The academic distribution of the Romanian group was similar, whereas the Spanish participants had a diverse academic profile, which included three individuals with doctoral degrees. The distribution of gender and educational background among the 45 participants highlights the varied perspectives that contribute to the enrichment of this study.

Distinct comparative studies were performed on respondents from Iran, Romania, and Spain to assure accuracy. The 15 interviews conducted with Iranian participants were thoroughly examined to extract significant and recurrent words, a similar procedure was followed for the Spanish and Romanian interviews. This methodology facilitated a detailed and sophisticated examination, emphasizing both commonalities and distinctions across the factions, thus enhancing our comprehension of the impact of social media on shaping global political connections.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

1. General Perception and Awareness
  - A. How familiar are you with internet censorship practices in China? Can you describe what you know?
  - B. How do you believe internet censorship in China influences your views or opinions about the country and its culture?
2. Impact on Cultural Understanding
  - A. How do you think China's internet censorship affects the global exchange of cultural and social information between China and the world?
  - B. Have you ever sought information about Chinese culture, customs, or lifestyle? How easy or difficult was it to find authentic information?
3. Social Media and Information Exchange
  - A. How important do you believe social media is for understanding different cultures, including Chinese culture?
  - B. In your opinion, how does the restriction of global social networks in China impact your ability to understand or connect with Chinese people and their way of life?
4. Perceptions of Government Policy
  - A. What are your thoughts on the Chinese government's reasons for implementing internet censorship? Do you see any justification in their actions?
  - B. How do you think internet censorship in China reflects on the Chinese government's image internationally?
5. Influence on International Relations
  - A. Do you believe China's internet censorship has any impact on its relations with other countries, including your own? Please explain your view.
  - B. How might China's control over information affect its standing as a global power in your perspective?
6. Future Implications
  - A. What do you think are the long-term implications of China's internet censorship on global cultural exchange and international understanding?
  - B. How do you see the future of China's role in the global digital landscape evolving?
7. Suggestions for Improvement
  - A. What suggestions would you have for Chinese policymakers to improve international perceptions of China through digital means?
  - B. Do you think increased digital openness could change global perceptions of China? How so?

### **Navigating the Complexities of Sino-Iran Relations**

Before analyzing and critiquing the conducted interviews, it is crucial to highlight an important element regarding the current situation in Iran.

Iran's modern socio-political landscape is characterized by an authoritarian rule, which serves as a focal axis around which different internal and external forces revolve. The Islamic Republic of Iran, known for its theocratic and authoritarian government, has strategically implemented systematic measures to regulate the digital domain, with the goal of exerting control over social media and public discourse. However, experts generally agree that the effectiveness of these regulatory systems is limited, despite the efforts made to implement them. This constraint is emphasized by the increasing digital skills among the population and the worldwide reach of digital platforms, which naturally oppose centralized authority (Nanquette, 2021; Bunt, 2018).

The Iranian government's association with global powers, particularly China, adds an additional level of intricacy to its system of governance. The collaboration between China and Iran, namely in the field of telecommunications infrastructure development, has generated substantial public dissatisfaction in Iran. Many Iranians view this collaboration as a way to increase the state's ability to monitor and regulate the flow of information and public discussion (Ullah,

Ullah, & Ullah, 2022). Furthermore, the business ties between Iran and China have faced criticism. The accords' nature and consequences have led to a decline in how Iranians perceive China, exposing a complex interaction between global economic relations and domestic public opinion (Eisenstadt, 2016; Osiewicz, 2018).

Further complicating this situation is the impact of Iran's conservative and religious forces, which often support the government's policies. However, they express criticism against

China, specifically about China's treatment of the Uyghur Muslim population. This critique encompasses wider apprehensions regarding human rights and religious liberty, situating Iran's internal religious dynamics within a worldwide framework of human rights discourse (Turdush & Fiskesjö, 2021).

The complex character of Iran's administration and international relations, including its contacts with China, highlights the delicate equilibrium between political authority, public opinion, and global diplomacy. The global digital transformation adds complexity to these processes, as it disrupts old methods of information control and requires a reassessment of governance techniques in the digital era (Peeters & Willaert, 2022).

