

Shakespeare Lives in Mandarin

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Contents

1	Executive Summary	3
1.1	Summary of Findings: Twitter	3
1.2	Summary of Findings: Weibo	4
1.3	Recommendations	5
	Phase One: Shakespeare Day.....	7
2	Methodology	8
2.1	Twitter	8
2.2	Weibo	8
2.3	Notes on Coding for Values, Value, and Tone	9
3	Findings and Analysis.....	11
3.1	Twitter	11
3.1.1	Demographic and Geographic Distribution of Discussion	11
3.1.2	Engagement with Shakespeare Lives on Twitter.....	12
3.1.3	Popular elements of the Shakespeare Lives programme on Twitter.....	13
3.1.4	The Impact of the Shakespeare Lives Programme	14
3.2	Weibo	15
3.2.1	Themes of British Council posts.....	16
3.2.2	Engagement with the Shakespeare Lives Programme on Weibo	17
4	Conclusions.....	19
	Phases Two and Three: Shakespeare Lives in Mandarin	21
5	Methodology	23
5.1	Twitter	23
5.2	Weibo	23
6	Findings and Analysis.....	25
6.1	Twitter and Weibo.....	25
6.1.1	Demographic and Geographic Distribution of Discussion	25
6.1.2	Engagement with the Shakespeare Lives Programme on Twitter and Weibo.....	30
6.1.3	Popular Elements of the Programme on Twitter and Weibo	35

6.1.4	The Impact of the Shakespeare Lives Programme	36
6.2	Weibo (British Council Posts and User Engagement)	47
6.2.1	Themes	47
6.2.2	Engagement with the Shakespeare Lives Programme on Weibo	50
6.2.3	Weibo Users' Comments on British Council Posts	53
7	Conclusions	58
8	Bibliography	60

1 Executive Summary

This report examines the online conversation around the Shakespeare Lives programme in the Mandarin language on social media platforms throughout 2016. It reveals the values associated by different audiences and actors with the Shakespeare Lives programme, Shakespeare himself, and Britain as a whole. We begin by giving a summary of findings from our research of Shakespeare Lives on Twitter and Sina Weibo, a microblogging site very popular in China, subsequently referred to as Weibo. We give recommendations on how social media can be used to promote, and promote engagement with, ambitious international cultural programmes such as Shakespeare Lives.

We then provide analysis from the first phase of our social media research on Shakespeare Lives in Mandarin, which focused on the weekend around Shakespeare Day (23 April), the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. We examine how Mandarin-speakers discussed Shakespeare Lives and Shakespeare Day on Twitter, and how the British Council used Weibo to promote the programme and the extent to which audiences responded. Finally, we will provide analysis from the second and third phases of our research, which studied the promotion of and engagement with Shakespeare Lives more broadly, from May to December 2016, broadening the scope of our research on Weibo to include posts from members of the public and partners of the Shakespeare Lives programme.

1.1 Summary of Findings: Twitter

- The major actor categories among Twitter users were 'members of the public' (40%) and 'alternative media and bloggers' (40%). In other languages, 10% of Arabic users were members of the public, while 55% of Russian users were.
- While 60% of the actors' locations were untraceable on Twitter, the traceable accounts respectively were distributed in East Asia, North America, Europe, Australasia, and South Asia, 35% among of which were located in Taiwan.
- The key focus of tweets was on the Shakespeare Lives programme from 1 May onwards.
- 85% of tweets promoted and provided information about the Shakespeare Lives programme or Shakespeare.
- The alternative media and bloggers and the members of the public played a major role in promoting Shakespeare Lives on Twitter.
- 'Members of the public' were a major actor in reporting their engagement in Shakespeare Lives activities (62% of all types of actors) on Twitter.
- Tweets about Shakespeare Lives mainly shared information about the dates and locations of performances.

- The tone of 74% of the tweets was neutral, while 25% of tweets had a positive tone. The positive tone largely emerged from tweets regarding promotion of the Shakespeare Lives programme, and providing information about it.
- **Through Shakespeare Lives, Britain was perceived as a nation that respected the value of ‘mutuality’** (42% of 295 tweets). Britain was also seen, by smaller numbers of Twitter users, as ‘welcoming’ (16%) and creative (14%). There was no evidence that Shakespeare Lives promoted an image of the UK’s ‘diversity’ (less than 1%) or its ‘innovation’.
- 92% of the tweets which associated Britain with one of the above values were tweets also coded as promoting or providing information.

1.2 Summary of Findings: Weibo

- **Cultural sector organisations played the most active role in publishing Shakespeare Lives related posts** on Weibo (26%), followed by the British Council itself (25%) and government/policymakers (23%)
- 81% of the Weibo users were located in Mainland China.
- 90% of the Weibo posts focused on Shakespeare Lives. Only 9% focused on Shakespeare himself, and 1% of the posts referred directly on Britain.
- 80% of posts promoted and provided information about the Shakespeare Lives programme. **The British Council, cultural sector organisations and the ‘government/policymaker’ category were the key actors in promoting and providing information about Shakespeare Lives on Weibo** (respectively 31%, 29% and 24% of all types of actors in promoting Shakespeare Lives). The latter includes a prominent role for British embassies and consulates.
- **Members of the public on Weibo published most posts about their engagement in Shakespeare Lives activities** (50%), followed by government/policymakers (28%).
- The information about Shakespeare Lives posted on Weibo was much more diverse than on Twitter, but the majority of the posts which appeared on the Shakespeare Lives Weibo topic page, which is hosted by the British Council, were published by 艺述英国 (UK NOW).
- Other actors, especially partner cultural organisations and government/policymaker, published a variety of Shakespeare Lives activities on Weibo, and some posts contained diverse and comprehensive information about British culture and its values.

- **54% of the posts adopted a neutral tone, and 40% of the posts adopted a positive tone.** The positive tone largely emerged from posts that promoted and provided information about the Shakespeare Lives programme, and posts from partner organisations contained more positive posts (57%) than neutral posts (43%). This positivity may be characteristic of Weibo; across all language reports, most Twitter posts are neutral and information-sharing.
- Britain was mainly seen as a nation of mutuality (54% of 818 posts), welcoming (22%), diverse (22%), creative (21%) and innovative (10%) by Weibo users.
- **Government/policymakers was the major actor ‘type’ in projecting the five values** promoted by the British Council through Shakespeare Lives (50% of all posts), followed by cultural sector organisations (30%). 11% of British Council posts reflected these values.
- 76% of the Weibo posts that reflected these five values promoted and/or provided information about Shakespeare Lives, whilst only 12% came from posts reporting engagement with the programme.
- **#PlayYourPart was the dominant theme of British Council Weibo posts** (68%) from 1 July to 19 October, followed by the theme ‘performance of Shakespeare’s works’ (19%) and ‘celebrity’s engagement in Shakespeare Lives’ (5%).
- **70% of posts registered a low level of engagement**, and 24% of posts attracted very low attention from Weibo users.
- To put engagement into perspective, however, the posts that registered the highest scale of engagement still received much lower attention than the posts regarding Sir Ian’s visit.
- **The most popular theme – ‘Play Your Part’ – failed to receive significant attention.** Most of the posts were located low on the scale.
- The analysis of the comments indicates that **Weibo users responded to British Council posts with a positive tone in general.**

1.3 Recommendations

1. The active use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) by Chinese mainstream media, official institutes and government organisations for public diplomacy, indicates that **the British Council would benefit from establishing accounts on these social media platforms to target the Chinese diaspora and audiences from the Greater China area** (Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan).
2. **The British Council should utilise more Weibo functions, such as trending topics, to foster more public engagement, and engage with media and celebrity accounts.** A

hashtag, for example #ShakespeareInChina, could have been created to direct discussions and focus attention among Weibo users to enhance their engagement with Shakespeare Lives events. Mainstream and alternative media, active bloggers and celebrities could be involved or @ed (mentioned) in the discussion.

3. **Online engagement with partner organisations could be strengthened and extended to other social networks.** Partner organisations played a very active role in promoting Shakespeare Lives and projecting values associated with Britain on Weibo, so would likely have been equally beneficial to the programme on Twitter if the British Council chose to use it.
4. Considering the high engagement rate from Sir Ian McKellen's participation in Play your Part in June, the British Council should **continue to use this strategy of inviting Chinese or British celebrities to take part in events that can gain high publicity and register more public engagement.**
5. Instead of posting large numbers of Shakespeare's quotes on Weibo, **UK NOW could repost links about Shakespeare related events** (i.e. seminars, performances), and discussions about Shakespeare-related British culture from Chinese mainstream media (i.e. China Daily, Xinhua news agency), cultural institutes/organisations, and universities. The British Council should diversify the content and distribution channels of posts if it wishes to promote British culture, and the values that Britain wishes to promote. Spanish British Council administrators did well to immerse their communication and events as part other events happening in their local milieu. This model could work well for Chinese language social media spaces too.

Phase One: Shakespeare Day

This section of the Shakespeare Lives in Mandarin report sets out our analysis of conversation in Mandarin around the Shakespeare Lives programme on Twitter during 22-25 April 2016, the weekend around Shakespeare Day. This period most notably included [Shakespeare Day Live](#), a day of live Shakespeare Lives broadcasts streamed around the world through a digital pop-up channel co-curated by the BBC and the British Council. Highlights of Shakespeare Lives were also made freely available through the BBC iPlayer. This case was selected for analysis as celebrations of Shakespeare Day drove a peak in discussion of Shakespeare across our languages of interest (Arabic, English, Mandarin, Russian and Spanish) and on Instagram.

This section of our report also studies how the British Council used Weibo to promote Shakespeare Lives, and how members of the public engaged with these posts, during this period and the earlier stages of the programme more broadly, from April 2015 when the British Council began to use #永恒的莎士比亚# (Shakespeare Lives Programme) on Weibo, to June 2016.

During the period around Shakespeare Day, tweets about Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives were most frequently posted by members of the public in the Chinese diaspora. The key focus of all the tweets was the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death and the Bard's works, followed by approximately 30% of tweets focusing on the Shakespeare Lives programme specifically. Very little attention was paid to Britain (five tweets) or the British Council (no tweets). No posts contained a negative tone, and the use of a positive tone was mainly associated with tweets about Shakespeare's fame and reputation and his well-known classical works, as well as the profound influence of his legacy on English and world literature. The tweets in relation to the Shakespeare Lives programme express perceptions that the programme is creative, welcoming and diverse.

Our analysis also finds that prior to Shakespeare Day, the British Council focused their promotion of Shakespeare Lives on Weibo on the [Play Your Part](#) campaign. This campaign, run in conjunction with the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), aimed to promote the VSO's work to improve access to education worldwide, through Shakespeare Lives. On Weibo, users were encouraged to [share their favourite Shakespeare moments](#) by celebrities sharing Shakespeare quotes. However, these posts registered the lowest level of engagement from Weibo users. Following Shakespeare Day, the British Council's posts focused mainly on celebrity engagement with Shakespeare Lives (36 posts), with a lesser emphasis on Shakespeare Lives in Language (5 posts), and performances of Shakespeare's works (4 posts). The most notable post concerned Sir

Ian McKellen's (often referred to as Gandalf, the character he portrayed in Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings movie trilogy) visit to Shanghai People's Park before his attendance at the Shanghai International Film Festival on 11 June, which received 38,766 reposts, 37,414 likes and 5,942 comments.

2 Methodology

2.1 Twitter

Using Sysomos MAP, we were able to obtain tweets over the period of four consecutive days (22-25 April 2016), the weekend around Shakespeare Day. The search for tweets in Mandarin used the following keywords:

'Shakespeare', 'Shakespeare Lives', 'Shakespeare 400th Anniversary Day' and 'British Council', including different names for these keywords in Mandarin. For instance, the official translation of the name of Shakespeare in Mandarin is '莎士比亚'. A respected nickname for the old bard in Mandarin '莎翁' is widely used. '翁' is a general word for elderly man in Mandarin. Correspondingly, the Shakespeare 400th Anniversary Day was referred to two ways – '莎士比亚逝世 400 周年纪念日' and '莎翁逝世 400 周年纪念日'.

The keyword search criteria were finally identified as the following:

(莎士比亚 OR 莎翁 OR 永恒的莎士比亚 OR 莎士比亚逝世 400 周年纪念日 OR 莎翁逝世 400 周年纪念日 OR 莎士比亚逝世 400 周年 OR 莎翁逝世 400 周年 OR 莎士比亚 400 周年 OR 莎翁 400 周年 OR 莎士比亚逝世 400 周年纪念晚会 OR 莎翁庆典 OR 永恒的莎士比亚 OR 英国文化教育协会) AND NOT RT.

Of 742 tweets returned by the query, 722 were randomly selected for interpretative coding and analysis. A Mandarin-speaking researcher then individually analysed collected tweets according to the project's coding framework (see the Summary of Methodology document for more information on our approach and full coding frameworks).

2.2 Weibo

The official website of the British Council in Mandarin indicates that the British Council has registered four official social media accounts in Mandarin, namely Weibo, Douban, Youku and Wechat. Wechat is an exceedingly popular mobile communication service app developed by Tencent. It supports users to register as an official account that enables them to push feeds to subscribers and interact with subscribers. However, Wechat does not show the interaction with subscribers to the public. Youku is an online video and streaming service platform in China, which

has a similar function to YouTube. British Council uploaded a couple of short videos regarding ‘Shakespeare Lives’ in February 2016. The number of replays was low, 74 and 102 respectively, as was the number of followers (347 followers). Doubai has the same deficiency. The lack of content and user engagement indicates the low comparative value of the analysis of Youku. Considering the content and feasibility of analysing user engagement, the researcher therefore selected Weibo for analysis. Weibo, a Twitter-like microblogging service, is one of the largest social media platforms in China. Compared with other Weibo platforms, “Sina Weibo quickly became the most popular social media site in the country” (Yuan, Feng and Danowski 2013, p.1014).

The British Council has created a hashtag for #Shakespeare Lives#, #永恒的莎士比亚. Besides its own Weibo account, it hosts a Weibo topic page titled #永恒的莎士比亚# (#Shakespeare Lives). A topic page is a Weibo function which allows you to and present all the discussions (posts) in relation to the topic on this page. These are the main platforms that the British Council uses to release relevant information and to interact with Weibo users. The posts and reposts from the British Council appear on both the British Council’s Weibo official account and the #Shakespeare Lives# page. The researcher examined all the posts in relation to Shakespeare Lives on these two accounts through qualitative content analysis. The aim of the analysis in this report is to categorise the themes of the posts and to investigate the possible relationship between theme and users’ engagement. The investigation into the Weibo users’ engagement rests upon the numbers of shares, comments and likes.

The British Council started using the hashtag #永恒的莎士比亚#(Shakespeare Lives) on Weibo on 23 April 2015. There are 111 Weibo posts collected from the British Council #Shakespeare Lives# account. The researcher divided the date range into three periods for the convenience of the thematic analysis in this report: pre-Shakespeare Day (23 April 2015 to 21 April 2016), Shakespeare Day (22-23 April 2016), and post-Shakespeare Day (25 April to 29 June 2016). The numbers of posts in these three different stages are 50 posts, ten posts and 51 posts respectively.

2.3 Notes on Coding for Values, Value, and Tone

The five values that the British Council sought to promote and associate with Britain and British culture through Shakespeare Lives were coded in accordance with the definitions set out in the coding framework.

The ‘diversity’ value refers to cultural diversity of identities and performance. If the post showed different cultural traditions and forms of performance and/or incorporated new cultural elements, or actors from all over the world, it was coded as expressing or signalling the UK’s embrace of diversity as a principle.

A post was coded as expressing or signalling ‘innovation’ if it referred to transformations at an organisational level and/or the adoption of new approaches in manufacturing or technology. Following this interpretation, innovation was coded if the Shakespeare Lives programme made good use of new technologies, or a partner cultural organisation used innovative approaches to

promoting Shakespeare Lives or performances of Shakespeare's plays, or British cultural organisations and local cultural organisations created novel kinds of collaborations.

The 'welcoming' value refers to the openness and hospitality of Shakespeare Lives and, by association, Britain, and the social media conversation. Where evidence was available, references to the openness and hospitality of the British Council in China were also coded as being welcoming. For example, for the open day of the British Embassy in China, some posts encouraged Weibo users to visit the Embassy.

The 'creative' value was coded when references were made to the creation of new art forms or genres, novel plays and imaginative theatre performance. We also coded references to the mobilisation of creative ideas including use of new technologies to promote Shakespeare and his works, or any Shakespeare related activities or events. As long as the post conveyed the information that new, different or creative elements are embedded in Shakespeare Lives related activities, it is counted as being creative.

The coding of 'mutuality' value is directed mainly at Shakespeare being an international figure and belonging to the world, to the cross-cultural and reciprocal sharing of feelings, actions. Any reference to reciprocal relationships between two or more nations, intercultural dialogue, or mutual exchange of ideas and knowledge was coded as expressing 'mutuality'. For instance, Chinese theatres performed Shakespeare's plays, and Chinese theatre actors had dialogues with British counterparts. Such international cultural exchange and mutuality is at the heart of British Council activities.

