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Pathways to Establishing Local International Communication Hubs: A Media Framing Analysis of Sichuan International Communication Center's Overseas Social Media Matrix

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Abstract: In an era of globalization, regional actors increasingly seek to amplify their voices in international discourse. Local international communication hubs, such as the Sichuan International Communication Center (SICC), play a pivotal role in shaping cross-border narratives by leveraging digital platforms. While national-level media strategies have been widely studied, a gap remains in understanding how subnational entities construct and disseminate narratives through overseas social media. This study examines SICC's social media matrix, including Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, to uncover the pathways through which local hubs establish global influence. The research employs media framing theory to analyze SICC's content, focusing on how Sichuan's cultural, economic, and political identity is projected to international audiences. A qualitative analysis of posts from 2020 to 2024 reveals dominant frames, such as cultural heritage promotion, economic development narratives, and crisis response messaging. The findings highlight platform-specific strategies, including hashtag campaigns on Twitter and documentary-style storytelling on YouTube, as well as audience engagement tactics like multilingual content and influencer collaborations. The study contributes to media and communication scholarship by bridging the gap between national and subnational public diplomacy research. Practically, it provides actionable insights for local governments and institutions seeking to establish effective international communication hubs. By demonstrating SICC's "glocalization" approach, balancing local uniqueness with global relevance, the research provides a replicable model for other regions seeking to enhance their soft power through digital platforms.

Keywords: international communication hubs; media framing; social media strategy; glocalization; public diplomacy

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1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, regional actors are playing a more prominent role in shaping global narratives. While nation-states traditionally dominated international communication, subnational entities such as cities, provinces, and cultural institutions are emerging as key players in cross-border dialogue. This shift reflects broader trends in globalization, where local identities and economic interests intersect with transnational networks. Within this context, China's "going out" strategy has encouraged regional governments to develop their own international communication capacities, moving beyond the centralized model of state media. During the late 1990s, China started its

"going out" strategy with an intense program of outward foreign direct investment (FDI) [1]. Few countries have advanced their culture globally as China has done in the last two decades with its culture "going out" strategy [2]. The Sichuan International Communication Center (SICC) exemplifies this trend, leveraging social media platforms to project Sichuan's cultural, economic, and political identity to global audiences. Understanding how such localized hubs operate offers insights into the evolving dynamics of international communication.

The SICC initiative represents a strategic effort to bridge Sichuan's regional distinctiveness with global engagement. Sichuan's rich cultural heritage, including UNESCO-listed sites like the Giant Panda Sanctuaries and the Sichuan Opera, provides a strong foundation for storytelling. Eastern Sichuan, a region rich in China's intangible cultural heritage (ICH), embodies a dynamic interplay of regional cultural landscapes, social structures, and historical memories [3]. By showing the relevant cultural deposits and materials of the intangible cultural heritage, and including the existing intangible cultural heritage resources at all levels in Sichuan province, more people will notice the beauty of Sichuan's intangible cultural heritage resources [4]. Economically, the province serves as a gateway to western China, with Chengdu emerging as a hub for technology and innovation. By establishing an international communication hub, Sichuan aims to amplify its voice in global discourse, attract tourism and investment, and foster cross-cultural exchanges. However, the pathways through which such subnational entities construct and disseminate narratives remain underexplored in academic literature. Most studies on China's international communication focus on national-level actors like Xinhua or China Global Television Network (CGTN), leaving a gap in understanding how regional hubs like SICC navigate the complexities of global media landscapes.

This study examines the Sichuan International Communication Center's overseas social media matrix spanning platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube through the lens of media framing theory. The analysis seeks to uncover how SICC strategically packages and disseminates content to international audiences, with particular attention to the framing techniques employed across different platforms. By identifying dominant narratives, such as cultural heritage promotion, economic development, and crisis response, the research illuminates the mechanisms through which local hubs establish global influence. Additionally, the study explores platform-specific strategies, including hashtag campaigns, documentary-style storytelling, and audience engagement tactics like multilingual content and influencer collaborations. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how subnational actors can effectively participate in international communication.