### **Voices from Iran: A Qualitative Inquiry into Public Sentiment and Digital Expression**

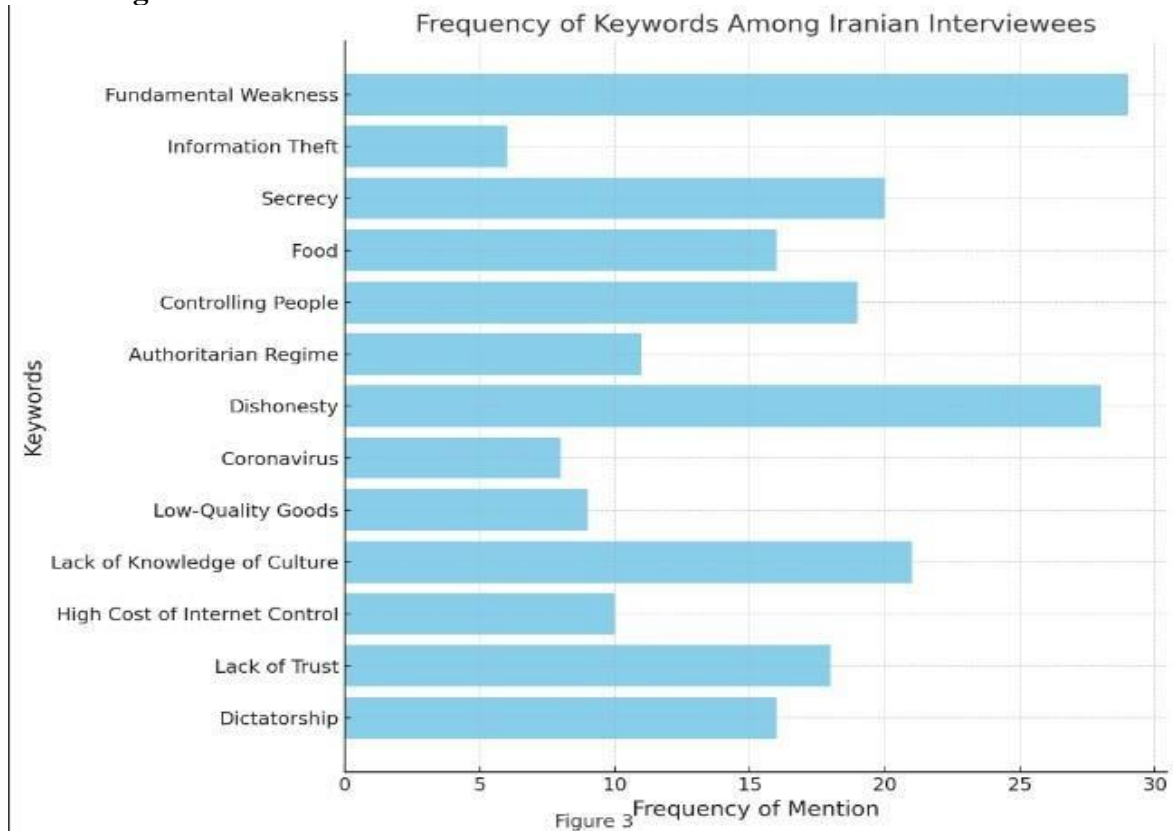
Figure 3 provides a graphical depiction that measures the frequency of particular keywords mentioned by respondents from Iran. This figure presents a bar graph that accurately records the frequency of each keyword, allowing for a clear understanding of the main themes and issues within this group. It provides valuable comparative information on the most commonly discussed topics among the interviewees. Notably, the term 'Fundamental Weakness' appears as the primary keyword, being used 29 times, which implies a strong concern with basic weaknesses within the environment under review. Immediately following, the term 'Dishonesty' is mentioned 28 times, emphasizing widespread concerns with honesty and truthfulness. Conversely, the term 'Information Theft' is only used 6 times, suggesting that the participants are relatively less concerned about this matter. The graphical analysis is crucial for highlighting the significant issues as viewed by the Iranian interviewees. It also helps to outline the varying levels of priority given to each topic, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of their collective thought and priorities.

The narrative explores the Iranian participants' predominantly negative and critical viewpoint towards the Chinese government, with a specific emphasis on its policies of information restriction. The lack of cultural understanding of the Chinese population among the Iranian respondents further intensifies this feeling. The Chinese government's deliberate restriction techniques on social media platforms are directly responsible for the lack of awareness, hindering cultural exchange and understanding. The participants unanimously deduce that the reason for the limited understanding of Chinese culture originates from these oppressive methods of controlling information.

