

Copyright

by

Jia Dai

2011

The Dissertation Committee for Jia Dai Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Deliberating in the Chinese Blogosphere:

A Study on Hotspot Internet Incidents

Committee:

Stephen D. Reese, Supervisor

Dominic Lasorsa

Robert Jensen

Joseph Straubhaar

Gidon Sjoberg

Deliberating in the Chinese Blogosphere:

A Study on Hotspot Internet Incidents

by

Jia Dai, B.A.; M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2011

Dedication

To my parents, my husband, and my daughter.

Acknowledgements

I could not have finished this research without the many hands that have helped me along the way. Thanks especially to my supervisor, Stephen Reese, who generously provided support when I needed it. Throughout the entire process of this study, he has been a steadfast source of wisdom and knowledge and has challenged me with insightful comments. He pushed me to think harder and more critically, to answer his favorite question at each stage—“So ... what?” I am blessed to have him as both a mentor and a friend. Dominic Lasorsa, who was a coauthor on my first journal articles, led me through the procedures of developing academic competence until I tasted the fun of publication. Robert Jensen, who is a firm believer of organized citizen action, and whom I deeply admire, always kept me alert to the unfounded certainty about how civil deliberation and movement will be realized through spontaneous and sporadic grass-roots actions. Joseph Straubhaar, who first piqued my interest in global communication when I read his work in the National Library of China in 2002 as a master’s student, kept inspiring me to explore media and communication with a global perspective. Gidon Sjoberg, whose class on the current debates in sociology theories, broadened my views on understanding and interpreting social phenomenon and who won my respect for his keen desire to learn about global issues even after retirement.

A few faculty members also deserve special acknowledgement for their generous support. Maxwell McCombs taught me how to develop a great concept and model and to constantly refine it to enhance and enrich it. Iris Chyi, a creative thinker in media economics and a friend, checked with me now and then to make sure that I was making progress. Paula Poindexter encouraged me to balance life as a mother and as a student

writing a dissertation. Qi Cai, my teacher and friend, started me on this academic journey and has been a source of motivation for me ever since.

Thanks to the following friends who made my years in Austin a beautiful memory that I will treasure my entire life: Wei-ching Wang, Nan Zheng, Yi-Hsin Yeh, Jing-rong Huang, M. Jacie Yang, Ching-hui Hsiao, Soo J Moon, Kideuk Hyun, Amy Schmitz Weiss, Sara Struckman and Robert Handley.

Most of all, thanks to my family. My Mom, Zhenglan Gao, and Dad, Niusong Dai, have given me unconditional support over the years—for whatever I decided to do. My sister, Jing Dai, and my brother-in-law, Deyong Zhang, helped recruit the coders for my study and then organized the coding team. My husband, Yichao Cui, contributed in countless ways, to both this study and to my doctoral degree as a whole, and whose love, care, and understanding has been my safe harbor at all times. While writing my dissertation, my daughter, Jane, was born. She is now two-and-a-half years old. I am blessed that she was so cooperative—it was as if she understood Mom’s crazy schedule. Her laugh has always rejuvenated me with new hope.

Deliberating in the Chinese Blogosphere:

A Study on Hotspot Internet Incidents

Jia Dai, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: Stephen D. Reese

The concept of deliberation, both theoretically and empirically, was examined in the Chinese blogosphere by content analyzing Internet blog posts and comments, associated with sixty hotspot incidents in China from 2007 through 2009. Measurements of analytic and social processes were made and the factors that affect these processes were examined to identify deliberative patterns in the blog posts and comments. The findings suggest relatively substantial deliberative outcomes in the blog posts about the incidents, especially relating to the analytic process. Two variables were examined with respect to the factors that determine deliberation: an incident's category (non-threatening, threat to performance, and threat to legitimacy) as classified under the command and control system, and information availability (news availability and total information availability) about the incident.

Findings support the theoretical framework proposed in the study and suggest the following logical sequences: Firstly, the Chinese command and control system is a significant factor in explaining deliberative outcomes about incidents that can be categorized according to their level of considered threat to the system. An incident that was considered to be at a higher level of threat linked to a higher level of deliberation. Secondly, the command and control system also determines the information availability of an incident but in a negative way— incidents with higher threat levels have lower levels of information availability. Thirdly, information availability, in turn, predicted deliberation on its own—higher levels of information availability link to lower levels of

deliberation. Moreover, information availability functioned as a moderating variable between the command and control system and the deliberative outcomes. Posts that were associated with non-threatening and threat to performance incidents, with higher levels of information availability, tended to have a lower quality of deliberation. Posts associated with incidents that were a threat to legitimacy, with lower level of information availability, yielded similar deliberative patterns that were of relatively high quality.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	xii
List of Figures	xiii
List of Figures	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background: Blogging and Hotspot Internet Incidents in China.....	1
Purpose of Study	5
The Basic Framework	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
Theory of Public Deliberation	11
Deliberation as a Normative Ideal	11
Deliberation and Political Conversation	14
The Analytic and Social Processes of Deliberation	17
The Changing Chinese Media and Communication	21
Traditional Media.....	21
Internet Media	25
Authoritarian Deliberation: A Chinese Approach	28
Blogging as Deliberative Communication?	34
CHAPTER THREE: BLOGGING AND INTERNET INCIDENTS	37
Blogging in Transitional China.....	37
History of Development.....	37
Early Stage: 2002-2003.....	37
Growing Stage: 2004-2006	37
Rapid Developing Stage: 2007-present	39
Differentiating Blog from BBS Forums	40
Blog Service Providers (BSPs)	43

Censorship and Surveillance.....	43
Rehearsing Democracy?	45
Blogging vs. Journalism.....	46
Mass Incidents and Internet Incidents.....	48
Studying the Blogosphere.....	55
CHAPTER FOUR: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	58
The Central-Local Relationship Paradigm: A Command and Control System ...	59
Threats to Core Interests vs. Non-threatening	60
Information Availability of Internet Incidents.....	64
Research Questions and Hypotheses	71
Category of Command and Control System → Deliberation	73
Category of Command and Control System → Information Availability ...	77
Information Availability→ Deliberation	80
Category of Command and Control System → Deliberation (Information availability as an intervening variable).....	81
CHAPTER FIVE. METHOD	86
Sampling Incidents.....	86
Categorizing Hotspot Internet Incidents	87
Sampling Blog Posts	90
Measuring Information Availability	91
Content Analysis.....	94
Unit of Analysis	96
Measuring Deliberation	97
Other Measurements	104

CHAPTER SIX. RESULTS.....	107
Univariate Analysis.....	108
Bivariate Analysis.....	111
Category of Command and Control System → Deliberation	111
Category of Command and Control System → Information Availability .	114
Information Availability→ Deliberation	116
Multivariate Analysis.....	118
Relation between Category and Deliberation: Information Availability as An Intervening Variable	118
Test of Mediation.....	118
Test of Moderation.....	119
Summary of Hypotheses Test.....	120
CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION	129
Major Findings and Implications.....	129
The general deliberative pattern in the Chinese blogosphere	129
Category of Command and Control System → Deliberation (direct impact)	130
Category of Command and Control System → Information Availability .	133
Information Availability→ Deliberation	134
Category of Command and Control System → Deliberation (indirect impact through information availability).....	139
Significance of the study.....	141
Building on Gastil’s model	141
Originality and Theoretical Contribution.....	143
Limitations and Future Research	144
Appendices.....	149
References.....	157
Vita	165

List of Tables

Table 1. A Typology of Chinese Online Media.....	27
Table 2. Category of the Command and Control System	75
Table 3. Categorized Internet Incidents	88
Table 4. Factor Analysis for Analytic Measurements	101
Table 5. Frequency for Category of Command and Control System	108
Table 6. Means of Deliberative Outcomes	109
Table 7. Means of Information Availability	110
Table 8. Frequency of Originality.....	110
Table 9. Means of Pictures, Blog traffic and Blog Update Frequency	111
Table 11. Univariate General Linear Model for Information Availability by Category of Command and Control System.....	114
Table 12. Correlations between Information Availability and Measurements of Deliberation.....	117
Table 13. Univariate General Linear Model for Deliberation by Originality.....	123

List of Figures

Figure 1. The Theoretical Framework	9
Figure 2. Key Features of Deliberation.....	18
Figure 3. Estimated Mass Incidents in China 1993-2005	50
Figure 4. Command and Control System, Information Availability and Deliberation	83
Figure 5. The Moderating Effect of Information Availability.....	120
Figure 6. Relationship among Category of Command and Control System, Information Availability and Deliberation.....	122
Figure 7. Relationship between Originality, Pictures, Blog Traffic, Blog Update Frequency and Deliberation.....	128

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background: Blogging and Hotspot Internet Incidents in China

Weblogs represent an important emergent form of public life. As web pages frequently updated with posts centered around one topic and arranged in reverse chronological order (Blood, 2002), blogs are characterized by their self-generated content, volunteer commentating, and connected networks of discourse through features such as links, cross-postings (posting identical material on multiple pages), track backs (records of the pages that link to a specific page) and tags (metadata that assist in sorting and finding articles on a particular topic). These specific features have led many to envision their potential to advance public deliberation: a problem-solving form of communication, centered on a current social or political issue, in which diverse, competing ideas are presented, exchanged, and debated by citizens to form better reasoned opinions and decision-making in public affairs (Bohman, 1996; Cohen, 1989; Habermas, 1989). As a unique decentralized communicative form, blogging, and the networked community encompassing blogs – the blogosphere – has been documented as having deliberative potential by advancing discussion of social problems (Maratea, 2008), functioning as a vehicle for enhanced civic involvement (Kerbel & Bloom, 2005), and contributing to a more democratic global public sphere that is “more open to participation by more kinds of people – than in the pre-Internet era” (MacKinnon, 2008, p. 254).

While blogs’ deliberative potential in Western societies corresponds with the established liberal democratic tradition, it remains unclear whether it is even a legitimate concern to explore deliberation-relevant properties of the blogosphere in non-democratic countries where Internet communication is under surveillance and individual expression is often regulated by the state. Is it that a democratic regime is a necessary condition to

harbor public deliberation, or is it that people in non-democratic countries could effectively experiment, albeit in limited ways, with deliberative participation in political life?

Answering these questions seems to be urgent and significant now that Internet technology has been employed as popular communicative forms in non-democratic nations such as China. In China, home to the world's largest Internet user population, the rapid growth of blogs (295 million bloggers by the end of 2010) implies that a great communicative power is taking shape through the new media (CNNIC, 2011). This giant volume of blog use and the social and political meaning behind it have invited discussion about whether it represents a new media form that could eventually break through the authoritarian-restricted media environment and nurture a transparent and fair communication system that leads to reasonable policy-making.

Hotspot Internet incidents that have emerged in Chinese cyberspace in recent years have created a significant subject to study for research on public deliberation. Hotspots are "incidents" that break out suddenly as single, episodic occurrences online or offline, usually with no formal organization and unattached to any durative social movement. However, due to the highly controversial issues involved, they usually invite enormous, intensive attention among "netizens" and intriguing public discussion across various Internet platforms. They are "Internet" incidents in that they tap into salient issues attracting enormous attention and common concern (heated debates and emotional excitation) online. The social impact of these events then expand via the Internet. A typical hotspot Internet incident, for example, involves a clash between the interests of the authorities and those of average citizens, such as one between an authority of urban construction and a tenacious house owner who is forced to move but refuses to do so, instead taking a dramatic approach such as self-immolation in protest. As "hotspots,"

these incidents often aggregate public deliberation that is unattainable in terms of breadth and depth with other incidents or issues.

This study looks at sixty hotspot Internet incidents from 2007 through 2009 in China as a gateway to explore the deliberative style in the Chinese blogosphere. They represent the rising trend of incidents that have occurred online in recent years through which netizens aggregated, often in an unorganized way, to comment on important issues, appeal for social justice, and shape the public opinion that may influence the policy-making process. Different from traditional incidents – in which the impact is limited offline – these hotspots either broke out online or, as offline incidents, successfully drew tremendous attention due to Internet distribution of information about them. Given their top rank in the current online world, they constitute critical moments that make public discussion on certain issues especially visible and significant. They are the most recent and prominent cases in which the Internet has cracked open a channel for citizens to voice mass discontent toward social injustice and abuse of power, demonstrating the Internet’s potential as a catalyst for social change. Among all Internet platforms, blogs played a critical role in giving rise to public deliberation, not only because thousands of bloggers joined the discussion to distribute information and challenge vague official accounts of reality but also because some incidents were exposed through blogs in the first place and then spread to other platforms.

Confrontation between authorities and average citizens during these incidents yielded the most passionate and critical discussion in Chinese cyberspace. Some events not only resulted in the government’s acceptance of responsibility and apology for inappropriate or even illegal administration, but they also propelled forward legislative procedure that attempted to amend current policy. For example, in one incident in Hangzhou, called the “70 kph case,” a pedestrian crossing the crosswalk was killed by a

sports car driven by a “rich second generation”¹ person who was drag racing. The traffic police report that the racing car was going 70kph, caused an uproar on the Internet because many eyewitnesses said the car speed was over 100 kph. Netizens made another phrase, the “horse of deception” (*qi shi ma*), that has a similar approximate pronunciation in Chinese to the phrase “70kph,” and the pun became an online catchphrase to satirize the law enforcement agencies’ disguise of the car’s actual speed. Later, the driver and his family were exposed by the “human flesh search engine,”² and public opinion aimed its anger at the perceived collusion between the rich family and the law enforcement agencies. Due to the vehement public criticism, the police reinvestigated the incident and reported that the speed was between 84 and 101 kph. Eventually, the Hangzhou police apologized to its citizens, and the perpetrator was punished. The incident also led citizens and the government to consider ways to eliminate the phenomenon of urban racing and criteria to distinguish between the crime of causing traffic accident and the crime of jeopardizing public security. China’s Supreme People’s Court also debated increasing the penalty rate for traffic accident crimes in cases of drunk driving and drag racing and judged those crimes as felonies.³

Similarly, after a series of accidents in which detainees died from torture and abuse in detaining centers (including the “hide-and-seek” incident⁴), netizens were so

¹ “Rich second-generation” refers to the first generation of private entrepreneurs since China’s reform and opening-up in the 1980s who rely on inherited family property and who have deep pockets. The word first appeared in the well-known TV program “Date with Lu Yu,” which defined the “rich second-generation” as those born in the 1980s, when China’s economy opened up and started to take off, and with inheritance of hundreds of millions of family property. China’s rapid economic development in recent decades has promoted the rapid expansion of this rich demographic and, in turn, has generated a huge number of “rich kids.”

² The “human flesh search engine” is a form of online “vigilante justice” based on massive human collaboration, in identifying and exposing people who have attracted netizens’ wrath. The word “human flesh” means not only that the search is realized through networking of human beings rather than computer technologies, but also that it was aimed to locate human beings (those who have committed offense or social breach).

³ Source: <http://gcontent.nddaily.com/d/87/d87ca511e2a8593c/Blog/615/a991fc.html>

⁴ A prisoner Li Qiaoming, at age of 24, died while in a police detention center in Yunan province in February, 2009. The local police’s official explanation for Li’s death was that he carelessly hit his head into

suspicious of the official report, which stated that the deaths were “normal,” that they organized third party groups to investigate the cases. As a response to the online criticism, some local authorities have made provisions to hold the involved law enforcement officers responsible for “non-normal deaths” (deaths that may involve abuse).⁵

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Researchers have wrangled over the controversial topic of the political meaning of the Internet in China for years. Some believe it is bringing a revolution to China “in a thousand tiny, everyday ways” (Thompson, 2006), considering the fact that over 470 million netizens are adopting the Internet as communicative tool and are engaged in the practice of open information and free expression on a daily basis. On the other hand, however, some contend that it simply provides “a place to blow off some steam” but is incapable of yielding any actual social change (Grossman, 2006), since factors such as censorship, irrationalism, and commercialism hamper the use of the Internet as an equal, transparent and fair communicative tool. Like the Internet in general, each new online medium inspires discussion about whether it will enhance or inhibit freedom of expression and democracy, and blogging is no exception. Literature has shown two trends regarding blogs’ potential in Western societies: the democratic function that advances

a wall, causing fatal brain injuries while playing the game of hide-and-peek (Duo Maomao, or literally “eluding the cat”) with his cellmates. This explanation of Li’s death provoked an online frenzy, with netizens disbelieved and outraged, asking for a thorough investigation. In responding to the Internet-fuelled outcry, the provincial government’s propaganda bureau took the unusual step of organizing a group of netizens, including two high-profile local bloggers and three journalists, to act as a special investigation committee. Although the committee was given limited access to the case, the truth eventually emerged when higher authorities got involved amidst the online public uproar. Li was actually beaten to death by prison bullies. The case was closed with three prison suspects receiving different sentences, and three senior officials being removed from their posts for dereliction of duty in connection with the death. After the case, “Duo Maomao” becomes a popular catchphrase among the Chinese netizens, being synonymous for danger and unclear circumstances.

⁵ Source: <http://www.cnstock.com/index/gdbb/201003/442234.htm>; and http://news.shangdu.com/201/2010/04/10/2010-04-10_405280_201.shtml

decentralized and transparent information distribution and the “echo-chamber” function that intensifies political insularity and reinforces the existing political structure.

Blogging has gained a tremendous popularity in China and has become a daily communication tool for millions of people. Despite the popularity of blogging, however, the lack of academic exploration in the Chinese blogosphere, especially from a public sphere perspective, questions whether the blogosphere represents a healthy and meaningful public space for the public to talk about issues they care. While many contend that a democratic system (of which China is below the mark) is the prerequisite for deliberation, expecting deliberation in the Chinese blogosphere is reasonable, considering the current political environment in China. On one hand, in recent years the development of deliberative institutions and processes have opened avenues to facilitate and practice active citizenship for Chinese people, whom are normally viewed as being deprived of freedom of speech and other rights by the state. The public hearing system,⁶ for example, is now routinely employed to measure public opinion and popular support for local projects. This development not only increases the transparency of public policy-making but also familiarizes the public with the process of exerting its civil rights. On the other hand, social problems such as unemployment, poverty, and class polarization have had an unprecedented rise in the past few years, causing both emotional outpouring and reason-based discussion among citizens. Under such circumstances, blogs have been viewed as playing a role as a valve and monitor of the “social weather” (Halavais, 2002).

One major purpose of this study is to examine in what ways public opinion is presented and exchanged in the blogosphere in discussions about prominent hotspot

⁶ Officially introduced in the 1996 Law on Administrative Punishment, the public hearing system was added to the Law on Pricing in 1998, stipulating that authorities must hold a hearing before setting the price of certain public services, especially utilities. China’s first hearing was held in 2002 to set prices for railway tickets, and since then hearings on utility prices have gotten more frequent. While this system is believed to be beneficial in creating a more transparent decision-making process that was previously behind-the-scenes, its actual effectiveness in bringing about better policy still remains to be tested.

Internet incidents. In this regard, deliberation is a key concept in studying the blogosphere and its democratic potential. It refers to the problem-solving communication process centered on a political or social issue, during which diverse, competing ideas are presented, weighed and exchanged, by citizens to form better reasoned opinions and decision-making. Studying the deliberative pattern in the blogosphere will help us better understand whether and how blog communication manifests democratic potential in current China, and to what end.

In the meantime, factors that function behind the deliberation are also subjects of this study. As some scholars (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004) point out, the influence of deliberation on democracy varies with context-dependent factors, such as “the purpose of the deliberation, the subject under discussion, who participates, the connection to authoritative decision makers, the rules governing interactions, the information provided, prior beliefs, substantive outcomes, and real-world conditions” (p.336). Therefore, to realize democracy through deliberation, especially in non-democratic countries like China, it is very important to understand the factors that constrict or impact deliberation. Governing officials and designers for the public space could therefore avoid obstacles impeding deliberation, or could further stimulate mechanisms facilitating deliberation, so as to substantially push the process of democratization. Few studies, however, have explicated the relationship between deliberation and the context-dependent factors, especially in an undemocratic context.

THE BASIC FRAMEWORK

This study will link two factors that are unique in Chinese political life to the deliberative quality of the blogosphere: the command and control system that structures the central-local government relationship, and the information availability about hotspot incidents. I propose to test a theoretical framework in which the central-local command

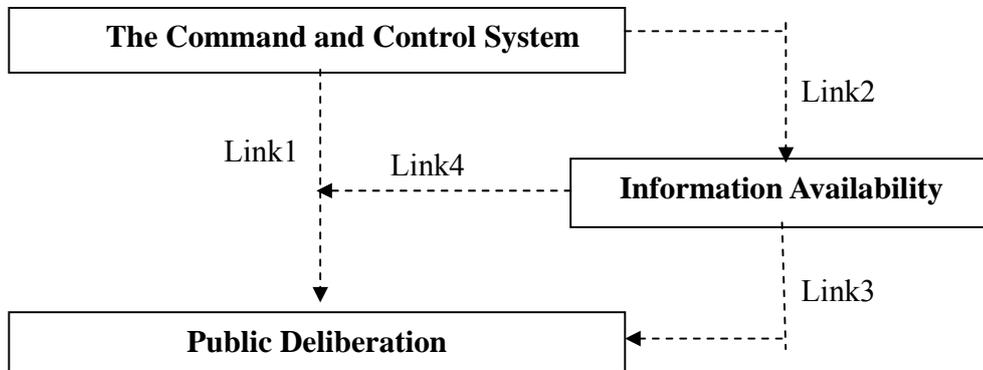
and control system influence the deliberative outcome directly or indirectly through the moderation of information availability (See figure 1).

Firstly, I will determine with each incident whether it threatens the core interest of the central or local government, based on assessment of “threat” detailed later in the text. Specifically, the incidents are grouped into categories of “threat to legitimacy” (at central level) that challenge the legitimacy of the Communist Party rule, “threat to performance” (at local level) that challenge local political and economic stability, and “non-threatening” that neither challenge the legitimacy of Party rule nor local political and economic stability.

Then for each of the incidents, I will examine a selection of blog posts, as well as the comments responding to each post. In order to capture the deliberative pattern suggested by Gastil (2008), which combines the analytic process (quality of argument) and the social process (communicative norms presented in the discussion), a content analysis will be conducted. For the analytic process, coding of content will focus on measurements of quality of discussion such as fact, locus of problem, criticism, reasoning, and solution. For the social process, communicative norms among bloggers and commenters such as involvement, respect, diversity, and rationality will be examined through coding the content of comments.

The third element concerns the information availability of each post—a possible mediator or moderator on the relationship between category and measurements of deliberation. Information availability will be operationalized as the amount of news (news availability) or all information online (total information availability) that is available for the blogger prior to the publication of the post. Eventually, multivariate analysis will be conducted to reveal the relationship among the three elements in the framework (see Figure 1). Conclusions will then be drawn regarding how to make deliberation develop healthily and effectively in China.

Figure 1. The Theoretical Framework



CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the introduction chapter I have laid out the theoretical framework and some key concepts. The purpose of the study is to examine in what ways and to what extent deliberation is realized in the Chinese blogosphere regarding discussion of prominent hotspot Internet incidents. The working definition of deliberation is the problem-solving communication process centered on a political or social issue during which diverse, competing ideas are presented, weighed and exchanged by citizens to form better reasoned opinions and decision-making.

Besides the deliberative pattern, I am also interested in identifying factors that function behind the deliberation. Specifically, two factors are considered here: the command and control system and the information availability of the incidents under discussion. The theoretical framework in Figure 1 presents the links that are to be established in the study: Firstly, the Chinese command and control system directly determines the quality of deliberation on incidents categorized into different cells (link 1). It also determines the information availability of different incidents (link 2); in turn, information availability may yield different styles of deliberation on these incidents (link 3). Since information availability can be treated as an intervening variable between the command and control system and deliberative outcomes, its impact on the relationship of the two will also be examined (link 4).

This chapter is devoted to the literature review of deliberation theory. It will analyse deliberation as a normative ideal, as well as empirical measurements of its components in both analytic and social process. Then I will elaborate on the soft authoritarian media environment and introduce the concept of “authoritarian deliberation,” which explains the current situation of public deliberation in China. The

phenomenon of Chinese blogging and the rise of Internet hotspot incidents will also be discussed as a backdrop of examining deliberation in China.

Theory of Public Deliberation

DELIBERATION AS A NORMATIVE IDEAL

Since the late 20th century, “deliberative democracy” has become popular as a new democratic theory and practice in Western societies when many believed that the electoral democracy did not offer adequate means for fully realizing democratic goals (Bessette, 1980; Cohen, 1989; Manin, 1987). Deliberative democracy, therefore, is viewed as an advancement from electoral democracy, and represented the newest developmental direction of democracy. While electoral democracy restricts the citizen to the status of a mere voter, without substantial control or input to politics, deliberative democracy promotes public deliberation among citizens and encourages citizens’ opinions to enter into the policy-making process.

Although it lacks a coherent and precise definition (Burkhalter, Gastil, & Kelshaw, 2002; Ryfe, 2005), public deliberation, many agree, is a problem-solving communication process centered on a political or social issue, during which diverse, competing ideas are presented, weighed, exchanged, and compromised by citizens to form better reasoned opinions and decision-making (Bohman, 1996; Cohen, 1989; Habermas, 1989). Such a deliberative communication has a democratic potential in the following aspects:

First and foremost, by enhancing the public understanding of a society and the moral principles that govern it, public deliberation betters the quality of policy and law making. The process of rational argumentation and well-intentioned discussion of policy options tends to take into account the preferences of all participant citizens and to bring fairness and justice into policy making and institutional arrangement (Benhabib, 1996)

Cohen, 1989). In turn, compared to a society where policy-making does not depend on public deliberation, a society that allows for it is more likely to be viewed as fair and righteous by its citizens since any collective action is eventually based upon agreement about the advantages of policies through argumentation.

In addition, public deliberation plays an important role in educating participating citizens and promoting an informed citizenry. When engaged in an opinion exchange about an issue, citizens not only practice their narrative and logic capabilities, such as advancing claims and presenting evidence, but they also enhance their morality, knowledge and rationality, such as respecting alternative views—all of which helps makes them good citizens and, most importantly, good human beings (Arendt, 1958). These virtues of citizens as well as political interest and efficacy brought about by deliberation will then further instigate and empower citizens to engage in political discussions and actions.

Deliberation requires some *condition-based* norms of political equality in guaranteeing accessibility and freedom of action. For example, deliberation requires equal access to the public sphere (Cohen, 1989; Dahl, 1989; Habermas, 1989; Muhlberger, 2006), free interaction and an open agenda (Fishkin, 1991; Kavanaugh et al., 2005), and freedom from manipulation or coercion (Coleman & Gotz, 2001; Fishkin, 1991; Kavanaugh et al., 2005).

Besides these conditions, the *predisposition* and the *capacity* of participating individuals are also fundamental. *Predisposition* refers to an individual's pre-established mindset that determines to what extent and in what way he will take part in the deliberation. For example, Scheufele et al. (2005) find that strength of ideology is positively related to willingness to speak out publicly and willingness to express a conflicting viewpoint but is negatively related to willingness to listen to a conflicting point of view. They also document that political tolerance is a determinant in a person's

willingness to listen to a conflicting point of view: the more politically tolerant one is, the more likely he is to consider conflicting opinions. Because the ultimate goal of deliberation is to achieve a conceded solution that is acceptable to every individual, individuals have to be open to reflection on their points of view and remain amenable to changing if they are persuaded in deliberation. Theorists thus contend that deliberation should be free of ideology that is apt to cause distortion of the rational-critical dialogue necessary to achieve this goal (Bohman, 1990; Habermas, 1984). Others argue that participants should be civil and polite (Papacharissi, 2004) and allow mutual respect, consideration, and empathy to guide argumentation and decision-making (Fishkin, 1991; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). Truly deliberative public opinion-formation thus requires peoples' commitment to dialogue with different points of view and a willingness to negotiate and to accept ambiguity and compromise.

The *capacity* dimension refers to the sorts of abilities that citizens need to engage effectively in the rational-critical dialogue with others. Because political decision-making is not achieved through an aggregate of pre-existing opinions and preferences (Steenbergen, Bächtiger, & Steiner, 2003), but rather through a “dialogical process of exchange of reasons” (Bohman, 1996), the capability of reasoning and criticizing is essential to deliberative competence. For Rawls (Rawls, 1993), public reason should govern citizens' discourse in the political realm whenever it concerns matters of justice or “constitutional essentials.” As to what constitutes rational-critical capability, various criteria exist. Ryfe (2002) contends good deliberation includes the “advancement of claims, presentation of evidence, consideration of counterfactual data,” and Bohman (1996) considers capacities for full and effective use of political rights and liberties as those that are evident when citizens successfully initiate deliberation, introduce new themes into public debate, and influence political outcomes. Bohman argues that “lacking these capabilities, politically impoverished citizens may be left out of democratic

majorities formed in the decision-making process” (p. 124). Similarly, Cohen and Rogers (1983) argue that the “self-governing capacities” are necessary for effective engagement in deliberation, which include the capabilities to understand, imagine, access, desire and articulate as well as having command of rhetoric and argumentation.

DELIBERATION AND POLITICAL CONVERSATION

Although it sets the standards of “good deliberation,” the “ideal speech situation” described by Habermas is stringent and is not easily fully realized. Fishkin (1991), for example, finds that in most contemporary democracies, including the United States, this type of deliberation is absent. Similarly, Bohman (1996) criticizes deliberative theorists like Rawls and Habermas for their counterfactual assumptions, which are also challenged by others as an “unrealized utopian ideal” (Fraser, 1992). More recently, referring to a large body of research in social and developmental psychology, Rosenberg (2006) argues that individuals are not the competent interlocutors that deliberative democratic theory assumes, and, therefore, their deliberations fall short of the fair, reasoned, critical, and constructive discourse imagined by many deliberative democrats. If deliberation as a normative ideal hardly sees any presence in current democratic societies, one practical way to think about it is to juxtapose it with political conversation—the form of political communication with looser restriction on rationality—and see if they share commonalities that could be viewed as deliberative features.

One central theme of the scholarship in this area is distinguishing between deliberation that involves problem-solving versus reasoning from conversation that often occurs between like-minded individuals and requires a lower demand on intelligence (Schudson, 1997). Of significant interest here is whether there is a utilitarian-oriented goal involved that centers on solving a concrete problem. As Schudson notes, “the sociable model sees conversation as an end-in-itself” whereas the problem-solving model sees conversation “as a means to the end of good government” (p. 300).