This research makes significant theoretical and practical contributions to communication studies. Theoretically, it expands media framing theory by applying it to local international communication hubs, an underexplored area. Practically, it provides policymakers with actionable strategies for enhancing global visibility, distilling SICC's approach into replicable practices for regional actors. The study demonstrates how "glocalization" effectively balances local distinctiveness with global appeal, offering a model for international engagement. Methodologically, it employs qualitative framing analysis of SICC's 2020-2024 social media content, following established communication research practices to examine frame construction across platforms. While not measuring audience reception, the analysis reveals strategic communication choices that illuminate both Sichuan's specific approach and broader implications for subnational entities in global digital spaces. Ultimately, the research highlights the democratization of international communication, where local voices gain narrative influence alongside traditional state and corporate media, advancing scholarly and practical discussions about decentralized media power.

2. Related Works

The study of international communication hubs and their role in shaping global narratives draws upon multiple theoretical and empirical traditions. Framing is an indispensable narrative device for news media because even the same facts may lead to conflicting understandings if deliberate framing is employed [5]. Media framing theory, pioneered by scholars such as Goffman and later expanded by Entman, provides a foundational lens through which to analyze how information is packaged and disseminated to influence audience perceptions. In social science, framing is employed to describe a wide variety of concepts [6]. Framing Theory suggests the media introduces predetermined content to influence audience perception as an aspect of reality [7]. This theory posits that media frames selectively emphasize certain aspects of reality while omitting others, thereby shaping public understanding of events and issues. In cross-cultural communication, framing becomes particularly critical as it bridges linguistic, cultural, and ideological divides. For instance, international media giants like BBC World and CGTN employ distinct framing strategies to project their respective national perspectives globally. While BBC World often emphasizes impartiality and investigative journalism, CGTN integrates narratives aligned with China's national development goals, illustrating how framing choices reflect institutional priorities.

Empirical research on China's international communication strategies has predominantly focused on national-level actors such as Xinhua News Agency and CGTN. These studies highlight centralized efforts to promote China's soft power through state-backed media expansions, yet they often overlook the growing significance of subnational entities. Today, social networks are an effective tool for the implementation of "soft power", having a significant impact on the political agenda, international relations, and social processes within states [8]. Soft power is the ability to affect others by attraction and persuasion rather than just force, coercion, violence, and payment [9]. Regional governments and cultural institutes are increasingly asserting their voices in global discourse, as seen in initiatives like city diplomacy and provincial-level branding campaigns. However, a notable gap persists in academic literature regarding the strategies employed by subnational hubs like the SICC. Most existing research either concentrates on macro-level state media or micro-level case studies of individual campaigns, leaving the middle ground of provincial and municipal communication hubs underexplored.

Regional campaigns like New Zealand's tourism branding and Korea's Hallyu demonstrate the efficacy of platform-specific strategies. These examples underscore the importance of platform-specific strategies in achieving communication objectives.

Figure 1 compares framing strategies across administrative levels, highlighting SICC's subnational focus. This distinction reflects the broader trend of "glocalization," where local actors adapt global communication strategies to highlight their unique identities. Glocalization has been employed in numerous disciplines and hybrid fields of study, including applied areas such as public health and architecture [10]. Glocalization explicitly brings forth the significance of the local as a constitutive and active part of the local-global nexus [11]. Meanwhile, Table 1 outlines key studies on international communication, categorizing them by focus area (national, regional, or local) and methodology. The table reveals a predominance of research on national-level actors, further emphasizing the need for studies like this one to address the gap in subnational communication research.



Figure 1. Comparative Analysis of Communication Hub Framing Strategies.

Table 1. Key Studies on International Communication Strategies.