Moreover, the conversation among the participants indicates a notion that the friendly diplomatic relations between the Iranian and Chinese administrations are based on their common authoritarian traits. This preference for autocratic administration is suggested to enhance the efficiency of interactions among such regimes. The Iranian respondents strongly criticize the censoring of information and social media, viewing it as a deliberate tool to maintain control over the population and uphold dictatorial rule. The participants argue that the consequences of this restriction on international cooperation are negative. They believe that these restrictive policies reduce the possibility of genuine engagement with China, even if China has a considerable global influence.

A significant proportion of respondents strongly support the elimination of these oppressive practices. Meanwhile, a portion of the participants emphasizes their lack of trust in the reliability of information distributed via Chinese networks. This collective critique not only reflects a profound dissatisfaction with the current state of information censorship by the Chinese government but also underscores a broader concern regarding the impacts of such policies on international perceptions, cultural understanding, and diplomatic relations.

**Figure3**



### **Navigating the Complexities of Sino-Spanish Relations**

Before analyzing the interviews conducted with Spanish volunteers, it is important to place the inquiry within the wider context of the attitudes held by the Spanish population towards China. This is a comprehensive analysis that includes several aspects, with a specific emphasis on the economic transactions and cultural contacts between China and Spain. The economic ties between the two countries have experienced enormous growth, with China becoming one of Spain's most important commercial partners (Anikina, 2021). The economic involvement has the capacity to influence the public's perspective in Spain, leading to a range of opinions that alternate between acknowledging economic prospects and harboring apprehensions about competition and reliance on China.

Some Spanish people believe that the Chinese government is trying to control the Spanish economy by flooding it with low-quality items. This observation highlights the intricate nature of economic interactions and their influence on mutual views between two parties (Esteban & Armanini, 2022).

The integration of Chinese communities in Spain and the inclusion of Chinese language programs in esteemed Spanish academic institutions have fostered a greater cultural understanding and admiration of Chinese culture among the Spanish population. This tendency implies a higher degree of cultural acknowledgment compared to the exchanges between Spanish and non-Western populations, including those from Iran (Song, 2020).

The depiction of China in the media, namely with the official visit of the Chinese President to Spain in 2018, exemplifies the contrasting narratives put forth by Spanish and

Chinese media organizations. The Chinese press highlighted the possibility of strengthening bilateral relations and collaborations, while the Spanish media viewed the visit with careful optimism, expressing concerns about the underlying political intentions behind China's foreign cooperation endeavors (Wang, 2021).

The COVID-19 epidemic and its subsequent consequences posed substantial problems to China's reputation on the international stage, especially in terms of how it was perceived by the European Union and Spain. The Spanish media and social networks have played a crucial role in shaping a perception of China that is filled with doubt and suspicion, frequently portraying the activities of the Chinese government as deceitful. The depiction has exerted a substantial impact on the perspectives of the younger cohort and intellectuals in Spanish culture, leading to a prevailing unfavorable stance towards the Chinese government (Wu & McGoogan, 2020).

Although China and Spain have established strategic economic and scientific linkages, these connections have not been enough to generate favorable attitudes among the Spanish population towards the actions of the Chinese government. The widespread impact of social media, combined with its ability to freely distribute knowledge, has been essential in changing public sentiment. The Chinese government's perceived lack of response to address this unfavorable depiction, which is attributed to its limited influence over media narratives in Spain, adds extra complexity to the relationship.

Overall, although China and Spain have engaged in significant economic and scientific partnerships, these efforts have not resulted in positive attitudes about China among the Spanish population.

### **Voices from Spain: A Qualitative Inquiry into Public Sentiment and Digital Expression**

The qualitative study indicates a unanimous agreement among the participants on the ambivalent nature of digital platforms. These platforms are acknowledged for their capacity to bridge cultural divides and promote global comprehension; nonetheless, concerns are highlighted regarding the preservation of stereotypes and cultural seclusion resulting from limited information dissemination. The significance of digital media in improving cross-cultural interaction and comprehension is emphasized by this.

The interviewees' scrutiny of the Chinese government's programs reveals a profound doubt regarding the effectiveness of digital openness in changing the worldwide impression of China.