With a utilitarian goal, deliberation demands more sophisticated skill or capacity—what Schudson (1997) calls “reasonableness”—from rational, self-directing citizens than conversation requires. That is to say, citizens must “justify any demands for collective action by giving reasons that can be accepted by those who are bound by the action” (Gutmann & Thompson, 1997). This reasonableness includes several dimensions, such as self-disclosure and self-monitoring of the discussion (Bohman, 1997) and a rational-critical discourse as opposed to an emotional one (Benhabib, 1996; Bohman & Rehg, 1997; Elster, 1998).

Another group of scholars, however, do not see such a gap between political conversation and deliberation. Among them are Gamson (1992) and Barber (1984). In *Talking Politics*, Gamson documents that conversation among working people is deliberative and argues that “ordinary people sometimes do develop ways of understanding issues that support collective action for change” (p. xi). For example, he finds that in discussing issues such as affirmative action, people draw from conversational resources such as media discourse, experiential knowledge, and popular wisdom to frame the issue in a particular way and to justify this framing. He also remarks on the emergence of adversarial frames and the negotiation and reinterpretation during the conversation. Gamson thus challenges the widely held belief among classic deliberation theorists that it is somehow necessary for people to understand issues intellectually before engaging in discussion, and that working people can only think as individuals and family members in making sense of political issues. Overall, the central theme in Gamson’s book is that everyday political conversation is often deliberative and complicated, and average people are not so passive, dumb, and quiescent as is often depicted in social science. Likewise, Barber’s (1984) conceptions of talk and conversation question the rigid divide between conversation and deliberation and signal an intrinsic connection between the two. As he contends, the process of talk and

conversation, which involves a complex mix of imagining, wondering along, listening, and understanding, is “at the heart of a strong democracy” (Barber, 1984, p. 173). In addition to the emphasis on deliberation as a problem solving process, Barber stresses the importance of an open-ended conversation as an avenue to realize mutual discovery among dialogists. Recently, in an analysis of the online discussions hosted by AmericaSpeaks in which New Yorkers discussed how to redevelop the site of the former World Trade Center, Black (2009) contends that storytelling should be more explicitly recognized by deliberative theory as a legitimate form of deliberative discourse.

In summary, the Habermasian notion of an “ideal speech situation” and Gamson and Barber’s understanding of talk and conversation represent the most popular reflections on public deliberation. The former stresses rationality, or the competence of analysis and argument of an issue in the pursuit of a rational political order. The latter puts an equal importance on the social aspects of communicating, such as consideration and respect to others. Most literature on public deliberation tends to focus on the former, as the substance and quality of reasons pertaining to the issue at stake are evidently important in terms of social or political outcomes. The significance of the latter, however, is often underestimated probably because, as communicative norms, they are apt to be taken for granted. In this sense, Gastil’s model of deliberation provides a valuable example in combining the two and illustrates why both are important in realizing effective deliberation.

Gastil’s model of deliberation is important for this study. When considering deliberation in the blogosphere, a crucial question is whether online deliberation will be as effective as face-to-face deliberation, such as town hall meetings, in coping with problems? Due to anonymous commenting and the effect of “Internet disinhibition,” the rationality and constructiveness of discussion has often been questioned. The analytic process provides quantitative measurable criteria, with quantifiable results to refute or

confirm such a doubt. For the same reason, deliberation online also reflects a different social process. Without the constraints of face-to-face communication, such as eye contact and the appearance of respect, whether there is equal participation and friendly interaction becomes a question. When it comes to hotspot incidents, this social process is important because representatives of a wide variety of interests usually conflict with each other, and a congenial communication environment is needed to secure the quality and effectiveness of deliberation. Therefore, this study will combine the analytic and social processes.

THE ANALYTIC AND SOCIAL PROCESSES OF DELIBERATION

In Gastil's model, deliberation is composed of two processes: the analytic process, or the "substance of an exchange" (Gastil, 2008, p. 9) and the social process, or forms and norms associated with communicating (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Key Features of Deliberation⁷

General Definition of Deliberation	Specific Meaning for Conversation/Discussion
<i>Analytic Process</i>	
Create a solid information base.	Discuss personal and emotional experiences, as well as known facts.
Prioritize the key value at stake.	Reflect on your own values, as well as those of others present.
Identify a broad range of solutions.	Brainstorm a wide variety of ways to address the problem.
Weigh the pros, cons, and trade-offs among solutions.	Recognize the limitations of your own preferred solution and the advantages of others.
Make the best decision possible.	Upgrade your own opinion in light of what you have learned. No joint decision need be reached.
<i>Social Process</i>	
Adequately distribute speaking opportunities.	Take turns in conversation or take other action to ensure a balanced discussion.
Ensure mutual comprehension.	Speak plainly to each other and ask for clarification when confused.
Consider other ideas and experiences.	Listen carefully to what others say, especially when you disagree.
Respect other participants.	Presume that other participants are honest and well intentioned. Acknowledge their unique life experiences and perspectives.

In the *analytic process*, the “substance of an exchange” of a particular issue involves multiple steps. It begins with the creation of a solid information base depicting the nature of the problem. The information includes not only personal and emotional

⁷ Source: Gastil, John. (2008). *Political communication and deliberation*. Los Angeles: Sage. p. 20.

experiences, but also known facts from sources such as the media. Personal and emotional experiences make issues amenable to human understanding, and help validate claims (Manosevitch & Walker, 2009). Known facts provide evidence and advance claims. The next step is then to identify and prioritize the key values at stake. This is where disagreement emerges: People who have different values may find that they disagree with each other. Preserving the pleasant view of a blue sky may conflict with a plan of massive urban construction; and an increase in taxes may benefit some but at the same time harm others. To solve the incompatibility between different principles or interests, participants need to identify a broad range of solutions, and weigh pros, cons, and trade-offs among them. It is in this process that the Habermasian “communicative rationality” takes a central role. Rationality is used not only to advance claims and present evidence with the purpose to convince others but also to “systematically apply our knowledge and values to each alternative” (Gastil, 2008, p. 9). When the trade-offs among different alternatives are carefully considered, a deliberative group may eliminate some solutions and accept others, realizing that there is no solution that satisfies all, and compromise has to be made in order to achieve essential agreement. The result is that each individual upgrades his own opinion in light of what has been learned through previous discussion, and arrives at an independent judgment on the matter or further makes the best decision possible.

Meanwhile, the *social process* refers to the consideration of forms and norms associated with communicating. Gastil points out that this process “speaks directly to Barber’s interest in mutual respect and the consideration of ‘the other’ as a whole person—more than just a source of ideas and information that happens to be human” (pp.19-20). Foremost among these considerations are to adequately distribute speaking opportunities to all and to ensure an inclusive and balanced discussion. Such a principle responds to the requirement of egalitarian and equal access to the public spheres well as

the free interaction and open agenda exempt from manipulation or domination. Moreover, mutual comprehension is required by speaking plainly to each other so that participants can comprehend the complexity of the issue. Gastil contends that, although a lack of understanding could be attributed to the lack of technical training, it is most likely that the speaker does not make enough effort to communicate effectively. Finally, participants should think in others' shoes, consider, and respect different ideas and experiences, especially when they disagree. The capability of "perspective taking" and "role taking" (Bohman, 1996) is required so that each participant's opinion is appreciated as honest and well-intentioned, and that person's unique life experiences and perspectives are acknowledged.

The two processes of deliberation in Gastil's model combine the capacity and predisposition of participating individuals in deliberation discussed above. It also addresses the condition of the deliberative space (equal access), and integrates both the micro level (each person's internal reasoning) and macro level (the blending of diverse opinions and compromises among conflicting points of view) deliberation distinguished in the previous study (McLeod et al., 1999). Integration of the two helps to promote the breadth and depth of comprehension of the issue being discussed.

For this study, it is particularly important to examine both processes. Because the incidents studied here involve social confrontation and protest to inequality, they tend to evoke extreme emotions and reactions. Objective description and dispassionate analysis of the incidents are therefore important for citizens to understand the meanings of these incidents, and for policy makers to comprehend the public opinion. Meanwhile, mutual comprehension and respect are also indispensable in guaranteeing productive agreement on collective decision and action. Marrow argues that (Marrow, 2004) what distinguishes blogs from other genres of online publishing, such as personal websites, is that blogging has a social character. Through the network among individual bloggers and that among

bloggers and commenters, there is a sense of community, within which each participant is connected to each other, sharing common interests and achieving mutual comprehension. The theoretical framework proposed in this study, therefore, will address both the analytic and social process.

The Changing Chinese Media and Communication

As the world witnessed Internet communication getting phenomenal popularity in China in recent years—in terms of the rapid growth in user volume and the increasing political influence exhibited in incidents such as the anti-CNN movement⁸—many started to wonder to what extent deliberative democracy could bear some possibility in China’s cyberspace. A challenge to this question, obviously, is in what way the theory of public deliberation, which is rooted in liberal or civil societies, could be applied in authoritarian China. Before further deliberating on this topic, let’s take a brief look at the Chinese media system.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA

In the late 70s before China’s modern reform and open policy, China’s media system was a “Commandist System” (Lee, 1990; Pan, 1997; Wu, 1994) and “Party Journalism” (Zhao, 1998) based on the combination of totalitarian and communist model. The media were primarily propaganda tools to serve the state and the Communist party rather than a tool for the citizens to express freely. Under the state ownership, the media were subsidized by the state and the subscription was implemented through administrative means. In such a system, information was controlled by the authorities,

⁸ In the Tibet Riots in March 2008, CNN’s depiction of the Chinese authorities as the instigators of the unrest gave rise to strong feelings of patriotism among young Chinese. They accused Western media of committing anti-China “misbehaviors,” and started the anti-CNN movement to criticize and boycott Western media. This movement against CNN spawned the website anti-cnn.com, which aimed to “expose the lies and distortions in the western media.” The anti-cnn.com’s effort to protest the portrayals of China by Western media kept growing even after the Tibet riot.

and the media basically were not allowed to scrutinize the government.⁹ At the same time, thanks to the financial support from party committees on all levels, there was neither the motive to seek economic benefits nor the consideration of audience needs. Market competition among the media was therefore very weak.

Then, along with the economic transition from planned to market economy, starting in the late 70s, Chinese media entered the process of commercialization. As Zhao (2004) documents, “the overburdened state, with a declining share of the national GDP, actively pushed existing media organizations to the market by eliminating direct subsidies and providing financial incentives, including tax breaks, performance-based salary supplements, and operational freedoms” (Zhao, 2000a, p.5). News organizations gradually transited from being a nonprofit public institution (Chen, 1998) into companies that participated in market competition, and thereby had some substantial breakthrough from the old “Commandist System” and “Party Journalism.” First, the cutting of government subsidization, which is often described as a “weaning” process, forced the media to enter the market and rely on advertising, circulation, and other business activities as the main sources of income. In this sense, media have to consider the needs of the readers, and to cater to public opinions whether or not within a propaganda framework. Second, although the government still controls some media by keeping the ownership and editorial personnel under the jurisdiction of the party committees at all levels, the emerging and rising of media companies and private media have weakened the media’s ideological and political functions as advocacy tools, and enhanced the media’s role as an economic entity. Third, the increasingly fierce market competition forced the media to pay attention to audience needs and thereby enhanced their role as information and entertainment providers, and sometimes even as government watchdogs (He, 1998).

⁹ Government control, including political/ideological control, economic control, institutional control, legal control and administrative control. For more details, see Houchin Winfield & Peng, 2005, p.264.

Finally, as Hao and Li (2001) contended, the fast development of new media technologies posed direct challenges the government's controls over mass communication, and facilitated the debate of freedom vs. information control. In particular, the challenges lie in the following aspects. First, it broke the official information blockade to foreign sources. Second, it challenged the previous unified mode of communication under which media content was highly homogenized, and supported a diversified mode of communication with respect to technologies. Third, it strengthened the capacity of audience feedback, transforming the one-way dissemination of propaganda toward the two-way or multidirectional communication. Fourth, it blurred the bound between interpersonal communication and mass communication as well as between national and international communication, hampering the official control of information as a result.

In sum, economic development, commercialization, and new media technologies have all eroded the party-state control of information. Freedom of the press has made great progress. On the one hand, due to the pressure of multiple factors illustrated above, the Communist Party has recognized the function of the media as an information provider and monitor of government, and continues to use them as means of legitimizing the ruling of the government while loosening its control on the expression of multiple views (Lee, 1990). On the other hand, market forces have increased the public's information needs, and the use of new communication technologies and media globalization have helped to meet these needs. Although many scholars argue that changes in contemporary journalism should still be interpreted within a control framework, as a "marketized authoritarian media system," or a "tug-of-war" between the traditional authority and the emerging market economy (He, 2000; Xu, 1994), it is undeniable that there has been a growing space for free expression as well as a more open and transparent communication environment since the late 70s.

Traditional Chinese media are often categorized mainly in regard to media ownership and financial support. Winfield and Peng (2005) proposed a typology in which media organizations were classified into three groups: First, the official mainstream media that are “directly owned and operated by the government at central level; e.g. Xinhua News Agency, the *People’s Daily*, CCTV.” They are officially designated as the party’s “official newspaper,” in other words, the mouthpiece of the party and government. They follow the central ideology and are the main tool for propaganda. Government’s subsidization and subscription through administrative means embody the characteristics of the planned economy. The second group is the “outer circles media” that are traditionally affiliated with central or local government institutions but not considered the official state media, e.g., regional newspapers. These media do not directly assume the propaganda duties, but fulfill the role of party media through the provision of services, entertainment, and information, as well as opening up urban markets that have centralized advertising sources (Liu, 2000). Some of this type of media have access to government’s financial allocations, but most are self-financing, reflecting a combination of planned and market economy. There are some differences among these media even when they are in the same category. For example, while both the *Southern Weekend* and *Xinmin Evening News* are subsidiary newspapers of the provincial and municipal official news groups, the former is more critical and investigative-oriented, and is well known for its independent and critical consciousness in muckrake reporting, whereas the latter pays more attention to people’s daily lives and emphasizes the closeness to life and practicality. The third group is the outmost layer, or the fringe media, in other words, the “mass appeal newspapers and magazines, financially and managerially independent from the government” (Winfield & Peng, 2005, p. 261). Examples include *Cai Jing* and *21st Century Economic News*, as well as some Internet portals. This type of media are

financially self-supported and subscription are at readers' own expense. Despite the ideological regulation, they usually do not bear the propaganda responsibility.

INTERNET MEDIA

Similarly, the Internet media can also be grouped into three kinds based on ownership, financial support, and relations with the government (see Table 1). First, in addition to the website established by the aforementioned official mainstream media, such as people.com.cn by the *People's Daily*, websites set up by governments at all levels can be considered official mainstream media. They are directly owned and operated by the government, and firmly represent the official voice.

Then, the outer circles media includes the following types: (1) websites of news media that are traditionally affiliated with government institutions but not considered the official state media, e.g., *Southern Weekend*; (2) websites of news media independent from the government, e.g. *Cai Jing*; and (3) news websites on commercial Internet portals, e.g. news.sina.com.cn. Although the parent companies of the outer circles media are partially state-owned, there is usually an indirect ownership by collective and private businesses (media conglomerate) or publicly listed companies. The financial support is mainly from advertising, circulation, and financial investment, and their function is more of a market commodity rather than an ideological apparatus. Compared to the official mainstream media, they enjoy relatively more leeway with respect to the state proactive censorship. But self-censorship is common among the professionals.

Under the umbrella of the fringe online media are various forms of media, such as mass appeal commercial portals, ISPs (Internet service providers) and ICPs (Internet content providers) companies (non-journalistic content), independent Web forums, independent blogs, and micro-blogs (the Chinese version of "Twitter"). These media are owned by publicly listed companies with financial support through advertising, traffic, and financial investment, or self-sustained by independent netizens. Rather than

completely or partially being an ideological apparatus as the official mainstream and the outer circle media, they are either market commodities that meet mass appeal for general information or entertainment, or platforms of free expression from netizens. Although the Internet is still subject to the government political constraint through various regulations of laws, statutes, and bureaucracies (e.g., the Internet Information Management Bureau), and by the mix of filtering technologies such as cyber police surveillance, it nevertheless provides what is considered the least constrained speech environment. State censorship is normally retroactive, and when it is used, the information under suppression has often been dispersed rapidly.

Admittedly, the categorization has some limitations in the sense that there are often differences in the same category. For example, both the mainstream media and the outer circle media have forums, blogs, and other message platforms, which are relatively less constrained than the news websites of these media. However, because they are to some extent dependent on the government, government's constrain on them is more stringent than on the fringe media. For example, there is relatively less dissent in *Qiangguo* forum (affiliated to the *People's Daily*) than in the independent *Tianya* forum.

Table 1. A Typology of Chinese Online Media

	Media Type		
Characteristics	Official mainstream media	Outer circles Media	Fringe media
Ownership	State-owned	Parent companies are partially state-owned; indirect ownership by media conglomerate	Publicly listed companies; independent netizens
Financial support	Government-funded	Chiefly advertising, circulation, and financial investment.	Advertising, traffic, financial investment; no funding
Management and editorial personnel	State appointed for key personnel	Open hiring of personnel	Open hiring; self-management
Functions of the media	Mouthpiece; ideological apparatus	Partial ideological apparatus; source for advertising	Source for advertising; information and social service to/by the audience
Nature of media products	Political ideological and propaganda	Partial propaganda; market commodity	Market commodity; citizen expression
Actors	Party and government representatives; state-appointed media professionals	Entrepreneurs, media professionals, advertisers	Entrepreneurs; netizens
Media content	Official government news; entertainment, advertising	News, entertainment, advertising,	Entertainment, advertising User-generated content (including news about social and political affairs)

Censorship	State censorship; self-censorship	proactive	State retroactive censorship; self-censorship	proactive and	State censorship; self-censorship	retroactive
-------------------	---	-----------	--	---------------	---	-------------

Authoritarian Deliberation: A Chinese Approach

While some scholars hold an unfavorable attitude toward the proposal of studying Chinese communication environment using public sphere or the deliberation theory, emphasizing the lack of a democratic tradition and freedom of speech in China, many advocate empirical research on the distinctive practice of deliberation and its potential meaning in the Chinese communication environment. In his reflection to the International Conference on Deliberative Democracy hosted in China in November 2004, Leib (2005) expressed that deliberation in China was insufficiently addressed when he said, “We spoke generally about online chat rooms, but less about whether those forums qualify as deliberative in any real or useful way. We talked a lot about participation, but less about what sorts of participation could truly be held to be or designed to be deliberative” (p.5).

In the normative sense, the implementation of deliberation depends on a democratic social system that renders rights and opportunities for the public to participate equally and freely in public sphere. In reality, however, such idealism is often compromised by social “pluralism” and “unavoidable social complexity” (Habermas, 1989; Rawls, 1993) that fail to guarantee a fair and diversified speech situation even in a democratic society. Scholars therefore suggest a more realistic approach on public deliberation. Bohman (1996) suggests to consider the pluralistic and complex nature of public deliberation in empirical studies, and to emphasize the essential requirements to get public deliberation off the ground, as opposed to the more ambitious visions of full fulfillment of public deliberation in a normative sense. Similarly, Leib (2006) calls for a more pragmatist perspective that differs from the idealist ones that “can only imagine one

proper account of democracy” (p.113), and for an approach that takes into account specific political and cultural characteristics that distinguish China from the Western nations.

Indeed, the unique cultural characteristic of China determines the very different social and political circumstances where public deliberation is formed. In China, there is a very different understanding by the Chinese government and average citizens in terms of the nature and purpose of deliberation. The government’s approach to deliberation, oriented by the goal of social harmony, is to reduce social confrontation and criticism, and legitimize its rule (Jiang, 2008; Zhou, 2009). Therefore, “the normative emphasis is on sustaining social integration” and “establish consensus on specific issues that are consistent with broader collective understandings and values” (Rosenberg, 2006, pp. 104-105). Under this consideration, the government often plays a role of actively directing public discussion, especially when the issue at stake is controversial and may potentially foster social conflict, such as the issue of waste incineration, dam construction, genetically modified food. In these cases, the government often invites experts to conduct research and report, then speak on behalf of the government. As these experts obtain official endorsement, they often become opinion leaders, whose views get widely published. In fact, government’s guide of public opinion under the guise of expertise has been subjected to public criticism.

Take the discussion of waste incineration in Guangzhou, for instance. In this debate, the local residents were against the establishment of waste incineration in the center area of the city while the majority of experts invited by the government supported waste incineration. Media accused the experts who supported waste incineration of “voicing support for self-interests.” One expert in the panel, for example, had 25 patented inventions, most of which were related to waste incineration. Citizens therefore believed that the experts were not giving objective and fair views about the project in the first

place, and thus were skeptical of their judgments. In such circumstances, the so-called consultations under the government leadership lack the essential fair negotiation condition advocated by the theory of deliberation.

For average Chinese citizens, however, public deliberation is a strategy in addressing the “intractability” (Rosenberg, 2006, p. 105) of social or political issues due to inadequate information and the government’s opaque decision-making process. Since the official mainstream media often function as the “mouthpiece” of the central government, and their news has long been criticized for nontransparent and directed in a way that minimizes critiques to the current regime, the function of what Rogers called as a “collision space” (Rogers, 2006) for official and unofficial accounts of reality is often left to the outer circle and fringe media. Here “collision space”¹⁰ means that when an event occurs, the government’s interpretation of the event tends to compete with that of the public, and the two sides therefore collide with each other in various message platforms. Usually the government’s goal is to avoid responsibility, and the public nevertheless condemn government’s dereliction of duty. The result is often the lack of a timely solution, and in some cases, violence or chaos. For example, a forced demolition of a civic house in Fuzhou, Jiangxi province, in September 2010 caused vicious conflicts, resulting in the serious burn injuries of three of the residents. The residents who were asked to relocate and the local government had uncompromising conflicting claim of the truth of the incident. Family members of the injured insisted that the injuries were caused by the government’s forced evictions and demolition; but the government called it a burn accident when the residents threatened to pour gasoline and set a fire to intimidate the demolition workers. An extensive “collision space” appeared in various online platforms with netizens strived to bring the behind-the-scene stories into the center stage.

¹⁰ “Collision space” sometimes appears in the Web forums affiliated to the mainstream official media such as the Qiangguo BBS forum as well.

Information was under full public review via tools such as onsite photos and “human flesh search engine,” a process that yields conflicting point of views rather than resulting in a consensus (see footnote 2).

Apparently, the government’s approach to deliberation does not quite fit the basic demands of deliberation, considering that it is often steered and manipulated, neither able to provide adequate information nor aimed at encouraging equal and fair participation. Rather, citizen’s approach appeals to meet such conditions in the respect that deliberation is usually oriented toward the goal of problem-solving, which fosters reasoning, identifying solutions, and weighing the pros and cons among the solutions, as well as criticism to authorities that counteract such efforts. In this sense, deliberation can be considered as one of the “weapons of the weak” (Scott, 1985), through which subaltern people resist authorities and dominance through everyday low profile self-defense coping mechanisms. The resistance is not negligible when they limit the ambitions of the rulers and develop the resilience of self-preservation for the weak.

However, the government has led some institutional development to accommodate public deliberation, although the deliberation is often used by authorities as tools to enforce ministration or legitimacy. For example, in addition to the public hearing system illustrated above, deliberative institutions such as village Representative Assembly¹¹ have also exhibited significant democratic achievements and enhanced local self-governing (Tan, 2006). In addition, although not of obvious democratic relevance, nationwide voting for the contest of popular cultural or entertainment activities, such as the “Super Girl” contest on television¹², also helps to nurture skills and capacity of free

¹¹ Village Representative Assembly is a representative body in many Chinese villages to vote for the Villages Committee. It usually practices the basic norms of a democratic process such as secret ballot, multiple candidates, and public counting.

¹² “Super Girl” contest was an annual national singing contest hosted by the Hunan Satellite Television between 2004 and 2006 (later renamed “Happy Girl”). It is a Chinese version of the American Idol, but only with female contestants, and has generated enormous public fascination. The “Super Girl” has been a leading entertainment show in China since 2004.

participation in public affairs. In these contests, viewers vote directly for their favorite contestants through sending millions of text messages from their mobile phones. During the 2007 contest, for example, more than 800 million text messages were sent throughout the country. It was thus considered an imitation of a democratic system in China (Yardley, 2005).

Online, citizens have been allowed to initiate vehement discussion on social unfairness, corruption among government officials, suppression of freedom of speech, and so on (Zhou & Moy, 2007). Although the authorities may lead public deliberation in their own favor, they nevertheless see the importance of delivering transparent and authoritative information for the purpose of stopping rumors, reducing social confrontation, and legitimize its rule (Jiang, 2008; Zhou, 2009). This ambivalent attitude toward public deliberation often creates sporadic zones in public sphere where grassroots voices contend against the official one in accounting social issues. When the online public opinion eventually directs strong criticism to the authorities and causes social disorder, it may influence the policy-making process. Given that the Chinese state has encouraged the development of deliberative institutions, in which public deliberation, not voting, is central to legitimate lawmaking, many therefore argue that, deliberative democracy could be realized in China without having an electoral democracy first (Brook & Frolic, 1997; He, 2006).

The term of “authoritarian deliberation” developed by He (2006), referring to the deliberation under an authoritarian regime, effectively captures this Chinese uniqueness of public deliberation. As He notes, “Chinese authoritarian deliberation is authoritarian in the sense that the top leaders are not elected and therefore deliberation takes place under one-party domination” (p.134). It is still deliberative, however, because the public’s arguments and reasons do matter in solving some collective problems, especially at local levels. In particular, as He contends, the “authoritarian” aspect of the term includes the

following dimensions: (1) The Chinese state has played an active and significant role in promoting and shaping deliberative practice, including sponsoring deliberative meetings, limiting the deliberative scope, setting the agenda, and so on. (2) The development of deliberative institutions lacks active involvement of a civil society “due to the state’s suppression of an independent civil society and its heavy regulation of the activities of civic groups” (He, 2006, p. 139). As for the “deliberation” aspect of the term, He notes:

in the process of state-organized deliberation, the state has to make compromises and concessions through granting some rights to citizens and defining and enforcing a set of rules, including publicity and impartiality. Citizens are able to use this opportunity to move toward democracy (He, 2006, p. 139).

He’s approach sheds light on the current situation in China, where opinion sharing and exchange through the Internet is increasingly influential even though under surveillance and control. Even senior party leaders have realized the irresistible influence of Internet communication as a vital place to feel the pulse of the people and an avenue to release social pressures; these leaders have started to pay closer attention to online public opinion. For instance, after President Hu Jintao answered questions from netizens through the Internet in June 2008, Premier Wen Jiabao had an online dialogue with netizens in February 2008 and 2009 through the online chatting channel hosted by the Chinese government (gov.cn) and Xinhua News Agency websites (Xinhua net.com). The discussed issues arranged from the shoe-throwing protest during his speech at the Cambridge University to the corruption among government officials. Anecdotal as it may seem to be, these efforts are nevertheless considered as the “sign of how the government is trying to reach out to the current generation of Chinese teens with a caring and sharing message” (Moore, 2008). Recently, local governments of different levels also start to practice the “Internet spokesperson” strategy, which aims to build a new communicative channel between public opinion and government policy. A government spokesperson

monitors online posts that have to do with government responsibilities, and responds promptly by releasing official posts and documents. This strategy is conducive to resolving social conflicts and providing correct guidance to public opinion. Many local governments also have established online forums to interact with citizens in discussion about public affairs through responding to posts and making clarification. Officials and netizens therefore directly face each other and exchange views on an equal base, which is different from the way the traditional petition system works.

The fact that the government is becoming increasingly open to the online public, of course, should not be taken as a substantial change of the party dominance in political conversation. Various control strategies are still employed to ensure that the active and rich online voice does not carry dissent nor threaten the stability and safety of the authoritarian regime. The Great Firewall of China, the censorship and surveillance network nicknamed after the ancient Great Wall of China, has a notorious functional power in locating and blocking undesirable content, and monitoring the Internet access by individuals.

Blogging as Deliberative Communication?

Allowing for free self-expression, decentralized communication and hyperlinks to relevant online sources, blogs form an interconnected network—a dynamic community of the “blogosphere”. In the light of Habermas’ concept, how closely can the blogosphere approximate the public sphere and, further, to what extent can blogs help to promote public deliberation? A few studies on this topic reflect mainly two threads of findings.

The first one supports the view that the blogosphere extends and enhances public deliberation or civic engagement, so as to invigorate democracy (Kerbel & Bloom, 2005; Yamamoto, 2006). Indications include advancing social problem discussion (Maratea, 2008), functioning as a vehicle for enhanced civic involvement (Kerbel & Bloom, 2005),

and contributing to a more democratic global information order (MacKinnon, 2008). In a study about the impact and significance of Akaevu.net, an advocacy blog that was linked to the “tulip revolution” in Kyrgyzstan, Kulikova and Perimutter (2007) found that samizdat (unofficial) blogs can serve to incite or sustain democratization in Third World countries when they become a unique and rich source of information not available from anywhere else. In particular, they carry advocacy materials on protest, and call for voting in the interactive polls on questions such as impeachment and re-election of the president, or the legitimacy of suppression by national forces. As sources of alternative information for citizens of the nation, as well as international observers, the samizdat blogs exhibit fierce criticism to the ruling regimes.

The second thread is skeptical of the aforementioned optimistic vision. Roberts-Miller (2004), for example, contends that the blogosphere simply enables a wider argument that only offers opinion without further advancing and deploying it. It thus does not necessarily encourage better argumentation, which is a process of reasoning systematically in support of an idea, action, or theory. As a result, it produces a realm of enclaves that facilitate the hardening of ideology. Some structural limitations of blogs are also deemed to be harmful to an open atmosphere of deliberation. Ó Baoill (2004) points out impediments that “seriously damage any claim of the blogosphere to be a strong public sphere.” These impediments include the privileging of some blogs over others as a result of earlier entry, established reputation in media publicity (the “A-list” of blogs, for example), unbalanced distribution of prominence and resources caused by different level of time commitment, and the lack of equal, rational debate among all topics. Ó Baoill’s arguments match Kottke’s (2003) and Shirky’s (2003) findings that there is an remarkable imbalanced distribution of inbound links between the highly ranked blogs and those further down the chain, reaffirming the power law in the blogosphere that the most resourceful blogs catch the most attention and enjoy a more salient position than others

among the blog networks. MacDougall (2005) also observes that “at their worst, blogs represent the latest form of mass-mediated triviality and celebrity spectacle, with the potential to create and sustain insulated enclaves of intolerance predicated on little more than personal illusion, rumor, and politically motivated innuendo” (p.575).