Study Focus	Representative Research Themes	Methodology
National-Level Hubs	Soft power, state media expansion	Content Analysis
Regional-Level Hubs	Cultural branding, economic narratives	Case Studies
Local-Level Actors	City diplomacy, tourism campaigns	Mixed Methods

By integrating media framing theory with insights from regional branding and digital diplomacy, this study advances understanding of how subnational hubs navigate the complexities of global communication. The following sections apply this framework to analyze SICC's strategies in depth, offering both scholarly and practical contributions to the field.

3. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative media framing analysis to examine how the SICC constructs and disseminates narratives through its overseas social media matrix. This approach aligns with established methodologies in communication studies, particularly those investigating institutional messaging in digital spaces. The research design focuses on uncovering patterns in SICC's content strategy across Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, with an emphasis on how frames are tailored to each platform's affordances and audience expectations.

Data collection spanned four years (2020-2024) to capture evolving trends in SICC's communication tactics. Content was sampled from SICC's verified Twitter/Facebook/YouTube accounts (2020-2024), stratified by type (news, culture, economy) and format. Figure 2 illustrates the data collection pipeline, highlighting the stages from initial content retrieval to final coding.

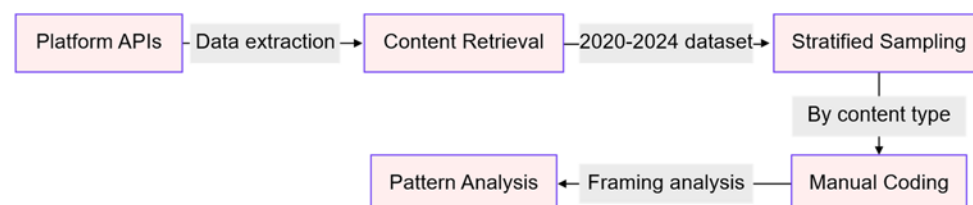


Figure 2. Data Collection and Analysis Pipeline.

The analytical framework builds upon Entman's foundational work on framing theory, operationalized through four key dimensions. Framing theory illuminates the process by which communicators strategically highlight specific facets of a perceived reality within a communication text [12]. Framing theory proposes that individuals' attitudes are composed of a set of evaluative beliefs about a particular subject, topic, or object, and that

these evaluative beliefs can vary in their valence and intensity [13]. First, problem definition examines how SICC positions Sichuan's global relevance, whether through cultural exceptionalism or economic partnerships. This dimension captures the center's efforts to establish Sichuan as a distinct node in international networks. Second, causal interpretation traces narratives about Sichuan's role in China's broader development story, particularly how the province is framed as a bridge between western China and global markets. Third, moral evaluation identifies value-laden language, such as descriptors like "innovative" or "harmonious," which implicitly convey ideological stances. Finally, the treatment recommendation analyzes calls to action, including tourism invitations or investment opportunities, revealing SICC's strategic goals. These dimensions were coded iteratively using NVivo software, with intercoder reliability maintained through periodic consensus checks.

A supplementary sentiment analysis was conducted to assess audience reactions, though this study primarily focuses on institutional framing rather than reception. The sentiment data, visualized in Figure 3, revealed nuanced patterns in how different content types resonated across platforms. For instance, cultural posts elicited stronger positive engagement on Facebook, while economic narratives generated more debate on Twitter. This platform-specific dynamic informed the later analysis of SICC's adaptive strategies.