We also coded for different ways in which the public may perceive the Shakespeare Lives programme to be valuable through representing quality, being useful or relevant, and/or pleasurable or enjoyable. We also coded the tone of posts as being either positive, neutral, or negative. If there were positive words (for example good quality, creative, classic, grand, famous, excellent) or emojis (for example claps or likes), or an event was described as uplifting and/or exciting, these posts were identified as having a positive tone. By contrast, if there were any negative words, or the tone was sarcastic, suspicious, or critical, they were considered as negative posts. Posts that held a neutral tone normally include quotes of Shakespeare and promotion of Shakespeare Lives events without the use of positive words.

We will now present our findings and analysis for the first phase of our research, firstly looking at discussion of Shakespeare Lives and Shakespeare more broadly in the period around Shakespeare Day, before looking at how the British Council used Weibo to promote the programme and the extent to which Weibo users engaged with different Shakespeare Lives content.

3 Findings and Analysis

3.1 Twitter

3.1.1 Demographic and Geographic Distribution of Discussion

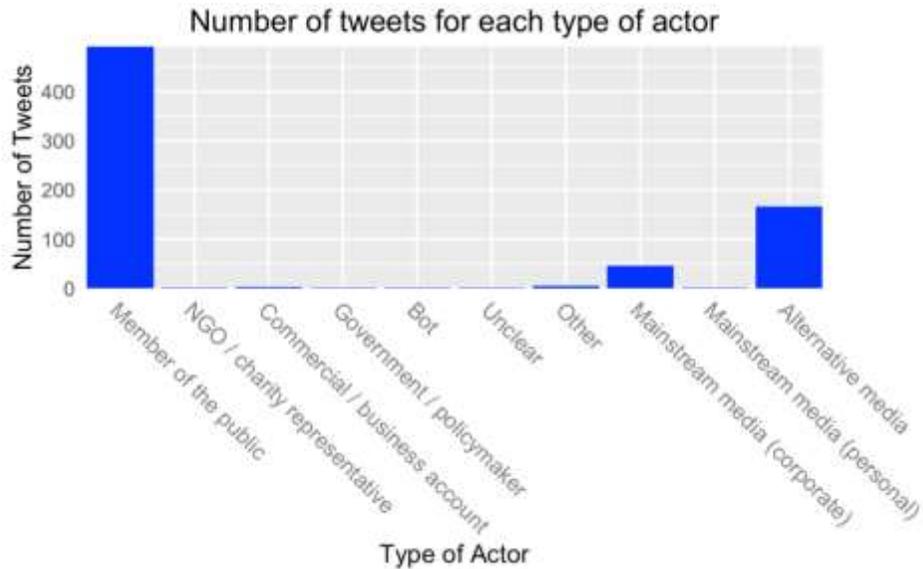


Figure 1: Type of actor posting about Shakespeare or Shakespeare Lives

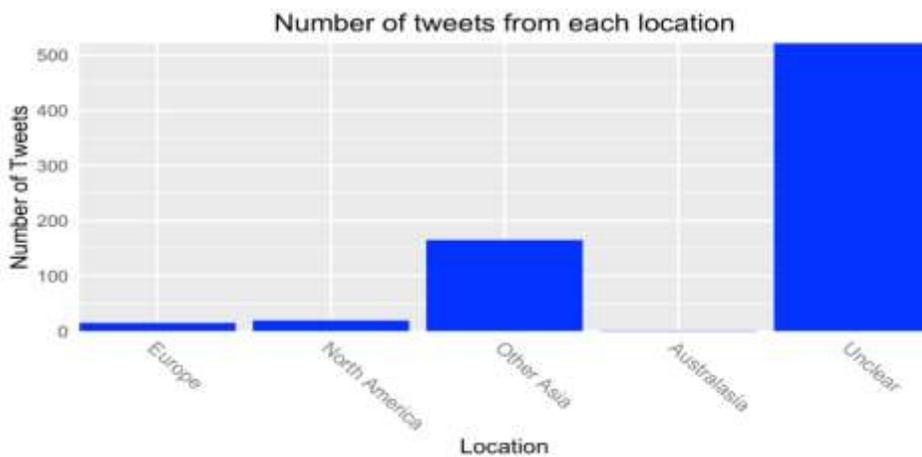


Figure 2: Location of Twitter users posting around Shakespeare Day

Figure 1 and Figure 2 indicate that the majority of those tweeting about Shakespeare, Shakespeare Day or Shakespeare Lives during this period were members of the public, whilst the remainder fell into the categories of ‘alternative media/blogger/citizen journalist’ and ‘mainstream media corporate account’. Some mainstream media, including BBC, VOA and Xinhua.net, posted information about the anniversary of Shakespeare’s death and the Shakespeare Lives programme, and their posts were retweeted by Twitter users. The alternative media that distributed the relevant information were mainly run by Chinese diaspora in the US and Europe.

Figure 2 shows that most of the Twitter users’ locations were untraceable, especially the individual accounts. The mainstream media corporate accounts and alternative media and blogger accounts were centred elsewhere in Asia, North America and Europe. One of the main reasons for the limited distribution to the Chinese speaking audience on Twitter is that Twitter is still banned in Mainland China. Our assumption is that the general public participants were mainly Chinese diaspora living in North America, Europe, and Asian countries including Taiwan.

3.1.2 Engagement with Shakespeare Lives on Twitter

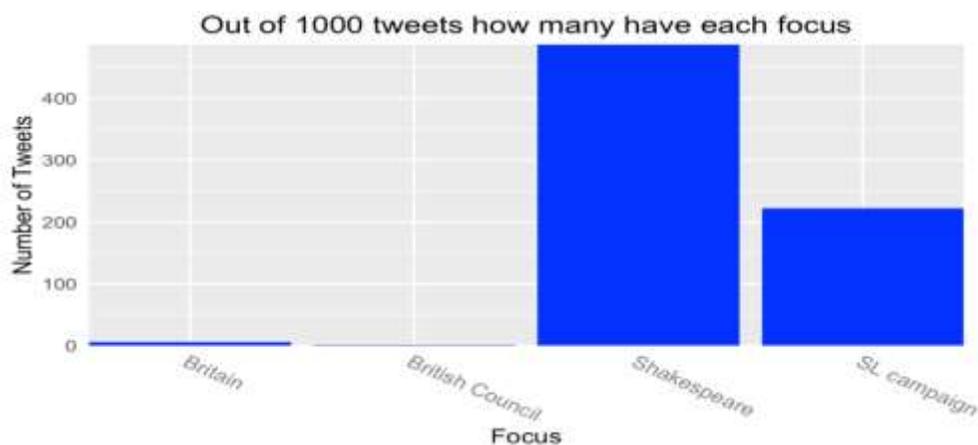


Figure 3: The focus of tweets in the weekend around Shakespeare Day

The key focus of all the tweets was the anniversary of Shakespeare’s death and the Bard’s works, followed by approximately 30% of posts focusing on the Shakespeare Lives Programme specifically. Figure 3 above also reveals that very little attention was paid to Britain (less than 1% of tweets) or the British Council (no tweets). The themes of the tweets that focused on Great Britain included the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the significant British and Chinese playwrights Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu, and the charm of Britain. In the former theme, the focus was on Britain's and China's promotion of the two countries’ relationship, and the post was originally taken from a news article by People.net. In the latter, charm was associated with British fashion inspired by Shakespeare’s works in the 16th Century.

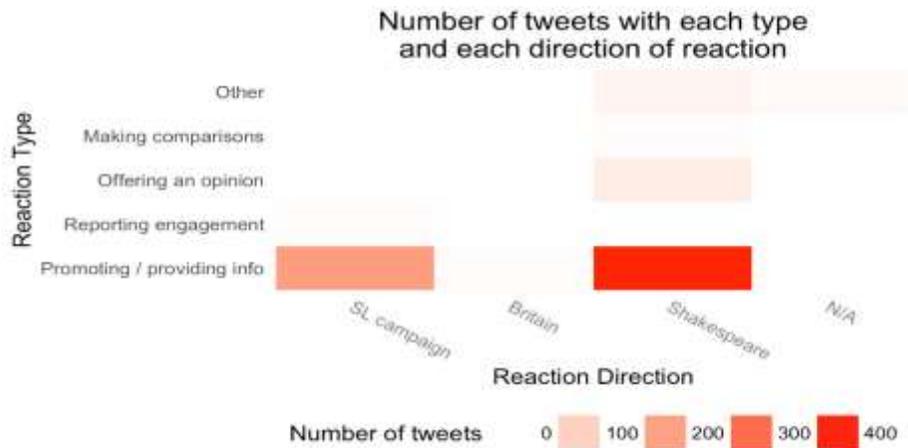


Figure 4: Types of reaction directed toward Shakespeare Lives, Britain, and Shakespeare

Most Twitter users shared news articles featuring information about the anniversary of Shakespeare’s death or the Shakespeare Lives programme. Considerable numbers of Twitter users tweeted the same article from an alternative media source regarding the British Council’s survey finding that Shakespeare is more popular abroad than in the UK. Only two of the tweets analysed during this period were about the Twitter users’ personal experience in engaging with a performance or event staged as part of the Shakespeare Lives programme.

3.1.3 Popular elements of the Shakespeare Lives programme on Twitter

Tweets about the Shakespeare Lives programme largely concentrated on the celebration of Shakespeare Day on 23rd April 2016. There were three types of content that attracted a notable amount of interest on Twitter: President Obama watching Hamlet in the Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in London during his official visit to the UK (71 posts); Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre broadcasting the short video of Shakespeare’s works (32 posts); and the tweeted news report from the Chinese mainstream media about the celebration of Shakespeare Day in China, such as the performance of ‘Charlie III’ by the National Theatre Company of China, and the co-celebration of Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu, a well-known master playwright from China’s Ming dynasty (14 posts). The Chinese mainstream media emphasised that two great Bards shared great thoughts in their plays, and both contributed hugely to the enlightenment of their societies 400 years ago. The co-celebration of Shakespeare 400th anniversary and Tang will help promote the Sino-British cultural exchange and the bond between the nations. It is worth noting that assessment of the popularity of the mentioned posts with the Twitter users rests upon the number of tweeted posts shared from mainstream or alternative media outlets. The lack of users’ personal descriptions in their tweets makes it difficult to identify how Chinese members of the public felt about or perceived the programme or the possible parallels with Tang Xianzu’s work and status.

3.1.4 The Impact of the Shakespeare Lives Programme

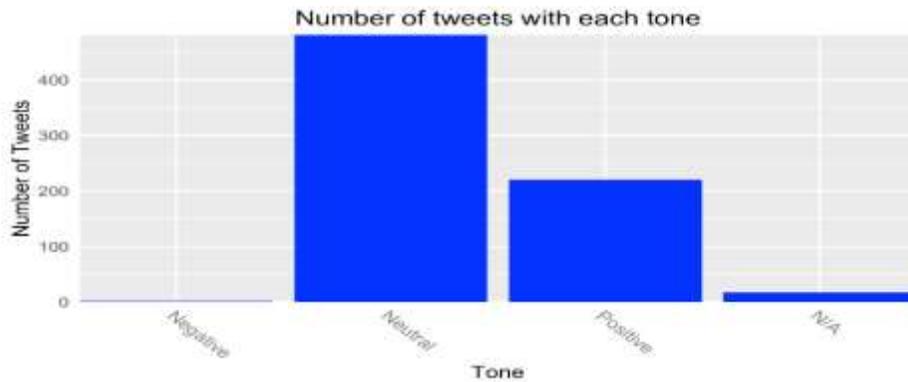


Figure 5: The tone of tweets posted around Shakespeare Day

Figure 5 above indicates that all posts were either positive or neutral in tone (with only a few tweets coded as ‘unclear’). Tweets with a positive tone mainly concerned the fame of Shakespeare and his well-known classical works, as well as the profound influence of his legacy on English and world literature. When users did tweet opinions they wrote, for example, that the notable rhetoric of Shakespeare’s impact contains ‘the greatest play writer in the world’, ‘the King of Drama’, ‘a rich treasure of the world culture history’. The tone about the events and performances on Shakespeare Day was positive and inspiring.

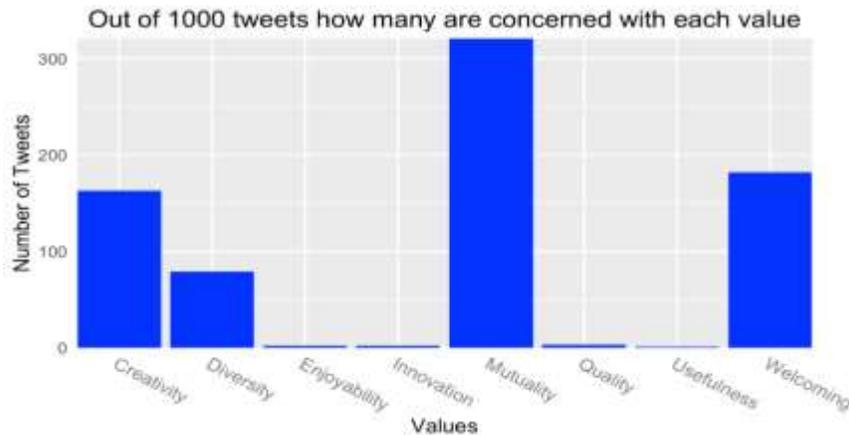


Figure 6: The values associated with, and perceived value of, Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives

It is when reading these tweets by hand that it can be seen that Shakespeare and his legacy symbolise Britain in Chinese social media discourse. Of the few that explicitly mentioned Britain, one post regarding the book *British Museum Review*, explains that the charm of Britain can be credited to Shakespeare. Shakespeare as a symbol denotes Britain as a country of creativity and mutuality. This sense of mutuality was also expressed in implicit ways without stating ‘Britain

is...’. That mutuality is reinforced by the influence of Shakespeare and his legacy and the country-to-country exchange of performances of Shakespeare’s plays. For instance, it was reported that the new play *Go, Make You Ready*, directed and performance by The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, would be performed in Chinese theatres, whilst the Chinese classic play *Peony Pavilion* (*Mu Dan Ting*) would be performed in Shakespeare’s hometown, Stratford-upon-Avon.

The tweets in relation to the Shakespeare Lives programme reveal that Britain is perceived as a creative, welcoming and diverse country. For example, creativity and diversity were reflected in the performance of new types of the music such as hip-hop, blues, jazz that were influenced by Shakespeare plays. The Globe Theatre broadcast Shakespeare’s 37 plays in a short video on screens along the Thames. This was described by one user as ‘breaking new ground’. ‘The Shakespeare version map of London’ was interpreted by another as creative. The value of welcoming was embedded in coverage of the global celebration of Shakespeare’s anniversary.

3.2 Weibo

The Weibo page titled #永恒的莎士比亚# (#Shakespeare Lives#), shows that the page has 250 followers (fans), has received 290 million visits, and 74,000 discussions (see Image 1 below).



Image 1: #Shakespeare Lives# topic page on Weibo, hosted by the British Council

3.2.1 Themes of British Council posts

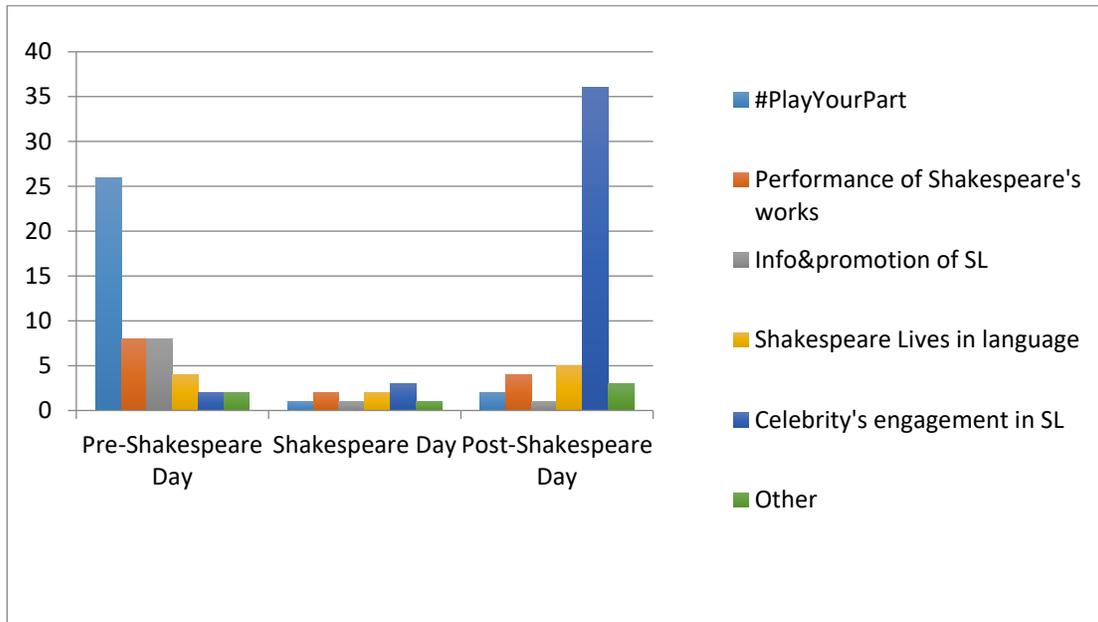


Figure 7: Themes of British Council posts about Shakespeare Lives on Weibo (N= 111)

Figure 7 reveals that Play Your Part was the dominant theme of British Council Weibo posts during the pre-Shakespeare Day period (n=26). The secondary themes include the performance of Shakespeare's works and providing information about and promoting the Shakespeare Lives programme (n=8). There were a small number of posts (n=4) regarding the [Shakespeare Lives in the English Language](#) programme, and a couple of posts about the engagement of celebrities and public figures in Shakespeare Lives, including the British Prime Minister David Cameron's speech on Shakespeare Day and Sir Ian McKellen's new bus guide position for the BFI.

