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## SNS RESEARCH BRIEF SUMMARY

### Chinese media: politics and economy\*

Freedom of the press is a prerequisite for well-functioning democracies, since it enables citizens to hold political representatives accountable. Conversely, government-controlled press is considered a prerequisite for non-democracies. This report studies the latter case in the one-party state China. Even though Chinese media is strictly controlled, the level of control varies systematically among regions and is affected by competition. Further, this report shows how an authoritarian regime can use information from social media for surveillance. China is an interesting case for exploring these issues considering its leading position in the emerging industry of surveillance, propaganda and censorship, on social media. The corporations developing these products in China will in all likelihood expand to other countries as well.

This report has three key findings. First, competition within the communist party makes Chinese newspapers become less faithful to the regime. From national to regional levels the Chinese newspaper market is characterized by competition among the different party committees that owns the papers. Competition influence how regime-biased the newspapers are, and in what formats they are offered. Increasing competition causes newspapers to become less biased towards the regime.

Second, local newspapers erode the government's media strategies. Newspapers owned by low-level party

committees are less regime-biased. These newspapers crumble the media strategies of high-level government that aims to maximize political influence and economic profit.

Third, social media is used for surveillance and propaganda in China. Social media platforms contain millions of blog entries on corruption, protests and strikes, which makes the platforms means of surveillance. This report shows that protests can be surveilled and predicted, and corrupt politicians can be identified, through social media. Propaganda is also common; the regime is estimated to have double the amount of Sina Weibo accounts than they officially admit. Sina Weibo is the most prominent online public platform in China.

The report was presented at a seminar at SNS in Stockholm on October 3, 2018. Ola Wong, journalist and sinologist, commented on the report.

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\*This is a summary of a research brief in Swedish "Kinas medier: politik och ekonomi".