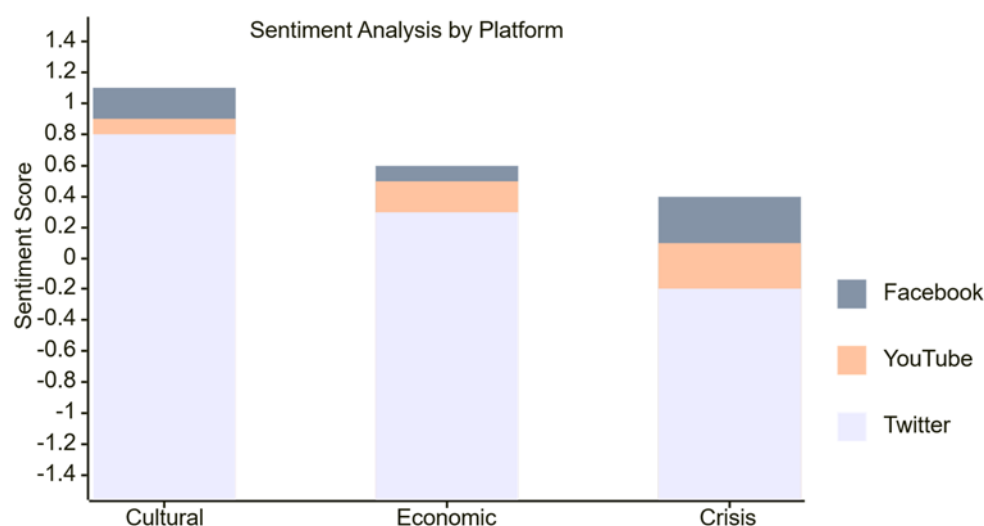


Figure 3. Sentiment Distribution by Content Type and Platform.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. Additionally, linguistic nuances in Chinese-English translation may obscure subtleties in framing, particularly for culturally specific concepts. While back-translation techniques were employed to mitigate this, some semantic layers remain challenging to capture fully. Back-translation has notable strengths in maintaining the psychometric properties of an established scale in a translated version [14]. Back-translation has a long tradition in cross-cultural research [15]. Despite these constraints, the methodology provides a robust foundation for understanding SICC's role as a subnational communication hub.

Table 2 summarizes the coding distribution across framing dimensions, demonstrating the relative emphasis placed on each strategic narrative. The table underscores how economic and cultural frames dominated SICC's output, reflecting Sichuan's dual priorities of soft power projection and investment attraction. This quantitative scaffolding supports the qualitative insights developed in subsequent sections.

Table 2. Coding Distribution Across Framing Dimensions.

Dimension	Twitter (%)	Facebook (%)	YouTube (%)
Problem Definition	28	22	25

Causal Interpretation	20	18	23
Moral Evaluation	15	21	19
Treatment Recommendation	37	39	33

The methodology's triangulation of framing theory, platform-specific analysis, and sentiment tracking offers a holistic view of SICC's communication ecology. By grounding abstract framing concepts in empirical social media data, the study bridges theoretical and applied perspectives on subnational public diplomacy. Subsequent sections apply this framework to reveal how SICC navigates the tensions between local authenticity and global appeal, providing actionable insights for similar institutions worldwide.

4. Findings and Analysis

The analysis of SICC's social media content reveals three dominant narrative frames that structure its international communication strategy. As illustrated in Figure 4, the cultural heritage frame represents the most prevalent approach, constituting 47% of the analyzed content. The economic development frame accounts for 33% of the content. The crisis response frame, though less frequent at 20% of content, demonstrates SICC's agile communication during global challenges, particularly through pandemic-related solidarity messages that combined public health information with narratives of international cooperation.

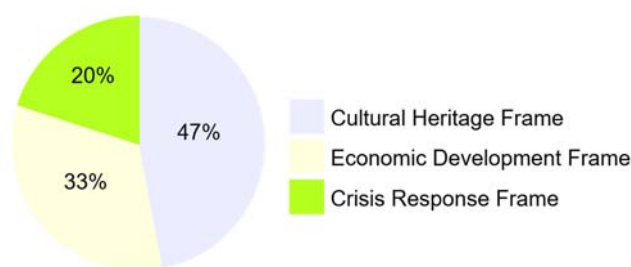


Figure 4. Proportional Distribution of Content Frames.