The Weibo posts on Shakespeare Day itself were diverse in content. The posts covered the Shakespeare Lives celebrations including [Shakespeare Day Live](#), the [UN English Language Day](#), and celebrity engagement with the Shakespeare Lives programme. Obama's visit to Shakespeare's Globe was notable for many, though this post did not receive as much engagement from Weibo users (eight shares, comments, 16 likes) as Twitter users (83 tweets).

Figure 7 above shows that a frequently-mentioned theme during the post-Shakespeare Day period was celebrity engagement with Shakespeare Lives (n=36), followed by a secondary theme, Shakespeare Lives in the English Language (n=5), and a third theme, performance of Shakespeare's works (n=4).

Play Your Part is one of the Shakespeare Lives programmes that runs across 2016. It encourages the public to share on Weibo their favourite Shakespeare quotes from his plays or poems or their favourite Shakespeare moments, and aims to raise awareness of the VSO's work in increasing access to education worldwide. It is a social-media oriented interactive programme. The posts with Play Your Part across these three periods largely included favourite moments or quotes of

Shakespeare by celebrities such as the Downton Abbey star Hugh Bonneville, or high profile personages such as the Director of Shanghai Drama Art Centre and the British Ambassador in China.

The significant peak in posts about celebrity engagement with Shakespeare Lives shown in Figure 7 above was caused by the visit of the British actor Sir Ian McKellen to China starting on 7 June 2016. The British Council created a few hashtags using the name of his well-known character, Gandalf in Lord of the Rings trilogy: #甘道夫在中国 (#Gandalf in China) #甘道夫在北京 (#Gandalf in Beijing) #甘道夫在上海 (Gandalf in Shanghai). McKellen participated in three Shakespeare Lives programmes during his visit to China: #ShakespeareOnFilm# at the Shanghai International Film Festival, #Shakespeare SMART Talk#, and #PlayYourPart#.

3.2.2 Engagement with the Shakespeare Lives Programme on Weibo

The forms of engagement available to Weibo users are ‘share’ (forward), which we found used most frequently followed by ‘likes’ and ‘comments’. The levels of engagement with posts was categorised as being very high, high, medium, low or very low. The number range for these levels is identified as – very high (over 1,000), high (500-999), medium (100-499), low (10-99), very low (0-9).

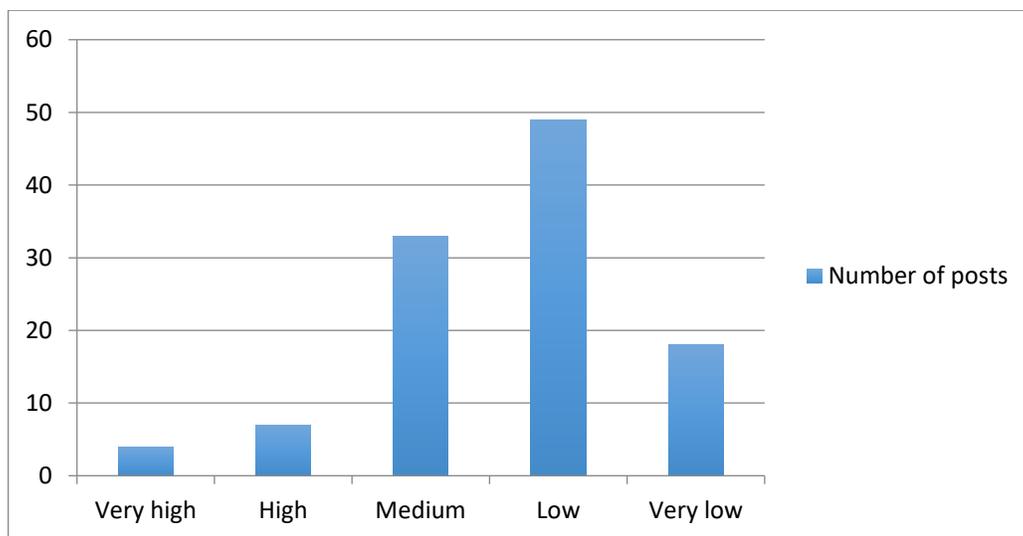


Figure 8: Level of engagement (shares, likes and comments) with British Council Weibo posts about Shakespeare Lives (N= 111)

Figure 8 above shows that 43% of British Council posts about Shakespeare Lives received a low level of engagement, a further 16% very low engagement, whilst approximately 31% of the posts registered a medium scale engagement. The rests of the posts (approximately 10%) registered significant high scales of engagement.

A notable phenomenon is that all posts regarding Play Your Part (other than Ian McKellen's engagement with this programme) registered the lowest engagement rate (12 out of 18 posts relate to Play Your Part); by contrast, the posts in relation to the British celebrities received the most engagement from Weibo users. For example, the British Council released four posts about the Hamlet sketch starring Prince Charles alongside British actors David Tennant, Tim Minchin (who is Australian) and Benedict Cumberbatch during Shakespeare Day Live on Weibo. These posts were shared by Chinese Weibo users 1,188 times in total, and received 232 likes and 87 comments.

The visit of the Sir Ian McKellen to the Forbidden City in Beijing received the most engagement, with one post on 7 June 2016 receiving 2,794 shares, 1,266 likes, and 386 comments. On 8 June, the British Council released three posts in relation to the #Shakespeare Lives Programme#. Two concerned the visit of 'Gandalf' to the Great Wall in Beijing, while the other post was about ['Shakespeare on Film'](#) (#莎翁影史#) during the 2016 Shanghai International Film Festival in collaboration with the British Film Institute (BFI). One post about Gandalf's visit was forwarded 2,264 times (785 and 1,479 respectively), liked by 1,206 users (671 and 535 respectively), and received 197 comments (90 and 107 respectively). By contrast, the post about the 'Shakespeare on Film' did not receive much attention, including 13 reposts, 19 likes and one comment.

The posts about Sir Ian McKellen's visits to Beijing and Shanghai constitute the peak of Weibo users' engagement with the Shakespeare Lives Programme. Most of the posts from 9 June to 21 June were related to Gandalf. The most notable post was about Gandalf's visit to Shanghai People's park before his attendance at the Shanghai International Film Festival on 11 June. The post provided a brief biography of McKellen. This post amazingly received 38,766 reposts, 37,414 likes and 5,942 comments (see Image 2 below).



英国大使馆文化教育处

6 -11 16:39 come from iPhone 5s

#甘道夫在上海# @上海国际电影节 今晚开幕前，伊恩爷爷抓紧时间体验魔都生活。怎么样，人民公园这个地方大家熟悉吧？爷爷自曝：身高五英尺又十一，年方七十七，伦敦有房（爷爷掌握了魔都相亲角精髓内容），@剑桥大学 毕业😁 等下爷爷就登台与中国老戏骨莎剧王子焦晃老师演绎#永恒的莎士比亚# #Ian McKellen# 收起全文



Favorite

38766

5942

37414

Image 2: British Council Weibo post about Sir Ian McKellen's visit to Shanghai

4 Conclusions

Weibo users showed greater engagement with the Shakespeare Lives programme than Twitter users. The main reason is the absence of an official British Council Twitter account in Mandarin. From the perspective of strategic communication, consistent and focused messages should be delivered to target audiences – including those in the Chinese diaspora using Twitter, as our findings show – to create and strengthen a favourable environment in order to achieve the desired goals, in this case to encourage and invite perceptions of Britain as a creative, diverse, innovative and welcoming country that promotes mutuality with Chinese publics via cultural exchange.

The British Council should consider establishing a Twitter account in Mandarin. Release of regular tweets about Shakespeare Lives or other cultural programmes in different countries (for example the US, Canada, Australia) in Mandarin through this official account and via Chinese cultural and media institutions and diasporic associations would be beneficial. The British Council may also use the same posts or content used on the Weibo account, but adapt them for Twitter as the communication codes are different.

The findings of Weibo analysis reveal that Play Your Part registered a low scale of engagement from Weibo users. The content of the posts in relation to Play Your Part look thin, and the activity itself did not contain an abundance of cultural elements that Shakespeare and his works can bring. Play Your Part was designed to encourage the public to share Shakespeare quotes and moments on Weibo. The majority of the posts focused on the Shakespeare quotes. This activity, along with Shakespeare Lives in the English Language tends to confine the Weibo users' experience of

Shakespeare and his works to language learning rather than a cultural feast. This observation also extends to all the posts and reposts in the #Shakespeare Lives# sphere on Weibo. The posts regarding performance of Shakespeare's works were also limited to pure theatrical or cinematic experience. The language of those is very distinctive and clearly mobilises internet-specific and social media-specific socio-linguistic registers. These are very catchy and easy to understand. The British Council needs to employ people who can use this social media language to appeal to and attract Chinese social media users. However, the key deficiency in the posts is the lack of clear cultural content relating to the values and perceptions that the British Council wish to promote. The cultural values that Britain and British Council desires to disseminate to the world were not reflected in those posts on Weibo. It is very likely that the British Council would prefer to take a discrete and subtle approach but this approach to strategic communication may not work well in a Chinese context where the tendency is to be more explicit and clear. The key values and images that the British Council wish to project may, as a result get lost.

Culture is a significant soft power resource. How can British Council China improve its communications to build cultural relations? There is tremendous scope to harness the British Council's social media strategy on Weibo, as the findings show that the #Shakespeare Lives# topic page has received 290 million visits, and contains 74,000 discussions. Aligned with simple, fresh and colloquial internet language, alternative posts that convey and stimulate cultural values can be considered. For instance, how do Shakespeare's works impact on or connect with British culture? Can links be drawn between British culture and Chinese culture through Shakespeare, or comparison of Shakespeare with Chinese literary figures? The British Council can use Weibo to find a way to help Chinese audiences better understand British literature, cinematic, TV, theatrical and royalty through participating in or discussing the Shakespeare Lives programme.

The findings of the Weibo analysis also indicate a strong celebrity effect. To continue with this robust engagement, some Chinese celebrities could also be involved. Two celebrities, Yang Lan and Hu Ge, were '@ed' by the British Council during this period of analysis. Yang Lan is a symbol of an independent, intellectual and successful woman in China. She runs her own TV programmes. If there is any possibility of collaboration with Yang Lan and her TV programmes, that would have a positive effect, receiving much more attention and triggering much more engagement with Shakespeare Lives or other cultural programmes. Hu Ge is a very popular film star in China. He is also a good English speaker. His involvement may generate more impact on the promotion of Shakespeare Lives in China as well.

Finally, the British Council can consider how best to deploy a strategic localisation of Shakespeare Lives in China. Shakespeare has become a global-local cultural phenomenon and his legacy still enjoys great favour and impact on the world literature and entertainment (British Council, 2016). The British Council needs to understand better how to exploit this global-local dynamic. For example, Shakespeare opened the door to the modern drama in China in the early 20th Century – why not tell that story? Meanwhile, the findings of these two social media analyses suggest that China has attempted to localise Shakespeare's works in theatrical performances, and to incorporate China's classical plays with Shakespeare's works. The mutuality value behind this phenomenon is that Chinese audiences perceive Chinese classical literature on a par with Shakespeare's works. If the social media interaction could reflect the localisation of Shakespeare and his works in China, it might attract more attention and more engagement from Chinese audiences. The British Council

may begin by reposting articles from Chinese cultural institutes and universities (see Zhang 2016 for examples).

Phases Two and Three: Shakespeare Lives in Mandarin

This section of the Shakespeare Lives in Mandarin report sets out our analysis of conversation in Mandarin after Shakespeare Day. This includes analysis of 295 tweets about Shakespeare or Shakespeare Lives between 1 May and 1 September 2016. Having struggled to identify tweets relevant to the Shakespeare Lives programme, we shifted the focus of our analysis to Weibo in the second and third phases of our research. Findings from our first phase clearly show that this platform was used to promote and engage with the programme to a far greater extent than Twitter. We continued to look at how the British Council used Weibo to promote Shakespeare Lives, and how members of the public engaged with these posts between 1 July and 31 December. We also broadened our analysis of Shakespeare Lives on Weibo by manually coding Weibo posts by all actor types, studying a total of 818 Weibo posts between 1 May and 31 December, using the same coding framework as we used to code tweets.

This analysis finds that while discussion of Shakespeare Lives on Twitter was very limited, 40% of these tweets came from members of the public, with a further 40% posted by alternative media and bloggers. 62% of tweets which reported engagement with the Shakespeare Lives programme came from members of the public. 85% of tweets promoted and provided information about Shakespeare Lives programme or Shakespeare, with alternative media and bloggers and members of the public again providing most of these information-sharing tweets. The information being shared was most frequently information about performances of Shakespeare plays. 74% of the tweets we analysed were neutral in tone, while 25% were positive; positive tweets were usually those promoting or providing information about the Shakespeare Lives programme. Tweets frequently associated Shakespeare or the Shakespeare Lives programme with mutuality (42% of tweets), welcoming (16%) or creativity (14%), but very few tweets (two of 295) were explicitly focused on Britain. Diversity and innovation, the other values promoted by the British Council through the Shakespeare Lives programme, were near absent.

On Weibo, cultural sector organisations played a key role in discussing the Shakespeare Lives programme, posting 26% of posts about the programme, followed by 25% by the British Council and 23% by government/policymaker accounts. 81% of posts analysed came from users or organisations located in Mainland China. 80% of posts promoted or provided information about the Shakespeare Lives programme, with the British Council playing the biggest role in promoting the programme (31%) followed by cultural sector organisations (29%) and government/policymaker accounts (24%). Posts which reported engagement with Shakespeare Lives events or campaigns came most frequently from members of the public (50%), followed by government/policymaker accounts (28%). The majority of the posts which appeared on the #Shakespeare Lives# topic page on Weibo were published by [艺述英国 \(UK NOW\)](#), the ‘official account of the British Council Cultural and Educational Office of the British Embassy’, which has 85,000 followers. Other actors especially partner cultural organisations and government/policymaker institutions published a variety of Shakespeare Lives content on Weibo, and some posts contained diverse and comprehensive information about British culture and its values.

54% of the posts analysed denoted a neutral tone, whilst 40% of the posts denoted a positive tone. The positive tone largely emerged from posts regarding promoting and providing information about the Shakespeare Lives programme, and Weibo posts from partner organisations contained much more positive posts (58%) than neutral posts (43%). Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives were frequently associated with the values of mutuality (54%), welcoming (22%), diversity (22%), creativity (21%) and innovation (10%). These values were most frequently promoted by government/policymaker accounts (50%) followed by cultural sector organisations (30%). 11% of posts by the British Council reflected the values the organisation sought to promote through the Shakespeare Lives programme. The majority of posts which made reference to these values were promoting or providing information about the Shakespeare Lives programme (76%), while 12% came from posts which reported engagement with the programme.

The Play Your Part campaign continued to be the dominant theme of British Council Weibo posts (68%) between 1 July and 19 October, followed by performance of Shakespeare’s works (19%) and celebrity engagement with Shakespeare Lives (5%). 71% of British Council posts received low engagement, and 24% of posts attracted very low attention from Weibo users. No post could match the level of engagement with the British Council posts about the visit of Sir Ian McKellen to China we analysed during the first phase of our research. Again, the Play Your Part campaign, the most frequent theme of British Council posts, failed to receive significant attention. The analysis of comments on British Council posts shows that Weibo users respond to these, in general, in a positive tone.

5 Methodology

5.1 Twitter

The dates for the analysis of tweets ranged from 1st May to 1st September. The search keywords included Shakespeare's plays that appeared on the British Council (China) official website, programs of Shakespeare Lives, Sir Ian McKellen's visit to Shanghai, and other Shakespeare Lives related keywords (i.e. 皇家莎士比亚剧团 Royal Shakespeare Company). Over 50 additional keywords and phrases, along with keywords used in the first phase of research, were provided for the search on Twitter. Four generic data sets of tweets relating to Shakespeare and the Shakespeare Lives were downloaded. After manual selection, a total of 295 tweets were identified for being relevant to the Shakespeare Lives programme.

5.2 Weibo

In addition to continuing the analysis of British Council Weibo posts and engagement with them, in phases 2 and 3 we coded 818 Weibo posts about Shakespeare Lives from May-December 2016 according to the same coding framework used for analysing tweets.