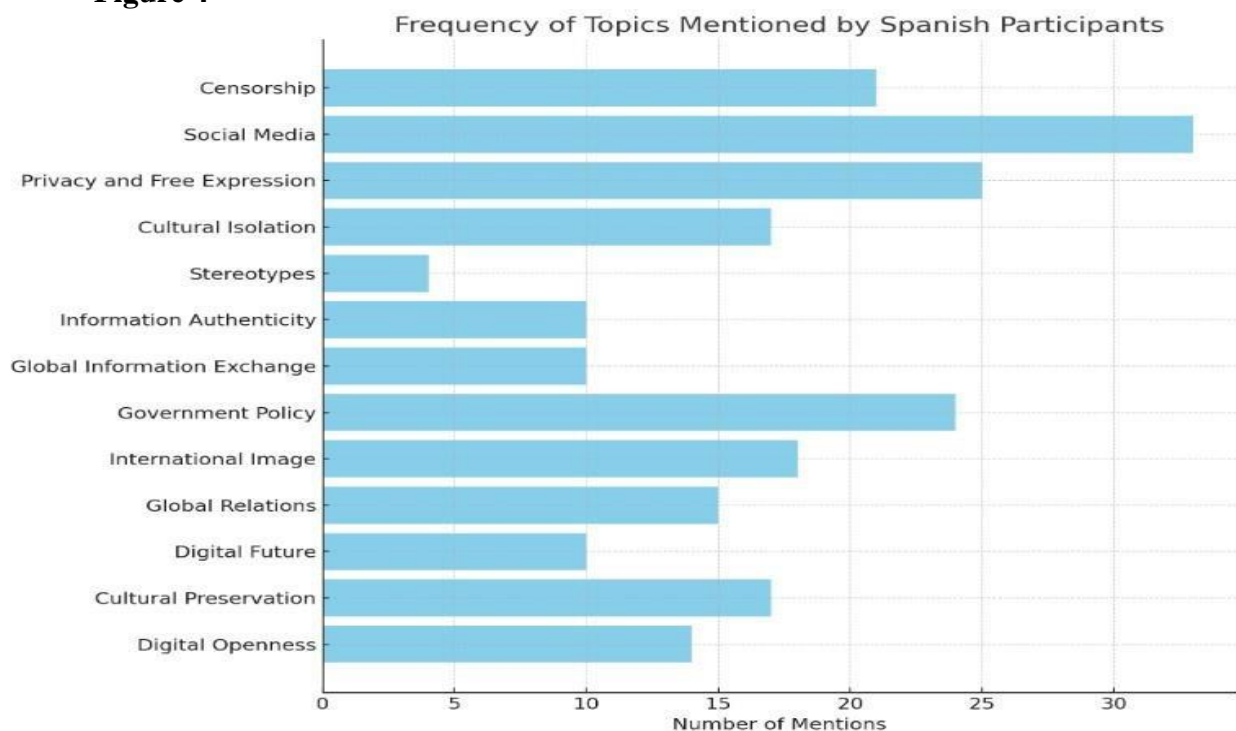
The discussion over governmental policies and China's global reputation reveals a criticism of the intricate equilibrium between authority and liberty. While censorship in China may not have a major impact on its technological advancement or international relations, it is believed to have a negative influence on how the global community views the country's culture and society. This critique encompasses the ramifications of internet restriction on cultural diplomacy and international relations, emphasizing a nuanced acknowledgment of China's steadfastness and independence on the worldwide platform.

In addition, the Spanish participants perceive social media as a crucial medium for cultural interchange and self-expression, while it is subject to strict regulations. The Chinese government is implementing this legislation as a purposeful tactic to reduce Western influence and conceal domestic problems. This is done in order to create an impression of China as a secure and attractive destination for Western investments. The participants' insights into the soft policy approach, aimed at infiltrating Western sensibilities, provide a nuanced strategy of international involvement and image management that contrasts with the strategic portrayal.

The Spanish interviewees had a higher level of knowledge regarding Chinese state censorship, political dynamics, and cultural nuances compared to their Iranian counterparts. The difference in reporting can be explained by the more liberal media landscape in Spain, which allows for a wider and more scrutinizing examination of global events. In contrast to Iran, where media is tightly regulated by the state and less inclined to criticize foreign governments, Spanish media provides a platform for a wide array of opinions and critical analysis. The Spanish participants primarily relied on traditional media channels, such as television documentaries, rather than social networks, to gather knowledge about China. This diverse media consumption pattern significantly influences their impressions of China.