In sum, the previous researches have shown a disagreement on whether the blogosphere has a democratic potential in fostering public deliberation. More evidence needs to be provided in order to strengthen either side of the argument, however, since each side had specifically focused on certain factors and left out the others. Studies presenting an optimistic view, for instance, tend to emphasize blog’s role in advancing free expression and civic engagement. Skeptics, however, mainly employ a macro level analysis from the network theory perspective to document the unbalanced distribution of prominence and resources, and the lack of equal, rational debate among all topics. In other words, because the focus of the two threads on different aspects of the blogosphere, their views do not directly conflict with each other. Therefore, although each has its own merits, there is no synthesizing that reach a clear understanding of blog’s deliberative potential. Also, most of these studies focus on Western society, with only a few (e.g., Kulikova & Perimutter, 2007) exploring the deliberative role of blogging in non-democratic countries. In these countries, because mainstream media are often strictly controlled, the extent to which blog can act as a deliberative space and promote openness and freedom of expression has a direct impact on the process of democratization. Therefore, studying blogs in these countries has a more timely and far-reaching significance. This paper is committed to fill this gap, to study blogging phenomenon in authoritarian China, and relate the blogosphere to the macro communication environment in China, namely, the commanding and control system, and explore its effects on the pattern and quality of deliberation.

CHAPTER THREE: BLOGGING AND INTERNET INCIDENTS

Blogging in Transitional China

HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT

Early Stage: 2002-2003

Born in the 1990s in the United States, blogs were introduced to China in 2002. The year Internet critic and analyst Fang Xingdong and Wang Junxiu coined the Chinese name 博客 (*bo ke*) for blog, contending that blog was bring “a revolution” in China (Fang & Wang, 2003). In August 2002, Fang and Wang founded blogchina.com, further promoting the practice of blogging. Many blog service providers (BSPs) appeared afterwards, including blogcn.com, Blogbus.com and Blogdriver. However, by then blog users were limited to a handful of people in the area of information technology, economics, and science. Blogging in China first received its boost in June 2003, when a magazine writer Mu Zimei’s sexual diary on blogcn.com (now bokee.com) created tremendous traffic (peaked at 160,000 pageviews in November), and made the word of “blog” a popular Internet search keyword. Chinese netizens started to witness blog’s enormous influence from then on.

Growing Stage: 2004-2006

From the second half of 2003 through the first half of 2004, China saw the beginning of commercialization of blogging. On the one hand, the emergence of professional BSPs, such as blogchina, blogcn, and blogdriver provided service for users to set up and maintain a blog. On the other hand, leading Internet portals¹³ also joined to launch blog services and compete with BSPs in aggregating blog users. In September 2005, the largest Chinese portal, sina.com, launched its blog service, blog.sina.com.cn.

¹³ InternetInternet portals refer to websites that present information from diverse sources in a unified way and act as a starting point for browsing the Web. Portals typically include search engines and large directories of websites that are categorized by topic, such as news, technology, and entertainment.

Shortly afterward, the other two commercial and leading portals Sohu and Netease also launched blog service.

However, the nationwide popularization of blogging had to wait until 2005 to take off when hundreds of celebrity blogs started to aggregate on blog.sina.com and soon attracted enormous visits. A blog on Sina by Xu Jinglei, a Chinese movie star, claimed the No. 1 spot on Technorati 100 in 2006. According to Technorati's statistics, there were 45,700 in-bound links to Xu's blog from 28,151 websites, a number much higher than that of websites linking to the second-ranked Boing Boing blog. These were just linking websites to Xu's blog homepage, not including the ones linking to a single post. Therefore, although ranked as the No. 1 blog, the number of in-bound linking websites to Xu's blog were still significantly underestimated by the Technorati's statistics. Han han, a best-selling author, became another popular celebrity blogger after criticizing established celebrities including literary critics, writers, directors and musicians, for their pretentiousness and capriciousness in Chinese cultural criticism.

Celebrity blogs on other BSPs also aggregate significant traffic. Wang Xiaofeng, a Chinese magazine writer who is well known for sarcastic comments on problematic social and culture phenomena in his blog, had millions of blog readers, and was named by *Time* as one of the 15 "citizens of the new digital democracy" in 2006. Also on the rise sharply were blogs run by average citizens. Most citizen blogs focused on personal reflection of daily life, such as records of life and work routine, and information about private hobbies. Comparatively, blogs devoted to discussion of sociopolitical issues were much less in number at this stage. With the flush in of venture capital to the blog business, blogging technologies and services continue to expand and develop. The practice of blogging has evolved due to the increasing use of multimedia on blogs such as video, music and podcast, which serves not only personal, but also organizational purposes such as those of education and marketing.

Rapid Developing Stage: 2007-present

The year of 2007 saw the emerging success of leading Internet portals over professional BSPs because portals typically include search engines and large directories of websites that are categorized by topic, which tend to attract larger amount of users and financial resources. Portals such as Sina, Sohu, and QQ further strengthened and promoted their blog services by putting advertisement of their blog service on the portal page as well as at the bottom of the posts in existing celebrities blogs. These strategies accelerated the process for portal users and blog readers to set up their own blogs on the portals. Professional BSPs such as blogbus.com that focus only on blogging, however, have less advantage than these portals in respect to users and financial resources.

Another noticeable trend in this stage was the convergence of blog and the newly prevailed social network service (SNS) websites. Starting from the middle of 2008, SNS became one of the most popular Internet applications. Rising SNS websites such as kaixin001.com and xiaonei.com(now renren.com) provided various plug-ins to integrate social networking functions, among which built-in blog feature helped to drive a large number of Web users to become active bloggers. When opening a SNS website account, one simultaneously set up a blog that was hosted by the website. In other words, blog became an enclosed feature of social network services. The affiliation thus helped to increase cross-links among bloggers who had been interacting with each other as community members in the social network.

In 2006 the number of bloggers increased to more than twice as that in 2005; in 2009, this number was increased by five times again. By the end of 2010, there were 295 million bloggers--about 64 percent of the overall netizens (CNNIC, 2011). Bloggers' enthusiasm in expression has been substantially increasing and the number of active blogs had an explosive growth (CNNIC, 2009).

DIFFERENTIATING BLOG FROM BBS FORUMS

One important question in studying blogs is what characterizes blogs compared to other forms of online communication such as the bulletin board systems (BBS) forums—currently the most popular online communication in China. What is the important role of blog when it comes to discussion about hotspot Internet incidents? A BBS forum is an Internet application that allows users to start up or participate in the discussion about certain issues, with their postings organized based on topics or interests. A BBS forum breaks the previous limitation wherein the channels and chances for expression were monopolized by the powerful minority, and gives opportunity to the public to speak on an equal basis. Scholars have established the popularity of BBS forum as a communication tool among Chinese netizens, particularly in terms of its role, as a relatively free speech platform, in advancing public discussion on significant incidents (Li, Xuan, & Kluver, 2003; Zhou & Moy, 2007).

However, as a relatively free speech platform, BBS forum has its own limitations with respect to public deliberation. First, the forum is a topic-oriented space of public discussion, the subject of which often takes on great randomness. Forum participants have to deliberately look for topics of interest in order to participate in the discussion. Therefore, there is a prior requirement for the participants to have interest on certain topic, and the willingness to seek relevant information. This excludes those who have less interest or capability to seek information. Second, there is no independent identity of the participants except for an ID. Unless an individual is particularly well-known, he is not very likely to be recognized by participants and readers of their posts. It is therefore, not conducive for participants to have a sense of identity in the forum community. Third, the structure of BBS posts is relatively simple, usually with an original post followed by comments from others, lacking multimedia applications such as audio and video players and tags. It is not conducive to connecting posts on the same topic and forming an

aggregate of information resources. Fourth, the fact that netizens comment on a large number of themes at different times makes the formation of knowledge a discontinued and cluttered process. Most BBSs do not archive posts except for “the pick of the basket”, making it impossible to archive, search, or recall a conversation without making additional efforts. Therefore, there is often such a phenomenon in BBS posts, for example, that the focus of a theme is weakened by the quick transition to another theme and that the discussion on a certain topic becomes fragmented. Finally, with respect to the information retrieval and sharing mechanisms, BBS does not automatically realize a cross-BBS information collection and retrieval.

In addition, discussion in the BBS may be directed in a way that deviates from the deliberative norm. On one hand, the presence of opinion leaders in each forum is likely to shape the discussion as a whole (An & Yang, 2009). On the other hand, the discussion tends to fall to the lowest common denominator as those with the most free time (rather than the most intelligent and insightful) on his hands may find more chances to dominant a conversation.

Comparatively, deliberation in the blogosphere has the following advantages. First of all, the stickiness of blogs is higher than the BBS forums, considering there is often a stable group of readers who follow the blog on a regular basis. A blog’s comments on an issue will be presented to its readers in a continuous way, thus readers are exposed to different issue discussion even though they do not deliberately go out for a topic. Second, the domain name of a blog creates an identity in the virtual online community, which makes it easier for readers to follow and to establish a long-term relationship with the blogger. Third, blog’s content structure is more complex. While each blog has relatively limited resources, and perhaps attracts only a handful of people, the aggregate of blogs could form rich information resources when blog aggregator organizes posts by topic, dates, or popularity. This classification and archiving effectively

reduces the difficulty to find and participate in discussion about a certain issue. Then through the interconnection among various blogs, users can re-screen relevant information, which will not only ensure the validity and reliability of resources, but also become conducive to the expansion and deepening of the theme. Finally, information retrieval and sharing mechanism, such as the RSS (“really simple syndication”) technology, helps readers to directly access to the subscribed blogs and browse the latest updates. It makes it possible for subscribers to search across the retrieved blog information as well. This helps to maintain audience’s continuous interest as well as developing interest in new issues when they are presented by the subscribed bloggers.

Although the argument that blogs are personal and isolated stands up well under some conditions, the context of the blogosphere conveys the idea of public sphere in a better sense. First, speaking opportunity is almost guaranteed when setting up a blog since there is no moderator (*banzhu* in Chinese) as most BBS forums have when these moderators tend to limit the discussion from some participants. Second, blogs usually aggregate bloggers with common interests through blogrolls and links, which helps to extend the scope and depth of discussion in a given blog post. Blog features such as tags and trackback strengthen cross-referencing and interactivities among bloggers and readers. When a post is designated with a tag, both the blogger and readers are able to see posts that share a common tag on the same blog service portal, thus generating more contact and communication with others. In addition, trackback allows bloggers to request notification when somebody links to a post. This not only enables bloggers to keep track of who is referring to his post, but also bridge the posts that discuss the relevant issues with a potential to decrease occurrence of disrespect. With these unique features, blogging creates an ongoing relationship among bloggers, peer bloggers, and commentators, resulting in better dynamics than BBS.

BLOG SERVICE PROVIDERS (BSPs)

The uniqueness of blogging in China, as compared with its Western counterparts, lies in the fact that most blogs (about 86 percent) do not exist independently but are hosted by BSPs. There are two major types of BSPs: One is associated to portals, such as blog.sina.com.cn and blog.sohu.com. The other is professional BSPs focusing only on blog services such as bokee.com and blogbus.com.

In general, BSP functions both negatively and positively on blog communication. Without an autonomous domain, blogs hosted by BSPs are constrained in terms of space capacity, diversity of webpage design, and control of content. For example, BSPs can exert censorship when a blog or a post is considered politically sensitive. At the same time, however, blogs also benefit from depending on BSPs that often have economic resources (e.g., financial support and advertisement sources) and social leverage (e.g., support from the state, rallying point stems from established status) than independent blogs. In 2007, for example, the largest BSP Sina blog homepage was ranked by Technorati as the most popular blog (having the most incoming links) in the world.¹⁴ With such a high ranking, the BSP may help to direct attention to a blog through mechanisms such as first page recommendation.

The most recent trend is that blogs on portals that have strong brand influence (e.g., Sina, Sohu), on space that bundled with real-time communication tools (QQ, Netease), and on booming SNS websites (Kaixin, Xiaonei) become blogs visited most often by blog readers and users.

CENSORSHIP AND SURVEILLANCE

Blogging is under the censorship and surveillance of the Chinese government. Various control strategies are employed to ensure that blogging does not carry dissent and threaten the stability and safety of the CCP Party rule. These strategies include removing

¹⁴ Technorati has removed Sina Blog homepage from Technorati Top blogs.

post from service system, stopping visit, or removing the entire blog, etc. The Internet Society of China released the *Public Pledge of Self-regulation on Blog Service* in 2007, signed by more than 10 BSPs including people.com, sina.com, sohu.com, netease.com, QQ.com, and MSN China. The obligation was for the BSPs to ensure politically acceptable and morally appropriate content through constraining the behavior of individual bloggers on these BSPs. The pledge requires that the blogger agrees to abide by China's laws and regulations, not disseminate pornography, rumors, or illegal information. A blogger is also required to agree to monitor and manage postings and comments, and to delete those that are illegal or objectionable. If a blogger does not adhere to the terms, the service provider has the right to delete unpleasant information, or terminate the blogger's service. Under such a surveillance, scholars have argued that political discussion in the blogosphere is often "the result of a compromise between what bloggers want to express and what the regime allows them to write" (Esarey & Xiao, 2008, p. 756).

In recent years, the control has even gone beyond the hands of party regime to the commercial companies. Rebecca MacKinnon (2009), a former CNN journalist and an expert on Chinese Internet censorship, conducted a systemic testing of Chinese BSPs in 2009, and found that blogs suffer from commercial BSPs' wide variation of censorship, ranging from being prevented from posting at all, to be "held for moderation" or partial visibility to the public, or to be fully deleted after publication. The multiple strategies of content filtering thus constitute a technical barrier for bloggers to get their opinion distributed—they have to be able to master knowledge and strategy of avoiding censoring techniques to increase the likelihood of survival of politically sensitive information.

Foreign corporations providing blog services in China are also subject to the local laws of censorship. Microsoft's MSN Spaces, for example, censors its Chinese language blogs, and in 2005 took down the popular blog written by Michael Anti, one of China's

liberal and edgiest journalistic bloggers, to show its determination to comply with the Chinese regulation on Internet speech.

REHEARSING DEMOCRACY?¹⁵

Regulations and intermittent restrictions do not eclipse the fact that there is still leeway for bloggers to evade regulation pressures. By installing certain blogging software or using euphemisms, for example, bloggers often successfully bypass controls from cyber police. Recently, blogs also initiated public discussion on issues such as social unfairness, corruption among government officials, and suppression of freedom of speech. Although the critique usually takes the form of a compromise of what bloggers want to say with what the government would allow them to say, it presents voices and opinions that would otherwise unheard. In this sense, blogging, as well as the Internet in general, creates a virtual space for the Chinese people to practice democratic discussion on issues they care. The more people begin to engage in deliberation and use it to solve problems and conflicts, the deeper the aspiration and sense of democracy in their mind. In this sense, blogging on sociopolitical issues is a rehearsal for democracy.

According to a 2009 survey conducted by the CNNIC, 36.6 percent of bloggers said the reason that they set up a blog is to “find a place to express opinions on current social affairs” (CNNIC, 2009, p. 27). Studies found that blogging has provided the Chinese people with a medium for making sophisticated critiques of the regime without encountering harsh repression (Esarey & Xiao, 2008). Blogs have also initiated vehement arguments on social unfairness, corruption among government officials, suppression of freedom of speech, and so on (Zhou & Moy, 2007).

¹⁵ This subtitle and thoughts about rehearsing democracy are indebted to my mentor Prof. Stephen D. Reese, as well as to the notion of theatre as “rehearsal for revolution” proposed by Augusto Boal.

Another factor that could be argued against the deliberative role of blogs is that it is hard for blogs hosted by ordinary citizens (who neither have an established reputation nor have outstanding expertise) to attract public attention when they are normally submerged in millions of blogs, lacking the visibility of those celebrity and elite blogs. In network theory terms, they are not positioned on the key focal points-- thus their function is peripheral. Admittedly, if a blog has the potential to be a deliberative tool, then this potential mainly depends on the scale effects. In other words, only when numerous blogs are interconnected to form a blogosphere can the impact of blog be demonstrated. When substantial incidents occur, with each blog creating a relatively small visibility, average citizen blogs' contribution to publicity and critiques to these incidents might be significant.

BLOGGING VS. JOURNALISM

Studies have documented the link between the popularity of political blogging and public skepticism of traditional journalistic values (Glaser, 2004), as well as blogs' ambition to supply the gap left by journalistic constraints (Lowrey, 2006). During the 2004 presidential campaign, for example, the so-called "watchblogs" run by anonymous liberal bloggers (mainly Howard Dean supporters) watched campaign reporters who covered their favored candidates, and then critiqued them for factual errors or biases. As Glaser (2004) noted, "If they gain traction, watchblogs represent another step in the evolution of reader feedback and media criticism, and they have the potential to improve the work of journalists." In the context of China, such a competition between bloggers and journalists is even more remarkable, since media's dominant role as government organs is still assumed, and inadequate information and intractability of political problems and solution is common in news coverage.

At the same time, in the older communications ecology, information was costly and asymmetric in distribution, and access to large-scale communication was highly

resource-dependent (Levy, 1997). Under this circumstance, minority interests are often ignored, news that may bring up controversy is withheld, and the effort to track down the facts suppressed. When an apparently intractable political or social problem needs to be addressed, therefore, transparent information and citizen deliberation in new media are seen as necessary to better the decision-making process. Bimber (2000) noted that the relationship between traditional resources and the capacity to communicate and manage information integrated in traditional journalism is weakening in the new media environment, and that this weakened relationship empowers marginalized groups. In particular, Bimber (2000) writes:

Lower information costs reduce the need for large, inflexible, bureaucratic organizations that benefit from economies of scale and the accumulation of resources and permit, in their place, more specialized and more flexible organizations. Novel groups and organizations formed only for the duration of a single political effort or civic event may increasingly replace more traditional, institutionalized entities as organizers of civic engagement (p.332)

Indeed, information management becomes more flexible and effective through online media such as blogs. A source of traditional news could take it upon himself to become a blogger and distribute the news, which not only shortens the publish cycle, but also condenses the feedback loop from audience when the news is referred or responded through trackbacks or comments.

Blogging has demonstrated the advantage in distributing information more rapidly, and sometimes with more in-depth and eyewitness accounts. For example, on Feb. 18, 2005, China's biggest online game operator Shengda purchased stocks of China's most influential portal Sina. Because both are leading Chinese Internet company, the change in ownership structure may affect the pattern of the entire Internet in China. However, due to strict confidentiality, no media reported the news, and it was revealed

firstly instead by a well-known IT critic, Wang Jipeng, in his blog. Similarly, in the earthquake in Jiujiang, Jiangxi province, Nov. 26, 2005, a blog reported the earthquake 15 minutes earlier than the mainstream media.

In addition to the speed of information distribution, there are also examples in which a blog also has beat the traditional journalism with respect to the exposure of politically unpleasant news. On Aug. 1, 2008, a landslide accident occurred in an iron mine in Loufan, Shanxi province, and the local government alleged that it was a natural disaster. The *Oriental Outlook* published Sun Chonglong's and Wang Xiao's report that revealed cover-up and falsity in the official report of the accident. This article was cross-posted by the Netease, Tencent, and Phoenix TV news websites (the "outer circles media" category as mentioned previously), but was deleted soon. On Sept. 14, Sun Chonglong posted *An Informant's Letter to the Premier of Shanxi Province* in his blog, trying to reveal the true story. Sun's blog had 631,231 visits, and this letter was cross-posted on various message platforms online by netizens who hailed Sun's courage. Then it was picked up by the central leaders. The State Council investigated into the accident and confirmed that the local government has concealed the truth, and changed the alleged "natural disaster" into a "major liability accident." In this case, although Sun, as a journalist, first published his article in traditional media, but it was his blog post that has invited extensive attention. Because once an article is removed from mainstream or the outer circles media, it disappeared in the public's field of vision; but a blog post often has long been reproduced everywhere by its readers or subscribers even if they are removed.

Mass Incidents and Internet Incidents

Hotspot Internet incidents are incidents in which they break out suddenly as a single episodic occurrence with no previous organization and unattached to any durative

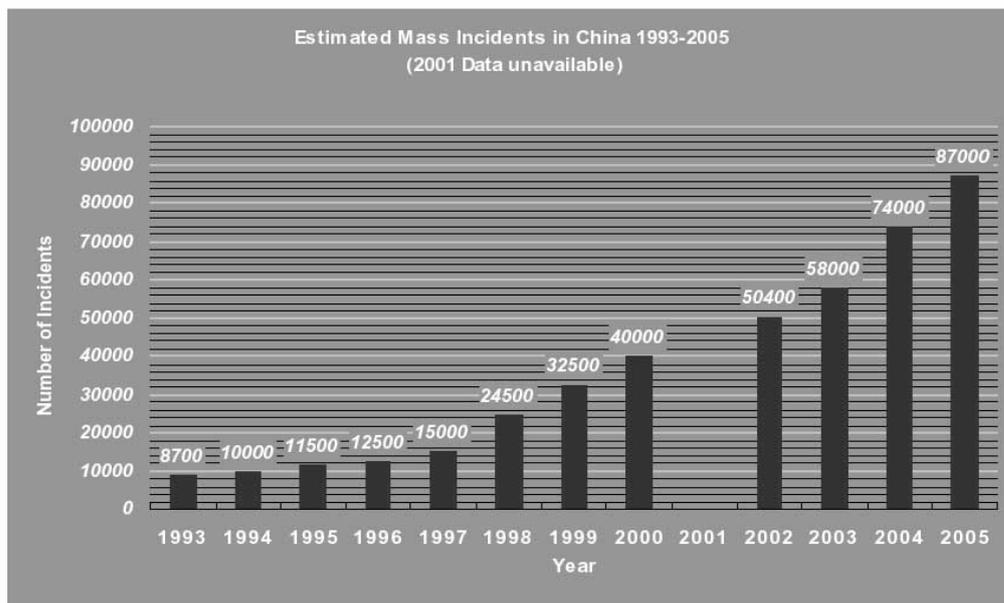
social movement or legal process. However, due to highly controversial issues involved, they usually invite enormous and intensive attention among netizens, and vibrant public discussions across various Internet platforms. They are “Internet” incidents in that they create salient issues and topics that attract enormous attention and generate common concern (heated debates and emotional excitation) online, the social impacts of which is expanded through the Internet. They often invite large-scale attention and protest due to clash between the interests of the authorities and those of the netizens, who, standing together with the direct victims of the clash, think that their rights have been infringed and that authorities should be held accountable. Usually, participants gather in conflict with an administration or some powerful social group, with purpose to declare certain rights and interest, or simply vending dissatisfaction with social injustice. Poor management by authority due to incompetence or self-interest often contributes to the rapid escalation of a minor gathering into large-scale conflicts, taking the forms of protests, demonstrations, group petitioning, traffic blocking, and besieging of governmental institutions that may disrupt social stability. The subsequent involvement of the public is often a self-mobilized process, however, with no definite organizer pushing agenda and action. Most of the participants involved out of indignation and empathy, and their purposes are to vent dissatisfaction against unfairness and defend rights.

A remarkable example of such incidents is a mass incident (*quntixing shijian* in Chinese), which involves a large number--more than five--of participants formed as a group through temporary association, whose behavior may neither necessarily comply to legal provisions nor even expressly prohibited by laws and regulations, but exert certain impact on the social order (Yu, 2009). As Figure 3 illustrates, the China Ministry of State Security reported that over the latest 10 years, China’s mass incidents signaled a linear upward trend (Figure 3): from 8,700 occurred in 1993, rising to 87,000 cases in 2005, and

more than 90,000 in 2006 (China stopped publishing the data in 2005). The number of mass incidents in the years 2007, 2008, and 2009 all exceeded 90,000.¹⁶

Figure 3. Estimated Mass Incidents in China 1993-2005

Estimated Mass Incidents in China 1993-2005



Source: China Ministry of State Security (http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20061115_1.htm).

The rapid and dramatic social and economic reform in China in the past three decades has exacerbated social contradiction, which is thought to be the cause of the increasing amount of mass incidents. On one hand, social problems such as unfair interest allocation, unemployment, and rich-poor polarization have caused social inequalities and a strong dissatisfaction with these inequalities. On the other hand, few channels are created for

¹⁶ for more discussion on mass incidents, refers to: The accuracy of China's 'mass incidents', at: http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9ee6fa64-25b5-11df-9bd3-00144feab49a,dwp_uuid=0a8cf74c-6d6d-11da-a4df-0000779e2340.html; Data show social unrest on the rise in China, at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/171fb682-88d6-11da-94a6-0000779e2340.html>; China Protests: A New Approach? at: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1820345,00.html>; Statistics of Mass Incidents, at: http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20061115_1.htm.

average citizens to pursue equality and protect their rights, which often bring inevitable outbursts of public grievance and protest.

Specifically, scholars (Yu, 2006; Yu & Yu, 2008) summarized the following factors rooted in Chinese society that hinder citizens to seek solutions of problem through legal and routine channel: First, bureaucracy and corruption cause tension between cadres and the populace. Local cadres, usually with vested interests, are indifferent to average citizens' plight and are reluctant to change the status quo that benefits themselves. In a worse situation, even when a personal appeal gets into administrative or legal process, it may still encounter systemic handicap from administrative or judiciary institutions that are part of the interest group protesters are against of. Accumulated dissatisfaction therefore tends to be exacerbated into large mass protests, especially when managed poorly by the authority (e.g., police suppress and information block). Second, some citizen's awareness of the legal rights and protections and the competence of using them are still weak. When confronted with disputes in the incident of conflict, many do not know how to use legal means to protect their legitimate rights and interests, but rather to take extreme measures such as smashing governmental buildings or burning themselves to protest. Third, social management seems to be incompatible to people's increasing awareness of democratic principles. China's economic system has been advancing citizens' democratic consciousness and political participation, but many party authorities and cadres are still using social control and management methods under the planned economy system, sometimes even use forced command and illegal execution, leading to intensification of conflicts. Some local authorities are often weak and slack, simply putting off solution or suppressing dissents, which eventually makes mass action the only feasible method for the populace to address their grievances.

Social contradictions involved in these problems are usually irreconcilable and difficult to be resolved satisfactorily in a timely manner when the political condition as a

whole does not offer rightful channels for citizens to express dissatisfaction and defend rights. Mass incidents, however, when involving large amount of people and creating social pressure with rabble-rousing approach, can force relevant authorities to respect public demands and take actions. In this sense, mass incidents in China are deemed as an effective shortcut to expose problems and invite authorities' attention, and sometimes even an effective method in solving social and political problems.

Hotspot Internet incidents share the above common characteristics with the offline mass incidents, but at the same time bear some "online" features: First, large number of netizens are the major participants who mobilize Internet tools to express dissatisfaction and expose problems under full public review. The "human flesh search engines," for example, as a form of online "vigilante justice" based on massive human collaboration, has become an Internet power in hunting down and exposing people who have attracted netizens' wrath.¹⁷ Personal details of the target's life, from home and work address to family history often publicized for the public to humiliate and punish the searched person. Second, disregard of the original locus of an occurrence (either online or offline), Internet incidents tend to build higher visibility of the incidents and relevant issues in a society than incidents limited offline. Incidents such as the protest to the Green Dam Internet filtering scheme¹⁸ and the Jia Junpeng case¹⁹ broke out directly online, and

¹⁷ "Human flesh" refers both to the search by humans (contribution of knowledge through networking) and the search for humans (those who has committed offense or social breach).

¹⁸ In 2009, the Chinese government initiated the installation of a specific filtering software product, Green Dam, publicly stating to protect children from harmful Internet content. But the public was concerned that the move might have included the Government to strengthen control of the Internet and restrict the flow of information that is undesirable to the Center. The result of the protest is that the government scraps the controversial Internet filtering scheme, making a rare concession that the plan was a mistake.

¹⁹ On July 16, 2009, a single sentence message "Jia Junpeng, your mom wants you to go home to eat" appeared in a popular forum for the game World of Warcraft, and attracted more than 7 million hits and 300,000 user comments within one day. Because the game (hosted by Netease) had been inaccessible due to the sanctions from Netease's higher authority, the Press and Publication General Administration, many Chinese WoW players have interpreted this message as "Netease hurry up and start the World of Warcraft service." Later, it takes on political meanings when netizens used it as a slogan for airing various grievances, especially in the case of rescuing a well-known netizen Guo Baofeng, who was detained with alleged defamation. Numerous netizens sent post cards to the police with the message of "Guo Baofeng,

discussion about them unfolded online eventually directed public challenge to the involved authorities such as Internet supervising bureaucracies. At the same time, an offline incident can also aggregate tremendous attention when it gets online exposure and distribution. The rapid flow of information through the Internet often puts more pressure on involved authority to respond to the public's demand. So these are incidents pursued online, but usually with offline results.

Thus I define Internet incidents as occurrences on the Internet through which netizens aggregated, often in an unorganized way, to comment on important issues, appeal for social justice and shape the public opinion that may eventually influence policy-making. In most of the cases, an Internet incident becomes a "hotspot" because it involves acute conflict that related to the majority of the public, such as the conflict between authority and powerless citizens (e.g., the "Open-chest Lung Inspection" case),²⁰ or conflict between public and private sphere (e.g., the Green Dam Internet filtering case). It thus creates a channel for people to vent grievance and lodge complaint that is often not accessible in offline administrative routine, and usually yielded the most passionate and critical discussion in the online world. In a sense, Internet incidents can be viewed as the online forms of offline mass incidents, as both involving fierce official-citizen conflict and political protest. As Yang (Yang, 2009) contends,

From a macro perspective, the network incident reflects the characteristics of the Chinese social structure in transition. The polarization between rich and poor, official

your mom wants you to go home to eat," and successfully pressed the police to release him. Some other people attributed the popularity of the message to the childhood memories it arouses. It turned out later, however, that it was merely a marketing strategy conducted by an Internet business company to maintain the attention and popularity of the WoW game. Allegedly, the company hired more than 800 marketing personnel, who then registered more than 20,000 Internet user IDs to post responses to that message.