In the second phase of our research, 394 Weibo posts from 2 May to 31 December were collected from the topic page titled #永恒的莎士比亚(#Shakespeare Lives#) that is hosted by the British Council, and the British Council Weibo page. In the final phase of our research, 424 additional Weibo posts were selected from non-British Council accounts from 1 May to 31 December 2016. These posts mainly covered cultural institutes, government or policymakers, commercial and business sector, mainstream media and celebrities. These actors were categorised as a mediator for or partner of the Shakespeare Lives programme, and played a role in promoting Shakespeare Lives events and campaigns and interacting with their audiences. For instance, Royal Shakespeare

Company (RSC) released 125 posts (of 212 posted by cultural sector organisations in general) regarding performances of Shakespeare plays and their cooperation with Chinese arts performance organisations such as National Centre for the Performing Arts. The selection of these mediators was mainly based on the interaction with the British Council on its Weibo page and the #Shakespeare Lives# topic page. For instance, the British Council shared posts published by these organisations on the #Shakespeare Lives# topic page, and @ed these related organisations or celebrities. I visited their Weibo pages and manually collected Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives related posts for coding.

To avoid repetition, I deleted posts that appeared on both the 'Shakespeare Lives' topic page and Weibo pages of these organisations. This means that the first 394 posts coded were mostly published by the British Council and the general public. The 424 additional Weibo posts contained posts from non-British Council accounts. All the posts were coded using the same coding framework as was used for tweets.

As noted, we also continued to conduct ethnographic analysis of British Council posts about Shakespeare Lives on Weibo. We did this by categorising the themes of the posts, and investigating the possible relationship between the theme and the users' engagements by examining the numbers of reposts, comments and likes. In addition, the comments on the most popular Weibo posts, including the ones relating to Sir Ian McKellen's visit to China in June, were analysed. The British Council official Weibo and the topic page (#Shakespeare Lives#) that is hosted by British Council on Weibo were selected for the analysis. Having analysed British Council posts up to 29 June 2016 in the first phase of research, in phases two and three we covered posts between 1 July and 31 December.

We will now set out the results of our analysis of tweets and Weibo posts, discussing who was talking about Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives on these platforms and how they were discussing the programme, before moving on to present findings on the key themes of British Council Weibo posts and user engagement with them.

6 Findings and Analysis

6.1 Twitter and Weibo

This section presents findings of analysis Shakespeare Lives on Twitter (295 tweets) and Weibo (818 posts) after Shakespeare Day, followed by comparisons and discussions. The analysis focuses on four aspects: demographic and geographic distribution of people/organisations posting about Shakespeare Lives, Twitter and Weibo users' engagement with the Shakespeare Lives, popular elements of the Shakespeare Lives programme with Twitter and Weibo users, and the impact of the Shakespeare Lives programme.

6.1.1 Demographic and Geographic Distribution of Discussion

The analysis of the demographic and geographic distribution is focused on identifying types of actors and the locations of Twitter and Weibo users. 15 types of actors and nine locations were coded. 'Asia' was divided into two categories in the coding workbook, namely South Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal) and other Asia.

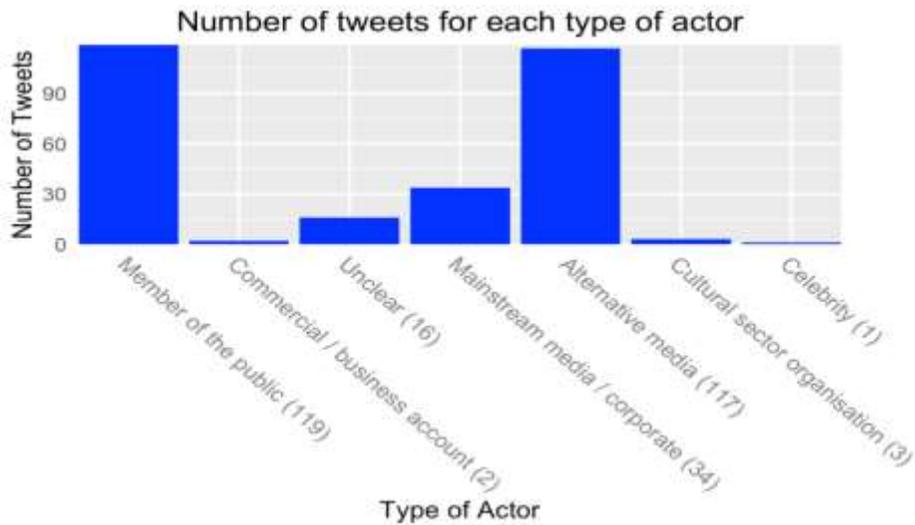


Figure 9: Number of tweets by actor type

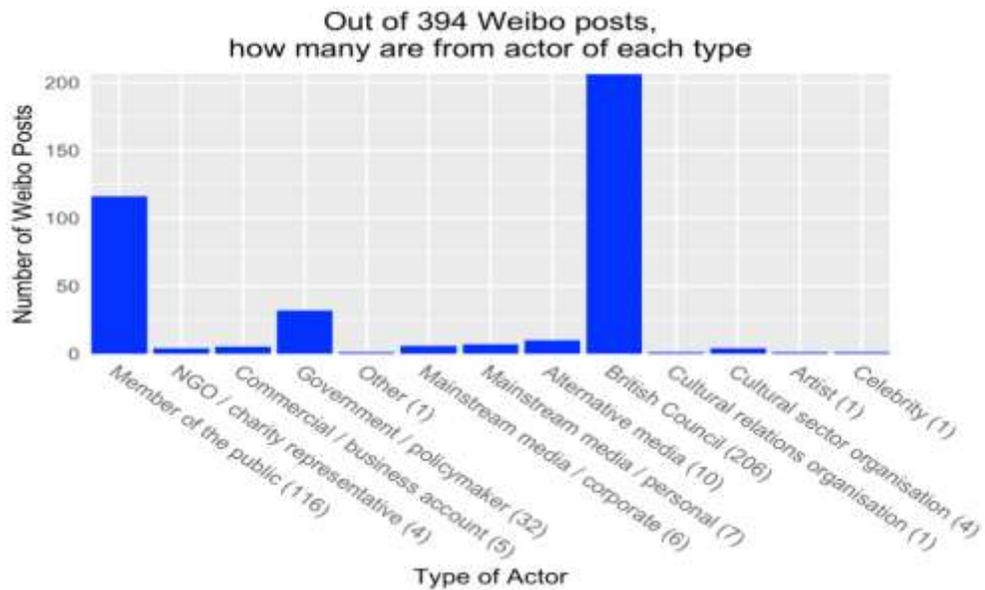


Figure 10: Number of Weibo posts by actor type

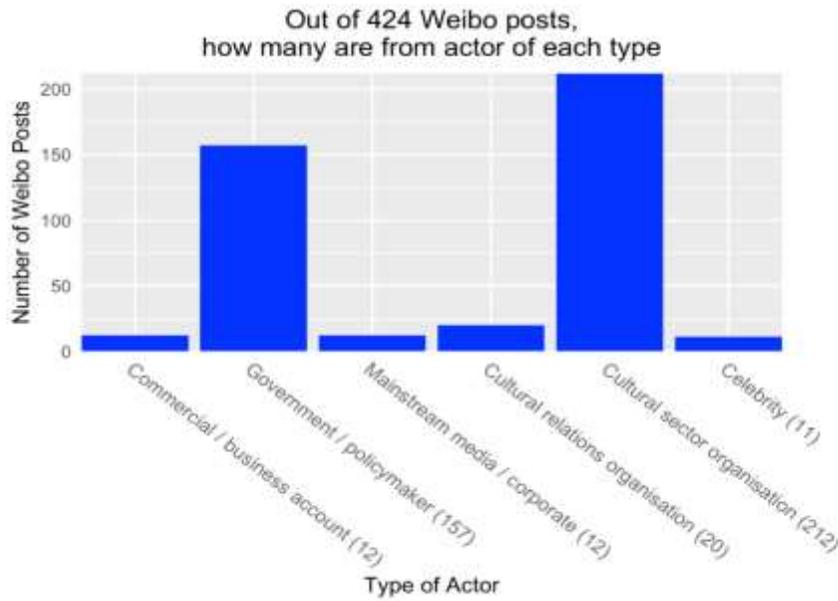


Figure 11: Number of non-British Council Weibo posts by actor type

Figure 9 above reveals that most of the tweets analysed were published by members of the public (40%), followed by alternative media and bloggers (40%), and mainstream media organisations such as the BBC and VOA (12%). This suggests that while the overall number of tweets posted about Shakespeare Lives was very low, there was some engagement from members of the public with the programme on Twitter. It is notable that there were no government or policymaker accounts reported the Shakespeare Lives programme on Twitter, and very few posts by cultural sector organisations.

In contrast, these organisations played a crucial role in promoting and mediating Shakespeare Lives on Weibo. Figure 10 and Figure 11 above show that cultural sector organisations (for example RSC and Shanghai Performing Arts Theatre) played the most active role in publishing Shakespeare Lives related posts on Weibo (27% of all the 818 Weibo posts), followed by the British Council (25%), although there are almost as many British Council posts as there are for the rest of the cultural sector organisations combined. Most of these posts were circulated by the account “艺述英国”(UK NOW), which is the official account of the Arts program of the British Council. A considerable number of posts (23%) were published by Government policymaker accounts. These actors are mainly affiliated with the British Embassy in China, such as the British Embassy in China Education Division, the British Consulate General official accounts, and accounts of officers of the British Consulate General in China.

Among all of these 818 Weibo posts, 14% were posted by members of the public. The mainstream media and alternative media did not play a significant role in promoting and mediating the Shakespeare Live programme on Weibo (4%). Some culture relations organisations (for example Shanghai International Literature Week), commercial/business sector (for example Shanghai Metro) and celebrities (such as David Tennant and famous Chinese theatre actors) engaged in the

discussion of Shakespeare Lives events, but on the whole very low engagement was discerned among these actor types (respectively 3%, 2% and 2%).

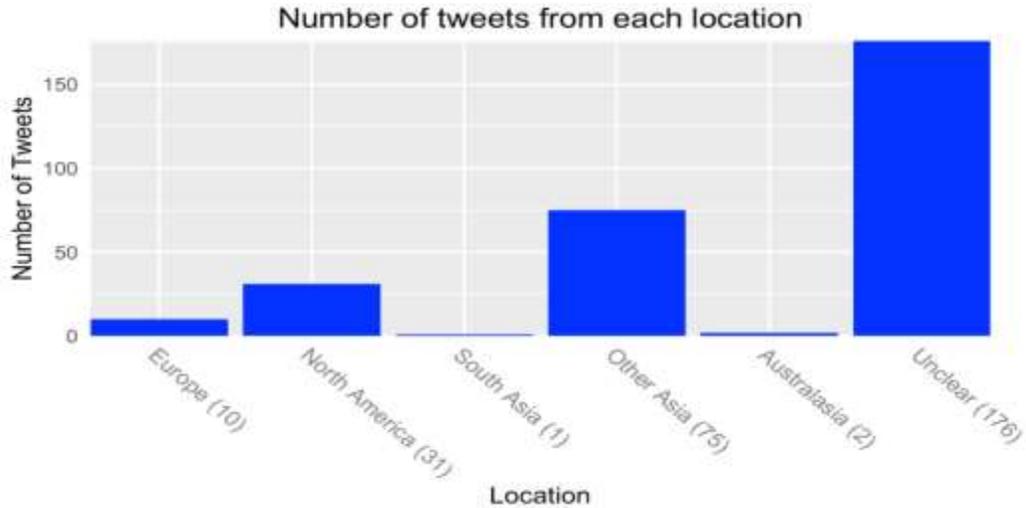


Figure 12: Number of tweets by location

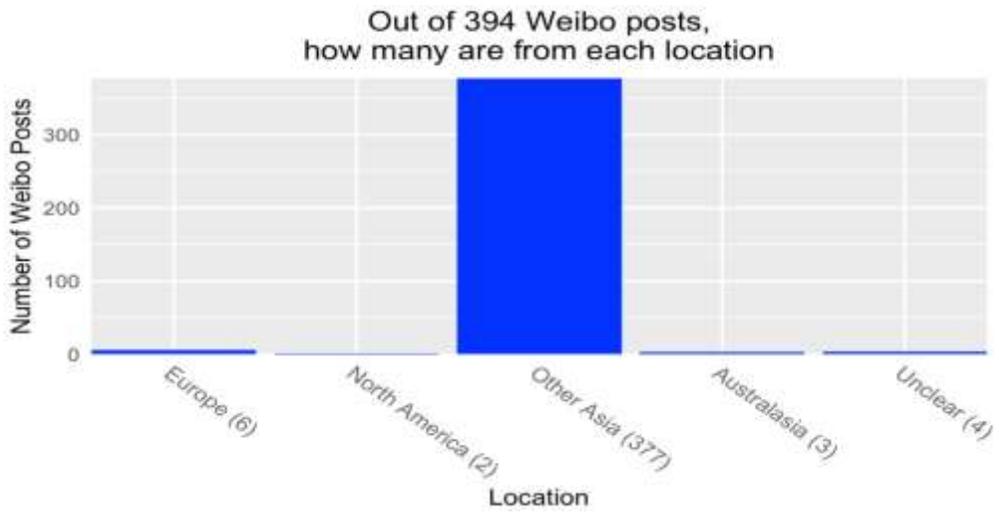


Figure 13: Number of Weibo posts by location

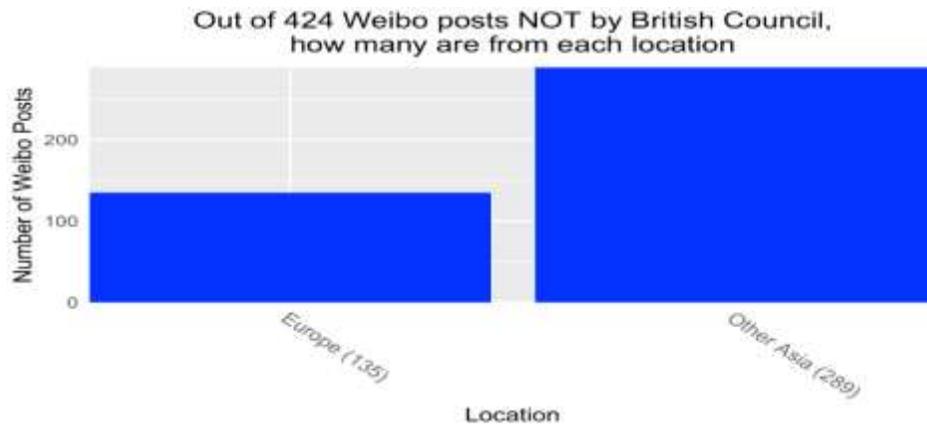


Figure 14: Number of non-British Council Weibo posts by location

Figure 12 shows that 60% of the actors' locations were untraceable, especially among individual rather than organisational accounts. The traceable accounts were distributed across East Asia, North America, Europe, Australasia, and South Asia. A considerable number of Twitter users were located in Taiwan (35% of other Asia), while 31% of the users who fell into the coding category of 'other Asia' were located in Mainland China (as shown by the location of tweets as displayed by Sysomos MAP, the tool used to search for and download tweets).

Figure 13 and figure 14 show that 81% of the Weibo users were located in the coding category of 'other Asia'. It is identified that all of these posts came from Mainland China. The reason for the high concentration of posts in Mainland China is that Weibo is the leading social media for Mainlanders to participate in public events in the social media sphere. 17% of the Weibo users came from Europe. These users are mainly British cultural organisations (such as the Royal Shakespeare Company).

Comparing the geographic distribution of Twitter and Weibo users who posted about Shakespeare or Shakespeare Lives indicates that there is potential to extend targeting to and enhance interaction with Taiwanese audiences, because Twitter and Weibo are both accessible and popular social media for them. Many Taiwanese celebrities have opened a Weibo account and been actively interacting with Weibo users.

Our analysis earlier had showed that it could be beneficial for the British Council to establish a Twitter to target overseas Chinese diaspora and audiences from the Greater China area (Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan). Several of the largest social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) have been banned in Mainland China. However, these social media have become important platforms for the Chinese mainstream media, official institutes, and government organisations to publicize information and interact with foreign audiences, including Chinese overseas diaspora, in their public diplomacy practices. For instance, People's Daily, CCTV, Xinhua News, China Daily, Hunan TV, Zhejiang TV, and Shanghai TV¹ all have registered

¹ These are the most popular provincial TV channels in China that are well known for their entertainment programming.

accounts with these three social media platforms. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs appears to have an official account with Twitter. The American Embassy Beijing has a closed group on Facebook. It does not seem a sensitive issue for the British Council to use those social media to promote its cultural and educational programmes.

In October 2016 the British Council opened its Chinese Twitter account, [BritishCouncil China \(@cn_British\)](#), and began to tweet about Shakespeare Lives in China. The followers have grown to 385, and it has a reasonable amount of interaction with Twitter users. For example, a tweet about Chinese New Year was retweeted 31 times and gained 40 likes. We suggest that the use of Mandarin as well as English could help to further grow this account, making it a valuable tool for promoting future cultural programmes to the Chinese diaspora around the world.

