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DIGITAL RIVALRY BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA: IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL IMAGE

Annotation

This article examines the digital rivalry between the United States and China and its implications for international image formation in the context of contemporary technological competition. It analyzes TikTok, artificial intelligence, and semiconductor technologies as strategic instruments of digital influence and geopolitical competition.

Key words: Digital rivalry, United States. China; International image, Digital diplomacy, Soft power, Artificial intelligence, TikTok, Technological competition, Cyber power.

ЦИФРОВОЕ СОПЕРНИЧЕСТВО МЕЖДУ СОЕДИНЁННЫМИ ШТАТАМИ И КИТАЕМ: ВЛИЯНИЕ НА ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО ИМИДЖА

Аннотация

В статье исследуется цифровое соперничество между Соединёнными Штатами и Китаем и его влияние на формирование международного имиджа государств в условиях современной технологической конкуренции. Анализируются TikTok, искусственный интеллект и полупроводниковые технологии как стратегические инструменты цифрового влияния и геополитического противостояния.

Ключевые слова: цифровое соперничество, Соединённые Штаты, Китай, международный имидж, цифровая дипломатия, мягкая сила, искусственный интеллект, TikTok, технологическая конкуренция, киберсила.

AQSH VA XITOIY O'RTASIDAGI RAQAMLI RAQOBAT: XALQARO IMIDJINI SHAKLLANTIRISHGA TA'SIRI

Annotatsiya

Mazkur maqolada AQSh va Xitoy o'rtasidagi raqamli raqobat hamda uning zamonaviy texnologik raqobat sharoitida davlatlarning xalqaro imijini shakllantirishga ta'siri tahlil qilinadi. TikTok, sun'iy intellekt va yarimo'tkazgich texnologiyalari raqamli ta'sir va geosiyosiy raqobatning strategik vositalari sifatida o'rganiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: raqamli raqobat, AQSh, Xitoy, xalqaro imij, raqamli diplomatiya, yumshoq kuch, sun'iy intellekt, TikTok, texnologik raqobat, kiber kuch.

Introduction. The digital rivalry between the United States and China in 2020–2025 has evolved into one of the central axes of contemporary global politics, encompassing the domains of the platform economy, data infrastructure, artificial intelligence, and global technological standardization.

Within this competition, TikTok has become not merely a popular application but a symbolic arena for contesting influence over mass audiences, interpreting political processes, and shaping the international image of states. For China, TikTok represents a potential resource of digital soft power, enhancing the appeal of its cultural code and normalizing the image of the country as an innovative global actor. For the United States, however, TikTok simultaneously constitutes a national security risk, a potential instrument of covert foreign influence, and a challenge to American technological hegemony.

Literature Review. The growing digital competition between the United States and China has attracted increasing attention in the fields of international relations, digital diplomacy, and geopolitical studies. Recent scholarship has shifted from examining traditional economic and military competition toward understanding how digital technologies, data governance, and artificial intelligence have become strategic resources in global politics. As a result, issues such as

digital platforms, technological sovereignty, cyber power, and international image have become central themes in contemporary academic debates.

One of the most influential theoretical contributions is Joseph S. Nye's concept of soft power, which explains how states can achieve their foreign policy objectives through attraction rather than coercion. In his later work on cyber power, Nye argues that digital technologies and information networks have fundamentally transformed the nature of international influence. His framework provides an important foundation for understanding how digital platforms and online communication contribute to the construction of a state's international image.

Another important perspective is offered by Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman through the concept of weaponized interdependence[1]. They demonstrate that states controlling key nodes of global economic and technological networks are able to convert interdependence into political leverage. Their research has become particularly relevant for explaining the technological rivalry between the United States and China, where access to semiconductors, digital infrastructure, and advanced technologies increasingly serves strategic rather than purely economic purposes.

Research Methodology. The study primarily relies on comparative analysis to identify similarities and differences in the digital strategies pursued by the United States and China. This method makes it possible to compare the two countries' approaches toward digital platforms, artificial intelligence, semiconductor policies, and technology governance while assessing how these strategies influence their international image and geopolitical positioning. Comparative analysis is widely recognized as an effective approach in international relations research for examining complex political phenomena across different cases.

A qualitative content analysis is employed to examine official policy documents, legislative acts, government statements, international reports, and academic publications. Particular attention is given to U.S. legislation concerning TikTok, China's digital governance strategy, reports issued by international organizations, and scholarly discussions on digital diplomacy and cyber power. Content analysis allows for the systematic identification of major themes, policy narratives, and patterns of digital competition within contemporary international relations.