²⁰ A worker had surgeons cut open his chest in order to prove pneumoconiosis--a work-related injury. Previously he was diagnosed as pneumoconiosis by several hospitals, but because the company he worked for refused to provide job relevant information, the evaluation center of occupational diseases first refused to make diagnosis, then claimed that he did not have pneumoconiosis. This heroic act gained deep sympathy among netizens and caused scathingly criticism of the current system of occupational diseases diagnosis. Eventually these discussion helped the worker to get his compensation.

corruption, environmental destruction, and changes in cultural values, among other factors, are directly reflected in the Internet incidents, making the Internet incidents an integrated part of the double movement²¹ that goes against the “great transformation” in contemporary China (p.43, translated from Chinese by the author).

This study uses a purposive sampling of the top 60 hotspot Internet incidents listed in the *Analysis of China's Internet Public Opinion*, a yearly report published by the Online Public Opinion Monitoring and Measuring Department of the People's Net.²²

Although the 60 hotspot incidents take small portion of all the Internet incidents that happened between 2007 and 2009, they aggregated disproportional amounts of social attention and resources, precipitated national public discussion and in some cases yielded substantial policy change. They thus provide valuable and adequate information for this study to explore in what way public opinion about social “hot spots” is formed in the blogosphere, and to what extent the process embodies deliberative spirit and skill. Moreover, due to the variety of interests and conflicts involved in these incidents, weighing the trade-offs among different opinions is crucial. Mutual understanding, respect, and conciliation are also required so that a solution is in accord with the majority's interests. Capturing this complexity and dynamics will help better understanding both of the analytic process (the quality of reasoning) and the social process (willingness to understand and compromise) of deliberation. Ultimately, these incidents may shed light on similar and related cases, and serve as a gateway in understanding the general deliberative practice in today's China.

21 The concept of “double movement” was proposed by the famous sociologist Karl Polanyi to describe the two-way trends in market economy: one is the movement of economic liberalism and the market expansion, the other is the reverse movement of self protection by the society (labor) to avoid the infringement by the market mechanism. The protagonist of the former is the bourgeois, and the latter is the working class.

22 The yearly reports were included in the Society Blue Paper *The Analysis and Prediction of the Situation of Chinese Society*, published yearly by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Studying the Blogosphere

So far, most studies on political blogs started from the “categorization” of blogs, namely, to sample a group of blogs that share common identity or characteristics, such as the campaign blog (Wallsten, 2007), warblog, or political news blog (Lee, 2006; Meraz, 2005; Reese et al., 2007; Tremayne et al., 2006; Williams et al., 2005). While these studies provide insights about blogs of certain types, to what extent their findings can be generalized to the whole blogosphere remains to be tested. This study makes a preliminary effort to sample blog posts based on a common topic (one of the hotspot Internet incidents in discuss), rather than on blog identities. Thus the sampling is likely to include posts from different types of blogs (e.g., political, journalistic, or personal/hobby, sports blogs, etc.), rather than being narrowed down to one type. A preview of the sampled posts indeed tells that discussion about these hotspot incidents is not limited to blogs focused on commenting politics; rather, it appears in blogs about personal lifestyle, economics and sports, etc. Expanding the sampling from a certain type of blogs to posts of blogs varying in types and styles, therefore, may yield more representative samples of the inclusive blogosphere as a whole.

Another trend emerged in the previous studies on blog is the elite approach, namely, the focus on the top-ranked, salient blogs—or “A-list blogs”—which are often widely read and take the role of “hub” in the networked blogosphere. This is understandable, considering that the obvious visibility and the authoritative reputation these blogs have established in the blogging community may render higher level of significance in the blog zone. But with such a high profile approach, tens of thousands of blogs—the majority in quantity—were left understudied and therefore their importance underevaluated. This study tries to approach the blogosphere from a different angle, that is, to look into the blogs written by average citizens without knowing about their pre-existed position in the field. In this way, the sampling of blog posts will be based on

the relevance of topic at hand, rather than the established reputation a blog holds in the blogosphere.

Although conversation addressing substantial political reform (legitimacy of the Party leadership, for example) may yield more deliberative outcome than other kind, as it impacts the majority of people in society, it often incurs censorship in China. This partly explains why researchers found that compared to other continents, political bloggers “are almost nonexistent in Asian cultures” (Su, Wang, & Mark, 2005, p. 12). However, the fact that political blogging is not as popular as in other countries does not mean that bloggers do not care about politics. The reputed “invisibility” of political blogs in China may stemmed from the fact that political concerns are often expressed indirectly in subtle ways to avoid censorship.

The most obvious tactic is to use “hidden text”-- euphemism and satire. Esarey and Xiao (2008), for example, studied blog postings of political satire, humorous adaptation of official media products (*egao* in Chinese), implicit criticism of the party or state structure, and explicit but guarded criticism. These are postings of “political” by definition, as they address political issues, but they may not look “political” as they use subtle form of political satire and criticism of the state.

Besides using political satire, the subject of discussion also effectively “tone down” the sensitivity of political criticism. That is, netizens in general, and bloggers in specific, often voice criticism by commenting on socially significant incidents rather than hard core political issues. Such criticism often points out a socially problematic status quo, and brings forth a cry for systematic change, which, in turn, demands an ultimate political reform. With such incidents increase in recent years, more problems have been exposed, and the public learned to test the water and understand what should be left unmentioned or not. For example, when debating on a sensitive incident such as the corruption of the head of the State Food and Drug Administration, a blogger would use

caution and observe if the commenting would result in repression (e.g., deletion of posts). If more bloggers are commenting on the case, he might then assume that it is a safe subject. In this sense, hotspot Internet incidents provide relatively “safe” topics that allow bloggers to test the water before they hit the regimes’ bottom line.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One unavoidable question in discussing public deliberation is the relationship between the state and deliberation. As previously mentioned, deliberation in China develops in the framework of “authoritarian deliberation,” and sometimes benefits from the government’s guidance and intervention. However, the authoritarian system also bring about restrictions on deliberation. After all, the survival and development of deliberation depends on the public sphere, which is independent of the state. As some theorists argue, the deliberative participation of citizens grows when it is established and implemented in the autonomous public sphere, but will meet the challenge from the state (Dryzek, 1990). One significant feature of this challenge is the confrontation between the state administrative power and the public’s communicative right.

Administrative power refers to the power through which a person or group forces another person or group to implement a decision. Within the framework of the authoritarian system, it can prevent people from organizing public consultations to set an agenda. The deliberation theory, however, advocates the public’s communicative right. In Habermas’s view, the communicative right is that in people’s social and national life, they should be able to form their own will and opinions on the basis of spontaneous and rational communication, and further decide the will of society and the national will. The inevitable tension between the state’s control on the public agenda and the autonomous public deliberation will therefore affect the quality of the deliberation. Thus, the administrative power, as a factor that constrains public deliberation, becomes an important variable in the theoretical framework of this study. Here the main focus is the command and control system and its function in protecting the core interests of the state and the party committee.

The Central-Local Relationship Paradigm: A Command and Control System

Unlike the Western political construction, in which local government is relatively independent of the federal government and enjoys autonomy in fiscal and political decision making, Chinese localities are completely subservient to the central government (represented by the State Council). The center and local government structure (constructed vertically by province, county, city or municipality, and town or village) constitutes a power hierarchy. From top to bottom, each level is directly in charge of the subordinate level of government through the party committee. The central government holds the centralized executive power of making financial budgets, planning economic and social development, allocating resources, and appointing personnel for local governments. In turn, localities must subject to the macro social and economic strategy in local economic and social development. This center-local relationship is described as a “commanding control system” (Rong et al., 2008), whereby the Center, as a single centralized focus of power, imposes its command of coercive force to extract compliance of the localities.

This command and control system puts persistent pressure on localities. Localities that respond more successfully to central demands have a better chance of political survival, and changes in institutional rules have to be passed and formally laid down by the center. In this sense, localities are the “coerced and responsive entity” (Li, 1997, p. 51), and are held accountable for any operations that violate the central rules or cause social unrest. Since 2004, the center has been promoting the construction of a “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui*), a social-economic vision that entails reducing social conflict and limiting social uneasiness at local levels. Localities now shoulder a greater responsibility for local social stability and harmony than before.

Under these two governmental layers are individual officials who, when held responsible, usually have less governmental protection. Officials at the central level rarely become targets of public critique because information about them is controlled. But in a few cases that involved corruption, the center has shown a low tolerance policy and has handed out harsh punishment. Zheng Xiaoyu, the former head of the State Food and Drug Administration, for example, was and sentenced to death. Similarly, when local officials are corrupt and abuse their power, they are portrayed as deviants, and are punished to mitigate the negative image and to shift the public's attention, which, in turn, usually satisfies the center.

THREATS TO CORE INTERESTS VS. NON-THREATENING

Another important issue is that of the central and local government's core interest. The exercising of executive power and its strength on incident management at both the central and local level is subject to whether an incident threatens the core interest.

From the perspective of the central level, the most fundamental interest is to maintain the legitimacy of the party rule, i.e. the public's belief in the value of the Communist political rule. This belief may come from the people's voluntary recognition, but it may also be enhanced through coercive power. Once the legitimacy of the party rule is challenged, the central government tends to resolve the crisis through a blackout or by guiding the public opinion. However, in the Internet era, a blackout and guiding the public opinion often results in resentment and discontent, and ends in massive protests. The consequence, then, is a dissipation of belief in the established political order.

In particular, the following areas constitute challenges to the legitimacy of Communist rule. Firstly, clashes with what the Marxist theorists call the *state apparatus* (i.e. the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts, the prisons), which often use violence to repress the people. The main function of the state apparatus in this case is to ensure the interests of the ruling party, so it is reasonable to believe that

a clash with these apparatuses constitutes a threat to the center's core interest. Direct conflict against the agents of repression (soldiers, policemen, politicians, administrators, etc.) is the most significant threat to the government, and therefore incidents such as "Professor Shot Dead by Police"²³ and "Police Killer Yang Jia"²⁴ clearly belong to the "core-interest" group. In addition, criticism of the due process of administration is another major form of threat. For example, suspecting that poor construction and corruption caused the schools to collapse in the Wenchuan earthquake is deemed to be taboo.

Secondly, clashes with *ideological state apparatuses*. Althusser (1970) contends that various realities exist in a society that inculcates the ideology of the ruling class to maintain domination. The ideological state apparatuses (i.e. the religious, educational, family, legal, political, trade-union, communications, and cultural ideological state apparatuses) work complementarily with the state apparatus to reproduce the "relations of production." Of particular interest here is the Chinese communication apparatus—the official mainstream media as elaborated previously, and their supervising institutions—whose major political function is propaganda, that is, to maintain the stability of the regime through the "guidance of public opinion" (embodied in political discourse such as "stability overrides everything" and "constructing a harmonious society"). When the monopoly status of the communication apparatus is threatened, or

23 On November 13, 2007, Associate Professor Yin Fangming from Guangzhou Zhujiang Hospital was questioned by the police about a false license plate when parking his car at the hospital gate. When Yin tried to drive away, the police shot him in the heart, and he died. Netizens were shocked and confused, questioning whether the police acted in accordance with procedural requirements and the shooting was an act of justifiable homicide or whether it was an act of manslaughter.

24 On July 1, 2008, Yang Jia walked into the Shanghai Zhabei branch of the Public Security Bureau and stabbed and killed six policemen and injured five others. Yang was found guilty of "intentional homicide" and sentenced to death. Yang claimed that the police humiliated and assaulted him when they asked him about his bike's license, so the public interpreted his actions as revenge. There was a widespread online debate regarding whether the police actions were reasonable, and whether procedural justice had been served by his sentence.

the ideology by which it guides the public opinion is challenged, it is understandable that it will harm the core interest of the government. For example, when China's restriction of foreign media to the Lhasa riot was criticized by the Western media, the Chinese government and the media emphasized the fact that Tibet's political and economic achievement and the Tibetan's wish to maintain the "family of nations" was ignored by ill-disposed critics.

Thirdly, scandals involving governmental officials also provide a challenge. The central government's image may be blemished; therefore, scandals are either covered up or simply portrayed as being the consequence of the deviant behavior of an individual official rather than of a flawed system or institution. In these cases, the center punishes these individuals (as in the Zheng Xiaoyu case) to show that they are determined to fight corruption. The local government's core interests are mainly related to local political and economic achievements. From a political point of view, it is to ensure "stability maintenance (*wei wen*)," namely, to maintain political consensus with the center, and prohibit political unrest incidents; from the economic perspective, it is to keep the economy growing steadily and to achieve the economic targets set by the center.

In particular, the following areas constitute challenges to the core interests of the local government. Firstly, a conflict between the public's interests with local interests will result in distrust of the government and even resistance to it. In the Chongqing "Nail House" case, for example, a tenacious home owner refused to move and make room for municipal real estate development, which directly challenged the local authority.

Secondly, mass incidents in which protesters try to protect their rights by violence, to vent their anger, or even to cause political turbulence (Yu, 2009). For example, when police covered up a girl's death in Wengan, it triggered rioters to torch governmental buildings and vehicles. Because the first response of local governments tends to cover up unpleasant news, or to stopping protests, it often misses an opportune

time to address these incidents effectively, and instead results in serious consequences such as riots. Scholars describe such phenomenon as “institutional lagging,” represented usually by a cycle of “minor problem–slow local response–escalation of the impact–out of control–shock–quick disposal–settlement” (Huang et al., 2007). In this cycle, a minor conflict often becomes more intense when a local authority is unresponsive or indifferent, or not able to address the initial conflict in a timely manner. The public’s resentment will then spread widely and get out of control, ultimately leading to mass incidents. In the “Deng Yujiao” incident, for instance, Deng, a waitress at an entertainment center, resisted the sexual advances of local officials and killed one. The local government first attempted to cover up the incident because of the dead man’s identity; then under public pressure, released the results of the investigation but with inconsistent details. The public became suspicious of the local government and caused local chaos.

Thirdly, catastrophic events that are a consequence of blind local pursuit of political/economic profit (e.g. local GDP growth) at the expense of other values such as food security and protection of the environment. When the Sanlu poisoned infant formula scandal was exposed, the city of Shijiazhuang (where the Sanlu company is located) tried to cover up the story because the company was one of the largest taxpayers in the city. Likewise, the algal bloom in Taihu Lake was the result of loose local supervision of the sewage disposal systems of factories that discharged phosphorus and nitrogen into the lake.

Finally, incidents caused by an official’s dereliction of duty and an indifference to basic human rights can challenge the core interests of the local government. In the incident of the Shanxi brick kilns, local officials ignored issues related to employment, especially illegal detention, forced migrant labor, illegal use of child labor, and other criminal acts.

In contrast, non-threatening incidents refer to those incidents that do not challenge the legitimacy of the center or political and economic achievements at the local level. Although they are sometimes related to people's livelihood, these incidents usually do not constitute a threat to the government. At the central level, non-threatening incidents include not only heated debates on prices, the stock market, the RMB appreciation, and other issues of economic control, but also issues involving the enhancement of the national image. At the local level, non-threatening incidents are mainly related to individual cases—the influence of which usually could be limited to the personal level and local authorities are not necessarily involved. In the case of Peng Yu, for example, a young man who helped take an old woman to the hospital was instead sued for compensation. “Common sense” suggested that Peng would not have taken the woman to hospital if he did not hit her, so the court concluded that Peng was guilty and should pay for 40 percent of the woman's medical expenses. This conclusion gave rise to a netizen's debate on the adverse consequences of social righteousness: if acting bravely for a just cause would incur a lawsuit, then one will hesitate to do good. Although this case ended with a reconciliation after local officials intervened, it was initially a civil dispute that did not involve the local government.

Information Availability of Internet Incidents

Information availability refers to the extent to which information about an incident is available for the public to review. It can be operationalized as the volume of information from journalistic sources, namely, news of an incident, as well as information from non-journalistic sources, such as blogs, twitters, or BBS forums. In the communication research literature, it is typically assumed that news reported by professional media is “quality” information since it is produced under the principle of objectivity with fact checking from multiple and balanced sources. Information from

non-journalistic sources, such as the Internet, however, is often considered “amateur” or “citizen,” in the respect that there is neither a gate-keeping, nor a fact-checking mechanism during the process of information production. In China, the authority to collect news is licensed only to professional news media; thus, these media have the advantage of accessing news sources that are often closed to other media outlets. Studies have shown that even for an online discussion, the participants’ messages often contained a substantial amount of content that was imported from traditional news organizations (Himmelboim, Gleave, & Smith, 2009; Zhou & Moy, 2007).

However, news produced by professional media in China (including the “official mainstream” and “outer circle media” mentioned previously) has long been criticized as being submissive to the party leadership, as these media often function as the “mouthpiece” of the central government. News coverage of political and social issues is often dominated by the official voice and framed in a way that minimizes criticism of the current regime. Qian Gang (2009), a well-known senior journalist, describes the Chinese media discourse system as a “discourse chromatogram,” which includes four colors of discourse: deep red, light red, deep blue, and light blue. “Deep red discourse” is the legacy of the Chinese Revolution, the use of which has been ceased, but occasionally re-appears to emphasize the consummate authority of the CCP’s leadership. Words such as “class struggle,” “dictatorship of the proletariat,” and the “Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought” are examples of this kind of discourse. Qian noted that the CCP’s language and ideology have gone through a “bleaching” process after the reform during the 1970s. The “light red discourse” is the hegemonic and mainstream discourse. It does not differ essentially from the deep red discourse, but has a more pleasing quality, which softens the mainstream ideology. One recent example is the slogan to “build a harmonious society,” which shows the CCP’s determination to govern, but also covers up the social inequality and social injustice. The use of the “light blue discourse” is

permitted by liberal intellectuals and commercial media, and sometimes even shared by officials. Words such as “the right to know” and “the right to express” appear frequently in governmental media such as the *People’s Daily*. “Deep blue discourse” is forbidden to be used, and includes discourse that challenges the regime and promotes lifting various restrictions on free political expression.

Under these circumstances, readers of the news learn to read “between the lines” and question the authenticity of news. They often refer to other online media such as blogs, BBS forums, and videos for more information and alternative perspectives. Regarding hotspot incidents, specifically, the amount of traditional news produced by the “official mainstream” and “outer circles media” can be used as an indicator of the official information availability. These media often have the advantage of the ability to access important information such as sensitive governmental records and documents, and to release important government news before others. In the meantime, however, they have to abide by the propaganda policies and withhold politically sensitive information to avoid conflict with the Party’s interest. Thus, it is often the public discussion through media other than these official mainstream and outer circles media that transforms a sensitive incident into a nationally prominent issue. In this respect, I include all information—that is, the total information available online, including news, blog and forum posts, videos, and pictures of an incident as a secondary indicator of information availability.

Of the factors that determine the level of information availability, this study is mainly concerned with the impact of the command and control system. That is, the impact of the hierarchical “power-down” structure of the central-local system, and the core or non-core interest of government that an incident is related to. The occurrence, result, and social impact of an Internet hotspot incident is directly determined by the way it is handled by a government and the degree to which a government is willing to provide

information to the public. When a threatening incident occurs, local governments often adopts a “secretive” approach that does not convey clear and accurate information, which often causes a public outcry or even turbulence. Meanwhile, the government’s historical practice as a media manager causes the government to use strategies such as gag orders to protect its own interests, rather than to communicate with the media in an equal and constructive way. Officials do not want to face the media for fear of upsetting the public with the truth on the one hand or of being blamed by their supervisors if they expose unpleasant information on the other hand. Journalists are therefore viewed with suspicion. These circumstances have a direct impact on the information availability of the incidents. Although I have introduced the three major media types in China, media management by the command and control system needs further explanation.

In China, media leadership is in the hands of the CCP and different levels of party committees. Central bureaucracies such as the State Council Information Office and the Central Propaganda Department hold the supreme authority over media at both the central and local levels. These institutions guide media coverage by issuing injunctions or executing punishments when topics are considered to threaten the Center’s sovereignty and exacerbate social conflict. Media, especially the official mainstream and outer circles media that are completely or partially owned by the Party and are working in the propaganda framework, are therefore sensitive about questioning the Center’s accountability when an incident at the central level occurs, which is likely to yield a low information availability. In the meantime, however, if an incident (like the protest against Western media in the Tibet riot) can be used by the Center to promote its interest, media tend to report on a grand scale, resulting in a great volume of information.

Lower down on the hierarchical scale, local institutions such as provincial propaganda departments are in charge of media at the same local and subservient level. This provides the localities with the executive power to implement self-protective

strategies to cover up any unpleasant news that occurs locally, with the fear of punishment as well as the loss of bargaining power in applying for preferential policies and special treatment from the Center. Regarding mass incidents, the normal action taken by a local government is to block the distribution of the story to suppress a rising panic—usually in a shortsighted, careless way, such as by recalling newspapers that have been issued or sold, limiting the action of an involved party, prohibiting public discussion of the matter, and so on. Such measures tend to exacerbate the public’s suspicion and anger, which, in turn, tends to inflame rather than ease the situation.

Mounting social pressures and a corrupt bureaucracy have disillusioned the Center about its capabilities of keeping the problems concealed and molding the people’s minds, and have forced the tentative support of certain kinds of watchdog journalism that depends on media’s supervision and criticism to check on local bureaucrats and expose violations of central rules (Zhao, 2000b). This watchdog journalism strategy (“supervision by media”) grants media with increased amount of latitude in the muck raking of localities, but, by nature, it manifests a clear hierarchy of power influence. Criticism against the central government is almost completely prohibited, not only in the official mainstream and the outer circles media, but also in the fringe media. In addition, local media are under the administrative jurisdiction of the local government and reports of government-related information have to go through layers of approval, so information that damages a local government’s image is hardly ever seen.

Therefore, this “power down” structure of watchdog journalism mainly manifests itself in cross-regional supervision (*yidi jiandu*),²⁵ a practice of state-owned official mainstream media or media from one region carrying out investigative reporting about

²⁵ Recently, the CCP issued a ban on cross-regional reporting, placing pressure on reporting hard news in China. However, this ban did not cause a full prohibition of the practice. See David Bandurski, Media scholar urges end to ban on cross-regional reporting, at <http://cmp.hku.hk/2009/04/09/1553/>; and Liaoning police on the beat in Beijing: pressures grow on cross-regional reporting in China, at <http://cmp.hku.hk/2008/01/07/807/>.

other local governments. Without the immediate fear of the local government, media in distant regions are allowed more opportunities and latitude to tackle tough stories, and are able to disclose problems that would not have been revealed otherwise. Cross-regional reporting includes two layers of media operation: at the first layer, official mainstream media are granted freedom in exposing and criticizing some local operation that breaches the central policy. CCTV's *Focus* program, for instance, is an example of an official mainstream media supervising a local malfeasance. It often exposes and criticizes various illegal and unethical actions of local governments, and in doing so, satisfies the public and intimidates local officials. However, as scholars have contended, even if these criticisms and exposure is beneficial for the people's welfare, the structural position of the program in the whole command and control system can not be ignored (Deng, 2006).

Regardless of *Focus*'s institutional identity—a national television program under the leadership of the state, or the identity of the person holding the microphone, which is not an ordinary microphone but a symbol of the top-down power, *Focus* holds a central position in the central-local structures of political power. In the past, the central government did not need to use the news to restrict local governments, as the pattern of central-local interests is being reshuffled, the central government has to use the media to expose abuses of power by local governments to warn and intimidate others, in addition to administrative measures. In this sense, *Focus* represents a new management technique that has been created by the central government in the new historical transformation. For this reason, we can also say that *Focus* is still far from conducting an independent journalistic supervision of the government. In short, the cross-regional supervision of state-owned official mainstream media is aimed at deterring illegal and unethical actions of local authorities, and by so doing, to achieve political stability and loyalty at the local level

At the second layer is the local media cross inspection, which includes “inspections down” on a subservient locality by media under the control of local party committees at higher levels, as well as media inspections across the same level regions. For example, the 2008 Wengan riot was caused by the cover up of an alleged rape and murder of a 15-year-old school girl, which generated the conflict between the public and the town government. The provincial television network broadcasted live coverage of the riot, showing images of the police headquarters in flames, usually a strong taboo in China. In recent years, the intensified contradictions in society have tended to cause local governments to suppress media investigations and restrict the public’s petitions and complaints to maintain local image and interests. In this example, however, the network news did not remain silent— allegedly because President Hu Jintao wanted to know the reasons for the outbreak of riots and would not allow the local government to block messages. Another example is the 2001 report on the Nandan mining disaster in the Guangxi province, which caused the deaths of eighty-one miners. The disaster was covered up by the Nandan government for about 15 days; however media from another province broke the news and revealed that local officials had accepted bribes and cheated the public.

So, rather than investigating governmental operations at all levels as their Western counterparts do, Chinese media often target selectively at different levels of governments, with acute consciousness of the presence of power and rules of the game. In this sense, scholars have argued that Chinese media are “watchdogs on party leashes” that serve the party to “reassert control over a dysfunctional bureaucracy” and to “strengthen the Party’s hegemony by smoothing the rough edges of the social transformation” (Zhao, 2000b, p. 577).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of the study is firstly to examine the general deliberative pattern of deliberation in the Chinese blogosphere, and then to explore the factors that affect the deliberative outcomes. There has been much debate on the many criteria measuring deliberation, with different ones emphasizing different conceptual aspects. This study uses Gastil's model as a measuring framework, composed by both the analytic and social process. The RQ1 asks,

RQ1: To what extent does the discussion about the hotspot Internet incidents in the Chinese blogosphere represent deliberation in terms of the analytic and social process?

As Gastil (2008) proposes, the analytic process of deliberation refers to the "substance of an exchange," which includes fact, value, reason, and solutions identified by participants of discussion. Conceptually, these are indispensable components in understanding a subject in a meaningful and thorough sense. Take Gastil and adding related concepts yields the following:

Fact: fact lays down the information base about an incident, including personal an emotional experiences, as well as known facts. Only with the presence of facts, can participants understand the nature of the incident.

Value: Prioritizing the key value at stake is also viewed as an important aspects in Gastil's model. An effective deliberation should includes participants' reflect on their own values, as well as those of others present. Because value is an abstract concept and not easily measured, two variables are developed to assess the presence of values in deliberation: locus of problem and criticism.

Locus of Problem: it refers to the major cause or the major responsible parties of the problem appeared in an incident. In the context of the Chinese social and political environment, incidents involving conflicts, for example, are usually caused by abuse of administrative power or misbehavior of officials.

When the locus of problem is identified, it usually becomes a target of criticism. Values held by participants will then reflected by the critiques, during which key values at stake can be presented and prioritized.

Criticism: it refers to the act of making an unfavorable or severe judgment, comment. Of the specific interest here, is the judgment against the locus of problem, namely, the person or authority that caused or exacerbate an incident.

Reasoning: reasoning refers to the process of forming judgments, conclusions, or inferences from facts or evidences. It is a capability that indicates if a person is able to articulate how his opinions were derived upon and where they are leading on the basis of or in accordance with reason or logic. Participants capable of reasoning can not only make thoughtful and well-grounded expressions, but also recognize the limitations of their own preferred solution and the advantages of others, and weigh the pros and cons among them. Participants of discussion will also be able to upgrade their opinion and make the best decision possible in light of exchange of reasoning.

Solution: it refers to the act of solving a problem or question presented in a situation.

The measurement of social process of deliberation examines whether the forms and norms associated with communicating among bloggers and commenters help to create an equal and meaningful discussion space that benefits all participants. According to Gastil, it includes equality (“adequately distribute speaking opportunities”), mutual comprehension, willingness to listen to others, and respect to others. Only with abundance

by these norms, participants of discussion are able to communicate with each other in a deliberative style. Accordingly, the following measures are developed.

Involvement measured the extent in which readers participated in the discussion of the incident, as a response to the blog post. Only through such an involvement, can a participant establish a meaningful contact or connection with others, and help to deepen the discussion. Participants are expected to consider and address others' ideas and experiences, which include expressing agreement or disagreement, building on others' ideas to make an argument, asking for clarification, or making a criticism (Gastil, 2008).

Interaction: it refers to the extent of which an exchange of point of view is realized between bloggers and commenters, as well as among commenters.

Respect: it refers to the extent of which a commentator tolerates the presence of others (blogger or other commenters) and their ideas in the communication space.

Rationality: it refers to the extent of which rational argument is made by a blog commentator, as a response to the blog post.

Diversity: it refers to the extent of which opinions from different perspectives are presented in the discussion about an incident.

Based on the theoretical framework proposed above, the study also aims to conceptualize the relationships between the Chinese command and control system, information availability and the styles of deliberation on Internet incidents, and to answer what variables are associated with deliberative outcomes, or under what circumstances it will tend more deliberative than otherwise. But before the hypotheses are proposed, the hotspot Internet incidents need to be classified under the command and control system with respect to the considered threat to the core/non-core interest of the system.

CATEGORY OF COMMAND AND CONTROL SYSTEM → DELIBERATION

In most cases, Internet incidents can be determined to be of a central or local level depending on the occurrence of the loci, and the level of government involved. This

determination is a straightforward task since the locality of occurrence and the responsible authority is usually distinguishable for an incident. Incidents of a central level refer to those that occur beyond a particular locality (e.g., a heated national discussion on pork or a gas price hike), and the core of the problem mainly involves a central policy. In these cases, public criticism and appeal targets the party's highest ruling body rather than a local government. Incidents of a local level refer to those that occur in a particular region, and the solution of the problem lies in the hands of local authorities. The public's appeal thus normally targets a local government.

Each incident was then determined as to whether it threatened the core interest of the central or local government, depending on whether it imposed the type of threat discussed in the "Core Interests vs. Non-threatening" section. As a result, incidents were easily divided into the following categories:

Incidents that were a "threat to legitimacy" (central level) refer to those that challenged the legitimacy of Communist rule, including clashes with the state apparatuses, the ideological state apparatuses, and scandals involving government officials.

Incidents that were a "threat to performance" (local level) refer to those that challenged the local political and economic stability, including contradictions between the government and the public, mass incidents caused by contradictions, catastrophic events that occur as a consequence to the blind pursuit of performance, and incidents caused by dereliction of duty and an indifference to basic human rights.