6.1.2 Engagement with the Shakespeare Lives Programme on Twitter and Weibo

This section investigates the focus of Twitter and Weibo users' engagement (whether this was Britain, the British Council, Shakespeare, or Shakespeare Lives), and the types of engagement, such as promoting or providing information about Shakespeare Lives or reporting engagement with the programme. The analysis further investigates the correlations between 'actors' of these two social media users and their reactions towards the Shakespeare Lives programme.

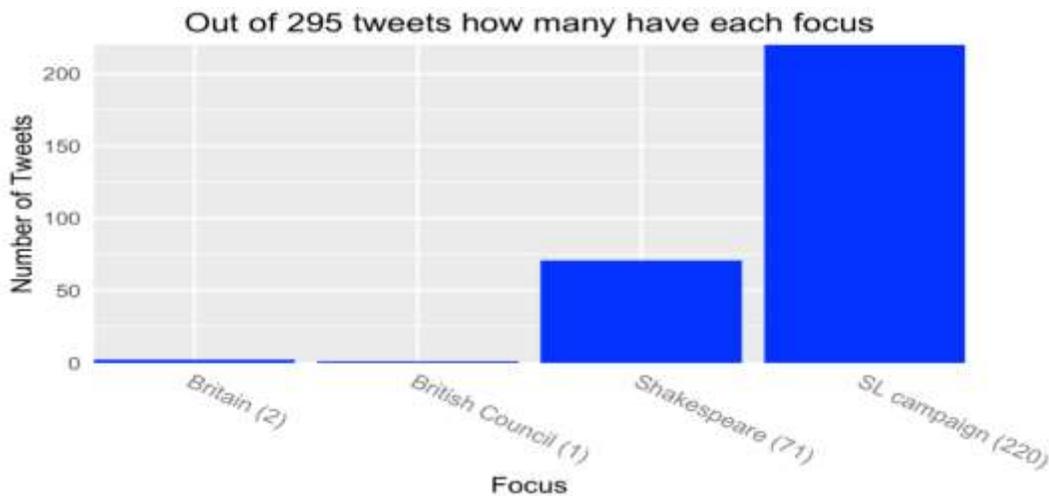


Figure 15: Number of tweets by focus

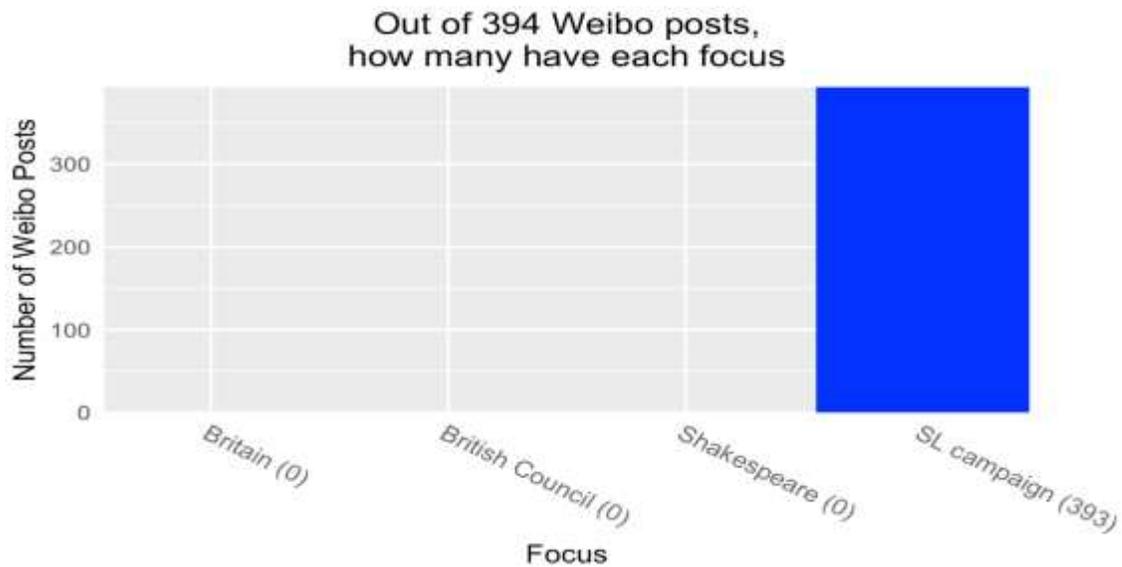


Figure 16: Number of Weibo posts by focus

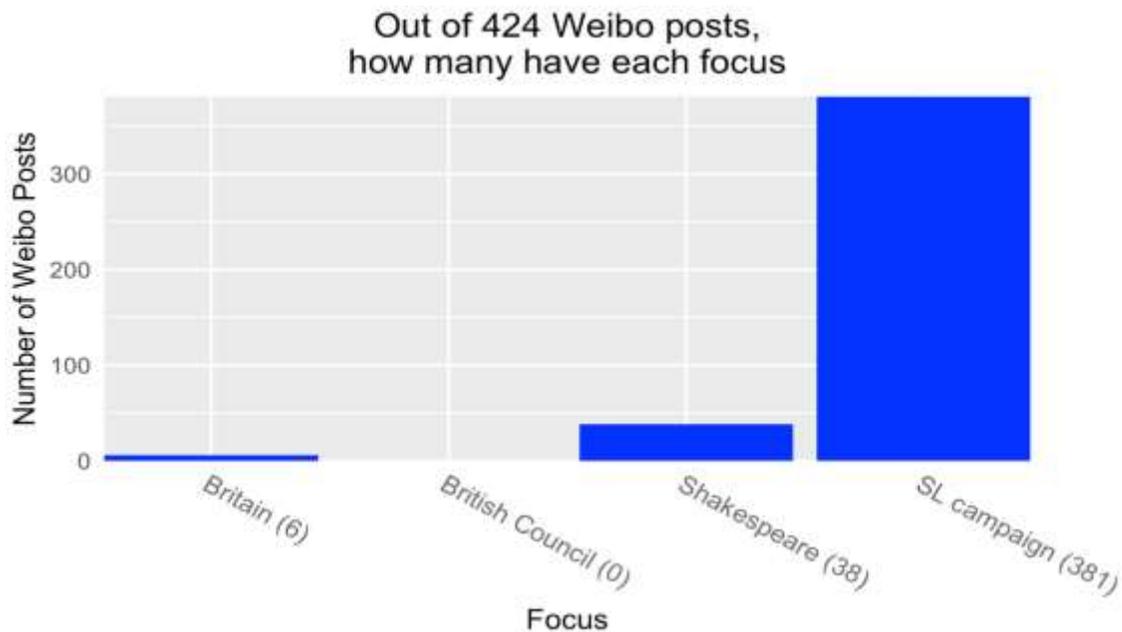


Figure 17: Number of non-British Council Weibo posts by focus

Among the tweets (Figure 15), the majority had a specific focus on the Shakespeare Lives programme (75%). This was a large shift in comparison to the first phase of our research on the weekend around Shakespeare Day the key focus was on Shakespeare, his death and his works, and approximately 30% of posts focused on the Shakespeare Lives Programme specifically.

Figure 16 above shows that all the Weibo posts were focused on Shakespeare Lives. These were collected from the Weibo page titled #Shakespeare Lives# that is hosted by the British Council. All the posts that appear on the page contain the hashtag #Shakespeare Lives# or the hashtag in Chinese (#永恒的莎士比亚#), even including Shakespeare quotes published by 艺述英国 (UK NOW).² Thus, all these posts are identified as focusing on the Shakespeare Lives programme. Figure 17 above shows that 90% of the non-British Council Weibo posts related to Shakespeare Lives, whilst 9% of the posts were focused on Shakespeare and only about 1% were focused on Britain. The British Council was not mentioned in all the 818 Weibo posts.

In summary, the majority of tweets and Weibo posts around Shakespeare Lives were focused on the events themselves, rather than paying much attention to Britain (two tweets, six Weibo posts) or the British Council (one tweet, no Weibo posts).

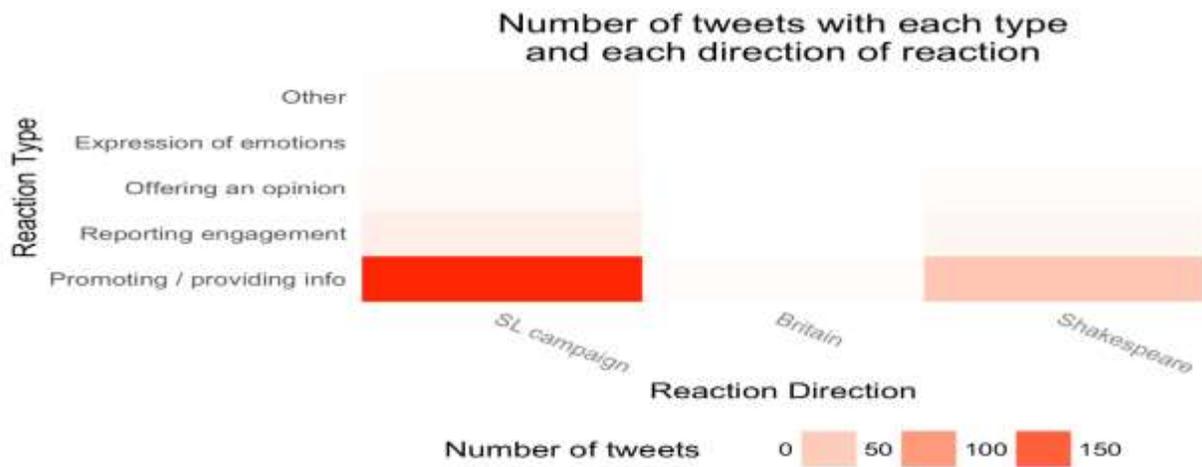


Figure 18: Number of tweets by reaction type and focus

² The UK NOW is an official account for the UK NOW programme that is run by the British Council on Weibo.



Figure 19: Number of Weibo posts by reaction type and focus

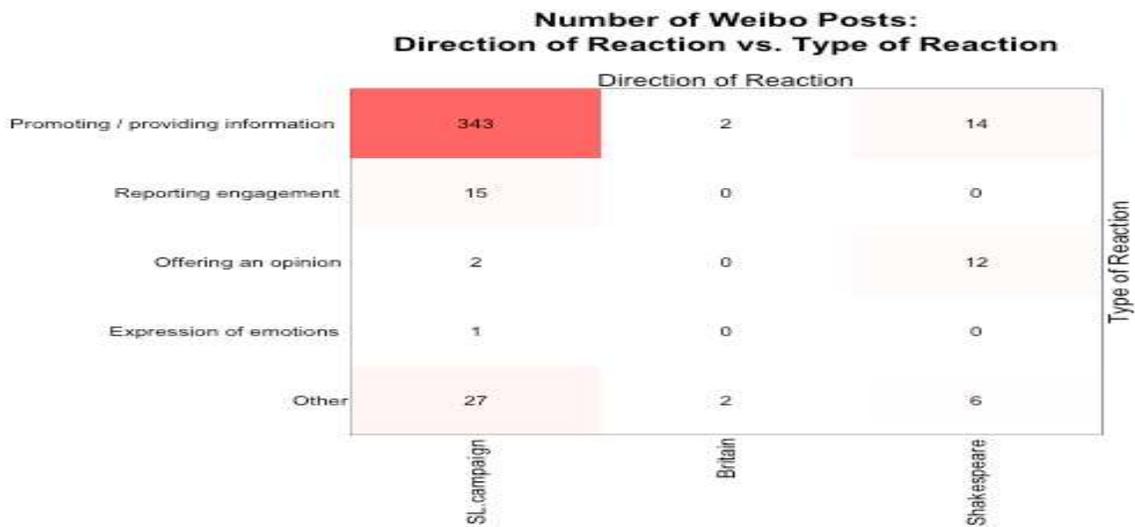


Figure 20: Number of non-British Council Weibo posts by reaction type and focus

These three heatmaps (Figures 18, 19 and 20 above) show that the majority of Twitter (85%) and Weibo (80%) users promoted or provided information about the Shakespeare Lives programme, Shakespeare, or Britain. 97% of this promotion on Weibo related to the Shakespeare Lives programme, 2% of the promotion related to Shakespeare, and 0.5% related to Britain specifically.

Alternative media, bloggers and citizen journalists, followed by members of the public, played a major role in promoting the Shakespeare Lives programme and Shakespeare on Twitter (44% and 36% of all types of actors respectively), followed by mainstream media (12%). The British Council, cultural sector organisations and government/policymaker accounts were the key actors in promoting and providing information about Shakespeare Lives on Weibo (31%, 29% and 24%),

far more active than other actors (only 8% of posts promoting or providing information about Shakespeare Lives came from members of the public). These findings suggest that the British Council can interact more with alternative media, bloggers and citizen journalists can be made on Twitter and Weibo to promote cultural programmes. These are active groups or individuals who could play a role of opinion leaders in disseminating information on events and campaigns.

Reporting engagement is the second most common type of reaction among both Twitter users (9%) and Weibo users (8%). Members of the public on Weibo published the most of posts in relation to their engagement with Shakespeare Lives activities (50% of all types of actors), followed by government/policy makers (28%), alternative media (6%), cultural sector organizations (5%), the British Council (3%), and celebrities (3%). On Twitter, posts reporting engagement with Shakespeare Lives were dominated by members of the public to a greater extent (62% of all types of actors), followed by alternative media (19%), mainstream media (12%), commercial/business accounts (4%) and celebrities (4%). However, member of the public played a much more active role in promoting and providing information about the Shakespeare Lives programme (76% of all types of reactions by member of public) than reporting their engagement with Shakespeare Lives events (13%) on Twitter, while the percentages of Weibo users are respectively 44% (promoting Shakespeare Lives) and 28% (reporting engagement).

‘Offering an opinion’ is the third most common type of reaction among both Twitter users (3% of all types of reactions) and Weibo users (4%). The majority of these opinions (64%) were related to the Shakespeare Lives programme, while the rest (36%) were concerned with Shakespeare. Members of the public were the most active actor in offering an opinion on both Twitter and Weibo.

This analysis indicates that the British Council and its partner organisations have played a very active role in promoting the Shakespeare Lives programme on Weibo, while the alternative media, bloggers and citizen journalists and the members of the public were the key players in promoting Shakespeare Lives on Twitter. Providing information about and promoting Shakespeare Lives on social media was still the main approach to initiating a conversation about the programme with social media users.

Weibo has a trending topic list that appears on each Weibo user’s homepage. These topics can attract an enormous range of attention and initiate very heated discussion by Weibo users. A possible strategy that the British Council could consider would be to create a hashtag such as ‘Shakespeare in China’ and invite mainstream media such as China Daily,³ active bloggers, celebrities and cultural institutes to lead the discussion about their engagement in British Council events and programmes, and encourage wider discussion about British culture and cultural values. British culture has its great advantage in China. Classical culture is highly regarded by the Chinese society (such as in schools, universities, cultural institutes). Therefore, the more information about British literature, cinematic, TV, theatrical and royal culture that is associated with Shakespeare and the Shakespeare Lives programme, the more helpful this would be to increase attention and discussion around the programme.

³ China Daily hosts a page titled ‘Let’s explore Shakespeare’ on Weibo.

6.1.3 Popular Elements of the Programme on Twitter and Weibo

The information shared by Twitter users mainly concerned the performance of Shakespeare's plays. For instance, a fairly large number of the tweets promoted the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the National Center for the Performing Arts. Regarding the information shared about Shakespeare, it was largely focused on the 400th anniversary of his death, and his works. Tweets reporting engagement with the Shakespeare Lives programme was focused on the performance of *Hamlet*, and the visit to Shakespeare's hometown.

The information about the Shakespeare Lives programme posted on Weibo was much more diverse than on Twitter, and included Shakespeare quotes, Play Your Part, 'smart talk', 'Shakespeare on Film', 'British Embassy open day', 'Sir Ian's visit', 'Hallé Orchestra concerts', 'The Merchant of Venice', Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu, Shakespeare on Shanghai Metro and so on. However, it is worth noting that the majority of the posts published by British Council were from its account 艺述英国 (UK NOW), and the majority of these posts were Shakespeare quotes (see Image 3 below for an example). By contrast, other actors especially partner cultural organisations and government/policymaker account published a variety of Shakespeare Lives content on Weibo. Some of the posts contained information about the highlights and values of Shakespeare's works, its influences on literature and plays on a global scale, as well as introduction to the background and history of particular plays, introduction to the actors in the plays, and some theatrical knowledge (see Image 4). These partner organisations can widen the reach to Weibo users by using diverse information from the Shakespeare Lives programme and foster potentially robust interaction with Weibo users. It has more credibility to present the culture values of Britain through the partner organisations rather than the British Council itself.



Image 3: UK NOW post on Weibo sharing a Shakespeare quote



Image 4: China Grand Theatre Weibo post showing a performance of *The Tempest*

Translation for Image 4 above: Pure visual shock and comedy effect, romantic and tragic feeling, the performing style is very energetic and full of body movement. Director Benedict Arnold represents the classic play of Shakespeare – The Tempest with special creative techniques. The Herald comments on this play that “it is very attractive; Arnold creates a different style, which is fully of energy and makes people think in depth. It is the best promotion of the favorite work of Shakespeare”. The new version of the Tempest will be performed in Beijing Comedy Theatre at China Grand Theatre from 28th to 30th October.

