

ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of social media's ubiquity among its younger user base, there have been concerns raised against tech giants such as YouTube and TikTok for propagating datafication on children by collecting personal data for their respective personalised advertising. This research contributes to the scholarship on Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) and post-truth through its application of multi-level analysis, incorporation of policy narratives as Corporate Political Activity (CPA) tool and use of post-truth as a theoretical lens to explore the narrative strategies employed by YouTube and TikTok in legitimising their datafication practices on child users in the United States of America (US) and the United Kingdom (UK). The two regions are selected due to their enforcement on respective regulations on children's data privacy, Children's Online Protection Policy Act (COPPA), under the jurisdiction of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), under the jurisdiction of Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), for both platforms, with each giving rise to different regulatory contexts due to their differentiated orientation — the former delineating commercial entities while the latter comprehensively delineates online activities in general. By employing a longitudinal and qualitative approach, this research uses content analysis on 44 official published statements and livestreamed hearings involving YouTube and TikTok over the 2019-2024 time period to explore the narrative form and content both platforms exploit as part of its political strategy in the US and UK. Findings from this research suggest that each platform employs different strategies, particularly on coalition-building, to provide an appearance of successfully protecting their younger user base due to the varying scrutiny of US and UK governments, in which TikTok is subjected to harsher scrutiny in the US due to its Chinese heritage. The meso-level analysis examining inter-group interactions between the platforms illustrates that Western institutional antagonism against increasing Chinese economic influence, which is more prevalent in the US, determines the narrative strategies. The competing narrative strategies are reflective of both platforms' and the US government's tendency to embody post-truth regimes which have direct policy implications on surveillance. Lastly, this paper offers conceptual contribution by integrating multi-level analysis through NPF, viewing policy narratives as a CPA tool in advancing corporate interests to the state as well as applying a post-truth lens on the narrative strategies employed in the policy arena.



The Big (Bad) Tech or a Hero for Children?: A Cross-platform Exploration of the Narrative Strategies Employed by Google's YouTube and ByteDance's TikTok on Children's Data Privacy

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