Incidents that were "non-threatening" at the central level refer to those that did not challenge the legitimacy of the party rule, such as incidents involving the price, the stock market, and those that positively promoted the government or nation's image. The "Carrefour Boycott after Torch Relay" case, as mentioned earlier, motivated a "Love China" movement in response to the interception of the Olympic torch relay by some

Western protesters. This patriotic movement helped increase the sense of a national cohesiveness among the netizens that participated in the action, and reinforced the legitimacy of the Chinese party regime. Similarly, when Premier Wen Jiabao gave an emotional and tearful speech at the site of the Wenchuan earthquake, the message he delivered was that the Party and the government cared about the people and would help them through the difficulties.

Incidents that were “non-threatening” at a local level refer to those that did not challenge local political and economic stability and blemish local reputation, including incidents that limited themselves to a personal scope, such as the “Peng Yu” case mentioned earlier in the text.

The result of the categorization, then, was a 2X2 typology with governmental layers on one side, and threats to core/non-core interests along the top that formed four separate groups of incidents (“threats to legitimacy,” “threats to performance,” and “non-threatening” at both central and local levels) as illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Category of the Command and Control System

	Core Interest	Non-core Interest
Central Government	Threat to legitimacy	Non-threatening
Local Government	Threat to performance	Non-threatening

The first step of the theoretical model proposed in this study involved testing the relationship between the category of command and control system (“non-threatening,” “threat to performance,” and “threat to legitimacy”) and the quality of deliberation.

The confrontation between administrative power of the command and control system and communicative right differs across the different categories of incidents. For incidents that threaten the legitimacy, the confrontation is that the public demands to know the truth about the incident, but the central government is often reticent about the details, and simplifies the explanation of the events to avoid conflict and to quench the public's inquiry in a short time. For example, in the Yang Jia case, the center rarely mentioned Yang's motive for killing the policemen, which was that he was allegedly abused and beaten by the police. There were also many questions regarding the police and judicial procedure, but Yang was sentenced to death and executed in just a few months. The enforcement of administrative power deprives the public of their right to know. People thus look for a space to discuss the incident and to determine the truth for themselves. Since these types of incidents are related to the legitimacy of the central administration and even the political direction of the whole nation, the people's need for public deliberation should be the most intense.

For incidents that threaten performance, the response to the administrative power includes seeking a channel to communicate directly with local governments to achieve certain demands, as well as a search for the truth. However, local governments are often rude and ruthless when dealing with these incidents, with officials treating protestors in the incident as the destroyers of public safety, rather than as victims whose civil rights are infringed. Some local authorities even use police force to suppress the victims. According to a survey of 560 petitioners who went to Beijing, about 71 percent of the respondents believed that persecution by local authorities are serious, 64 percent had been detained because of a petition, and 19 percent had been in a labor camp or sentenced (Yu, 2008). In such circumstances, people have to exercise their communicative rights to appeal to justice and to achieve interest demands by exposing injustice and inviting a public discussion and review. Compared with the incidents that threatened legitimacy, the

incidents that threatened performance often involved only the local population, so the demands for deliberation should be relatively lower than it was in the former situation.

In short, the command and control system determines the conflict between the state administrative authority and the public's communicative rights, which then may yield different deliberative results. This is the first logical relation set up in the theoretical framework of this study. H1 therefore suggests,

H1: The greater the level of threat to the system core represented by an incident, the more likely the incident yields deliberation in blog posts.

CATEGORY OF COMMAND AND CONTROL SYSTEM → INFORMATION AVAILABILITY

The second logical component of the framework is the relationship between category of the command and control system and information availability. Before getting to this relationship, it is necessary to introduce the normal operation of the information control strategies within the Chinese command and control system, which can be conceptualized as “control,” “partial control,” and “channeling.”

Control: The Chinese government tends to control information about incidents related to the core interest of the Center, if they challenge the legitimacy of the party rule and the Communist regime. This type of information is part of the “deep blue discourse” that denounces the existing political practices, such as the one party regime, and thus is forbidden to be used in media (Qian, 2009). Incidents that pose a threat to legitimacy, such as a clash with the police authority or an attack of government buildings, are typical events that put the party rule at stake, and therefore the information availability of these incidents is under tight control.

Partial control: Incidents that challenge the core interests of local government often represent threats to local political and economic stability, because they cause tension and

conflicts between local citizens and government. Local government therefore sees these incidents as political taboo, and rarely let the information out in local media. However, as mentioned earlier, information about these incidents often manages to get out to the public because of the central media and cross-regional media inspection. Some “light blue discourse,” such as questioning the legitimacy of the law enforcement of a local government, may appear in these media.

In the meantime, the lower technical threshold of distributing information on the Internet, compared to doing so in traditional media, has created a more comprehensive supervising network by the public, through which the operation of local government is under a more ubiquitous and stringent scrutiny by average citizens. Voicing of the public opinion on the Internet has successfully exposed corrupt officials and local operations in recent years, which has caused a deterrent effect on local government. Under the state’s check and the public’s review, localities have been paying closer attention to public opinion and become more cooperative toward critiques. For example, some local governments have set up a “spokesman” mechanism, responding to public critiques through online and offline methods when facing public criticism.

Channeling: when incidents, such as the stock market crash and the RMB inflation, do not challenge the regime, government tends to lead and steer information and allow public discussion. Because discussion of these incidents is likely to cause rumors and public panic if information is not transparent and delivered in a timely manner, the Center tends to carefully channel it to diminish confusion and conflict. This strategy of channeling manifests itself more frequently in “politically right” incidents that are beneficial in improving the national image and motivating the national pride among citizens. Information about the Carrefour boycott (as a response to the interception of the Olympic torch relay by Western protesters), for example, became mainstream discourse when

Chinese websites initiated the patriotic boycott and the “Love China” action.²⁶ In such cases, the “deep red discourse” and “light red discourse” often appear, emphasizing the importance and the righteousness of the party’s leadership.

Similarly, information about incidents that do not tarnish local performance is often allowed with little restriction. When an incident mainly involves individual local officials, particularly those involved in corruption or misconduct scandals, local and central governments often allow for media’s investigation, and frame the incident as being caused by deviant individuals, rather than as part of a broader systematic problem. Such a strategy can not only quickly satisfy the public, but also save the government from being implicated. The “channeling” strategy, therefore, allows for higher level of information availability than the “control” and “partial-control” strategies.

Under the combined pressure from the center and media inspections at distances, information availability regarding incidents at the local level is generally expected to be higher than those at the central level. Although local governments tend to prevent information diffusion through local media in their control, media at a distance and at a higher level, which is beyond the local power sphere, are apt to supply relevant information.

In addition to the central/local variable, information availability depends on whether an incident involves the core interest of the government. Specifically, each category may be characterized by an information control strategy (and therefore yield different levels of information availability). One may expect, for example, that information about incidents that threaten the core interests of a government, either at central or local level, will be more likely to undergo strict control strategies than

²⁶ The “Love China” action referred to the phenomenon that occurred when millions of users of the Chinese instant messaging service added “love CHINA” next to their identification (“love” is symbolized by a red heart) during the Carrefour boycott in April 2008, to show their patriotism and emotion against some Western countries.

non-threatening incidents. This is the second logical relation set up in the theoretical framework of this study. H2 therefore suggests,

H2: The greater the level of threat to the system core represented by an incident, the lower level of information availability about the incident.

INFORMATION AVAILABILITY → DELIBERATION

In the context of online public participation on sociopolitical affairs, there have been two camps of thinking regarding whether information availability leads to deliberation. The proponents argue that information availability helps to produce more rational and equal discussion among participants, since they can refer to relevant evidence to support and strengthen their own opinion (O'Hara, 2002). The skeptics contend, however, that people tend to credit and follow information they already know rather than information they do not, so the information availability does not necessarily guarantee a higher degree of deliberation (Mendelberg, 2002, p. 168).

Considering that the objects of this study—hotspot Internet incidents—are sudden and unexpected occurrences of which no pre-existed information is available, information is crucial for the public to understand why a situation has occurred and why previous initiatives have failed. This includes the subjective and objective information that a participant must comprehend prior to participating in a discussion about an incident. In this respect, information availability plays an important role in the development of an opinion about these incidents.

Specifically, a greater degree of information availability should be more conducive to a participant's command of the *facts* (about the nature of the issue) and *opinion presentation* (about the truth of the issue)—two fundamental dimensions of public deliberation. Normally, the larger the volume of information, the more likely it is

to provide more relevant information. In the meantime, a greater level of information availability creates more opportunities for alternative information and opinions to appear, and will inevitably influence *opinion diversity* (either for or against the authority, or holding a neutral stand), and *solution identification* (reasonable and feasible way to address the problem). As stakeholders involved in an issue compete over preferred options and mobilize resources to frame their positions (Mertha, 2008), it is reasonable to argue that comprehensive information, embracing inputs from various stakeholders, helps limit the manipulation of information and thus facilitates fair and transparent discussion. In the same way, the quality of *reasoning* (the capability of thinking clearly and sensibly) depends on the amount of information one has to organize his argument or counterargument, selecting evidence, and weighing the pros and cons among solutions. H3 therefore suggests,

H3: The higher level of information availability about an incident, the more likely the incident yields deliberation in blog posts.

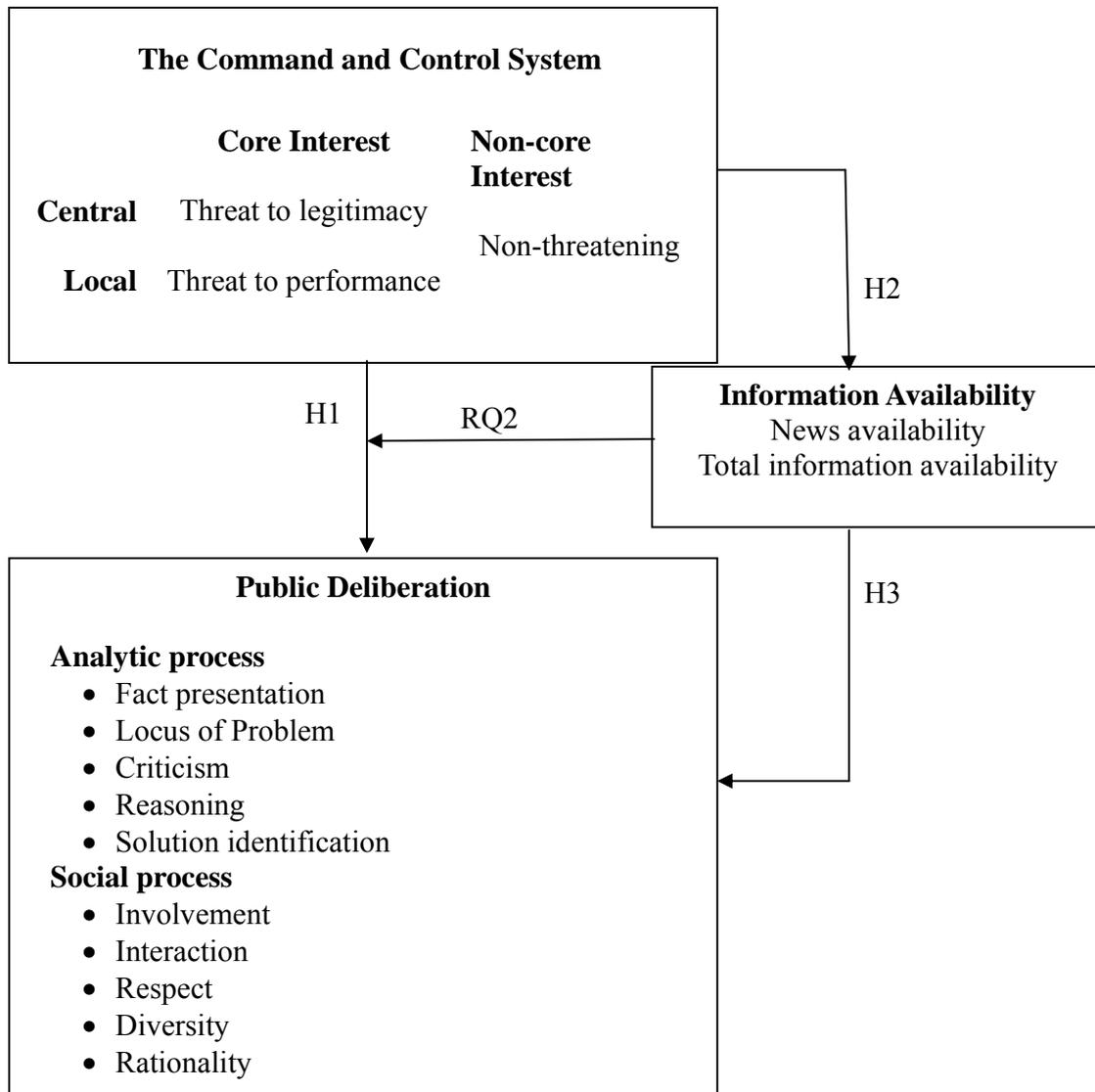
CATEGORY OF COMMAND AND CONTROL SYSTEM → DELIBERATION (INFORMATION AVAILABILITY AS AN INTERVENING VARIABLE)

Finally, Since in information availability can be treated as an intervening variable between the command and control system and deliberative outcomes, its impact on the relationship of the two will also be examined. Therefore RQ2 asks,

RQ2: Does information availability, as an intervening variable, affects the relationship between the command and control system and deliberative outcomes?

So far, I have proposed a causal sequence of relationship, which constitutes the theoretical framework of this study. Figure 4 summarizes the factors that influence public deliberation.

Figure 4. Command and Control System, Information Availability and Deliberation



Firstly, the Chinese command and control system directly determines the quality of deliberation on incidents with different level of threat to the system core (H1). It also determines the information availability of different incidents (H2); in turn, information availability may yield different patterns of deliberation based on the level of threat to the

system core of the incidents (H3). A possible intervening function of information availability between the command and control system and deliberative outcomes will also be examined (RQ2).

The hypotheses and research questions stated above have specified relationships between the categories of command and control, information availability, and deliberative outcome. I was also interested in other factors that may impact the quality of deliberation. Specifically, the following factors are in consideration:

Originality Originality refers to the capacity to act or think independently. The originality of a blog post is defined as the condition in which a post is not transposed from others nor copied on the basis of the work of others. It is considered to be a factor because the analytic score of an original post and a non-original post may differ. Usually a post that is transposed or copied indicates that the transposter has evaluated it and determined it to be a post of quality and expresses what the transposter wants to say, or wants a reader to know about. In the meanwhile, however, original posts by a blogger may not necessarily score lower on analytic score since it requires more investment of time and deliberation. In addition, original posts and non-original posts may differ on their social score as well. For example, readers of a blog may be more likely to respond to a post written by the blogger that he has been following for a long time, rather than to a post copied from other authors. RQ3 therefore asks,

RQ3: To what extent does the originality of a post impact deliberation in the blogosphere?

Pictures Pictures may convey more information than descriptive text in a more succinct way, so they may have some effect on deliberation. Considering that the subject of this study is posts devoted to discussion of incidents, pictures may play a more

significant role in providing facts and familiarizing the readers with the condition of the incident (such as the site, scene, people involved, etc.). RQ4 therefore asks,

RQ4: To what extent do the number of picture links in a post impact deliberation in the blogosphere?

Blog traffic Blog traffic refers to the popularity, namely, the number of people visiting a particular blog within a period of time. Previous research has documented that blogs with heavy traffic tend to function as the “hub” in the network within the blogosphere, and play crucial role in conveying information and connecting bloggers. Is the blog traffic, however, a significant predictor of deliberation? RQ5 therefore asks,

RQ5: To what extent does blog’s traffic impact deliberation in the blogosphere?

Blog update frequency Blog update frequency signifies how often a blogger post new content. As one updates regularly, the search engine spiders come more frequently and therefore the blog takes advantage in terms of search engine optimization and rank. The first 10 blogs of Technorati’s Top 100, for example, all have more than 10 new posts each day. Theoretically, blog update frequency should also be an important factor in attracting consistent traffic. Does this advantage conduce to deliberation among the blog readers, though? RQ6 therefore asks,

RQ6: To what extent does blog update frequency impact deliberation in the blogosphere?

CHAPTER FIVE. METHOD

Sampling Incidents

This study uses a purposive sampling of the top 60 hotspot Internet incidents listed in the *Analysis of China's Internet Public Opinion*, a yearly report published by the Online Public Opinion Monitoring and Measuring Department of the People's Net. From 2007 through 2009, the yearly report ranked the top 20 hotspot Internet incidents according to the number of original BBS posts (excluding responding threads) commenting on the incidents in leading Chinese BBS forums, including Tianya, kaidi, Qiangguo forums, etc. These forums have long aggregated comments on hotspot social and political issues, and usually a larger number of posts indicates a higher level of salience about a certain issue. In the year 2009, for example, the No. 1 incident was the Deng Yujiao case, which generated 25,133 BBS posts, and the No. 20 incident was the Shishou incident, which generated 4,104 BBS posts in five leading BBS forums.

The incidents ranked at the top are related to major social and public issues such as civil rights protection, public supervision, maintenance of public order and public morality (see appendix A-C). To further check the credibility of the ranking, I compared the rankings of the top 20 internet incidents in the 2009 report with the "Top 10 Internet Incidents" elected by netizens in 2009,²⁷ and found 8 overlapping incidents in the list. Considerable overlapping also appeared between the top 20 internet incidents and rankings elected by netizens for 2007 and 2008. Therefore, the ranking of incidents adopted in this study is judged to be fairly credible in the sense that the officially published report and netizens agreed upon the inclusion of most of the incidents to the list.

²⁷ The "Top 10 Internet Incidents" for the year 2009 were elected by netizens during a 10-day online survey, organized by 15 mainstream media and www.mop.com (a leading interactive online media), on which more than 90 million users clicked and 50,000 voted. No official "Top 10 Internet Incidents" elected by netizens for 2007 and 2008 is available.

With each incident, blogs played a critical role in distributing information, unsettling the official account of reality, and advancing public discussion. While governments took evasive actions and traditional media were restricted in reporting, blog posts about these incidents, either a description from a victim, or thoughtful, questioning of the responsibility-taker, were often quickly transposted or recommended as “top posts” and read by millions of netizens, who, in turn, promoted further discussion and actions such as human flesh search engine (see footnote 2).

Categorizing Hotspot Internet Incidents

As it shows in Table 2, incidents were classified according to the command and control system and the level of threat to the system core. Practically, “threat” can be conceptualized as an ordinal variable, such that it is “level of threat to system core.” This way, “threat to legitimacy” is the highest, “threat to performance” is middle, and non-threatening the least level of threat to the system core. On the basis of the definitions of each category in the command and control system, and the criteria assessing the “threat” discussed earlier, the researcher and another Chinese coder carefully reviewed each internet incident and typologized it into one of the four categories. A few incidents did not cleanly divide in such an obvious fashion, and so the coders discussed with each other whenever a conflict emerged, and read more information about the incident in question to better judge. For example, when it was difficult to determine whether an incident was a threat to a local government, we checked if evidence of the local government’s defense or self-justification against the public critiques was provided. We assumed that a local authority would clear the air, or dispel the “rumor,” when it realized the harm of criticism. Incidents in which a government took defensive action were coded as “threatening” incidents. Eventually, two coders agreed upon the categorization of the 60 incidents as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Categorized Internet Incidents

	Threat to Interest	Non-threatening
Central Government	<p>Schools Collapse in Earthquake Zheng Xiaoyu Case Professor Shot Dead by Police Western Media Criticized on Lhasa Riot Police Killer Yang Jia Student clash with police Professor Said 99 percent of Petitioners are Mentally Ill</p> <p><i>N</i> = 7</p>	<p>5.30 Stock Market Crash Tang Xiao Clash with Soldier Net Addiction Camp The Chinese Red Cross' Misuse of National Mourning Period CCTV Attacks Google Porn Links National Tooth Health Protection Group Quake Funds Pork Price Hike Gas Price Hike Chang'e-1 lunar probe RMB Appreciation Labor Day Holiday Debate End of Reality TV Competition Cell Phone One Way Charge New 7 Wonders Salary Show Hits the Net Real Estate Market Cooled Down Stock Market Recession Beijing Olympic Open Ceremony Wang Shi Donations Gate Liu Xiang's Quit <i>Chunyun</i> in Winter Storm Carrefour Boycott after Torch Relay Premier Wen Jiabao in Earthquake Controversial Green Dam Filter Delayed "Jia Junpeng, your mother calls you to go home to eat"</p> <p><i>N</i>= 26</p>

<p>Local Government</p>	<p>“South China Tiger” Photos Child slave laborers in Brick Kilns Sanlu Poisoned Milk Scandal Chongqing “Nail House” Taihu Lake Algae Invasion Cardboard Dumplings Story Fake South China Tiger Photos Wengan Mass Incident Deng Yujiao Chongqing Mob Corruption Crackdown “Hide and Seek” The Shanghai Illegal Cab Entrapment “70 kph” Tonggang Violent Protest University Students Drowned Rescuing Boys Open-chest Lung Inspection Speak for “the Party or the Common People?” Kunming “Student Prostitution” Case Chengdu Bus Fire Cross-provincial Chase Girl Stole Identity to Go To University Students in Guizhou Forced into Prostitution The Shishou Incident</p> <p><i>N</i> = 23</p>	<p>The Case of Peng Yu Fan Paopao Chen GuanXi Scandal ATM “Thief” Xu Ting</p> <p><i>N</i> = 4</p>
--------------------------------	--	--

Less than 5 cases fell into the category of “non-threatening” at the local level, and therefore this category did not meet the statistic test (e.g. ANOVA) requirements of a minimum of 5 cases per cell. As a result, I collapsed the two cells in the right column of Table 3 into 1 cell. “Non-threatening” incidents at the central and local level are thus combined into a single category of “Non-threatening” incidents. Another rationale behind the combination is that an incident that is “non-threatening” is usually “non-threatening” regardless of the government levels. Hence, a distinction between local and central “non-threatening” incidents is less meaningful than between local and central incidents that were “threatening.”

Sampling Blog Posts

Given my primary focus on 60 Internet incidents, Chinese blog posts devoted to these incidents and the associated comments constitute the “universe” of materials relevant to the research questions. Considering the capacity of this study, however, only the most relevant posts will be sampled, which was realized through the Google Blog Search (China). Google Blog Search is a Google search technology that focuses on searching blog posts from every blog that publishes a site feed (either RSS or Atom) around the world. When certain key words are used, the most relevant posts are sorted through a set of algorithms on the basis of “factors such as a blog’s title and content, as well as its popularity throughout the rest of the blogging community” (Google-Blog-Search, 2009), and displayed from top to bottom (multiple pages) by relevance. Therefore, the posts at the top are the most relevant posts using the searched key words about an incident.²⁸

In addition to relevance, the sampling should guarantee an adequate number of comments for measuring the social process of deliberation among bloggers and

²⁸ Learn more about Google's search technology, see <http://www.google.com/intl/en/corporate/tech.html>

commentators. A blog is a platform of personal expression, and if others do not respond to a blog post and trigger a discussion, then a blog may degenerate into a form of a soliloquy, rather than a form of deliberation in which there are many participants. A preview of blogs on leading Chinese BSPs confirmed that blogs hosted on Sina have more views and comments than those on other hosts, so I focused on blogs on Sina. The sampling process included the following steps: (1) key words search of each incident in the Chinese Google Blog Search (<http://blogsearch.google.cn/>). (2) search date for each incident (a single episodic occurrence, the prominence and influence of which was enormously expanded through the Internet) was set as 6 months from the date of occurrence. For example, if the incident occurred on 06/17/2009, then the search period was set from 06/17/2009 through 12/17/2009. A period of 6 months is considered long enough for an incident to fully unfold and reflect the major pattern of deliberation. (3) the URL was specified in the advanced blog search tools as “Sina.com.cn” so that Google only searched blogs on Sina. (4) the first 10 blog posts that were listed for each incident were sampled, regardless of the blog they came from. In total, 600 blog posts were retrieved. (5) the most recent 10 comments (appearing at the top of the comment area) were sampled for each of the sampled posts. A total of 2,135 comments was retrieved. Theoretically, there should have been a total of 6,000 comments, but some posts had less than 10 comments.

Measuring Information Availability

As mentioned above, information availability refers to the extent to which information about an incident is available for the public to review and consult. The most important empirically measurable evidence of information availability is the number of news published by journalistic media, which represents the information that has been fact checked and verified. Besides the news, other information published online, including

blog and forum posts, photos, videos, etc., can reflect information availability. Messages released through these online media outlets, albeit not necessarily verified, often provide more diversified and alternative information about an incident. A video clip uploaded by a witness on site of an incident, for example, may not be used by an official mainstream media, but may stimulate the enthusiasm of the public inquiring about the incident, and present some detailed information about its occurrence.

Therefore, the “total information availability” can be treated as a secondary indicator of information availability. It includes the overall information from both journalistic and non-journalistic sources such as the online media outlets mentioned above. It therefore reflects to what extent information about an incident is available through all existing channels.²⁹ The decision to group journalistic and non-journalistic information together in one category is based on the fact that many online platforms such as blogs often contain sources or direct copies of news from mainstream media, thus making it difficult to distinguish between the two.³⁰

In this study, the operational definition of information availability is the total information availability online prior to the publication of the sampled post. Because the unit of analysis in this study is a blog post, “news availability” and “total information availability” associated to each post was measured through a key words search on the “News” and “Everything” link of Google Search China (google.com.hk). Key words for each incident were determined through the following steps: (1) the researcher surveyed each one of the 60 incidents, and determined the words describing the essential characteristic for each one. For example, for the incident in which a pedestrian was hit and killed in downtown Hangzhou by a sports car that was drag-racing, but the police

²⁹ Admittedly, though, some information on the Internet is removed or blocked out before it reaches the public so the “total information availability” may not literally exhaust all information that ever existed. Rather, it includes all information that can be searched and analyzed by the Google search engine.

³⁰ Copies or trans-posts of traditional news are common for all incidents, thus it is reasonable to compare the “total information availability” across incidents.

who intended to screen the offender lied that the car was running only at 70 kph, the combination of “杭州” and “70码” (“Hangzhou” and “70 kph”) were determined to be the search key words, because they covered the most important elements of the incident. (2) at the same time, key words should also satisfy the need of an exhaustive search (include relevant information) and an accurate search (exclude irrelevant information) as much as possible. To meet these ends, the researcher did an experiment search with multiple combinations of key words, and then checked the top 3 pages and the last 3 pages of the Google search results for each key words combination. The most appropriate key words were used on the basis that they produced the largest number of search items, and included the least amount of irrelevant information.

The “custom range” of the search was 1 week, counted backwards from the publishing date of each post. For example, if a post was published on 10/15/2007, the search range was from 10/09/2007 through 10/15/2007. Usually, the information about an incident in the week preceding the publishing date of the post should be the most recent and updated, of which a blogger was assumed to have been aware of and had assimilated by the time of posting. In addition, compared to other search range such as from the date of outbreak of an incident through the publishing date of the post, the 1-week time frame eliminated the potential variance in information availability because of time differences (information availability is lower for bloggers who publish right after the outbreak of an incident than those who publish later).

For each 10 posts associated to the same incident, the same key words were used but with a different week period as the search range, on the basis of the specific publishing date of the post. The search of “news” included all news items published in the searched week by professional news media, including media such as press, magazines and television programs, and therefore reflects to what extent the incident was allowed to enter the mainstream journalistic discourse. The search of “total information availability”

included the total information in the preceding week from sources such as BBS forums, blogs, photos, videos, etc.—literally everything online, and therefore reflected to what extent the incident was allowed to enter the online public space. Since the searching language was simplified Chinese,³¹ it yielded mostly information published in mainland China, and information from outside China was not likely to show up unless it was published in simplified Chinese.

Content Analysis

Holsti (1969) defines content analysis as “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages.” One use of content analysis is to compare communication content to certain standards so as to capture the resemblance between the two. In this sense, content analysis should be an appropriate choice of methodology here since this study aims to measure to what extent blog content resembles aspects of deliberative style. The previous studies also set up examples in using content analysis to measure some criteria of public deliberation, although they used different theoretical approaches (Zhang, 2007; Zhou, 2009).

Twelve coders were recruited to code all 600 posts and 2,135 comments. They were graduate students at a research institute who were majoring in biological science, who had academic training in scientific research. Before assessing intercoder reliability, the researcher informed them of the goal of the study, explained measurements of each variable to the coders, and confirmed coders that they understood the coding procedure and standards. Each coder then independently coded 10 percent of the sample, selected randomly (60 posts and the responding comments) to find coding problems, disagreements, and assess intercoder reliability. The researcher and coders discussed any problem, and came up with a clear and viable solution. Additional training was conducted

³¹ Simplified Chinese is used in mainland China, and traditional Chinese is used in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

if needed. Coding instructions were refined accordingly, until adequate intercoder reliability was achieved.

Intercoder reliability was measured by percent agreement and Cohen's kappa. While percent agreement is used most widely and is intuitively appealing and simple to calculate, it was considered to overestimate true intercoder agreement. Cohen's kappa is a more conservative measure that accounts for agreement occurring by chance. An online software ReCal was used to calculate intercoder reliability for both percent agreement and Cohen's kappa coefficient.³² Intercoder reliability for major variables was reported as follows:

Fact: Percent agreement: .92, Cohen's Kappa: .87

Locus of problem: Percent agreement: .87, Cohen's Kappa: .83

Criticism: Percent agreement: .86, Cohen's Kappa: .82

Reasoning: Percent agreement: .94, Cohen's Kappa: .88

Solution: Percent agreement: .91, Cohen's Kappa: .86

Involvement: Percent agreement: .97, Cohen's Kappa: .96

Interaction: Percent agreement: .99, Cohen's Kappa: .78

Respect: Percent agreement: .99, Cohen's Kappa: .90

Rationality: Percent agreement: .99, Cohen's Kappa: .95

Diversity:

Support: Percent agreement: .91, Cohen's Kappa: .86

Neutral: Percent agreement: .92, Cohen's Kappa: .81

³² ReCal (<http://dfreelon.org/utis/recalfront/>) is an online software developed in 2008, by Deen Freelon, a then doctoral student in the Department of Communication at the University of Washington. As of 10/07/2010, ReCal (2, 3, and OIR combined) has been successfully executed 15,725 times by persons other than the developer.