This section’s findings suggest that the content of the posts on Twitter, and the British Council’s Weibo accounts, was did not present a diverse picture of British culture. In contrast, the partner cultural organisations published some varied and comprehensive posts that introduced, for example British theatre culture and the historical background of Shakespeare works. Instead of posting large numbers of Shakespeare’s quotes, the UK NOW may repost links about Shakespeare related events (such as seminars or performances), discussions about Shakespeare related British culture from Chinese mainstream media (such as China Daily or Xinhua news agency), cultural institutes or organisations, Universities, and so on.

6.1.4 The Impact of the Shakespeare Lives Programme

This discussion of the impact of the Shakespeare Lives programme includes the tone of tweets and Weibo posts, and the values associated with Shakespeare Lives, Shakespeare, Britain, or the British Council by Twitter and Weibo users. Regarding the values projected and perceived by social media users, I focused on the analysis of the popularity of each value that was presented on Twitter and Weibo, and the active actors that presented values on these two social media platforms.

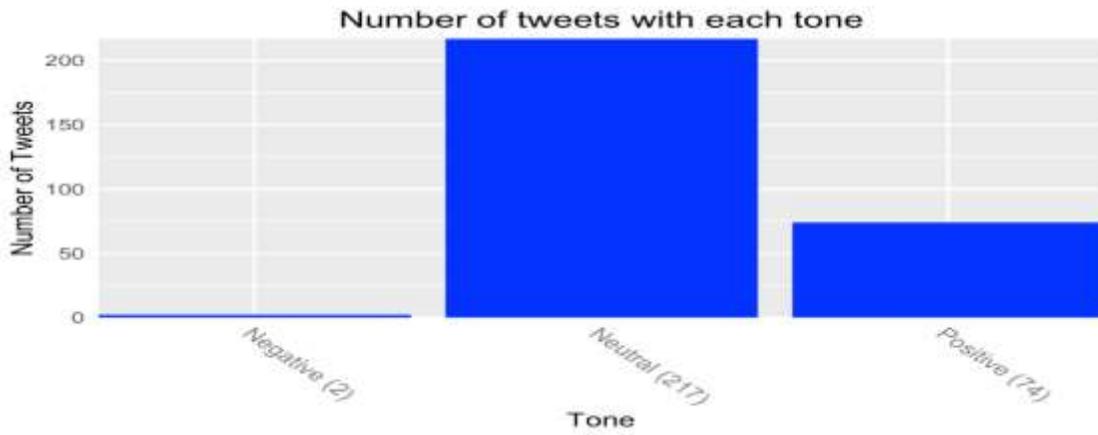


Figure 21: Number of tweets by tone

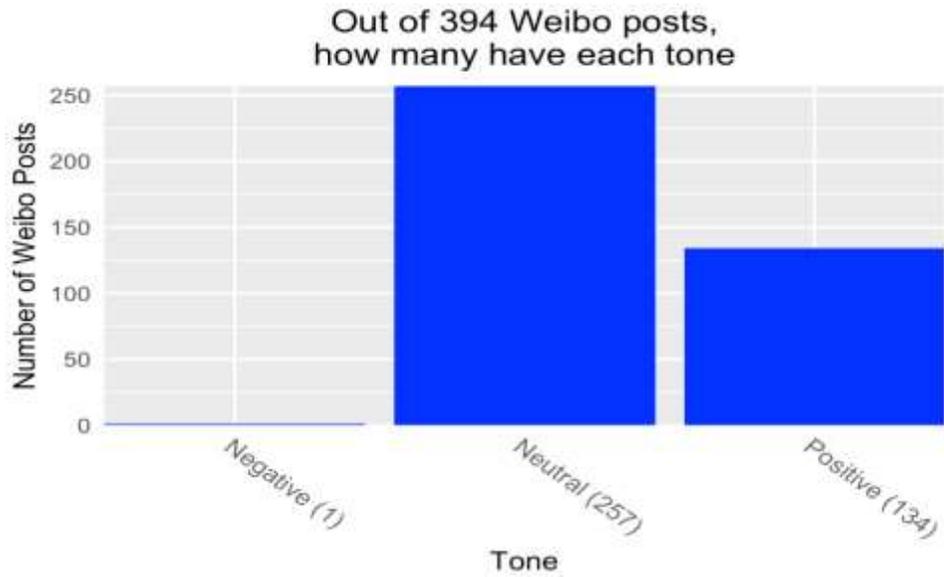


Figure 22: Number of Weibo posts by tone

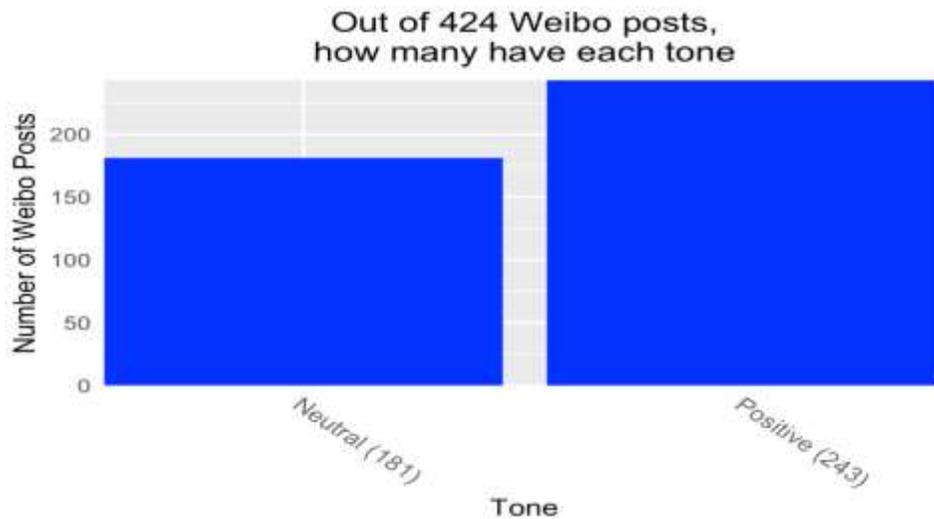


Figure 23: Number of non-British Council Weibo posts by tone

Figure 21, Figure 22 and Figure 23 above display that the dominant tone of tweets and Weibo posts is neutral (74% and 54% respectively). 25% of tweets and 40% of Weibo posts denoted a positive tone. It is worth noting that the additional 424 non-British Council Weibo posts shown in Figure 23 contained a greater proportion of positive posts (57%) than neutral posts (43%). In comparison (see Figure 22), 65% of the Weibo posts were neutral and 33% of the posts were positive. This finding indicates that partner organisations published more positive Weibo posts than the British Council.

Surprisingly, there were only two tweets and one Weibo post that denoted a negative tone. One tweet was about a complaint about the seat in the theatre by a tweeter who had watched a performance of *Hamlet*. The other tweet with a negative tone was the critique of the lengthy dialogue in the BBC's coverage of Shakespeare Day Live. The only Weibo post with a slight negative tone was critical of the Shakespeare play *Edward III*.

This analysis suggests that the majority of tweets (67%) and Weibo posts (48%) involved the promotion of and information about the Shakespeare Lives program, and that these tend to be neutral in tone. The positive tone largely emerged from both tweets and Weibo posts regarding promoting and providing information about Shakespeare Lives as well, but the percentages here were lower (18% and 33% respectively). Non-British Council Weibo users (particularly cultural sector organisations and government/policymaker accounts) published more positive posts providing information about Shakespeare Lives event than the British Council (76% in comparison to 17%). Members of the public also published more positive posts than the British Council on Weibo (46% in comparison to 22%).

In posts that reported engagement with the Shakespeare Lives programme, 46% of tweets reflected a positive tone, whilst 50% of tweets reflected a neutral tone. In comparison, 75% of the Weibo posts used positive language, whilst 25% of the posts carried a neutral tone about their engagement with Shakespeare Lives. 3% of positive posts were the opinions offered by Weibo users, and 2% of the positive Weibo posts emerged from the emotions that Weibo users expressed. In contrast, 2% of the positive tweets were the opinions that were expressed by Twitter users, and only one

tweet (0.3%) related to a surprise emotion about Sir Ben Elton’s new role as Shakespeare by a Twitter user.

This analysis indicates that partner organisations of the British Council spread more positive posts, especially in promoting the Shakespeare Lives programme to Weibo users, than the British Council itself. The general public felt positively about their engagement with the Shakespeare Lives programme.

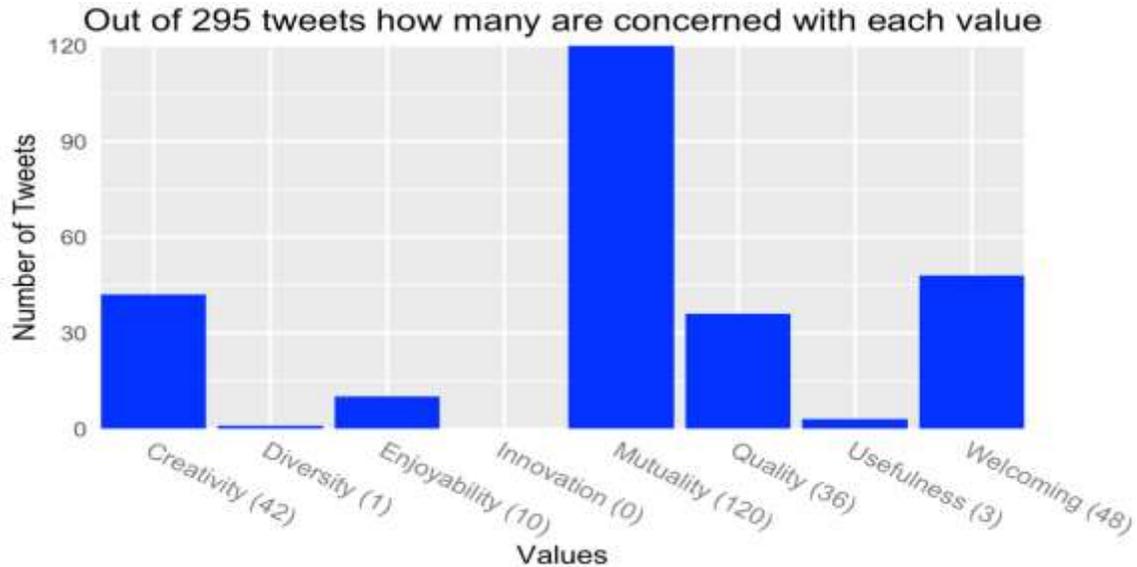


Figure 24: Number of tweets referencing the values promoted by the British Council, or the value of Shakespeare Lives/Shakespeare

Figure 24 indicates that Twitter users associated Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives with the values of ‘mutuality’ (42%), ‘welcoming’ (16%) and creativity (14%). The value of ‘diversity’ (0.3%) is lacking in comparison to the earlier analysis of tweets posted around Shakespeare Day, and the value of ‘innovation’ was absent from our data. In terms of the value of Shakespeare and Shakespeare live, 12% of Twitter users made reference to good quality, and 3% of them expressed their enjoyment. The value of ‘mutuality’ was mainly reflected in tweets about as the performance of Shakespeare’s plays (for example *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) in Chinese theatres, co-celebration of Shakespeare and Chinese famous playwright, Tang Xianzu, as well as the performance of their plays in both China and Britain. The other two values the British Council sought to promote through Shakespeare Lives, ‘welcoming’ and ‘creativity’, were mainly reflected in tweets with the same themes. Creativity was perceived in new forms of performance, especially those which drew upon plays from different cultures (such as China or Spain). The ‘welcoming’ value was usually perceived in relation to the visit to Shakespeare’s hometown by Twitter users.

The analysis shows that 92% of tweets which made reference to one of the values (creativity; diversity; innovation; mutuality; welcoming) were promoting or providing information about Shakespeare or the Shakespeare Lives programme. On the other hand, tweets relating to the value of Shakespeare or the Shakespeare Lives programme (referencing enjoyability, quality, or

usefulness) were mainly tweets that reported engagement with the programme or offered an opinion. Interestingly, the findings show that alternative media and bloggers played a major role in associating Shakespeare Lives with values, followed by members of the public, and mainstream media sources. In terms of discussing the value of the programme, most of these tweets came from members of the public.

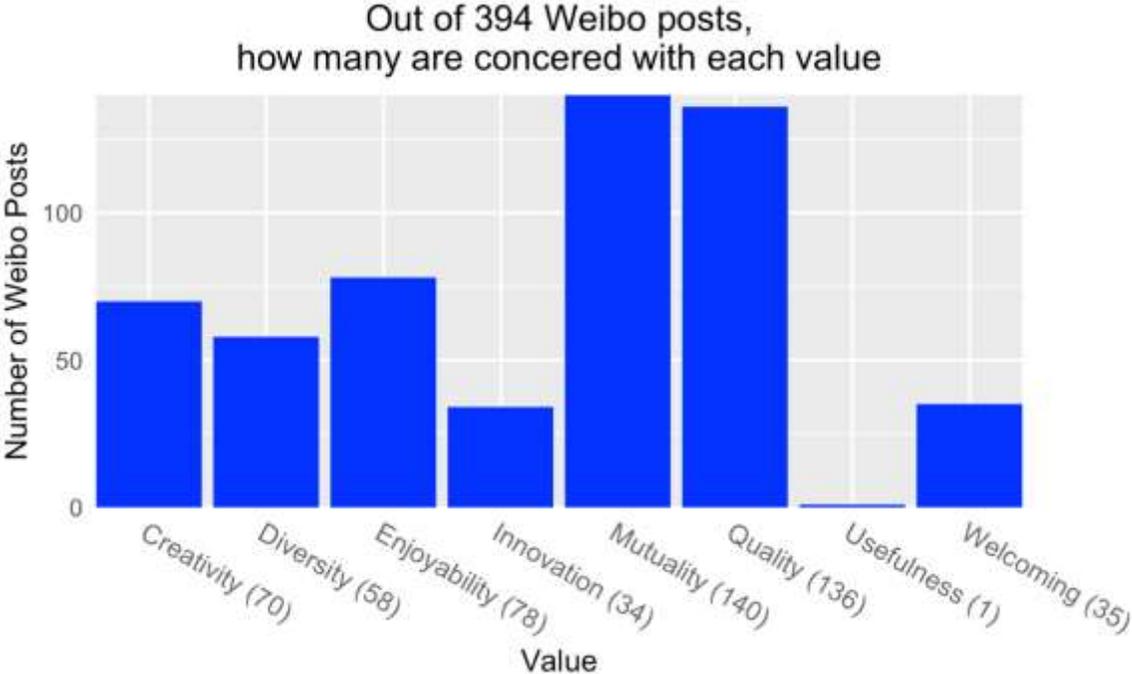


Figure 25: Number of Weibo posts referencing the values promoted by the British Council, or the value of Shakespeare Lives/Shakespeare

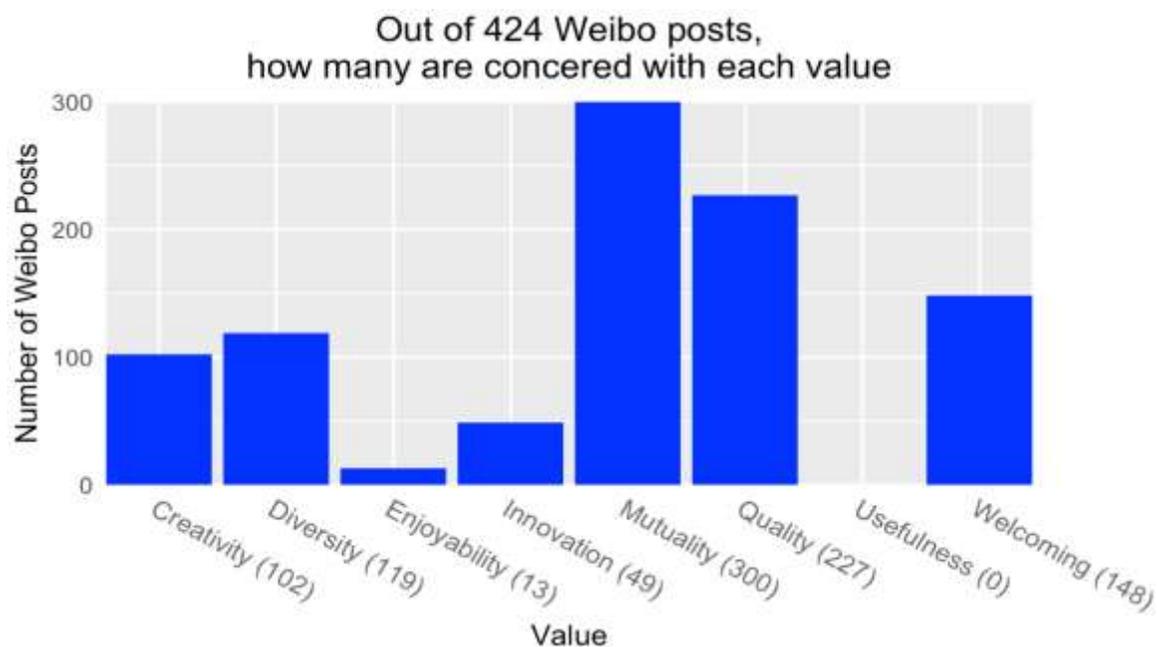


Figure 26: Number of non-British Council Weibo posts referencing the values promoted by the British Council, or the value of Shakespeare Lives/Shakespeare

Figure 25 and Figure 26 above show that on Weibo, Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives were frequently associated with the values of mutuality (54% of all Weibo posts), welcoming (22%), diversity (22%), creativity (21%), and innovation (10%). In terms of the perceived value of Shakespeare and Shakespeare lives, 44% made a reference to quality and 11% to enjoyability (with no references to usefulness or relevance).