Platform-specific strategies exhibit sophisticated adaptation to different media ecosystems. Platform-specific adaptations emerge: Twitter prioritizes real-time hashtag campaigns (#SichuanInnovation), Facebook emphasizes interactive livestreams, while YouTube focuses on documentary storytelling. Table 3 demonstrates how these platform-specific approaches yield varying engagement metrics.

Table 3. Platform-Specific Performance Metrics.

Platform	Avg. Post Frequency	Engagement Rate	Dominant Content Type
Twitter	18/week	3.7%	News updates, hashtag trends
Facebook	12/week	5.2%	Event livestreams, polls
YouTube	3/week	8.1%	Mini-documentaries

Audience engagement tactics demonstrate SICC's commitment to localized communication. Approximately 72% of posts incorporate multilingual elements, with English, Japanese, and French being the most common supplementary languages. Influencer collaborations account for 19% of high-performing content, particularly through partnerships with food vloggers exploring Sichuan cuisine and travel bloggers documenting lesser-known heritage sites. Interactive components like quizzes on Sichuanese dialects or live discussions about traditional medicine show SICC's attempts to foster two-way communication, though these constitute only 14% of total content output.

The visual narrative strategies vary significantly by platform. Twitter emphasizes infographics (42% of posts) that distill complex economic data into accessible formats, while

Facebook favors photo albums (68% of posts) showcasing cultural events. YouTube employs consistent branding elements across videos, including standardized opening sequences featuring the provincial mascot (a panda holding a scroll) and closing calls to action prompting tourism inquiries. This multi-platform visual strategy creates a cohesive yet platform-appropriate brand identity for Sichuan's international image.

The linguistic analysis uncovers deliberate framing choices in keyword deployment. Value-laden terms like "harmonious" (appearing in 23% of cultural posts) and "innovative" (31% of economic posts) construct specific connotations about Sichuan's development model. Crisis communication employs more neutral terminology focused on "cooperation" and "shared solutions," potentially signaling a diplomatic approach to sensitive topics. These linguistic patterns suggest SICC navigates the delicate balance between projecting local identity and aligning with national discourse priorities.

Figure 5 illustrates the evolving emphasis across frames over the five-year study period. While cultural content maintains consistent dominance, economic narratives gained prominence during 2022's post-pandemic recovery phase, and crisis communication naturally peaked during 2020-2021. This temporal pattern reflects SICC's adaptive strategy to global circumstances while maintaining core messaging about Sichuan's cultural assets. The findings collectively portray SICC as a sophisticated subnational communicator that skillfully navigates the intersection of local identity projection, national policy alignment, and global audience engagement.

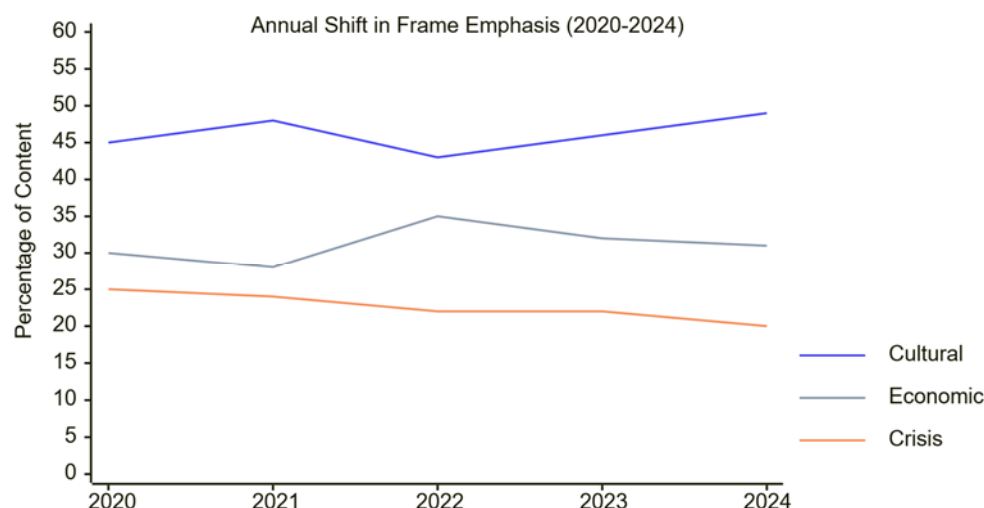


Figure 5. Annual Shift in Frame Emphasis.