Opponent: Percent agreement: .94, Cohen's Kappa: .75

Originality: Percent agreement: .93, Cohen's Kappa: .83

Although the network among bloggers represents the dynamics of interaction, and thus may be regarded as part of an overall deliberation process, the fact that few blog posts had out-bound or in-bound referred posts/sites made it difficult to conduct a network or a quasi-network analysis as was done in previous studies (Reese et al., 2007). Few link in posts indicates a low interaction among bloggers (at least on a certain topic), and a self-sustained site community within the post itself. In addition, since the blogs were randomly selected on topic base, rather than selected by popularity, bloggers' identities (e.g. political affiliation) were hard to determine. Therefore, only the social process among bloggers and commenters are concerned here.

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The blogosphere is “‘post-centric’ in that it is these posts to which others respond, add, reject, or reference” (Reese et al., 2007, p. 244). Meanwhile, the post is the basic unit of text when shared through hyperlinks, RSS, or trackbacks. In reference to deliberative style, post content is also the most telling material for measurement of what is being said. Therefore, this study takes the blog post as the unit of analysis in understanding the process of deliberation.

Blog comment, as a form of response to the post, is also an important element when it comes to measuring the social process of deliberation such as involvement, interaction, and respect. The number of comments per post, as well as the content of the comments, reflects to what extent a meaningful conversation is formed in responding to a blog post. Comments may also deepen the topic discussed in the post by adding new topic, information, and opinions. Since posts are the leading elements that invite and

aggregate comments, the comments responding to each post were treated as an associated character of that post in the coding procedure.

Consequently, each post had deliberative features (measurements of analytic and social process as detailed below), and was associated with a particular information availability (“news availability” and “total information availability” searched in 1 week preceding the publishing date of the post), and associated with an incident categorized by the command and control system. Using the post as the unit of analysis, therefore, the relationship between category, deliberative quality, and information availability can be tested.

MEASURING DELIBERATION

Fact: measured if a blog post provided some basic facts about the incident being discussed, so as to help participants to understand the nature of the incident. A post with descriptive details such as time, location, cause, process, characters, and context of the incident, or an eye-witness account at the scene was coded as providing fact. Variable values include “yes” or “no.”

Example (detail of process): “After that, Deng Yujiao left VIP5 private rooms. In the corridor, Deng Yujiao met KTV area attendant Tang and told her that the guests mistaken her for an attendant at water treatment area, and then entered the staff lounge with Tang.”

Locus of Problem: measured if a blog post clearly identified the major cause or the major responsible parties of the problem. Variable values included “Yes” and “No.”

Example of “Yes” on Locus of Problem: “Why can a Deng Yujiao incident arouse the anger of Chinese people at large? I think the key is that for a long time the party and government officials at the core of vested interests ruthlessly plunder and exploit the masses, causing serious income differentiation and the inevitable result of class differentiation.”

Criticism: measured if a blog post criticized the party/authority involved in the incident. Variable values included “Yes” and “No.”

Example 1 of “Yes” on Criticism (criticizing central government and central officials): “the party and the government that should be loyal to the people does not take the fundamental interests of the people as its ultimate goal, but rather surrendering itself to the parasites even gangland that live on the people’s life and property. I do not believe that is because the government does not realize the problem, but rather, it is simply because government officials under the leadership of the Party have chosen to stand against the public. ”

Example 2 of “Yes” on Criticism (criticizing local government and local officials): “This is a case in which a large number of local officials as well as mineral bullies forced a woman to have sex and tried to rape her when confronted with resistance...in fact the Badong local government has long been clear about the ugly situation, but in order to ‘ensure stability’, ‘protect the overall situation’ and ‘be politically right,’ they tried to trivialize major issues to minor ones, and minor ones to nothing.”

Reasoning: A post that laid out a reasoning process to form judgments, conclusions, or inferences and even call for action was coded as having reasoning. Variable values included “Yes” and “No.”

Example : “It is reported that in Shanxi province there are thousands of unlicensed brick kilns, and they are not limited in one or two county area, officials involved are not limited to one or two provinces, and the time period is much longer than one or two years. The Henan province alone has at least a thousand children that were abducted and trafficked to these brick kilns to be labors. There were child labors and migrant workers tortured to death by brick kilns owners, foremen and thugs. It is hard to believe that the

local evil power could run amuck in such a large area for such a long time without the local officials' protection and the money/power trade behind.”

Solution: measured if a blog post pointed out a reasonable and feasible way to address the problem. Variable values included “Yes” and “No.”

Example 1 of “Yes” on Solution (solution depending on government/authority): “Shanghai should follow the example of Chongqing, to take the case of ‘Illegal Cab Entrapment’ as an opportunity to launch a anti-gangdom campaign, and return justice to the law, to the public, and to the society.”

Example 2 of “Yes” on Solution (solution depending on parties involved): “For Deng Yujiao, the best defense strategy is still the exercise of unlimited defense right against rape (attempted). The prosecution has to provide sufficient evidence to prove that the two officials Deng and Huang’s intent to have sex does not exist, if they are to rebut the charge of rape (attempted).”

The fact that all 5 variables are measurements for the analytic process of deliberation, and that they were proved to be inter-correlated (as elaborated below), made it reasonable to consider an index for the purpose of data reduction. The previous study tried to develop such an overall index for a deliberative score (Manosevitch & Walker, 2009). But unless variables can be shown to empirically share the same underlying conceptual dimension, then they shouldn’t be combined into an index. Therefore, factor analysis was performed to test if these measurements shared the same underlying conceptual dimensions.

The factorability of the 5 measurements was examined with several well-recognized criteria. Firstly, 4 of the 5 measurements correlated at least 0.3 with at least 1 other item, suggesting reasonable factorability. Secondly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.658, above the recommended value of 0.6, and

Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(590) = 647.49, p < .001$). The diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix were all over 0.5, supporting the inclusion of each measurement in the factor analysis. However, because the communality was under 0.5 for solution, the variable of solution was removed from the factor analysis in the first iteration. In the second round of iteration, 3 of the 4 measurements correlated at least 0.3 with at least 1 other item and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.628, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(594) = 556.47, p < .001$). The diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix were all over 0.5, supporting the inclusion of each measurement in the factor analysis. Finally, the communalities were all above 0.5, further confirming that each measurement shared some common variance with other items. Ultimately, a principle components factor analysis of the 4 measurements (fact, locus of problem, criticism and reasoning) using varimax rotation shows that 2 factors explained 76 percent of the variance. All measurements had primary loadings over 0.5 and none had a cross-loading above 0.3. The factor loading matrix for this final solution is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Factor Analysis for Analytic Measurements

Variables	Factor1	Factor2	Communality
Fact		.98	.96
Locus of Problem	.88		.78
Criticism	.89		.79
Reasoning	.68		.52
Eigenvalues	2.05	1.00	
percent of total variance accounted for	50.69	25.65	

Note: Factor loadings < .4 are suppressed.

The variable of fact remained as an individual variable, since it was the only variable that loaded to factor 2. The three measurements (locus of problem, criticism and reasoning) that loaded to factor 1 were summed to create an analytic score, whose value varied from 0 to 3 (Cronbach’s alpha =0.75).³³ The number of “Yes” answers to the measurements were summed for each post. This created a score that was comparable among the posts. For example, the analytic score for a post that only identified a locus of problem was 1, for a post that had both a locus of problem and criticism was 2, and for posts that possessed a locus of problem, criticism, and reasoning was 3. Thus, the analytic score is actually an index, a simple additive summation of three constituent items that measure a common latent variable—the quality of analysis of a blog post. Development of such an index is not only for data reduction, but also for gathering a predictor variable to use in developing the model proposed in the previous context.

The measurement of social process of deliberation examines whether the forms and norms associated with communicating among bloggers and commenters help to create an equal and meaningful discussion space that benefits all participants. According

³³ Cronbach’s alpha is the common test of whether items are sufficiently interrelated to justify their combination in an index. Usually, it should minimally be greater than 0.60, and preferably be greater than 0.70.

to Gastil, it includes equality (“adequately distribute speaking opportunities”), mutual comprehension, willingness to listen to others, and respect to others. Only with abidance by these norms, participants of discussion are able to communicate with each other in a deliberative style. Accordingly, the following measures are developed: *Involvement*, *Interaction*, *Respect*, *Diversity*, and *Rationality*, each having a numerical measurement.

Involvement: Involvement was operationalized as the number of comments that made a concrete response to the incident discussed in the post (for or against the post). Categories of non-concrete responses included the placement of an advertisement, “shoot for the sofa,”³⁴ daily greetings that do not specifically address the issue at hand, and comments irrelevant to the post.

Considering the fact that the number of comments sampled for each post was different (some posts have 10 comments, while others had less than 10), a ratio, rather than an absolute number of involved comments was calculated for each post. The ratio of involvement was the number of involved comments divided by the total number of the sampled comments of each post (at most 10). This allows data on different scales to be compared, by bringing them to a common scale. For example, if post A had 10 comments of which 4 were coded as involved, then the value of involvement for this post was 0.4. If post B had 5 comments of which 3 were coded as involved, then the value of involvement for this post was 0.6. Thus, although post B had less involved comments in absolute number than post A, its value of “involvement” was nevertheless higher than post B. The ratio of other measurements as listed below was calculated the same way.

Interaction measured to what extent there was an exchange in the point of view between bloggers and commenters, as well as among commenters. Specifically, it was

³⁴ Some readers feel close to the blog poster if they are able to make immediate comments upon publication of the post. The first page of each post (with the post on the top and comments at the bottom) only shows the comments made with the shortest time lag to the post, and later comments are listed on “next pages” in time order. Chinese blog surfers say this is to “shoot for the sofa,” indicating that only the earliest arrivals get the favorable position to “watch” the blog writer’s performance.

operationalized by the ratio of comments that presented “interaction” (the number of interacted comments divided by the total number of the involved comments of each post), which included either a blogger’s response to a comment (in the form of a comment itself), or a response between commenters.

Respect measured whether a comment tolerated the presence of others (either to the blogger or to the other commenters) and their ideas in the communication space. Following Papacharissi’s study (Papacharissi, 2004), a comment was coded as “disrespect” if there was at least one instance of incivility or impoliteness as follows:

1. Assigned stereotypes (e.g. associate person with a group by using labels such as “right” or “left”)
2. Threatened other individuals’ rights (e.g. “you are not qualified to speak”)
3. Cast aspersions or made personal attack (e.g. “idiot” and “brain damaged”)
4. Used hyperbole (e.g. outrageous, heinous) or words that indicated non-cooperation, pejorative language, or vulgarity were used (e.g. “shameless,” and “mad dog”)

The number of “disrespect” comments was subtracted from the total number of comments for each post to get the number of “respect” comments. The ratio of “respect” comments for each post (the number of “respect” comments divided by the total number of comments of each post) was calculated as an indicator of respect.

Rationality measured the number of comments presenting rational argument towards the discussed topic in the post. Again, a ratio (the number of rational comments divided by the total number of the involved comments of each post) was calculated as an indicator of rationality.

Diversity measured the opinion diversity among involved comments, which is represented by the distribution of the number of supportive, neutral, or opponent

comments to each post. Simpson's Diversity Index (D) (Krebs, 1989; Simpson, 1949) was employed to measure the diversity. The formula for calculating D is:

$$D = (S \times S + N \times N + O \times O) / (I \times I)$$

S=the number of supportive comments for each post

N=the number of neutral comments for each post

O=the number of opponent comments for each post

I=the total number of involved comments for each post

With this index, 0 represents infinite diversity and 1 represents no diversity. In other words, the greater the value of D, the lower the diversity. To make it more intuitive, D is often subtracted from 1, where 0 represents no diversity and 1 represents infinite diversity. The final number produced was used as the indicator of diversity.

Similar to the analytic process, since the 5 measurements of social process are inter-correlated, factor analysis was performed with a purpose to group them into meaningful factors. However, the communalities of three variables, interaction, rationality, and diversity were all below 0.5 in the first iteration and thus needed to be removed from the factor analysis. The remaining two variables could not satisfy the condition that more than 3 measurements should be correlated at least 0.3 with at least 1 other item. Therefore, no meaningful factors could be loaded and no index for the social process was produced.

OTHER MEASUREMENTS

Originality measured if a post was original, or was a transpost or a copy from other authors. A preliminary survey of the blogosphere found that for a post that is not original, bloggers usually stated clearly at the beginning or the ending of the post. This made it possible to design the measurement values as 1. original, 2. partially original

(partly original, and partly trans-post from other sources), and 3. trans-post of copy from other sources.

Pictures measured the number of pictures used in a post.

Blog traffic measured the popularity of a blog in the blogosphere. It was operationalized by the “blog ranking” Sina gave to each blog, on the basis of the number of visits (see Sina’s transforming standards below). Blogs with more visits had higher ranks. For example, the corresponding visits of a blog ranked as 27 is 150,000,000, and for one ranked as 1 is 50.

Sina’s standards on transforming visits to rank:

Rank of blog	visits	Rank of blog	Visits
0	0	14	40,000
1	50	15	70,000
2	100	16	100,000
3	150	17	150,000
4	200	18	200,000
5	300	19	500,000
6	500	20	1,000,000
7	800	21	2,000,000
8	1,500	22	5,000,000
9	3,000	23	10,000,000
10	5,000	24	20,000,000
11	10,000	25	50,000,000
12	15,000	26	100,000,000
13	25,000	27	150,000,000

Blog update frequency measured the how often a blogger updated the blog. The “accumulated points” designated by Sina to each blog was used as the measurement of activity, which was used by Sina to acknowledge the extent to which a blogger is blogging in a frequent and persistent manner. Sina’s criteria of rewarding points is as following: each day, a blogger can get up to 5 points: 1 point for logging into the blog, 2 points for publishing a post, and 3 points for publishing comments on others’ blogs

(comments and replies by the blogger in its own space do not get points). These points are the maximum, meaning that if a blogger published 2 blog posts on one day, he still gets 2 rather than 4 points. So the daily maximum of accumulated points is 5.

CHAPTER SIX. RESULTS

This study explicates the concept of deliberation both theoretically and empirically, by examining deliberative patterns in the Chinese blogosphere. The purpose of the study is to examine the general deliberative pattern through the measurements of both analytic and social processes of deliberation, and the factors that affect them. Empirical data of posts and comments devoted to hotspot Internet incidents from 2007 through 2009 in China was content analyzed. The findings suggest relatively substantial deliberative outcomes in the blog posts about the incidents, especially on the analytic process.

With respect to the factors that determine deliberation, two variables are examined: an incident's category (non-threatening, threat to performance, and threat to legitimacy) as classified under the command and control system, and the information availability (news availability and total information availability) about it. Findings support the theoretical framework proposed in the study that and suggest the following logical sequences: Firstly, the Chinese command and control system is a significant factor in explaining deliberative outcomes about incidents that can be categorized according to their level of considered threat to the system. An incident that is considered to be at a higher level links to higher level of deliberation. Secondly, the command and control system also determines the information availability of an incident, but in a negative way, with incidents having higher threat levels correlating to lower level of information availability. Thirdly, information availability, in turn, predicts deliberation on its own, with higher level of information availability related to a lower level of deliberation. Finally, information availability works as a moderating variable between the command and control system and deliberative outcomes. Within the non-threatening and threat to performance categories posts associated with a higher level of information availability

tend to yield lower deliberation. For the threat to legitimacy category however, all posts yield the same relatively high quality of deliberation.

Univariate Analysis

Table 5 lists the percentage distributions and cumulative percentages of the command and control system categories among the 60 incidents sampled. The number of incidents varies negatively with the level that the threat of the incident is considered to be: the higher the level of threat an incident is considered to be, the less likely that it was able to enter the public’s view and became hotspot internet incident. In particular, half of the incidents were not considered a threat, 38.3 percent were considered a threat to performance, and 11.7 percent were considered a threat to legitimacy.

Table 5. Frequency for Category of Command and Control System

Category of Command and Control System	Incidents	Posts	Valid Percentage (%)
Non-threatening	30	300	50.0
Threat to performance	23	230	38.3
Threat to legitimacy	7	70	11.7
Total	60	600	100.0

RQ1 asks to what extent discussion about the hotspot Internet incidents in the Chinese blogosphere represents deliberation in the analytic and social process. Table 6 lists the results of the deliberative outcomes for the blog posts. Generally, variables related to the analytic process have a relatively high mean, and variables for the social process are lower. Each post presented a mean of 0.92 facts about the incident being discussed ($M = 0.92$), and the mean of the other measurements is approximately equal to or greater than 0.5. For the social process, each post had 0.42 involved comments ($M =$

0.42), and 0.61 respectful comments ($M = 0.61$). However, the interaction between bloggers and commenters or among commenters is only 0.06 ($M = 0.06$), and the opinion diversity is very small among the involved comments ($M = 0.10$). In addition, a very small number of comments ($M = 0.10$) presented a rational argument relating to the discussed topic in the post.

Table 6. Means of Deliberative Outcomes

	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Analytic process			
Fact	.92	.27	600
Locus of Problem	.77	.42	600
Criticism	.68	.47	600
Reasoning	.68	.47	600
Solution	.49	.50	600
Social process			
Involvement	.42	.43	600
Interaction	.06	.21	600
Respect	.61	.48	600
Diversity	.10	.19	600
Rationality	.10	.25	600

Table 7 lists the descriptive results for information availability. Approximately 170 news items were associated with each post ($M = 170.71$). Over 75,000 piece of information were associated with each post in the week preceding publication of the post ($M = 76,391.26$).

Table 7. Means of Information Availability

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
News availability	170.71	481.65	600
Total information availability	76,391.26	105,979.69	600

Table 8 lists the percentage distributions and cumulative percentages for the originality of the blog posts. Almost half of the sampled posts were completely original, one-third were partially original, and 20.2 percent were trans-posts or copy from other sources.

Table 8. Frequency of Originality

Originality	Frequency	Valid Percentage (%)
Original	279	46.5
Partially Original	200	33.3
Trans-post	121	20.2
Total	600	100.0

Table 9 lists the descriptive results for other variables. The average number of pictures in each blog post was 1.41 ($M = 1.41$), with a relatively large standard deviation. The average blog traffic (number of people visiting a particular blog within a period of time) associated with each post was 2,237,751 ($M = 2,237,751$) and the average blog update frequency (how often a blogger posts new content) associated with each post was 698.7 ($M = 698.70$).

Table 9. Means of Pictures, Blog traffic and Blog Update Frequency

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Number of pictures	1.41	8.40	600
Blog traffic	2,237,751.00	15,435,436.00	600
Blog update frequency	698.70	778.42	600

Bivariate Analysis

CATEGORY OF COMMAND AND CONTROL SYSTEM → DELIBERATION

H1 suggests that the greater the level of threat to the system core represented by an incident, the more likely that the incident will yield deliberation in blog posts.

Table 10 lists the effect of the level of threat to the system core as independent variable on measurements of deliberation as dependent variable. A univariate general linear model (one-way ANOVA)³⁵ was used to test whether deliberation outcomes vary across the three command and control system categories. The results show that the level of threat to the system core significantly predicts the measurements of the analytic process, with the results reported as follows.³⁶ The means of fact [$F(2, 597) = 3.83, p = .022, \eta_p^2 = .013$], locus of problem [$F(2, 597) = 10.69, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .035$], criticism [$F(2, 597) = 24.85, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .077$], reasoning [$F(2, 597) = 8.772, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .029$], and solution identification [$F(2, 597) = 3.68, p = .026, \eta_p^2 = .012$] of the posts

³⁵ The univariate general linear model functions as a one-way ANOVA test. The general linear model is frequently applied to analyze an ANOVA or MANOVA design with categorical predictor variables, an ANCOVA or MANCOVA design with both categorical and continuous predictor variables, and a multiple or multivariate regression design with continuous predictor variables. The general linear model was used because the independent variable in the analysis (category) is a categorical variable. In addition, it helps to test the intervening function of the information availability mentioned in later text (Aroian's second-order exact solution test) by calculating the covariance between the dummy-coded category variable and information availability, and the covariance between information availability and deliberation.

³⁶ In the general linear model, partial eta squared (η_p^2) is a measure of effect size, analogous to R^2 from linear regression. It describes the ratio of variance explained in the dependent variable by a predictor while controlling for other predictors. The rule of thumb in interpreting the value is that .01 refers to small, .06 refers to medium, and .14 refers to large predicting power.

vary significantly across the three categories. However, no significant difference in the means of the social process measurements was exhibited across categories.

Table 10. Univariate General Linear Model for Deliberation by Category of Command and Control System

	<i>Non-threatening</i> (<i>N</i> = 300)	Threat to performance (<i>N</i> = 230)	Threat to legitimacy (<i>N</i> = 70)	
	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	
Analytic Process				
Fact	.93(.250)	.89(.312)	.99(.120)	*
Locus of problem	.70(.460)	.81(.394)	.93(.259)	**
Criticism	.56(.497)	.77(.422)	.91(.282)	**
Reasoning	.61(.489)	.72(.449)	.84(.367)	**
Solution	.43(.496)	.54(.499)	.53(.503)	*
Social Process				
Involvement	.39(.420)	.43(.432)	.48(.426)	
Interaction	.06(.204)	.06(.212)	.07(.215)	
Respect	.58(.486)	.63(.472)	.68(.458)	
Diversity	.11(.194)	.08(.176)	.11(.210)	
Rationality	.10(.243)	.10(.250)	.16(.278)	

** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

The univariate general linear model indicates that the means across the categories are not equal to each other, but it does not indicate *how* exactly they differ. As a result, post-hoc tests were conducted in an effort to determine how they differed across the categories.

Fact: Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons of the three categories indicate that posts associated with both the non-threatening and the threat to performance category

have significantly lower means ($M = 0.93$ and $M = 0.89$, respectively) than the threat to legitimacy category ($M = 0.99$, $p < .05$). Comparisons of means of fact between the non-threatening and the threat to performance category were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Locus of Problem: The Games-Howell post-hoc test indicates that posts in the threat to legitimacy category have the highest mean ($M = 0.93$), posts in the threat to performance category are second ($M = 0.81$), and posts in the non-threatening category have the lowest mean ($M = 0.70$) at the .001 level.

Criticism: The Games-Howell post-hoc test indicate that posts in the threat to legitimacy category have the highest mean ($M = 0.91$), followed by the posts in the threat to performance category ($M = 0.77$), and posts in the non-threatening category have the lowest mean of criticism ($M = 0.56$) at the .001 level.

Reasoning: The Games-Howell post-hoc test indicated that posts in the threat to legitimacy category have the highest ($M = 0.84$), posts of the threat to performance category the second ($M = 0.72$), and posts in the non-threatening category have the lowest mean of criticism ($M = 0.61$) at the .001 level.

Solution: Tukey HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) post-hoc comparisons³⁷ of the three categories indicate that posts associated with the non-threatening category ($M = 0.43$) have significantly lower means of solution than those in the threat to performance category ($M = 0.54$, $p < .05$). Comparisons of the means of solution between the threat to performance and the threat to legitimacy category, and between the non-threatening and the threat to legitimacy category were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

³⁷ In the homogeneity test (Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances), the Games-Howell test is used when $p < .001$; otherwise the Tukey HSD is used.

Taken together, these results suggest that the level of threat to the system core does predict the analytic process of deliberation in a positive way. Specifically, posts in the threat to legitimacy category had the highest, followed by the threat to performance, and the non-threatening category with the lowest scores on analytic measurements. H1 is therefore partially supported.

CATEGORY OF COMMAND AND CONTROL SYSTEM → INFORMATION AVAILABILITY

H2 suggests that an incident with a greater level of threat to the system core will have a lower level of information availability. Table 11 shows that the univariate general linear model found significant differences in the means for the news availability and for the total information availability among the posts associated with the different categories [$F(2, 597) = 6.65, p = .001$ and $F(2, 597) = 9.27, p = .000$, respectively].

Table 11. Univariate General Linear Model for Information Availability by Category of Command and Control System

	Non-threatening (N= 300)	Threat performance (N= 230)	to Threat to legitimacy (N= 70)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
News availability	237 (549.7)	124 (444.7)	39 (65.3) *
Total information availability	83,225 (113,498.8)	82,870 (107,184.9)	25,818 (24,813.3) **

** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.01$

Again, post-hoc tests were conducted to explore how the means differ across the categories for news availability and the total information availability. For the news availability, the Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons indicate that the mean differences

among the posts associated with the different categories are all significant. In particular, posts that were non-threatening have the highest mean ($M = 237$), followed by posts in the threat to performance ($M = 124$), and posts that were a threat to legitimacy have the lowest ($M = 39$) at the .05 level. In other words, the amount of news decreased as the level of threat increased.

For the total information availability, the Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons of the three categories indicate that posts associated with both the non-threatening category ($M = 83,225$) and the threat to performance category ($M = 82,870$) have significantly higher means than the threat to legitimacy category ($M = 25,818$, $p = .000$). Comparisons of the means between the non-threatening category and the threat to performance category are not statistically significant at the .05 level. In other words, the total information availability for the non-threatening category and the threat to performance category are about the same.

Taken together, these results suggest that the command and control system categories affect the information availability. Specifically, the results suggest a negative correlation between category and information availability—the higher the level of threat, the lower the information availability. The threat to legitimacy category had the lowest information availability, regardless of whether the news availability or total information availability was measured. As for the difference between the non-threatening and the threat to performance category, when measured by news, the threat to performance category has higher information availability than the non-threatening category. When measured by total information availability, the mean difference does not appear to be significant. H2, which suggests that an incident with a greater level of threat to the system core will have a lower level of information availability, is therefore supported.

INFORMATION AVAILABILITY → DELIBERATION

H3 states that the higher the level of information availability about an incident, the more likely the incident will yield deliberation in blog posts. Table 12 presents the correlation between the information availability associated with each post and the measurements of deliberation. The news availability negatively correlates to the locus of problem and criticism. Posts with higher news availability were less likely to identify the locus of problem in the discussed incident and to be critical. Similarly, total information availability negatively correlates to the locus of problem.

For the social process, involvement negatively correlates to the news availability. The readers are less likely to engage in a discussion when the issue raised in the post has a higher news availability. Similarly, the higher the total information availability associated with a post, the less likely that the readers of the post will interact with each other in the discussion. Respect was also found to be weakly correlated to the total information availability—posts associated with higher total information availability correlating to a higher level of respect among the commenters of that post.

Table 12. Correlations between Information Availability and Measurements of Deliberation

Variables of Deliberation	Information availability	
	News availability	Total information availability
Analytic process		
Fact	-.03	-.01
Locus of problem	-.15**	-.12**
Criticism	-.15**	-.03
Reasoning	-.05	-.04
Solution	-.05	-.08
Social process		
Involvement	-.11**	-.01
Interaction	-.06	-.08*
Respect	.01	.09*
Diversity	-.01	.04
Rationality	-.01	.00

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

As mentioned earlier, since the three variables in the analytic process (locus of problem, criticism, and reasoning) can be combined into an index—the analytic score, which measures the quality of analysis of a blog post—the correlation between information availability and the analytic score can be tested. The correlation between the news availability and the analytic score is significant ($r = -0.14$). The conclusion, therefore, is that information availability (when measured by news availability) does explain, albeit not substantially, the variation in the analytic score. Posts that have higher news availability will have lower analytic scores. The total information availability does not have a significant correlation with the analytic score of a post. H3 is therefore rejected because the higher the level of information availability about an incident, the less likely the incident will yield deliberation in blog posts.

Multivariate Analysis

RELATION BETWEEN CATEGORY AND DELIBERATION: INFORMATION AVAILABILITY AS AN INTERVENING VARIABLE

RQ2 asks whether information availability acts as an intervening variable to affect the relationship between the command and control system and deliberative outcomes.

Test of Mediation

Since the command and control system predicts both information availability and the analytic score (the index of locus of problem, criticism, and reasoning), and information availability (the number of news) also correlates with the analytic score, it is reasonable to check if information availability is mediating (or partially mediating) the relationship between the command and control system categories and the analytic score. Here the focus is on the analytic index, because no correlation was found between category and the social process of deliberation. Aroian's second-order exact solution test (Aroian version of the Sobel test) was used to test the mediation effect as suggested by Baron & Kenny (1986).

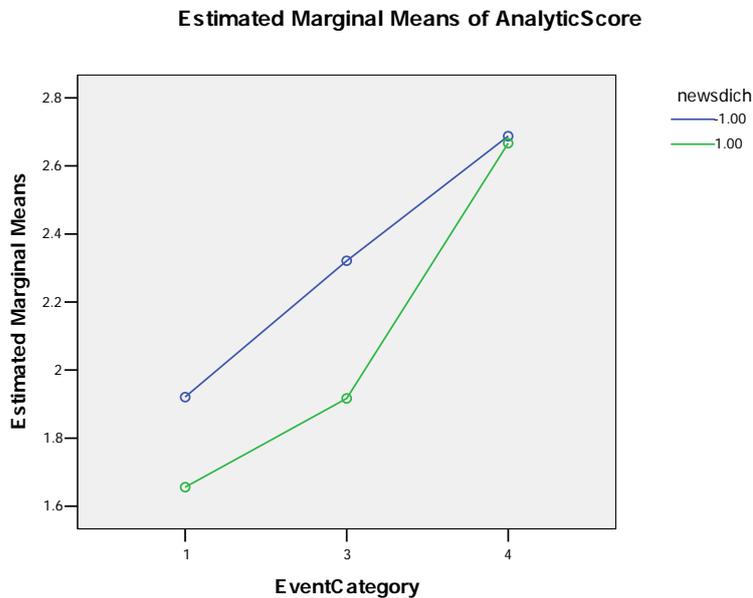
Running a univariate general linear model on Link 2 (effect of category on information availability), yields the zero-order unstandardized coefficient for predicting the news availability of -0.198 and 0.113 from the threat to legitimacy and from the threat to performance category, respectively. In the univariate general linear model on Link 3 (effect of information availability on the analytic score), the partial, unstandardized coefficient for predicting the analytical score from the news availability holding constant category was -0.236. These values were used in the Aroian test to calculate the critical ratio to test whether the indirect effect of category on the analytic score via the news availability was significantly different from zero. For the threat to legitimacy category, the Aroian test value is 1.930, $p = 0.054$. For the threat to performance category, the Aroian test value is -1.792, $p = 0.073$. The p values are not significant, so the H_0

hypothesis, which proposes that the indirect effect is zero, is not rejected. Therefore, the news availability is unlikely to be a mediating variable.