The value of ‘mutuality’, as the value most associated with the programme, was largely reflected in posts such as: Sir Ian McKellen’s performance at Smart Talk and Shanghai International, Festival British embassy open day, Shakespeare Arts Festivals hosted by the University and the British Council, the performance of Shakespeare’s plays in China, performance of Tang Xianzu’s plays and Shakespeare’s plays in British theatres. For example:



Image 5: National Centre for the Performing Arts Weibo post reflecting the value of 'mutuality'

Translation for Image 5 above: In this special year of Shakespeare's 400th Anniversary, world theatres are celebrating his anniversary in various forms. The National Centre for the Performing Arts welcomed another ballet performance – Romeo and Juliet yesterday. German Stuttgart Ballet and the National Ballet of China will present a dancing feast for us.

The second most frequently referenced value was 'welcoming'. It mainly featured in posts about the visit to Shakespeare's hometown, the openness of the British Embassy in China, the invitation to the participation in Smart Talk by the British Council, or any messages welcoming reading to attend Shakespeare Lives events. For example:



Image 6: British Consulate General Guangzhou Weibo post reflecting the value of 'welcoming'

Translation for Image 6 above: The best international TNT of Britain will perform the classical comedy of Shakespeare – The Taming of the Shrew, at Xinghai Music Hall in Guangzhou. They will meet audiences at Lianhe Book Store in Zhujiang, and share their journey of discovery of Shakespeare. Everyone is welcomed to join us. #Shakespeare Lives#

The ‘diversity’ value was the third most present value among all the Weibo posts. This refers to the diverse ideas and identities. If the post showed different forms of performance, or new elements perceived as modern or international incorporated in the performance, or actors in Shakespeare’s plays from all over the world, or the diverse revision of the Shakespeare’s plays, it was coded as featuring the diversity value. For example:



Image 7: Shanghai Administration of Culture, Radio, Film & TV Weibo post, reflecting the value of 'diversity'

Translation for Image 7 above: [The English Concert came to Shanghai yesterday evening] Wrapping up for the ‘Falling in Love with Shakespeare’ season by Shanghai Grand Theatre. In the 400th Anniversary of Shakespeare in 2016, Shanghai Grand Theatre has promoted ‘Falling in Love with Shakespeare’ arts season for nearly a year. The season covers diverse performances including drama, symphony concert, musical, ballet and modern dance and so on, and nearly a hundred of thematic activities such as forums and theatre open day. It has had 20 excellent performances from Britain, Switzerland, America, Russia and China, and various artistic activities brought by hundreds of artists and over 20 partners. The season has attracted over 40 thousands audiences.

The creativity value was coded for posts discussing the creation of new forms of arts, plays and theatre performance, and creative ideas including the use of new technologies to promote Shakespeare and his works or other Shakespeare related activities or events. Some diverse ideas about performance were also counted as creativity. For example:



Image 8: British Embassy in China Weibo post, reflecting the 'creativity' value

Translation for Image 8 above: Combine immersive theatre and Shakespeare's classic works; come and experience #Shakespeare Lives#. #World is stage#@British Council: the background is set in 1930s in China, has 10 themes, you will stay with over 300 characters in nearly 100 rooms, and go back to the old times in Shanghai. One of the most popular immersive theatres in the world is made by the British team. The inspiration comes from Shakespeare's works. It will come to Shanghai in December.

The ‘innovative’ value was the least referenced value in Weibo posts. This value refers to organisational change, manufacturing, technology and business innovation. For example:



Image 9: Royal Shakespeare Company Weibo post, reflecting the 'innovative' value

Translation for Image 9 above: The first English translation of the Chinese play – SNOW IN MIDSUMMER by RSC will be performed at Swan Theatre at RSC between 23 Feb and 25 Mar 2017. What kind of spark will the Chinese classic play have on the British theatre? Looking forward to it.

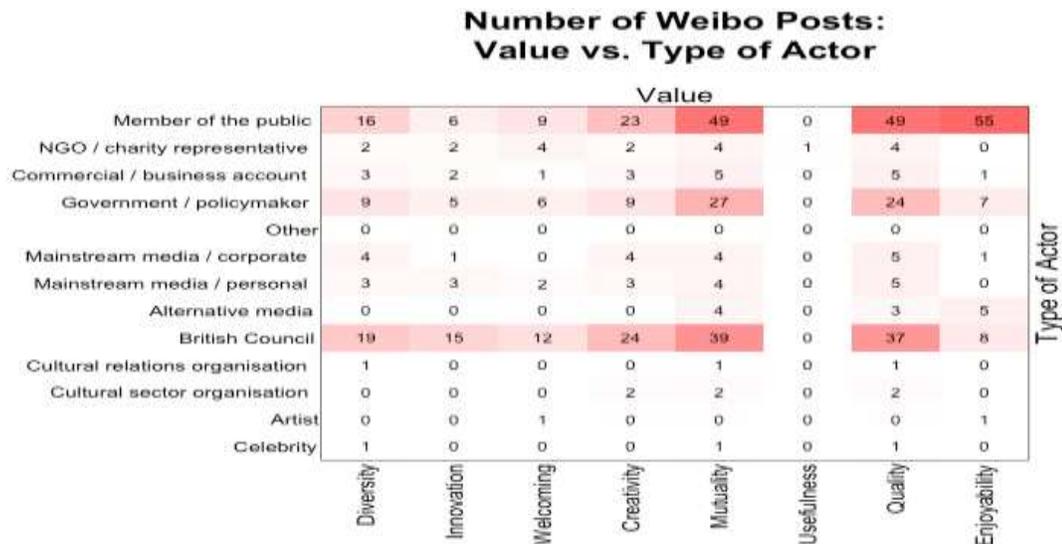


Figure 27: Number of Weibo posts by value/perception of being valuable and actor type

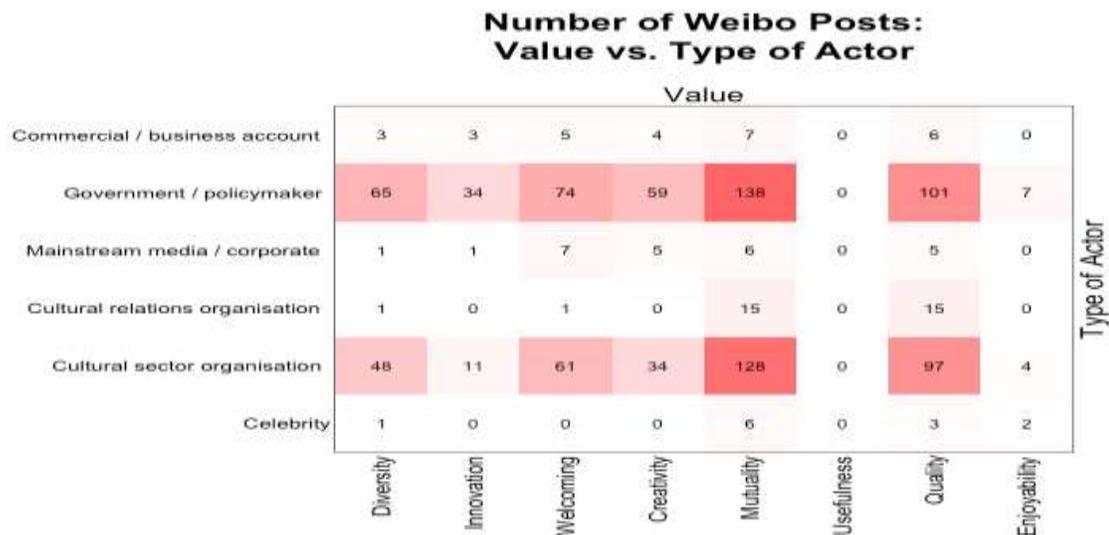


Figure 28: Number of non-British Council Weibo posts by value/perceptions of value and actor type

The analysis of the number of posts by each actor type concerned with each value/perception of value (see Figure 27 and Figure 28 above) reveals that government/policymaker accounts were the major actor in projecting the five values the British Council aimed to promote (50% of all actors), followed by cultural sector organisations (30%). 11% of British Council posts reflected these values. In other words, the results show that the British Council was not the main actor in projecting the values of diversity, innovation, creativity, mutuality, and welcoming. The accounts of government/policymakers mainly refer to accounts that are run by the British Embassy in China, and officers from the British Consulate General in China. Cultural sector organisations are mainly partner theatres such as the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Shanghai Drama Art Centre, and the National Centre for the Performing Arts. Government/policymaker was also the most active actor in reporting their enjoyable experiences in engaging in Shakespeare Lives activities on Weibo (30% of the posts referring to usefulness, quality, and/or enjoyability), followed by the general public (23%) and cultural sector organisations (23%).

Similar to our findings for Twitter, the majority of the Weibo posts (76%) that included a reference to the five values were posts promoting and providing information about the Shakespeare Lives programme, while 12% came from the posts reporting engagement with the programme.

This analysis reveals that ‘mutuality’ was the value most associated with Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives on both Twitter and Weibo, followed by the ‘welcoming’ value. The values of ‘diversity’ and ‘innovation’ were exhibited more on Weibo than Twitter. The analysis also demonstrates that partner organisations of the British Council, in particular government/policymaker accounts and cultural sector organisations, played the most active role in projecting these values on Weibo. Alternative media and bloggers, the general public and mainstream media were also more active in presenting these values on Twitter. This result indicates that the British Council was not the main actor promoting the values it wishes to associate

with Britain through the Shakespeare Lives programme on either Twitter and Weibo. This supports the argument made in the previous section that the content of British Council tweets and Weibo posts lacked a reflection of British culture and values. In contrast, partner organisations of the British Council published some comprehensive information that well reflected these values.

We will now look more closely at how the British Council promoted the Shakespeare Lives programme on Weibo, by presenting the findings from our ethnographic analysis of the themes discussed in British Council Weibo posts, and the extent to which users engaged with content about these different themes.

6.2 Weibo (British Council Posts and User Engagement)

This ethnographic analysis of discussions about Shakespeare Lives was conducted on the official Weibo page of the British Council, and the Weibo page titled #永恒的莎士比亚# (#Shakespeare Lives#) which is hosted by the British Council. This analysis also examined the comments posted by users in response to the most popular posts, as well as the level of engagement with all posts in the form of forwards (shares), comments, and likes.

6.2.1 Themes

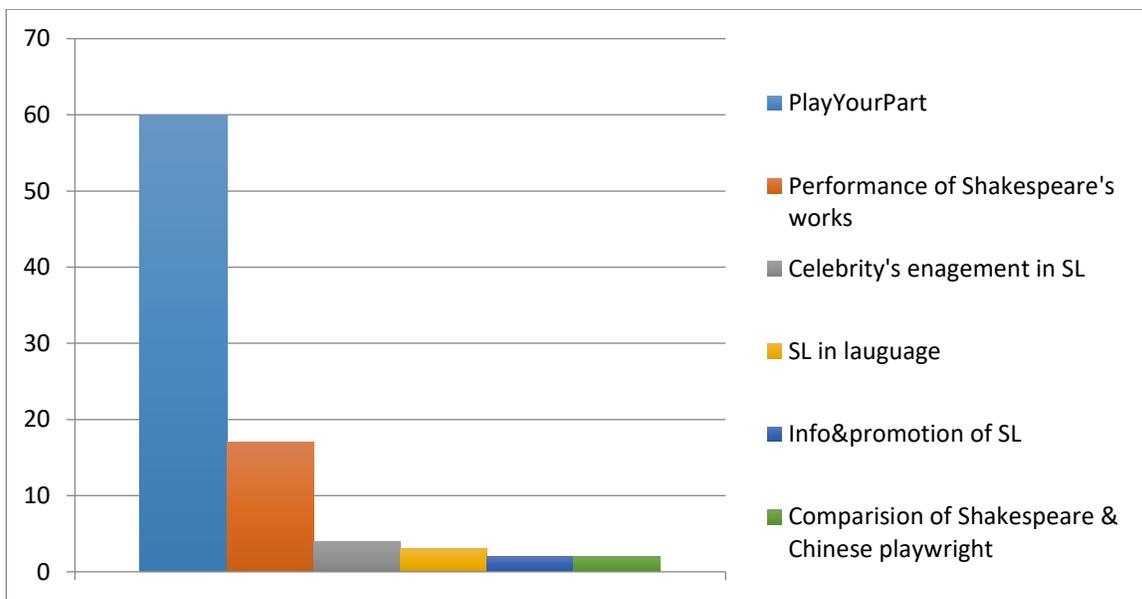


Figure 29: Number of Weibo posts by theme

Figure 29 above reveals that Play Your Part was once again the dominant theme of the British Council Weibo posts (68% of all posts) between 1 July and 19 October. The second most dominant theme was the performance of Shakespeare's works (19%). Posts about the celebrity engagement with Shakespeare Lives made only a small portion during this later period (5%), which contrasts with previous phase of research which featured Sir Ian's visit to China starting on 7 June. The

small number of celebrity posts during this later period still referred to Sir Ian, through his participation in Smart Talk and Play Your Part during his visit to China. Other themes received very infrequent attention, such as Shakespeare Lives in the English Language (3%), information and promotion of Shakespeare Lives (2%), and comparison of Shakespeare and a Chinese playwright (2%).

As we noted earlier, [Play Your Part](#) is one of the Shakespeare Lives campaigns that ran throughout 2016. It encourages the public to share on their favourite Shakespeare quotes from his plays or poems or their favourite Shakespeare moments. It is a social-media oriented interactive programme. Our first phase of research showed that that the majority of the posts involving Play Your Part referenced saw celebrities (such as Downton Abbey star Hugh Bonneville and Sir Ian McKellen) or public figures (such as the Director of Shanghai Drama Art Centre and the British Ambassador to China) presenting quotes by Shakespeare.

[Shakespeare on the Metro](#) was launched on Shanghai Metro Line 2 on 31 August 2016. The British Council encouraged the Chinese public, as part of Play Your Part, to share their encounters with Shakespeare on the Metro through photos, short videos or by sharing the quotes they saw (British Council, 2016a) (see Image 10 below). By doing so, people would have the chance to win “special Shanghai Metro day passes issued to commemorate the 400th-year of the death of Shakespeare, Chinese playwright Tang Xianzu, and Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes” (British Council, 2016) (see Image 11 below).



Image 10: Shakespeare Lives on Metro Line 2 in Shanghai



纪念汤显祖、莎士比亚、塞万提斯逝世 400 周年

400th anniversary of the deaths of
Tang Xianzu - William Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes



汤显祖

莎士比亚

塞万提斯

Image 11: Shanghai Metro day passes, a potential prize for sharing experiences of Shakespeare on the Metro on Weibo

The British Council intensively published posts with the hashtag #shmetro# or #PlayYourPart# from 31 August to 14 October. This included announcing the event, replying to Weibo users' reporting of their encounters with Shakespeare on Metro, releasing train schedules, reminding users of the Shakespeare metro train, reminding them of the ending time of the competition, and announcing the award lists (see Image 12 below).



Image 12: Two British Council Weibo posts about Shakespeare on the Metro and Play Your Part

6.2.2 Engagement with the Shakespeare Lives Programme on Weibo

Following the same form of analysis as used in the first phase of research, we measured engagement with British Council Weibo posts about Shakespeare Lives by combining the number of ‘forwards’ (reposts), ‘likes’ and ‘comments’. The level of engagement was then categorised as being very high (over 1000), high (500-999), medium (100-499), low (10-99), or very low (0-9).

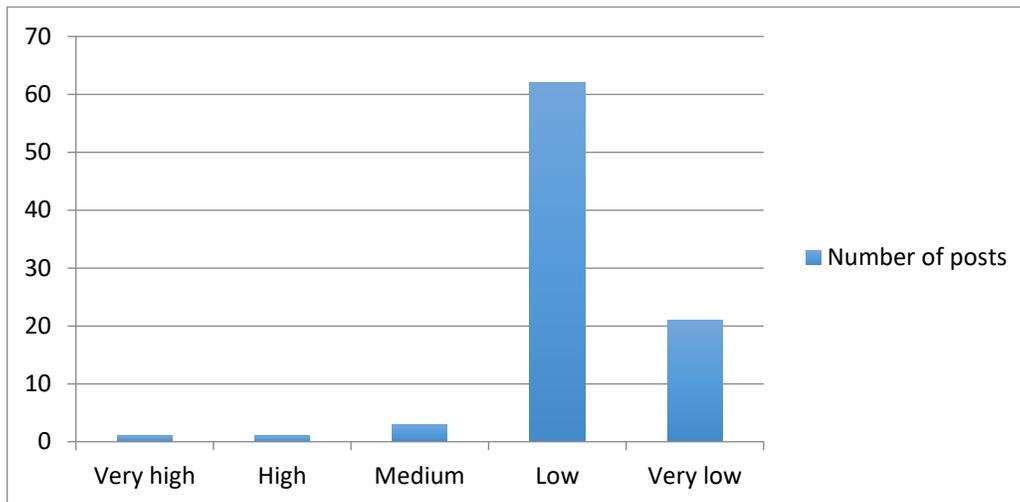


Figure 30: Number of Weibo posts by level of engagement

Figure 30 above shows that 71% of posts registered a low scale engagement, 26% higher than the number of posts receiving low engagement during our first phase of research. 21 posts (24%) attracted very low attention from Weibo users (compared to 16% during the first phase). Compared with the engagement with Shakespeare Lives posts on Weibo during the first phase, the number of posts receiving a high level of engagement rate significantly decreased from 10% (11 posts) to 2% (two posts) in the period of 1 July and 19 October.