Although many people are skeptical about the Chinese government's censoring techniques, a small number of Spanish participants recognized the efficacy of these procedures in handling the intricacies of China's extensive population. Nevertheless, they acknowledged the concurrent possibility of adverse consequences for China's international standing. This viewpoint differs from the lesser degrees of pessimism reported among Spanish interviewees in comparison to Iranian respondents, indicating a nuanced comprehension of the consequences of censorship and control on global relations and cultural diplomacy.

**Figure 4**



The bar chart depicts the frequency of particular subjects discussed by Spanish interviewees. The subjects encompass a wide range of topics, including apprehensions over censorship, the influence of social media, and matters pertaining to privacy and freedom of speech. Additionally, it explores perceptions of cultural seclusion, stereotypes, and the veracity of information. Significantly, "Social Media" emerged as the predominant subject of discussion, indicating its perceived significance as a forum for cultural interchange and self-expression, albeit subject to stringent control. The topics of "Censorship" and "Government Policy" were also prominently discussed, shedding light on the apprehensions over the regulation and limitation of online content by Chinese authorities, as well as the underlying reasons for these policies. Less commonly addressed subjects encompass "Stereotypes" and "Digital Future,"

signifying diverse concerns and conjectures regarding China's worldwide involvement and digital environment. The visual representation highlights the intricate relationship between internet regulation, cultural interaction, and international attitudes, as expressed by the Spanish participants.

### **Navigating the Complexities of Sino-Romania Relations**

Before analyzing the interviews with Romanian participants, it is crucial to thoroughly investigate the complex nature of the interactions between Romania and China. These connections merit investigation from various perspectives, clearly setting them apart from the patterns found in China's interactions with other countries like Spain and Iran. The notable influence of China on Romania, in contrast to the stated countries, can be ascribed to the historical basis that supports the mutual relations between these two nations.

**Historical and Diplomatic Aspects:** Sino-Romanian relations have a long history of diplomatic interaction, with Romania being one of the first countries to establish formal diplomatic links with the People's Republic of China (Roth, 2018). The development of these diplomatic contacts has played a crucial role in influencing public opinions over time, demonstrating a multifaceted interaction between historical benevolence, political partnerships, and shared

interests.

The cultural exchanges between Romania and China, which include festivals, exhibitions, and educational projects, are notably strong. Student exchange programs between the two nations have become frequent, promoting a more profound mutual comprehension and admiration of each other's cultural legacy. Historically, these interactions have bolstered Romania's positive view of

China, strengthening China's soft power and promoting people-to-people diplomacy (Gao, 2017).

**The COVID-19 pandemic's effect on public perception:** Before the emergence of the COVID-19 epidemic, the general sentiment of the Romanian populace towards the Chinese government was largely favorable. Nevertheless, the outbreak has caused a substantial change in perspectives, which has been shaped by both the worldwide health crisis and the actions taken by governments across the globe (Badea et al., 2021). While the Romanian and Chinese governments maintain robust formal connections at a high level, this feeling is not universally shared by the Romanian public.

**The Impact of Social Networks:** Social networks have played a crucial role, particularly during the pandemic, in magnifying adverse views against China. An extensive and widespread negative attitude against the Chinese emerged, driven by online discussions and disputes, resulting in a noticeable decline in how Romanians, especially the younger generation, view China (Manor & Pamment, 2022). China's government's apparent lack of effectiveness in sharing accurate information through these platforms, combined with its minimal representation on worldwide social media networks, has greatly damaged China's reputation in Romania. This situation highlighted the difficulties that China encounters when dealing with the intricate digital environment of public sentiment, where social networks possess the ability to greatly impact people's opinions and trust at a local level.

This research provides a thorough analysis of the complex and changing nature of the relationship between China and Romania. It highlights the deep historical connections, cultural exchanges, and the significant influence of digital media on how the public perceives this relationship. The interactions between these relationships, particularly in light of recent global occurrences, emphasize the crucial significance of efficient communication and cultural

diplomacy in promoting shared comprehension and maneuvering through the intricate network of international relations in the present day.

### **Voices from Romania: A Qualitative Inquiry into Public Sentiment and Digital Expression**

The analysis, as shown in Figure 5, demonstrates a high occurrence of important terms such as "control" (mentioned 33 times), "censorship" (22 times), and "isolation" (21 times), suggesting that these themes are widely discussed among the Romanian respondents. Conversely, topics such as 'International Relations' and 'Innovation' were not as commonly expressed, indicating a lower emphasis on these subjects in the Romanian narrative.