Test of Moderation

The news availability was then used as a moderator to check whether interaction effects between category and the analytic score occur via the news availability. The news availability needs to be mean-centered before calculating the interaction term to reduce the multicollinearity found between the interaction and the predictors. The linear regression equation for the analytic score is $y = 2.708 + 0.166 \times \text{news} - 0.819 \times \text{category 0} - 0.410 \times \text{category 1} - 0.494 \times \text{news} \times \text{category 0} - 0.222 \times \text{news} \times \text{category 1}$, where category 0 and category 1 are two dummy-coded variables from the category variable. To better evaluate the pattern of variance, the news availability was dichotomized into -1 if news availability is less than its mean ($M = 170.7$), and 1 if news availability is larger than its mean. The result is illustrated graphically in Figure 5:

Figure 5. The Moderating Effect of Information Availability



Note: Event Category 1= non-threatening category, 3 = threat to performance category, and 4 = threat to legitimacy category.

The graph shows that the news availability (dichotomized and mean-centered) moderates the relationship between category and analytic score. Specifically, for the non-threatening and the threat to performance categories, higher news availability relates to lower level of analytic score. However, the analytic score for the threat to legitimacy category remains high regardless of news availability. The answer to RQ2 is that information availability has a moderating effect on the relationship between the command and control system and the deliberative outcomes.

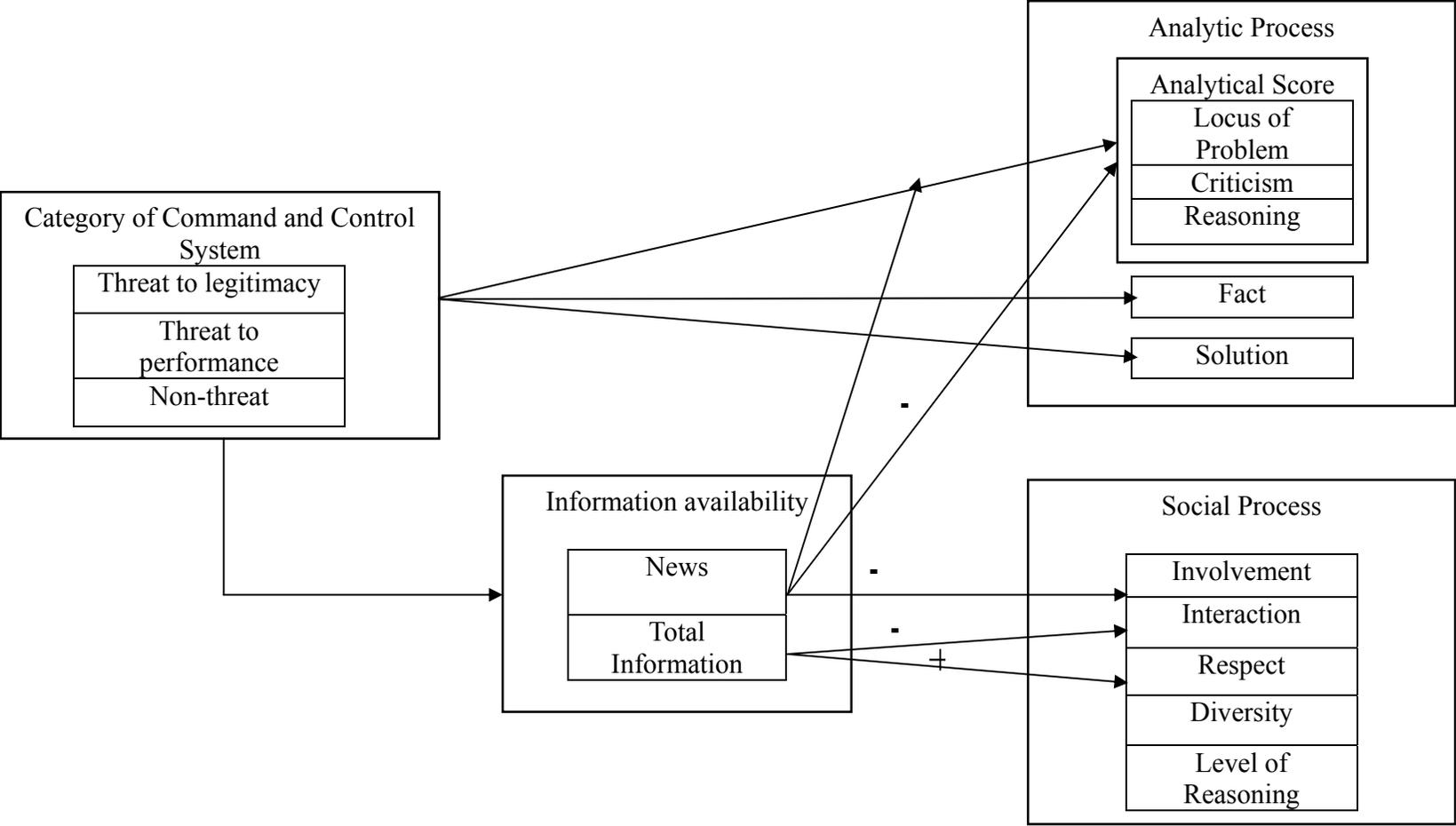
Summary of Hypotheses Test

Hypotheses were proposed to examine factors that may determine deliberation outcomes, and two variables were examined: the classification of an incident under the command and control system categories (non-threatening, threat to performance, and

threat to legitimacy), and the information availability (news availability and total information availability) about that incident. Findings support the theoretical framework with the following logical sequences (see Figure 6).

Firstly, the Chinese command and control system is a significant and positive factor in explaining the deliberative outcomes about incidents that were categorized according to the level of threat they were considered to have to the system. Incidents that were considered to be a higher threat level linked to higher levels of deliberation. Secondly, the command and control system has a negative relationship to the information availability of an incident—incidents that were considered to be at a higher threat level were related to a lower level of information availability. Thirdly, information availability, in turn, predicts deliberation—higher levels of information availability were related to lower levels of deliberation. Finally, information availability works as a moderating variable between the command and control system and deliberative outcomes. Within the non-threatening and threat to performance categories, posts associated with a higher level of information availability tended to yield lower analytic scores for deliberation. For the threat to legitimacy category, however, all posts yielded relatively high analytic scores. The tests found no significant relationship between the command and control system and measurements of the social process.

Figure 6. Relationship among Category of Command and Control System, Information Availability and Deliberation



RQ3 asks how originality of a blog post impacts deliberation in the blogosphere. Table 13 shows significant differences in the means of the fact presentation [$F(2, 597) = 3.709, p = .025, \eta_p^2 = .012$] and the analytic score [$F(2, 597) = 5.537, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .018$] among the three different categories of originality. It also shows significant differences in the means of four social measurements (except rationality) across the different types of originality: involvement [$F(2, 597) = 10.095, p = .000$], interaction [$F(2, 597) = 10.728, p = .000$], respect [$F(2, 597) = 6.764, p = .001$], and diversity [$F(2, 597) = 8.459, p = .000$].

Table 13. Univariate General Linear Model for Deliberation by Originality

	Original (<i>N</i> = 279)	Partial Original (<i>N</i> = 200)	Trans-post (<i>N</i> = 121)	
	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	
Fact	.90 (.296)	.97 (.184)	.90 (.300)	*
Analytic Score	2.02 (1.164)	2.34 (0.979)	2.03 (1.147)	*
Solution	.47 (.500)	.53 (.501)	.46 (.501)	
Involvement	.47 (.424)	.44 (.429)	.26 (.392)	***
Interaction	.10 (.266)	.03 (.137)	.02 (.117)	***
Respect	.64 (.468)	.66 (.467)	.47 (.496)	**
Diversity	.12 (.198)	.11 (.200)	.04 (.128)	**
Rationality	.12 (.263)	.10 (.240)	.07 (.232)	

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Post-hoc tests with the univariate general linear model were then conducted to explore how exactly the means differ across different types of originality for each of the measurement.

Fact: Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons of the three types of originality indicate that partially original posts have significantly higher means than the original posts ($M = .97$ and $M = .90$, respectively, for $p < 0.05$). Comparisons of means between the original and the trans-posted posts, and between the partially original posts and the trans-posted posts were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Analytic Score: Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons indicate that original and trans-posted posts ($M = 2.02$ and $M = 2.03$, respectively) have significantly lower means than partially original posts ($M = 2.34$, $p < 0.05$). Comparisons of the means between the original and trans-posted posts were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Involvement: Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons indicate that both original and partially original posts ($M = 0.47$ and $M = 0.44$, respectively) have significantly higher means than trans-posted posts ($M = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$). Comparisons of means between the original and the partially original posts were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Interaction: Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons indicate that original posts ($M = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$) have significantly higher means than both partially original and trans-posted posts ($M = 0.03$ and $M = 0.02$, respectively). Comparisons of means between the partially original and the trans-posted posts were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Respect: Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons indicate that both original and partially original posts ($M = 0.64$ and $M = 0.66$, respectively) have significantly higher means than trans-posted posts ($M = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$). Comparisons of means between the original and the partially original posts were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Diversity: Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons indicate that both original and partially original posts ($M = 0.12$ and $M = 0.11$, respectively) have significantly higher means than trans-posted posts ($M = 0.04$, $p < 0.001$). Comparisons of means between the original and the partially original posts were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

In sum, originality of posts correlates with both analytic and social score. Posts that are partially original are likely to score the highest on both fact and the analytic score when compared to those that are completely original or trans-posted. This is understandable considering that thoughts are more clearly articulated from two authors (the blogger and the author of the transposted or copied article) and will tend to be more comprehensive and profound than those from one. Plus, a post is usually transposted or copied by others only when the posts are deemed to be of high quality or written by experts, such as a lawyer or a journalist who have investigated the situation, and guarantees a level of deliberation in the first place.

Originality's effect on social score, however, presented a somewhat different picture. Posts that were original or partially original tended to score significantly higher on four measurements (involvement, interaction, respect, and diversity) than posts that were transposted or copied from somewhere else, signifying an inherent bonding between readers and the blogger to whom they respond. The conclusion is, then, that originality is an important factor in determining the social process of deliberation.

RQ4 asks to what extent the number of pictures in a post impacts deliberation in the blogosphere. A correlation was conducted between the number of pictures in each post and measurements of the analytic process. All measurements were found to negatively correlate to the number of pictures: fact ($r(598) = -0.109, p < .01$), analytic score ($r(598) = -0.167, p < .001$) and solution ($r(598) = -0.086, p < .05$). In addition, a cubic regression shows that the number of pictures significantly, albeit weakly, predicted the analytic score, through the following equation:

$$y = -3.8 \times 10^{-6}x^3 + .001 \times x^2 - .097 \times x + 2.219, t(596) = 46.566, p < .001.$$

The number of pictures in a post also explained a significant proportion of variance in the analytic score, $R^2 = .052, F(3, 596) = 10.812, p < .001$. Therefore, the number of pictures is negatively related to the analytic score: Posts with more pictures

tended to score lower than those with fewer pictures. The negative correlation may be because deliberation is diluted when bloggers express part, or all of their view through pictures. In addition, the use of pictures may help readers to understand a situation visually, but it may counteract a blogger's motive to use rationale and logic in analyzing an incident. Another explanation for this result is that the content of pictures was not coded because of technical difficulties. For example, it is hard to determine whether a picture is presenting facts or revealing an intrinsic logic (if posted in series in a timely order). The loss of some meaningful information in the pictures, therefore, reduced the pictures' contribution to deliberation.

No significant correlation was found between the number of pictures and measurements of the social process.

RQ5 asks how blog traffic impacts deliberation in the blogosphere. A correlation test found that blog traffic does not correlate to the analytic score, but does correlate to social measurements. Specifically, it positively correlated to respect ($r(598) = 0.092, p < .05$), and diversity ($r(598) = 0.158, p < .01$). Readers of the same blog tend to be congenial toward each other, and show higher levels of respect. More readers may also increase the possibility of diversified views and opinions. Also, readers who are familiar with the blogger, or with other readers, may be more willing to express different opinions.

RQ6 asks how the blog update frequency impacts deliberation in the blogosphere.

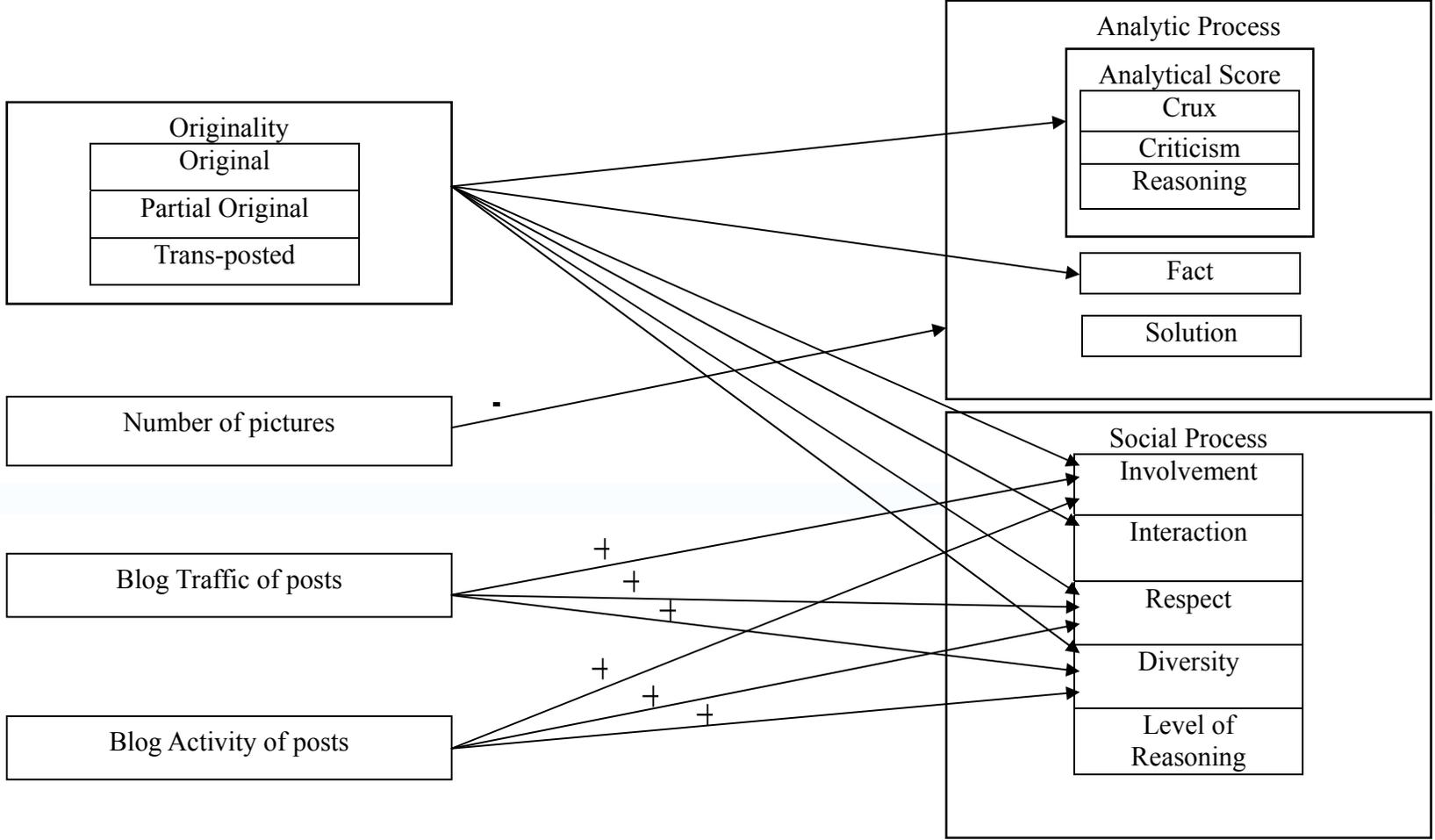
A correlation test found that the blog update frequency did not correlate to the analytic score, but it did positively correlate to social measurements. Specifically, blog update frequency was positively correlated to involvement ($r(598) = 0.161, p < .001$), respect ($r(598) = 0.231, p < .001$), and diversity ($r(598) = 0.264, p < .001$).

A blogger's frequent input and update will increase the stickiness of a blog, and the readers will then process the characteristics described above. These findings provide

empirical evidence for the argument that the contribution of dead or dormant blogs (blogs not updated for at least one month) to deliberation is limited, not only because they do not persistently provide valuable and thoughtful information, but also because they are less likely to advance a social and communicative atmosphere that is part of the deliberation process. Blogs that are regularly updated and enjoy a steady readership, therefore, should be considered as critical players in facilitating meaningful deliberation. Results for RQ3 through RQ6 are summarized in Figure 7.

In short, the general statement about the overall model and the logical relationship among the variables are proved. The command and control system significantly explains the deliberative outcomes (the analytic process) about incidents categorized according to their levels of considered threat to the system. It also determines the information availability of an incident, namely, the amount of news and total information available prior to the publication of a blog post about that incident. Meanwhile, information availability also predicts deliberation on its own (as independent variable), as well as moderating the relationship between the command and control system and deliberative outcomes.

Figure 7. Relationship between Originality, Pictures, Blog Traffic, Blog Update Frequency and Deliberation



CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The major purpose of this study is to explore public deliberation of incidents in the Chinese blogosphere, and identify factors that affect it. This goal was realized by testing a theoretical model that used 600 blog posts and 2135 comments on those blogs, which discussed 60 incidents in China from 2007 through 2009.

Major Findings and Implications

THE GENERAL DELIBERATIVE PATTERN IN THE CHINESE BLOGOSPHERE

This research started with a question: Does the popular blogging phenomenon in China represent a favorable communication form that may bring promising deliberative outcomes, or does it simply create a space for people to “blow off steam” without discussing important social and political issues in a meaningful and purposeful manner?

Generally, the study demonstrated a favorable pattern and an optimistic scenario for deliberative outcomes in the Chinese blogosphere. The mean of analytic score (an index of three measurements—locus of problem, criticism, and reasoning) for the sampled posts was 2.29 out of 3, indicating a fairly respectable level of analysis that is based on criticism and reasoning. Meanwhile, measurements of the social process variables also indicate that communicative norms were carried out effectively and facilitated deliberation in a relatively equal and respectful way. Previous surveys suggested that most Chinese blogs focused on personal issues, such as romance and relationships, and therefore the Chinese blogosphere contributed little to the Internet in terms of the breadth and depth of knowledge. This study provides evidence that a promising blog zone exists as a public space that allows for discussion of a more serious social and political issues.

Beyond the basic measurements of deliberative standards, the study also aimed to propose a theoretical framework to identify factors that may determine deliberative outcomes, and to test the proposed relationships among multiple variables.

CATEGORY OF COMMAND AND CONTROL SYSTEM → DELIBERATION (DIRECT IMPACT)

An important finding is that the command and control system category is a crucial factor in determining the style and quality of deliberation. Blog posts associated with incidents that were a threat to legitimacy—a threat that challenged the party rule and state legitimacy—were more likely to trigger analysis than posts associated with incidents that were a threat to performance—a threat that undermined the reputation and authority of a local government. Blog posts associated with a threat to performance were more likely to trigger analysis than posts associated with non-threatening incidents that usually were not seriously critical of the authorities. The implication of this finding is, therefore, posts devoted to incidents with higher levels of threat represent more promising opportunities for developing the practice of deliberation in China than posts devoted to incidents with lower levels.

Deliberation was measured for both an analytic process and a social process. Results show that the variables for the analytic process were remarkably predicted by the command and control system categories, the variables for the social process did not seem to be determined by category.

All measurements of the analytic process were associated with a category. The fact variable had significantly higher values for posts associated with a threat to legitimacy incident than posts associated with a non-threatening or a threat to performance incident. This finding was somewhat surprising since disclosing facts about threat to legitimacy incidents are somewhat of a political taboo. Information about these incidents is therefore more likely to be suppressed than for incidents in the other categories. The question is then: Why do bloggers present more facts in posts associated

with a threat to legitimacy incidents than for posts associated with the other incident categories, when it is obviously easier to do the latter?

The answer has to do with the conflicting perspectives on deliberation between the Chinese government and average citizens, as mentioned earlier in the text. While the government tries to reduce social confrontation and build consensus by monitoring information and guiding public opinion, citizens engage in deliberation as a way to address the intractability of government policymaking, which is plagued by inadequate information and conflicting interests. Therefore, a tug-of-war-like competition always exists that dictates how to account for the reality of these incidents, which have higher threat levels and in which the information is often too vague. The more threatening an incident is in the eyes of the officials, the more likely that the citizens will be inquisitive and motivated to seek the truth.

This answer helps explain the findings on the analytic score as well: Posts associated with threats to legitimacy had the highest analytic score, followed by posts on threats to performance, with posts on non-threatening incidents having the lowest. Again, the interest conflict between the government and citizens plays a major role in advancing analysis for incidents with a higher threat level. The government often offers inexplicable explanations, which are sometimes self-contradictory, when incidents are ultimately fatal. Unflattering information must be suppressed. However, citizens are aware of this tactic and are able to uncover the truth behind an incident by reasoning, if they can talk about it.

For example, the collapse of thousands of schools during the 2008 Sichuan earthquake made the public suspicious that local government officials were in collusion with construction companies, and had made money by substituting shoddy materials for standard materials. The government attempted to downplay the issue and to suppress criticism, and did not fully investigate the alleged corruption. It even officially declared through mainstream media that the collapse was caused by the magnitude of the

earthquake. The government's negligence caused a great deal of anger—the public was deeply sympathetic to the families of the students who died, and they also learned that they could easily be trampled on and justice would not prevail if the corrupt officials and construction companies could escape punishment by having money or power. Therefore, such events are most likely to trigger passionate deliberation.

On the other hand, the interest conflict between the government and citizens is much smaller for incidents with a lower threat level. For incidents that threaten performance, the central government or media in other regions often manage to uncover information even if the local government tries to suppress it. Therefore, the motivation behind a citizen to find out the true story is not as intense as it is for a highly untraceable incident. In addition, the truth behind non-threatening incidents can be relatively easy to reach, so analysis is even less necessary.

Certainly, the question remains as to whether public discussion about incidents with high threat levels could actually be sustained in the blogosphere. Firstly, control over the Internet is relatively weaker than over traditional media, making the Internet a possible collision space for official and unofficial accounts of reality (Rogers, 2006). Secondly, many bloggers know how to avoid censorship and how to make their words look less offensive. As suggested in previous studies, bloggers are able to use techniques such as political satire and implicit criticism or explicit, but guarded, criticism to make sophisticated critiques of the regime without encountering harsh repression (Esarey & Xiao, 2008). Furthermore, bloggers and readers learn from having their posts deleted, and thus understand the censorship scale more fully, helping them to be safe, without sacrificing the claim of truth. Finally, censorship may also strengthen bloggers' doubt of the government, as well as their criticism, and therefore inspire their determination and find more creative ways to explore the truth.

For deliberation to develop in a healthy and effective way in China, therefore, a crucial question is whether, and to what extent, incidents with high threat levels are able to have a full public review. As discussed earlier, chances for an issue such as Falun Gong to get into the public sphere is very slim, and deliberation is strictly forbidden. Only 7 incidents of the 60 that were studied during the three year period from 2007 through 2009 were classified as a threat to legitimacy, which implies a strong gate-keeping function by information sources such as the leading BBS forums. This diminishes the chance for an incident with a high threat to enter into the public domain. The government's current strategy of building a harmonious society, which emphasizes the maintenance of a grand political stability, makes it even more difficult for an incident with a high threat level to be talked about in public. The 60 incidents were ranked as top Internet hotspot incidents on the basis of the number of posts that appeared in leading BBS forums. Posts that were deleted by forum administrations were not counted. If politically sensitive posts about incidents that were a threat to the legitimacy had been deleted during this time period, then the number of these incidents would probably be greater, and the deliberative pattern may be more promising than that revealed in this study.

CATEGORY OF COMMAND AND CONTROL SYSTEM → INFORMATION AVAILABILITY

Another important factor that affects deliberation is information availability, namely, the amount of news available through traditional media, or the total information availability that exists online. Results show that the news availability and the total information availability varied across categories. Posts associated with non-threatening incidents had the highest news availability, posts associated with at threat to performance the second, and posts on threats to legitimacy had the lowest amount. In other words, the amount of news that was available decreased as the threat level increased. However, although the threat to legitimacy also tended to yield the least total information, the total

information availability for the non-threatening and the threat to performance categories remained about the same.

This difference is because of the distinct difference in the information control strategy in traditional and online media by local government. Local government has less control over the Internet than it does over traditional media, leaving a greater chance for information that may be a threat to performance to be available online. Therefore, the total information availability for posts associated with the threat to performance incidents was not significantly lower than the non-threatening category, which was probably subjected to a looser control. The center, however, is still able to control Internet-based information flow, either through cyber police or through the self-censorship mechanism of various online information sources such as portal websites. Therefore, the total information availability for posts associated with the threat to legitimacy incidents remained significantly lower than for that of the other two categories.

In the test of the framework, I was interested in whether the incident category had an effect on the information availability associated with each blog post. The command and control system category was found to be a significant factor in explaining the variance in information availability, with a higher threat level linked to a lower level of information availability.

This negative relationship is in accordance with observation of the normal operation of the Chinese command and control system, characterized with various information strategies that can be conceptualized as control, partial control, and channeling, as mentioned in the earlier text.

INFORMATION AVAILABILITY → DELIBERATION

The second step of the model involved testing the relationship between information availability and the analytic and social process of deliberation. Regression results show a small but significantly negative correlation between information

availability and the analytic score, with higher levels of information availability linking to lower analytic scores.

This paradox does not support the conventional wisdom that more information leads to better deliberation. Citizens must be able to access sufficient information and be able to discuss, critique, and weigh competing positions and options in order to be able to discriminate and synthesize different versions of the facts—one important criterion to achieve this, obviously, is the volume of the available information.

However, in an era of information abundance in which information scarcity is no longer a problem, and instead information overload has complicated the process of information seeking, a high level of information availability may not necessarily facilitate deliberation (Bimber, 2003). As Bimber writes:

...when citizens are given greater capacity to select among multiple media sources, they are most likely to make selections to narrower and more compatible viewpoints. That is, citizens do not use a richer and more diverse media environment to better inform themselves about conflicting ideas and positions, but instead select a narrower and more parochial set of sources (Bimber 2003:208, quoting Mutz & Martin, 2001).

The observation that information abundance tended to lead information seekers to reinforce prior knowledge and beliefs rather than to deliberate was shared by others (Brandenburg, 2006; Carson, 2006). Some studies on information cost (Downs, 1957) also indicated that a higher level of information availability increased the cost of information gaining, which, in turn, lowered the level of political learning (Delli Carpini, & Keeter, 1996).

In a model that tested the relationship between the independent variables of opportunity, motivation, and ability and the dependent variable of political learning, Prior (2005; 2007) found that the choice of media environment acted as a moderator, with a

high choice of media channels and content likely to induce people to abandon news for entertainment. Prior's finding shed light on the results of this study. Succinctly, a richer media environment may not necessarily facilitate the outcome of serious media use (such as political learning and deliberation). In contrast, it can work in a negative way.

This finding, therefore, questions the effort to provide the public with a better information base about incidents or other crucial events in political and social affairs by simply releasing more information. The government should not only provide more information, but also further enhance the quality of the information itself if it wants to consult the public on certain issues. The CCP's Regulations of the Open Government Information (OGI)³⁸, which aims to form a better information environment, in this sense, need to be estimated by a higher standard of providing not only more, but also more *accurate* information that the public believes is relevant to the issue. Information that is not accurate and relevant is unlikely to advance effective public discussion, regardless of the quantity. The Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China³⁹, for example, states that decisions made and orders issued by the relevant people's government in response to emergencies shall be made known to the public in a timely manner (*Article 10*). But the law does not stipulate that the government should also release information about the emergencies themselves in a timely manner. After all,

³⁸ The regulations came into effect on May 1, 2008. It requires all levels of government to open government information, such as public budgets, major construction projects and implementation, public emergency contingency plans, early warning information and response, as well as supervision and inspection on environmental protection, public health, safety production, food and drugs, product quality, to the public. These areas are where news media often are involved in investigations. The central administration hopes that the OGI regulation will curb corruption and rent-seeking behavior at the local level by increasing transparency, so that it can reinforce its administrative power over subordinate governments. The vague nature and overall weakness of the rule of law in China have led to some criticisms, however, and even though the law is now in effect, it will take significantly more effort before Chinese citizens will have a truly sufficient channel to access state information. A full version of the OGI is available at: http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/Intellectual_Life/CL-OGI-Regs-English.pdf (English); and [http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/Intellectual_Life/CL-OGI-Regs-Chinese\(1\).pdf](http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/Intellectual_Life/CL-OGI-Regs-Chinese(1).pdf) (Chinese).

³⁹ A full version of the Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China (came into effect November 1, 2007) in English is available at: http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2009-02/20/content_1471589.htm

accurate information (including the real cause, situation, and impact, etc.) about an emergency should be equally as important as the government response.

According to Qian (2009), the government's recent media strategies (promptly report news events that cannot be suppressed, and promptly issue an official explanation about an incident) in their quest to promote the increase of information may nevertheless limit the transparency of information and embarrass people, when these strategies are followed by the efforts listed below:

- Proactively set the agenda and guide public opinion;
- Make use of marginal media (especially influential Internet networks) in following the official party line; and
- Use nondisruptive measures to suppress unflattering information

Although media control has relaxed somewhat in terms of the provision of information, particularly information about breaking news, whether these operational methods will advance the public's understanding of an incident remains a question. Firstly, incidents that are a vital threat to the Center's legitimacy, such as Falun Gong, are not likely to be given a public's review. Secondly, the alternative voice and understandings of incidents will inevitably be weakened if the media are required to set the official agenda.

This analysis suggests why a higher level of information availability tends to yield a lower analytic score of deliberation. If more information simply means quantity (sometimes identical and repeating information), and not diverse and decentralized information, then the amount of available information does not necessarily promote quality deliberation. The seemingly abundant information may energize a blogger, for example, to seek more accurate and relevant information about an incident, but homogeneity has made it difficult for the information to be navigated and comprehended in a meaningful and purposeful manner.

The pattern of social process reflects the same trend as well: Involvement was found to negatively correlate to the news availability, meaning higher news availability is associated with lower levels of reader participation in a discussion, as a response to the blog post. One reasonable explanation for this phenomenon is that the existing news included all information and further information was *unnecessary*. The existing news may also have had a brainwashing effect, and so readers have a similar mind-set on the topic and thus *did not have any* new thoughts or ideas.