During our first phase of research, Sir Ian McKellen’s visit to Shanghai People’s park on 11 June received the most engagement: 38,766 forwards (reposts), 37,414 likes and 5,942 comments. Three other posts relating to Sir Ian’s visits received very high attention from Weibo users (total number of interactions was 1,540, 2,121 and 4,446). The posts about the performance of Prince Charles as Hamlet alongside British actors David Tennant, Tim Minchin, Benedict Cumberbatch during Shakespeare Day Live registered high on the engagement scale as well (1,188 reposts, 232 likes and 87 comments).

In contrast, the post that registered the highest scale of engagement between 1 July and 19 October was reposted 660 times, and received 229 comments and 360 likes. This post was about Citizens Advertising Takeover Service replacing all advertisements at the London Clapham Common station with posters of cats, using crowd-funding resources. The British Council used this event to encourage Weibo users to go and see the Shanghai Shakespeare Metro Line (see Image 13 below).



Image 13: British Council Weibo post about Shakespeare on the Metro



Image 14: British Council Weibo post about Shakespeare on the Metro and Sir Ian McKellen in China

Another post received relatively high attention (272 reposts, 59 comments and 208 likes). This post intended to encourage Weibo users to take part in the Shanghai Shakespeare Metro Line by recalling Sir Ian McKellen’s visit to China. The post was followed by a set of McKellen’s pictures with quote boards (see Image 14 above).

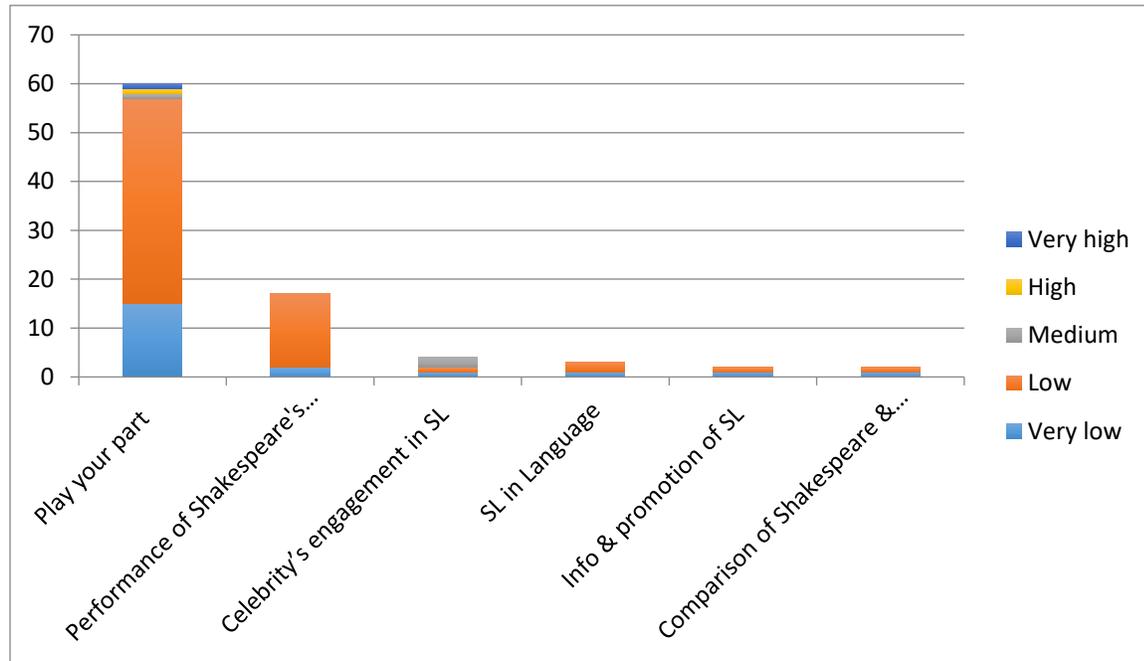


Figure 31: Level of engagement with British Council Weibo posts by theme

Figure 31 above reveals that the two most dominant themes of British Council Weibo posts registered the lowest levels of engagement. Two out of four posts relating to Sir Ian McKellen’s visit to China (Celebrity engagement with Shakespeare Lives theme) received moderate attention from Weibo users (105 and 241 interactions respectively). Posts about the performance of Shakespeare’s works received a low level of engagement rate by Weibo users (88% of low engagement posts and 12% of very low engagement posts). The theme most frequently used by the British Council, Play Your Part, failed to receive significant attention, as we also saw in the first phase of our research. 70% of the posts about Play Your Part received low engagement, while 25% of posts received very low engagement.

Compared with other Shakespeare Lives events and campaigns, Play Your Part is a public campaign that is supposed to be easily accessible, allowing for the widest participation, and the most frequent interaction with opportunities for member of the public to show their engagement with Shakespeare Lives on Weibo. However, it received the least attention from Weibo users. In contrast, the posts regarding McKellen’s visit received moderate attention even after his visit to China had concluded. This comparison supports the finding from our first phase of research that celebrity engagement has the most effective impact on engagement of Weibo users with British Council posts about Shakespeare Lives. The high interaction rate with posts about Sir Ian McKellen’s engagement with Shakespeare Lives suggests that the British Council can invite

Chinese or British celebrities to take part in campaigns such as Play Your Part, and cultural and charitable programmes more broadly, to gain publicity and encourage greater public engagement.

6.2.3 Weibo Users' Comments on British Council Posts

The posts selected for analysis of comments on British Council Weibo posts were those that received a high level of engagement across the phases of our research.

Sir Ian McKellen's visit to Shanghai People's park on 11 June received 5,975 comments. Sir Ian joined the corner of blind date in the park, with his personal details on the paper:

Ian, 77 years, Cambridge University, house in London, still active.

It is a very popular phenomenon in Shanghai that parents go to the blind date corner for their children who do not normally have spare time for dating, with a list of personal details normally including age, job, property, health, and qualifications. What Sir Ian McKellen did in Shanghai is very much in the spirit of "When in Rome, do as the Romans do". Parents going to blind date for children is a very hot topic in China. Sir Ian's popularity in China and the enthusiasm for this trend received a great deal of attention from Weibo users.



Image 15: British Council Weibo post about Sir Ian McKellen's visit to the Shanghai People's Park

The comments included the following themes:

- Praise for Sir Ian as a well-known and respected actor;
- Admiration for him;
- Surprise about his visit;
- Expressions that Sir Ian is adorable;
- Expressions that what he was doing is funny;
- Discussions about his personal details;
- Some humorous comments about Sir Ian.

For example:

- 原来是兔纸啊：伦敦有房，剑桥毕业，哈哈。 Translation: house in London, graduated from Cambridge, haha (laughing).
- 一只弥鹿：高富帅 哈哈哈哈哈，爷爷是我男神。 Translation: tall, rich, handsome..... Hahahaha, Grandpa is my idol.

Most of the comments regarding Sir Ian’s visit to People’s Park in Shanghai were positive or humorous, and they were pertinent to the content of the post. All of the comments came from members of the public, showing the success of Sir Ian’s visit in engaging the public with Shakespeare Lives content on Weibo.



Image 16: Comments on the British Council Weibo post about Sir Ian McKellen's visit to the Shanghai People's Park

The second post is about the cat pictures on the London Clapham Common station on 14 September 2016 (see Image 13). The British Council used this to encourage Weibo users to get involved with the Shanghai Shakespeare Metro Line. This post received the most attention from Weibo users during the second phase of our research (660 reposts, 229 comments and 360 likes).

The comments included the following themes:

- Envy of people who live in London;
- Expressions of a desire to visit London;
- Praise for the creative and artistic idea;
- Expressions that the kittens are cute;
- Some humorous comments about the kitten pictures.

For example:

- 孙子云康宁://@与欧洲有关的一切：好暖～用爱和美好呈现艺术～抬头，看有一只喵出没：用爱和艺术改变世界的意识！ Translation: so warm ~ represent Arts with love and beauty ~ lift your head, see a kitty: change the awareness of the world with love and arts.
- 蛋挞控：羡慕伦敦人民（羡慕表情）。 Translation: Envy people in London (admiring emoji).
- DNA007: 喵星人大举入侵伦敦地铁（大笑表情包）。 Translation: Cat-Men are invading London (laughing emoji).

Most of the comments were positive or humorous. Again, all of the comments came from members of the public, however most of them responded to the kitty pictures at London train station rather than the Shanghai Shakespeare Metro Line.



Image 17: Comments on a Weibo post about cat pictures at Clapham Common station in London

The third post encouraged Weibo users to take part in the Shanghai Shakespeare Metro Line by recalling Sir Ian’s participation in Play Your Part in China (see Image 13). This was reposted 271 times, and received 59 comments and 208 likes.

The comments included the following themes:

- The British Council announcing the winners;
- Expressions that the prize is tempting;
- Cannot participate because not in Shanghai;
- Will take the metro;
- Surprise to see Sir Ian;

For example:

- 青年女士：希望在帝都也能有这样的推广活动，毕竟一号线的把手广告非常无趣。
Translation: Hope the similar event could be promoted in Beijing; after all, the handle advertising on the Line 1 is very boring.
- Colley_Kings：等于说又是只有上海才能参加。川渝桑不起(哭的表情包)
Translation: It means that only those who are in Shanghai can participate. We, who are from Sichuan, get hurt (crying emoji)

-小昕王杨：卧槽卧槽我明天就去做地铁（微笑表情包）。 Translation: Wow, I will take the metro tomorrow (smiling emoji).

The features of these comments are similar to the comments of the previous two posts. Most of the comments are positive and pertinent to the content of the post.

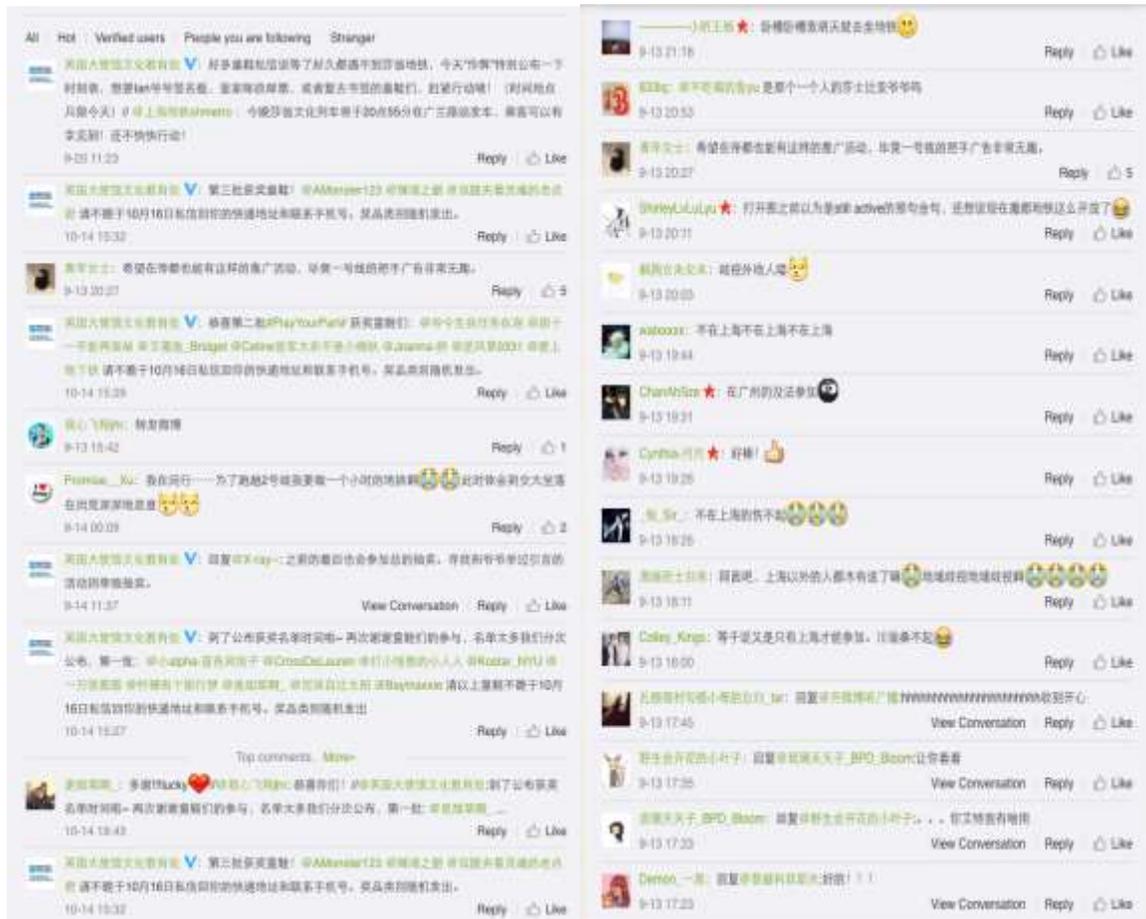


Image 18: Comments on a Weibo post about Shakespeare on the Metro and Sir Ian McKellen's visit to China

The analysis of the comments from these three posts indicates that where there was engagement with British Council posts, Weibo users responded with a positive, humorous tone. There were no assertively patriotic or anti-Western sentiments in the comments.

7 Conclusions

The most common type of Twitter users discussing Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives are members of the public and alternative media and bloggers. However, partner organisations (such as government/policymaker accounts and cultural sector organisations) played the most active role in publishing Shakespeare Lives related posts. While the geographic distribution of Twitter users was still largely untraceable, a fairly large number of users were located in Taiwan. 81% of Weibo users were located in Mainland China.

Most tweets promoted and provided information about the Shakespeare Lives programme or Shakespeare. Most of this information was about the performance of Shakespeare's plays, and was provided by members of the public and alternative media or bloggers. Weibo posts also largely focused on promoting and providing information about the Shakespeare Lives programme, but the British Council, cultural sector organisations and government/policymaker accounts were the key actors in promoting and providing information on Weibo. In comparison to Twitter, the information about the Shakespeare Lives programme on Weibo was not only greater in scale but much more diverse in content, especially posts published by partner organisations. The majority of tweets and Weibo posts denoted a neutral tone, and the remainders largely denoted a positive tone. This analysis indicates that Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives were mainly associated with the values of mutuality, welcoming and creativity by Twitter users. Partner organisations played a key role in projecting the programme as one which incorporated the values of mutuality, welcoming, diversity, creativity and innovation.

The ethnographic analysis of Weibo posts indicates that Play Your Part was the dominant theme of British Council posts from 1 July to 19 October. Most British Council posts (94%) registered a low level of engagement from Weibo users during this period, with engagement significantly lower than during the first phase of our research when Sir Ian McKellen visited China. Even the post that registered the highest scale of engagement between July and October received much lower attention compared with posts regarding Sir Ian's visit. The most popular theme, Play Your Part, again failed to receive significant attention, receiving the same low level of engagement as we saw during the first phase of our research. However, when Weibo users *did* respond to British Council posts, they did so with a positive tone and frequent uses of humour. As with the other language reports, there is a balance to be found between information-high, dialogue-low communication with the kind of richer, more nuanced and engaging communication evident around the British Council's own posts.

Our main recommendations for the future improvement in the promotion of British Council cultural programmes in China is to draw more on Britain's resources of cultural diplomacy, and the positive image of Britain in China (Xinhua, 2015). Diversifying the content of Weibo posts and putting more emphasis on British culture could help to extend the British Council's social media reach in China. The British Council should also continue to utilise Weibo functions such as topic pages and hashtags, and also use trending topics, to promote cultural programmes and events.

This analysis also suggests that there are benefits in reposting links regarding discussions about Shakespeare-related British culture and cultural values, rather than intensively concentrating on posting Shakespeare quotes. Partner organisations have played a very active role in promoting the Shakespeare Lives programme on Weibo, and projecting the values the British Council sought to associate with it. The British Council should engage and interact further with these partners, and extend this collaborative approach to other social networks.

In China, our analysis shows that the engagement of celebrities with a programme is the most effective way to encourage engagement from members of the public. The British Council should continue to play to the strength of their association with popular figures, and continue to invite Chinese or British celebrities to take part in events and campaigns, sharing images and video from these visits widely across social media platforms.

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