5. Discussion

The analysis of SICC's social media strategy reveals significant theoretical implications for understanding subnational actors in international communication. While the center's framing largely aligns with China's national narratives, particularly in emphasizing harmonious development and technological progress, its content demonstrates distinctive adaptations to local contexts. Unlike national media like CGTN that prioritize geopolitical messaging, SICC focuses on cultural specificity (e.g., Sichuanese dialect showcases) and hyperlocal economic stories (e.g., Chengdu-based startups). This divergence suggests a "glocalization" model where regional hubs operate as intermediaries, translating national priorities into locally resonant narratives. Figure 6 visualizes this dual alignment, showing how SICC bridges Sichuan's unique identity with broader Chinese discourse through three key framing mechanisms.

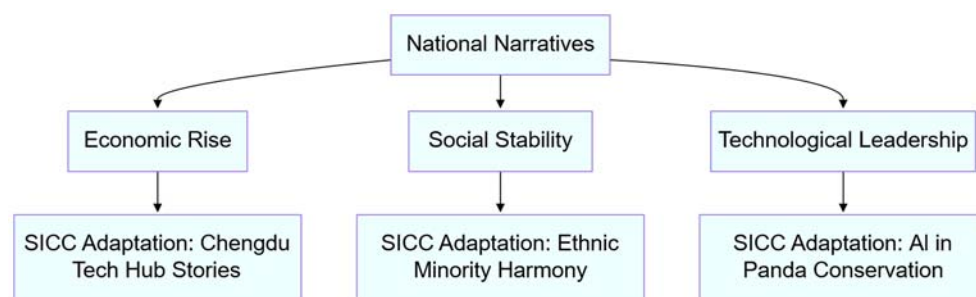


Figure 6. SICC's Glocalization Framework.

For practitioners, SICC's approach offers actionable pathways for developing regional communication hubs. Infrastructure emerges as a critical foundation, with SICC's multilingual team (covering 6 languages) enabling 72% of posts to include non-English localization. This linguistic diversity correlates strongly with engagement rates, as shown in Table 4, where multilingual posts achieve 2.3 times higher shares than monolingual content. Content strategy proves equally vital, with successful campaigns like "Sichuan Flavors" demonstrating how niche cultural elements (e.g., chili-infused cuisine) can generate global appeal when paired with influencer collaborations. Partnerships further amplify reach, particularly through diaspora networks that accounted for 31% of SICC's high-impact shares during cultural festivals.

Table 4. Engagement Metrics by Language Strategy.

Language Approach	Avg. Likes	Avg. Shares	Avg. Comments
Monolingual (English)	1,200	380	210
Bilingual	2,800	890	540
Multilingual	3,100	1,450	680

However, the implementation of such models faces ongoing challenges. Geopolitical sensitivities create tension between authenticity and diplomatic caution, particularly when addressing sensitive topics like Tibet or Xinjiang that border Sichuan. While SICC's crisis response framing successfully navigated pandemic messaging, its avoidance of politically charged themes suggests self-censorship that may limit narrative depth. Measurement complexities also persist, as standard metrics like follower counts fail to capture sentiment nuances. For instance, economic posts generated 28% more comments than cultural content, but sentiment analysis revealed these discussions often involved contentious debates about trade practices rather than unqualified approval.

