



Exploring China's Social Credit System: Comparative Infrastructure Possibilities for Social Credit System in Westernised States

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Description

In our paper on China's social credit system in relation to digital platform ratings cultures in Westernized democracies, Amy Dobson and Wong explore how important tools for governance and centralisation of information are increasingly being used in China to create a new form of power in the form of a social credit system. We discuss the similar structures which are already present and in place in Western liberal democratic countries. The paper shows that China focuses on utilising social media platforms and applications whilst implementing a reward and punishment system which rewards those who comply with the Chinese Government's morals and punishes those who deviate from them due to the supposed ongoing moral decay in China. The social credit system is China's ambitious attempt in merging a financial credit score system with a broader quantification of civic and social integrity for citizens and firms. The constant digitisation of everyday economic, political and social life has formed similar aligned structures and cultures of social media use and quantification that are already well in place in Western liberal democratic countries. The growth of technology and continuous call towards digitisation of the self in democratic countries may in future make possible a system similar to China's social credit system should social media platforms continue on without the implementation of stricter policies around privacy and data usage in the future.

China's social credit system

The social credit systems currently being piloted till today in China comprises of 'blacklist' and red list' systems that supports reward and punishment mechanisms built into the system. Each citizen is expected to have their own exclusive score tailored to their behaviour, exemplary citizens with high scores will find themselves on 'red lists' whilst those with low scores will find themselves on 'blacklists'. Both the public and private sectors have cooperated

together in running pilot projects that are currently in place. The Sesame Credit is one of the more well-known pilot projects developed by Alibaba in which every individual in their database is given a sesame credit score. Sesame credit not only incorporates the traditional credit score systems developed in western countries but expands beyond that to include social ranking systems. Sesame credit plays a role in shaping the behaviour of Chinese citizens by 'nudging' individuals away from purchases, other individuals and behaviours that are frowned upon by those in power.

The constant advancement in technology has enabled the Chinese government to compile all accumulated data on Chinese citizens from digital databases and integrate them with technological tools to influence the Chinese society as a whole. Integrating systems that 'nudge' individuals towards compliance with facial recognition systems which allows for cross-referencing of surveillance footage with the various digital data on individuals in a centralised system plays a huge role in aiding the Chinese government's attempt to produce obedient and loyal citizens. Both the digital representation of individuals that is monitored, along with the faces and movements of bodies in physical spaces are now used by states such as China to govern people.

Currently with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the social credit system has evolved into a more diverse and flexible tool in incentivising compliance with new regulations and laws. Utilising the same method of providing 'nudges', this flexibility allowed the Chinese government to promptly punish those who defy compliance ranging from the violation of location disclosure and quarantine regulations, the selling of inferior or counterfeit medical wares and the overcharging of medical supplies.

The comparative of similar structure possibilities of social credit systems in Western states

In many Western countries, the concept of a credit score system has already been implemented and widely used but have shown signs of going beyond their stated function. In Germany, Schufa uses geo-scoring: Living in a substandard neighbourhood or even having neighbours with poor credit ratings can negatively affect one's overall credit rating. As an individual's credit score can influence their significant aspects of life such as the locations where one can live and career opportunities, these credit scores have evolved in exerting extensive power in several Western countries.

Conclusion

Although there are no systems as thorough as China's social credit system in Western countries anytime soon, similar structures and cultures are already in place. In view of this, the social credit system should be viewed as a warning to Western countries of what may come in the future. As the constant advancement of technology allows vast amounts of data to be collected and used to construct digital profiles of individuals and map their patterns, the digitizing of one's reputation and identity is already advancing well underway.