An interesting discovery was the lack of mentions of the coronavirus pandemic in conversations on digital platforms, indicating a specific area of concern or a divergence in public debates on virtual networks within the Romanian group. Moreover, the research revealed a divided viewpoint among the participants about the control of the internet and digital networks, specifically in relation to China's government. Some interviewees justified the Chinese government's internet limitations as an essential policy in response to the difficulty of governing a large population. They argued that this control, although helpful for governing, unintentionally obstructs cultural comprehension and intercultural communication between Romanian and Chinese groups, therefore reflecting a feeling of deprivation in authentic cultural interchange and acknowledgment.

On the other hand, a different group of participants expressed disapproval towards these internet regulations, viewing them as symbolic of authoritarianism and making comparisons to the oppressive government that Romania had during its communist period. This contrast highlights a deep worry over the consequences of censoring and controlling information on the openness of society and the authenticity of its culture. The participants demonstrated a heightened understanding and criticism of censoring procedures in China, surpassing their Spanish and Iranian counterparts. They emphasized a strong doubt towards the contrived nature of culture promoted by these governing systems. This sentiment aligns with historical observations of Romania's communist history, in which the government's depiction of culture sharply contrasted with the actual experiences and feelings of the people.

Furthermore, although certain discussions proposed that cybernetic censorship may not have a substantial effect on international relations, the prevailing opinion among Romanian respondents was that such measures could further isolate the Chinese government. The state of being isolated, along with a perceived lack of authenticity in the representation of the country's image, was believed to undermine international confidence. In contrast to the viewpoints expressed by Iranian and Spanish participants, the Romanian respondents urged for a gradual relaxation of social network constraints. They warned about the possible economic and societal consequences of a sudden removal. The cautious position was influenced by historical analogies with the downfall of Romania's communist dictatorship, emphasizing a sophisticated comprehension of how freedom is implemented and its consequences on society and governmental stability.

This study not only presents a comprehensive analysis of Romanian public opinion on digital expression and censorship, but also offers a comparative perspective to understand the impact of internet regulation on cultural perception and international relations. This investigation highlights the crucial issue of the delicate equilibrium between governance, digital freedom, and cultural authenticity in comprehending the dynamics of digital expression in a globalized society.