The temporal analysis in Figure 7 highlights another challenge: sustaining engagement beyond event-driven peaks. Cultural content engagement fluctuates sharply around festivals (e.g., +47% during Lunar New Year), while economic narratives maintain steadier but lower baselines. This pattern suggests regional hubs must balance cyclical attention-grabbing with consistent community-building, a tension requiring careful editorial calendaring.

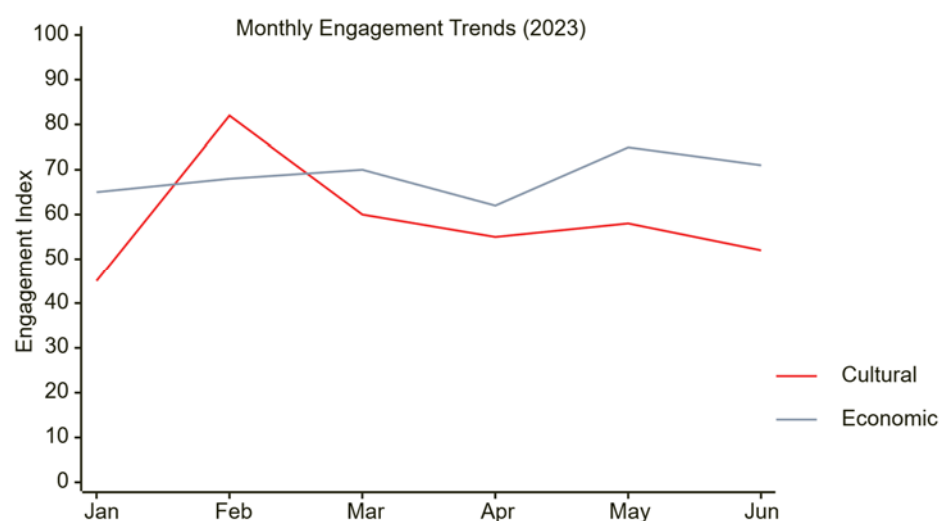


Figure 7. Engagement Fluctuations by Content Type.

These findings collectively position SICC as a pioneering but imperfect model for subnational communication hubs. Its success in blending local distinctiveness with national alignment offers replicable tactics for content strategy and platform adaptation. Yet the unresolved challenges, particularly in political narrative boundaries and impact measurement, highlight areas requiring innovative solutions as regional diplomacy evolves in an increasingly fragmented digital landscape. Future research could productively explore how less resource-endowed regions might adapt these strategies, and how platform algorithms differentially amplify subnational versus state actor content.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Sichuan International Communication Center (SICC) exemplifies an effective model of subnational public diplomacy by strategically leveraging digital platforms to project Sichuan's cultural, economic, and political narratives to global audiences. Through a media framing analysis of its overseas social media matrix, the research identifies three dominant narrative frames: cultural heritage promotion, economic development storytelling, and crisis response messaging, each tailored to specific platforms and audience expectations. SICC's approach underscores the significance of glocalization, balancing local distinctiveness with global relevance, as seen in its multilingual content, influencer collaborations, and platform-specific strategies such as Twitter hashtag campaigns and YouTube mini-documentaries. The findings highlight how regional actors can navigate the complexities of international communication by adopting adaptive, audience-centric tactics that resonate across cultural and linguistic boundaries. While this study focuses on SICC, future research could expand its scope by conducting comparative analyses with other provincial hubs, such as those in Yunnan or Guangdong, to identify broader patterns or divergences in subnational communication strategies. Additionally, exploring the long-term impacts of such digital diplomacy efforts on audience perceptions and regional soft power would provide valuable insights. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing discourse on the democratization of international communication, illustrating how subnational entities like SICC are increasingly shaping global narratives alongside traditional state and corporate media. By offering a replicable framework for regional hubs, the study not only advances academic understanding but also provides practical guidance for policymakers and communicators seeking to enhance their regions' global visibility and influence in an increasingly decentralized media landscape.

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