Analysis and results. In contemporary international relations, the technological rivalry between the United States and China is increasingly interpreted as a new form of great-power confrontation one that unfolds not in the classical military or purely economic dimensions, but in the sphere of control over digital infrastructure, data, and algorithms. In analytical literature, the concepts of "weaponized interdependence" and "cyber power" have become firmly established for describing this configuration, emphasizing that interdependence within global networks can be transformed into an instrument of coercion and pressure [2].

The United States has traditionally controlled the key nodes of the global economic-digital architecture: it dominates the international financial system (the dollar and cross-border settlement networks), sets standards in the field of payment infrastructure (including SWIFT), holds leading positions in cloud computing and global platform services, and maintains technological leadership in the design and manufacturing of advanced semiconductors. China, by contrast, seeks to reduce its critical dependence on Western technologies by constructing its own technological ecosystems from national payment systems and the digital yuan to alternative cloud platforms and artificial intelligence infrastructure.

The culmination of this process was the passage in 2024 by the U.S. House of Representatives of the bill H.R.7521, the "Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act," which effectively presented ByteDance with a choice: either divest TikTok's U.S. assets in favor of an entity subject to U.S. jurisdiction, or face the blocking of the application in the American market [3]. As a result, TikTok was formally institutionalized as an object of counteraction against a "foreign adversary," pushing the debate about the platform beyond the usual antitrust or regulatory framework and into the realm of national security and strategic competition.

In 2025, the development of this story continued in the judicial sphere through proceedings in *TikTok Inc. v. Garland*, where the courts considered the balance between the right to freedom of expression and the necessity of protecting national security [4]. Through these legal battles and the accompanying media discourse, TikTok became firmly entrenched in American public consciousness as a potential "digital Trojan horse" of China a platform whose origins and possible channels of influence provoke persistent distrust from the political establishment.

At the same time, in Chinese strategic and expert discourse, TikTok is perceived as an important instrument of

digital soft power and cultural expansion: a platform providing access to millions of Western users and serving as a channel for promoting China's image as a technologically advanced, dynamic, and culturally appealing power. Thus, the same digital tool is interpreted differently by key actors: for the United States, it represents a source of vulnerability and potential interference; for China, a resource of influence and a mechanism for constructing a favorable international image. This very dichotomy of perceptions makes the TikTok case a central example of how digital platforms become not only participants in the global economy but also full-fledged elements of grand geopolitics.

The United States employs export controls, sanctions, restrictions on the supply of high-tech components (primarily semiconductors), and political pressure on Chinese platforms and companies. This allows Washington to maintain strategic technological superiority and limit China's potential in AI, high-performance computing, and telecommunications.

China, in response, pursues a policy of technological self-reliance: developing its own chips, cloud platforms, search engines, social networks, and data ecosystems. This gives rise to an alternative technological architecture Alibaba Cloud, Tencent Cloud, Huawei, ByteDance capable of operating independently from Western suppliers. Simultaneously, Beijing promotes the "Chinese model" of digital governance, grounded in the principle of digital sovereignty and state-centric regulation [5].

Modern scholarship on the U.S. China "technology war" highlights that Washington's goal is not merely maintaining a balance of power, but preserving technological primacy, which underpins American global leadership. From China's perspective, U.S. restrictions amount to unfair competition and an attempt to slow the natural growth of China's innovative capacity.

In response to growing pressure, China has accelerated the implementation of its strategy of technological self-sufficiency. Beijing invests substantial resources in the development of domestic processors, the construction of national supercomputers, the expansion of cloud platforms, and the formation of a regulatory framework governing the deployment and application of artificial intelligence within the country. China's major technology companies Huawei, Tencent, Baidu, ByteDance have become drivers of state policy, serving as flagships of the Chinese model of digital development [6].

Conclusion and Recommendations (*Xulosa va takliflar*). Given the growing polarization and technological competition, states that are not direct participants in U.S. China rivalry are advised to adopt a strategy grounded in pragmatism and multi-vector digital diplomacy.

First, it is advisable to develop a strategy of "digital non-alignment," based on diversifying suppliers of cloud services, equipment, and platforms. This approach reduces dependence on any single technological bloc and strengthens national digital resilience [7].

Second, states should establish non-discriminatory and transparent rules for all digital platforms regardless of their origin. This requires unified standards for data storage, disclosure of algorithmic principles, compliance with moderation requirements, and responsibility for disinformation.

Third, countries should actively develop their own digital diplomacy, using global platforms including TikTok to promote their national branding. Producing high-quality multilingual content adapted to the visual culture of contemporary users enhances a country's international image.

Fourth, it is important to participate in global discussions on regulating artificial intelligence, cross-border

data flows, and platform accountability, in order not to remain a passive object of global processes but to become a subject in shaping international norms.

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