**Figure 5**

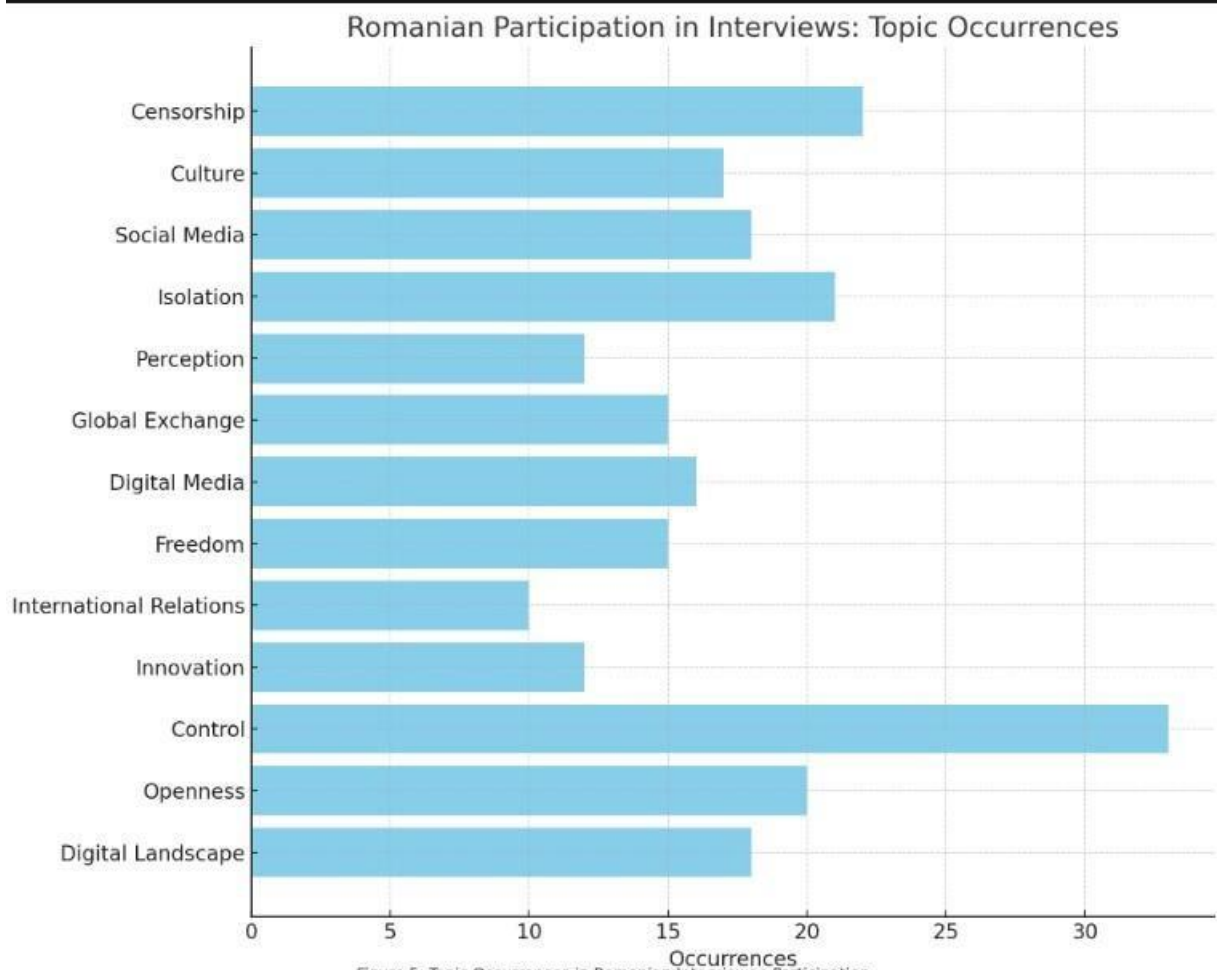


Figure 5: Topic Occurrences in Romanian Interviewee Participation

Figure 5 is a bar chart that clearly displays the frequency of different subjects discussed by Romanian participants during interviews. The graph clearly demonstrates that the topic of 'Control' was the most commonly mentioned, with a total of 33 mentions. This indicates a substantial emphasis on concerns pertaining to control within the study's environment. Subsequently, 'Censorship' and 'Isolation' are mentioned 22 and 21 times respectively, underscoring apprehensions about limitations and the consequences of being isolated. The topics of 'Digital Media', 'Freedom', and 'Global Exchange' are also included, each representing a specific facet of the participants' concerns and interests. The topics of 'International Relations' and 'Innovation' were given less attention, indicating that the Romanian interviewees did not discuss these areas as extensively.

### **Conclusion**

The essay "Digital Walls and Global Bridges: The Paradox of China's Internet Censorship and Its International Cultural Exchange" thoroughly examines the complex relationship between

China's strict internet censorship system and its efforts to promote worldwide cultural connections. This research, enhanced by qualitative interviews with individuals from Iran, Romania, and Spain, explores the intricate consequences of China's digital governance on worldwide perceptions of its culture, international diplomacy, and soft power initiatives. The

unanimous agreement among participants regarding the negative effects of social media platform censorship reveals an intricate network of outcomes, including reduced worldwide trust, distorted portrayals of China's genuine cultural narratives, and increasing doubt towards Chinese state media.

The research emphasizes a substantial decrease in trust towards the Chinese government among the interviewees, indicating a change in perspective that has wide-ranging consequences for China's diplomatic relations, especially with democratic nations. The breakdown of trust leads to shifts in foreign policy opinions and highlights the varied effects of domestic governance forms and international ties in the countries under examination. The tangible decrease in trust, particularly evident in totalitarian settings such as Iran, indicates a more widespread dissatisfaction that goes beyond individual feelings and impacts international diplomatic positions.

Moreover, the study examines the complex and diverse impacts of social media censorship, highlighting the pressing necessity for China to reassess its policies in response to worldwide calls for openness, cultural interchange, and the right to express oneself freely. The imperative to conduct additional study is crucial, promoting a comprehensive and interdisciplinary methodology to decipher the intricate dynamics between media censorship, public confidence, cultural portrayal, and global diplomacy. Engaging in academic pursuits is crucial for developing successful approaches to address the difficulties of digital censorship in a globally interconnected society with common cultural environments. This thorough examination not only adds to scholarly discussions but also provides important perspectives for politicians and individuals worldwide. It emphasizes the need to strike a careful equilibrium between asserting national authority and participating in significant cross-cultural interactions.

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