Similarly, interaction was negatively correlated to the number of everything, meaning higher total information availability is associated with lower extent of exchange of views between bloggers and commenters, or among commenters. Again, the enormous quantity of online information may have dampened the reader's enthusiasm and inclination to communicate to others.

The fact that respect was found to be positively correlated to the total information availability provides circumstantial evidence for the above speculation. When abundant information is easily available online, people are exposed to more diversified information, and thus are more likely to tolerate others' views.

The study found a generally negative relationship between information availability and deliberation. Specifically, higher level of information availability relates to lower analytic scores and to lower levels of most of the measurements of the social process of deliberation. Information abundance, contrary to the conventional wisdom, should not necessarily be a pre-existing and indispensable condition for deliberation to take place. Rather, the Chinese style of deliberation in the blogosphere seems to benefit from information scarcity: Citizens are more motivated to seek the truth through reasoning, and through weighing and exchanging points of views with peer participants who are similarly motivated, when less information is available about an incident.

Information redundancy caused by the abuse of free expression in Chinese online environment represents a more disconcerting challenge to public deliberation. Firstly, when facing public criticism, the government may be overly defensive, and use public relation tactics such as hiring the 50 Cent party⁴⁰ to steer the online discussion away from politically sensitive or unacceptable content such as anti-party or anti-government articulations. Secondly, profit-driven businesses may distort public opinion and information, when the Water Army⁴¹ or unscrupulous commenters are hired to manipulate online discussions. In addition, a trend of Internet inhibition lies behind the veneer of free expression online, in which people have a lowered sense of responsibility and behave in a much less inhibited way on the Internet, to the extent that they are developing into e-mobs who flush out resentment, which further dilutes the quality of available information in cyber space.

CATEGORY OF COMMAND AND CONTROL SYSTEM → DELIBERATION (INDIRECT IMPACT THROUGH INFORMATION AVAILABILITY)

Information availability, as a moderator, explains variability in the relationship between category and quality of deliberation. Although the basic relationship between the type of incident and quality of deliberation remains steady—in other words, incidents with higher threat levels tend to yield higher analytic scores—difference appears when information availability is considered. Specifically, posts associated with higher levels of information availability tend to have lower analytic scores for incidents that are non-threatening and a threat to performance. But all posts associated with a threat to

⁴⁰ 50 Cent Party (五毛党; pinyin: Wǔmáo Dǎng) refers to paid Internet commentators that work for the state, posting comments favorable towards government policies in an effort to skew public opinion on various Internet message platforms.

⁴¹ Water Army (水军; pinyin: *Shui Jun*) is the expanded version of the 50 Cent Army. The 50 Cent Army works for the government, but Water Army is employed by companies and other organizations, looking for online brand awareness and marketing objectives, under the guise of being genuine customers.

legitimacy tend to yield a similar analytic score that is relatively high, regardless of the level of information availability.

This finding enriches the understandings of the relationship between the types of incidents and deliberation. The nature of information availability cannot be ignored when assessing the extent to which the type of incident affects deliberation. Since the base number of news availability and total information availability is large for both the non-threatening (237 and 83225) and threat to performance (124 and 82870) incidents, after a certain point, more information becomes redundant, reflecting the principle of limitation on marginal benefit. Redundant information, then, tends to tamper the motivation to analyze and deliberate, as discussed above. However, for the threats to legitimacy, the base number of news availability and total information availability is much smaller (39 and 25818) so that even if there is an increase in the news availability and total information availability, they are still far from being redundant. Therefore, the thirst for more information will keep bloggers thinking and deliberating.

The moderating effect of information availability on the relationship between category and quality of deliberation lends further support for this argument. Within the non-threatening and threat to performance incidents, posts associated with higher levels of information availability tend to have lower analytic scores. For threats to legitimacy, however, since information availability is much lower than for the other incidents, all posts yield the same relatively high analytic score. Again, these findings indicate the negative impact of information abundance on deliberation, and prove that information scarcity actually stimulates deliberation.

So, increasing information availability in general is not a feasible approach for facilitating deliberation in China. Information redundancy on non-threatening incidents or incidents with low level of threat may conceal the fact that the information availability on incidents with higher threat levels is actually scarce. An essential improvement on

information availability, therefore, would be to increase the information on incidents with high threat levels.

In the meantime, blog traffic and activity (update frequency) significantly predict the quality of the social process of deliberation. A blog that is frequently updated is more likely to have a post that will attract readers to participate in the discussion of the topic at hand. Meanwhile, readers of the post are more likely to be respectful to each other and express diversified views. It is a worrying phenomenon, therefore, with the rise of new network media such as Facebook and Twitter, that some bloggers update on various media simultaneously, and former blog readers are distracted from other interests. The consequence of this trend, then, is that both blog traffic and activity decline, resulting in a less congenial communication environment for public deliberation.

Significance of the study

The study reveals certain deliberative patterns in the Chinese blogosphere and, as such, gives an answer to the long-standing dispute on whether blogging, differs from traditional media, and represents an opportunity for public deliberation to develop in China. The fairly high analytic score and presence of social process of deliberation rejects the idea that blogging only opens another avenue for netizens to vent or record trivial personal details, and therefore does not play a significant role in advancing public deliberation.

Building on Gastil's model

Gastil's model of deliberation, composed of the analytic and social process, proved to be a useful tool in examining the deliberative outcomes. The key elements of the analytic process (fact, value, solution, weighing, and decision) can be empirically measured to examine the reasonableness or the quality of deliberation. In the meantime,

the social process (speaking opportunities, mutual comprehension, willingness to listen to others, and respect) takes into account the communicative norms through which the deliberative outcome is realized.

The customized application of Gastil's model in studying the blogosphere, however, involves creatively developing new measurements. For the analytic process, the variable of value in Gastil's model was incarnated by the locus of problem and criticism variables. Unlike a post about a political issue such as a presidential election, it is often difficult to tell what values are held by the author of a blog post about an incident. Instead, the values are reified as identification of the locus of the problem, as well as criticism of the problem, which are manifest in content, and therefore can be easily measured and analyzed.

Another difference is that the real dynamics of exchange of opinion in an online environment (unless it is a live discussion open to the public) is hard to capture in contrast to a face-to-face deliberation. For example, the weighing process among solutions (Gastil, 2008), or the conscientiousness, borrowing Fishkin's word (Fishkin, 2009), can only be measured by observation in a live situation, or by a follow-up request after the deliberation. The blogosphere obviously does not provide such a condition. The process of making decisions in light of updated opinions through deliberation is also hard to measure. Contrary to a normal deliberation, which often asks participants to make a decision on an issue, deliberation in the blogosphere is more open-ended and decision-making is not necessarily required as a result of conversation. In addition, moderators do not exist in the blogosphere as they do in an organized face-to-face discussion.

Similarly, variables for the social process were modified to accommodate the uniqueness of the communicative norms in the blogosphere as compared to those in a face-to-face discussion. Speaking opportunities in Gastil's model were abandoned, for

example, considering the fact that the open access of blogging itself guarantees equal speaking opportunities⁴². Instead, new variables (involvement, interaction, diversity, and rationality) were created in order to capture the unique communicative dynamics of deliberation in the blogosphere. For example, mutual comprehension, an element proposed by Gastil, is difficult to measure in the blogosphere. It is often achieved through involvement and interaction among the blog readers and commenters.

In short, the customized application of Gastil's model in this study proved useful. With new variables created and original variables modified to better capture the uniqueness of blog communication, it can be beneficial to future studies on deliberation in the blogosphere.

The examination of both the analytic and social process of deliberation bridges the gap in most of the previous research, which emphasized the quality of communication rather than the communicative norms that facilitate discussion. Including both processes in the exploration of Chinese online communicative environment is very important, as many people are suspicious of the credibility of online expression, and are also cynical about the behaviors of the so-called e-mobs. Moreover, deliberation through the Internet is a practical way of promoting the public consultation because face-to-face deliberations, such as town hall meetings and community meetings, are not as popular in China as in Western society, because of prohibitive cost and enormous organizational efforts that are required. The results of this study, in this sense, have provided some empirical evidence regarding the status and future trends of online deliberations.

Originality and Theoretical Contribution

Most studies on deliberation focused on the deliberative pattern or quality, and did not address the affective factors. Studies that explored those factors tended to focus on an

⁴² The deprivation of speaking opportunity in the blogosphere may exist because of technical factors such as a lack of knowledge, but it is of a limited concern, since a blog can be established fairly easily when a person is motivated to do so.

individual's predisposition, such as a willingness to listen to others, network homogeneity, or institutional design. Studies examining systematic factors are rare, probably because predisposition and institutional design are easier to measure, whereas systematic factors are usually vague and intangible. Nevertheless, it is important to study the relationship between systematic factors and deliberation. After all, deliberation does not just happen because of individual participation; it needs to be deliberatively designed and carefully encouraged and protected in a systemic way.

This exploratory study tries to reveal the systemic factors that determine deliberative outcomes, and in doing so, makes a theoretical contribution through the proposed model. Two important concepts—category of the Chinese command and control system and the information availability associated with incidents discussed in the blogosphere—were developed and connected to deliberative outcomes.

The two concepts were original developments, as relevant literature was not found. Though preliminary, they provide meaningful and feasible approaches in examining factors that may exert influence on deliberative outcomes. Results supported logical relationships between the two variables and deliberation, and therefore signaled effective solutions for encouraging deliberative patterns. Moreover, although deliberative patterns may be different in other “fringe” media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) in China, these concepts can be useful and applicable in studying deliberation in those media. Deliberation on the Internet, in general, operates under the same command and control system, and information availability (news and total information) of sociopolitical incidents remains the same to all participants, such as tweeters or bloggers.

Limitations and Future Research

The major limitation of this study may lie in the generalizability of the findings to the entire blogosphere in China. The question first relates to the exposure of the fringe

media discussed in the earlier text: To what extent is the content of fringe media, such as a blog, knowable by the public? News and information about an incident are not pushed down with fringe media, but are instead pulled in deliberately by information seekers who are motivated to know more about a given issue. They may be ignored by people who are not interested, but they are out there and ready to be grabbed by those who are willing to take a step further to dig for information. They may not represent a predominant portion of the conversation in the blogosphere, but the foremost results (the top 10 posts in the Google Blog Search) that are presented to a searcher who is curious and wonder what blogs have to say about a particular incident are significant and important. In this sense, they are available and knowable, even if not as ostensibly visible as news in newspapers and on television programs.

In addition, deliberation about some incidents is simply unknowable in fringe media or suppressed through prior censorship, deletion upon publication, or in some situations, self-censorship by the content producers. Incidents studied here are publicly knowable, and had become hotspots during a certain time period, but many incidents that were considered to have a high threat level have been screened in the BBS forums and blogs and therefore were not exposed to the public in the first place. This study may be vulnerable to critiques on generalizability since deliberation about those incidents could not be addressed. However, content analysis was realized on manifest content that was tangible and technically analyzable. Moreover, discussion about an incident was usually censored because the incident was considered to be a threat to legitimacy. Higher threat levels were found to result in higher levels of deliberation, so even a higher level of deliberation could be expected if these incidents were able to get into the public domain and invite discussion. The generalizability of this study, in that case, will be strengthened rather than weakened.

Another limitation of this study is that exploration of the social process mainly focused on the relationship among commenters, and in limited cases, between commenters and bloggers (if bloggers respond to commenters), leaving a gap in the examination of the social process among bloggers themselves. This limitation results in very few cross links among the sampled blogs—unlike the situation in Western countries, blogging communities are yet to be formed in the Chinese blogosphere, especially on sociopolitical topics. It was therefore difficult to capture the nature of interaction and exchange among bloggers.

An investigation into the affiliations or identity of bloggers may help to better identify factors influencing the deliberative quality. In fact, the demographic and affiliations of bloggers (sex, education, occupation, etc.) was part of the coding scheme, but the data was not included because only a very small proportion of bloggers revealed this information.

Fortunately, overcoming the limitations of current studies can become a motive for future studies. To better understand the deliberative outcomes and the affective factors in the Chinese blogosphere, methods such as surveys or in-depth interviews with bloggers should be combined with content analysis. For example, as Scheufele, et al. (2005) have suggested, political tolerance, strength of ideology, network heterogeneity, and media use are key determinants on a person's willingness to speak out at a public forum, to listen to conflicting viewpoints, and to express conflicting viewpoints. Connections between survey results and interviews with bloggers with the measurements studied here, such as the command and control system category and information availability, may yield interesting results. For example, would different command and control system categories affect a blogger's political tolerance and media use, and thus produce deliberative patterns that differ from the findings in this study? With use of multiple methodologies,

deliberation studies can take into account all individual, institutional, and systemic factors, and therefore produce more accurate and insightful interpretations.

In today's Chinese society, sharp social conflicts that produce hotspot Internet incidents are often caused because few avenues have been created to vent resentments fueled by social conflict, and because the state control of the release of information hindered public dialogue. As scholars have noted, state organized participation often leads to deliberation that is less genuine or robust (Fung & Wright, 2003), or unlikely to have a high level of authenticity. Improvement of the quality of deliberation, therefore, relies on the participation of ordinary citizens, their associations, and civil society in bottom-up authentic processes (He, 1997). Opening up new channels of dialogue to ensure participation of ordinary citizens in sociopolitical life, therefore, is very important, and the blogosphere, especially blogs devoted to hotspot incidents, as indicated by the findings of this study, represents an effective channel in facilitating public deliberation.

This study also demonstrates, the command and control system and the information availability that is determined by the system, impact public deliberation in authoritarian China in a way that deviates from the government's intention. The government's intention is to control and guide through the media information is to suppress civil dissent and to build social harmony. As the findings suggested, however, it tends to backfire: The more the government wants to suppress an incident and information about it, the more likely people will be enthusiastic and motivated to discuss it. The government should relax the command and control system and loosen the control on information availability, expose more incidents with threats that are considered to be at higher levels to the public's view, and increase information availability of such incidents. From the perspective of the average citizens, deliberation could then involve not only the facts, reasonableness, and solutions, but also the making of decisions that solve problems in real sociopolitical life on the basis of updated viewpoints through

deliberation. To that extent, blogging, and Internet media in general, can serve as “weapons of the weak” that challenge the barriers against deliberation set up by the command and control system, and in doing so, realize its democratic potential in China.

Appendices

Appendix A: Ranking of 2007 Hotspot Internet Event

	Hotspot Internet Events	Key Words Searched for Blog Posts	Description
1	“South China Tiger” Photos	华南虎事件	A photo shopped picture of a tiger evoked a nationwide debate about propaganda and truth
2	5.30 Stock Market Crash	5.30 股灾 OR 暴跌	Stock market dropped over 6 percent after the government increased the stamp tax
3	Child slave laborers in Brick Kilns	山西黑砖窑	Child slave laborers found in illegal Shanxi brick kilns
4	Chongqing “Nail House”	重庆+钉子户	Tenacious house owner refuse to move and make room for real estate development
5	Super Girl Clash with Soldier	唐笑+武警	Super Girl Tang Xiao clashes with a soldier guarding Hunan TV Station
6	The Case of Peng Yu	彭宇案	A young man who helped to send an old woman fell down at bus stop to the hospital, was concluded wrongly by the court that he had collided with the woman and should compensate 40 percent of the treatment cost
7	Pork Price Hike	猪肉+涨价	Pork price hikes have grown into a contentious social and political issue
8	Zheng Xiaoyu Case	郑筱萸案	Former head of the State Food and Drug Administration sentenced to death due to corruption
9	Gas Price Hike	国内+汽油涨价	China raised gasoline prices as crude prices soar

10	Chang'e-1 lunar probe	嫦娥一号	The successful launch of Chang'e 1, an un-manned lunar orbiter
11	RMB Appreciation	人民币升值	Speeding up of the RMB appreciation process
12	Labor Day Holiday Debate	五一+长假+取消	Whether the May Golden Week holiday should be cut
13	Taihu Lake Algae Invasion	太湖+蓝藻	Invasion of blue-green algae fouled the Taihu Lake
14	End of Reality TV Competition	电视+选秀+停	Whether reality TV show should be cut
15	Cardboard Dumplings Story	纸包子+事件	A fake news story about sales of steamed dumplings stuffed with chopped up cardboard in Beijing led top official to make a rare apology
16	Professor Shot Dead by Police	广州+警察+副教授	Professor shot dead in dispute with police on false license plates on car
17	Cell Phone One Way Charge	单向收费	New fee policy would charge users only for outgoing calls
18	New 7 Wonders	新七大奇迹	The Official New 7 Wonders of the World was elected to represent global heritage throughout history
19	National Tooth Health Protection Group	牙防组	The National Tooth Health Protection Group that was set up at the approve of China's Ministry of Healthy was investigated for "inappropriate behaviors"
20	Salary Show Hits the Net	晒工资+网络 OR 网上	Professionals detail salaries under assumed names through the Internet

Note: 1. Ranking based on the number of original posts (excluding responding threads) appeared in three leading BBS forums: *Tianya*, *Kaidi*, and *Qiangguo*. 2. A combination of keywords about each incident is used in searching process, and duplicated posts were not included. 3. For the *Tianya* forum, only the incident of the "5.30 stock

market crash” is from the “stock market forum,” and the rest posts all come from “Tianya zatan” and “Guantian chashe” section; data of *Kaidi* forum all come from the “Maoyan kanren” section. 4. Posts deleted by forum ministrations were not included. Source: 2007 Analysis of China's Internet Public Opinion (<http://media.people.com.cn/GB/22114/52789/115416/6852601.html>)

Appendix B: Ranking of 2008 Hotspot Internet Event

	Hotspot Internet Events	Key Words Searched for Blog Posts	Description
1	Real Estate Market Cooled Down	中国+房地产+降温	Residential housing prices fell in 2008
2	Stock Market Recession	中国+股市+低迷	China's stock market continued its collapse
3	Western Media Criticized on Lhasa Riot	拉萨+骚乱+西方媒体	Chinese public criticizes Western media coverage of the Lhasa unrest
4	Sanlu Poisoned Milk Scandal	三鹿+奶粉	Milk and infant formula adulterated with melamine
5	Fan Paopao	范跑跑	High school Teacher abandoned students when the Sichuan earthquake struck
6	Beijing Olympic Open Ceremony	北京奥运+开幕式	Beijing Olympics open with spectacular ceremony
7	Fake South China Tiger Photos	平江+华南虎	Controversial photographs of a rare South China tiger were fabricated
8	Wang Shi Donations Gate	王石+捐款	Chairman of a leading real estate company criticized for not donating generously for the Sichuan earthquake victims
9	Police Killer Yang Jia	杨佳+袭警	Yang Jia was executed for killing six Shanghai police officers
10	Liu Xiang's Quit	刘翔+退赛	Super Star Liu Xiang quit 2008 Olympic 110-meter
11	<i>Chunyun</i> in Winter Storm	雪灾+春运	Transportation was heavily affected as storms hit during the busiest travelling season of the year

12	Chen GuanXi Scandal	香港+艳照门	Sexually explicit pictures shot by movie star Chen GuanXi with female singers and actresses spreaded and caused heated debate
13	Carrefour Boycott after Torch Relay	抵制+家乐福 OR 圣火+受阻	Chinese netizens boycott Carrefour after torch relay incident in Paris
14	Student clash with police	哈尔滨+警察+打死	Student beaten to death by six police officers
15	ATM "Thief" Xu Ting	许霆+ATM	Xu Ting got years of sentence for taking \$24,500 away from a Faulty ATM
16	Wengan Mass Incident	瓮安+事件	A cover-up over a girl's death triggered rioters to torch governmental buildings and vehicles
17	The Chinese Red Cross' Misuse of Quake Funds	中国红十字会+善款+问题	Use of quake donations causing concerns
18	Premier Wen Jiabao in Earthquake	温总理+地震	Premier Wen Jiabao traveled to the earthquake-devastated zone to inspect the damage and assure victims
19	National Mourning Period	国家哀悼日	The Chinese Government declared a national mourning period to express deep condolence to earthquake victims
20	Schools Collapse in Earthquake	地震+校舍+倒塌	Schools collapse in earthquake may caused by poor construction

Note: 1. Ranking based on the number of original posts (excluding responding threads) appeared in five leading BBS forums: *Tianya*, *Kaidi*, *Qiangguo*, *China.com* and *bullogger.com*. 2. A combination of keywords about each incident is used in searching process, and duplicated posts were not included. 3. Data of *Tianya* forum come from "Tianya zatan" section; data of *Kaidi* forum come from "Maoyan kanren" section, and data of *Qiangguo* forum come from "Shenru taolun" section. 4. Posts deleted by forum ministrations were not included. Source: 2008 Analysis of China's Internet Public Opinion (http://www.china.com.cn/aboutchina/zhuanti/09zgshxs/content_17100922.htm)

Appendix C: Ranking of 2009 Hotspot Internet Event

	Hotspot Internet Events	Key Words Searched for in Blog Posts	Description
1	Deng Yujiao	邓玉娇案	Waitress resists sexual advances of local officials and killed one
2	Chongqing Mob Corruption Crackdown	重庆+打黑风暴	Massive crackdown on violent gangs and corrupt officials
3	“Hide and Seek”	云南+躲猫猫+事件	Man beaten to death in prison “hide-and-seek” game
4	The Shanghai Illegal Cab Entrapment	上海+钓鱼执法	Shanghai entraps innocent motorists in sting operations against illegal cabs
5	Net Addiction Camp	网瘾+标准治疗	Net addicts are given electric shocks to treat their addiction in net rehabilitation camps
6	Controversial Green Dam Filter Delayed	绿坝	The government scraps the controversial Green Dam Internet filtering scheme, making a rare concession that the plan was a mistake
7	“70 kph”	杭州+70 码	A “rich second generation” kills pedestrian in drag-racing
8	Tonggang Violent Protest	通钢+事件	Angry Workers at Tonggang Group engaged in violent protest, beating to death the General Manager
9	University Students Drowned Rescuing Boys	长江大学+救人	Nearby fishing boat refused to save drowning students and asked 12,000 RMB per body recovery fee
10	CCTV Attacks Google Porn Links	谷歌+色情	CCTV reports Google carrying pornographic and vulgar

			information, fake interview exposed
11	Open-chest Lung Inspection	开胸验肺	To prove pneumoconiosis—a work-related injury, worker had surgeons cut open his chest
12	“Jia Junpeng, your mother calls you to go home to eat”	贾君鹏	A post becomes favorite Internet craze to express dissatisfaction against delay in game launching
13	Speak for “the Party or the Common People?”	遼军+说话	Official challenges journalist when faced with tough questions—“you speak for the Party or the common people?”
14	Kunming “Student Prostitution” Case	昆明+小学生+卖淫	Elementary school girls arrested as prostitutes but later tested to be “virgins”
15	Chengdu Bus Fire	成都+公交车+燃烧	Gasoline carried into a bus caused fire, killing 27 and injuring 74
16	Cross-provincial Chase	跨省追捕+王帅	Netizen tracked down across provinces and arrested after exposing local abuse
17	Professor Said 99 percent of Petitioners are Mentally Ill	99%+上访+精神病	Peking University Professor comments that 99 percent of China’s petitioners are mentally ill drew enormous criticism
18	Girl Stole Identity to Go To University	罗彩霞+冒名	A city official faked her daughter’s university entrance identity by taking advantage of another student’s personal information and assuming her name
19	Students in Guizhou Forced Into Prostitution	习水+嫖+幼女	Primary or middle school students were forced into prostitution

20	The Shishou Incident	石首+事件	Mass incident sparked by a dead body
----	----------------------	-------	--------------------------------------

Note: 1. Ranking based on the number of original posts (excluding responding threads) appeared in five leading BBS forums: *Tianya*, *Kaidi*, *Qiangguo*, *Sina* and *China.com*. 2. A combination of keywords about each incident is used in searching process, and duplicated posts were not included. 3. Posts deleted by forum ministrations were not included. Source: 2009 Analysis of China's Internet Public Opinion (<http://www.sociology.cass.cn/shxw/wgjj/P020100325807964372178.pdf>)

References

- 中国互联网络信息中心 (CNNIC)。 (2011)。 第27次中国互联网络发展状况统计报告。 English version retrieved on March 22, from <http://www1.cnnic.cn/uploadfiles/pdf/2011/2/28/153752.pdf>
- An, S. & Yang, B. 安珊珊、杨伯淑 (2009)。 多样性议题偏好与有限议题影响——互联网中文BBS论坛意见领袖舆论参与特征研究, 《中国传媒报告》第3期。
- Althusser, L. (1970). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (B. Brewster, Trans.). In *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, 127-186.
- Arendt, H. (1958). *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Barber, B. R. (1984). *Strong democracy: participatory politics for a new age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173-1182.
- Benhabib, S. (Ed.). (1996). *Democracy and difference: Contesting the boundaries of the political*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bessette, J. M. (1980). Deliberative democracy: The majoritarian principle in republican government. In R. A. Goldwin & W. A. Shambaugh (Eds.), *How Democratic is the Constitution?* (pp. 102-116). Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute.
- Bimber, B. (2000). The Study of Information Technology and Civic Engagement. *Political Communication*, 17(4), 329-333.
- Black, L. W. (2009). Listening to the City: Difference, Identity, and Storytelling in Online Deliberative Groups. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 5(1).
- Blood, R. (2002). *The weblog handbook: practical advice on creating and maintaining your blog*. Cambridge MA: Perseus Publishing.
- Bohman, J. (1990). Communication, ideology, and democratic theory. *The American Political Science Review*, 84, 93-109.
- Bohman, J. (1996). *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bohman, J., & Rehg, W. (1997). *Deliberative democracy : essays on reason and politics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Brook, T., & Frolic, B. M. (Eds.). (1997). *Civil Society in China*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

- Burkhalter, S, Gastil, J. & Kelshaw, T. (2002). A Conceptual Definition and Theoretical Model of Public Deliberation in Small Face-to-Face Groups. *Communication Theory*, 12(4), 398-422.
- Chen, Huailin 陳懷林 (1998)。經濟利益驅動下的中國傳媒制度變革—以報業為例。In H. 何舟、陳懷林編著, 《中國傳媒新論》 (pp. 108-153). 香港: 太平洋世紀出版社有限公司。
- 中国互联网络信息中心 (CNNIC)。 (2009)。 2008-2009 Survey Report on China Weblog Market and Blogging Behavior (Publication. Retrieved 10/02/2009: <http://research.cnnic.cn/html/1247815387d1066.html>)
- Cohen, J. (1989). Deliberation and democratic legitimacy. In A. Hamlin & P. Pettit (Eds.), *The good polity: Normative analysis of the State* (pp. 17-34). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Cohen, J. & Rogers, J. (1983). *On Democracy*: Penguin.
- Coleman, S., & Gotz, J. (2001). Bowling Together. Retrieved 1 January, 2007, from <http://bowlingtogether.net>
- Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Delli Carpini, M. X, Cook, F. L., & Jacobs, L. R. (2004). Public deliberation, discursive participation, and citizen engagement: A review of the empirical literature. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 7, 315-344.
- Deng, Zhenglai 邓正来 (2006)。《焦点访谈》及其背后的结构性力量 Retrieved March, 20, 2010, from <http://dzlai.fyfc.cn/art/80477.htm>
- Elster, J. (1998). *Deliberative democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Esarey, A, & Xiao, Q. (2008). Political Expression in the Chinese Blogosphere: Below the Radar. *Asian Survey*, 48(5), 752-772.
- Fang, X. & Wang, J. 方兴东、王俊秀 (2003)。《博客: e时代盗火者》。中国方正出版社。
- Fishkin, J. S. (1991). *Democracy and deliberation: new directions for democratic reform*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Fraser, N. (1992). Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere B2 - Habermas and the Public Sphere* (pp. 109). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Fung, A. & Wright, E. O. (Eds.). (2003). *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*. London: Verso Press.
- Gamson, W. A. (1992). *Talking politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gastil, J. (2008). *Political communication and deliberation*. Los Angeles: Sage.

- Glaser, M. (2004). "Watchblogs" put the political press under the microscope. *Online Journalism Review*, Retrieved July 03, 2009, from <http://ojr.org/ojr/glaser/1076465317.php>
- Google-Blog-Search. (2009). Frequently Asked Questions Retrieved March from http://www.google.com/support/faqs/bin/static.py?page=faq_blog_search.html&hl=en
- Grossman, L. (2006). Wang Xiaofeng: Bart Simpson In Beijing. *Time*, 17 December
- Gutmann, A. & Thompson, D. (1996). *Democracy and disagreement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gutmann, A. & Thompson, D. (1997). Deliberating about bioethics. *The Hastings Center Report*, 27(3), 38-41.
- Habermas, J. (1984). *Theory of Communicative Action Vol II: System and Lifeworld*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Habermas, J. (1989). The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of a Bourgeois Society. In F. Lawrence (Ed.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Halavais, A. (2002). Blogs and the "social weather," retrieved from <http://alex.halavais.net>
- Hao, X. & Li, Z. 郝曉鳴、李展 (2001)。傳播科技對中國大陸傳媒體制的挑戰。新聞學研究 (69), 95-112.
- He, B. (1997). *The Democratic Implications of Civil Society in China*. London: Macmillan.
- He, B. (2006). Western theories of deliberative democracy and the Chinese practice of complex deliberative governance. In E. J. Leib & B. He (Eds.), *The search for deliberative democracy in China* (pp. 133-148). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- He, Z. (2000). Chinese Communist Party Press in a Tug-of-War: A Political-Economy Analysis of the Shenzhen Special Zone Daily. In L. Chin-Chuan (Ed.), *Power, Money and Media : Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China* (pp. 112-151). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- He, Zhou 何舟 (1998)。從喉舌到黨營輿論公司：中共黨報的演化。In H. 何舟、陳懷林編著, *中國傳媒新論* (pp. 66-107). 香港: 太平洋世紀出版社有限公司。
- Himmelboim, Itai, Gleave, Eric, & Smith, Marc. (2009). Discussion catalysts in online political discussions: Content importers and conversation starters. *Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14, 771-789.
- Holsti, O. R. (1969). *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*. London: Addison-Wesley.

- Houchin Winfield, B., & Peng, Z. (2005). Market or Party Controls?: Chinese media in transition. *Gazette*, 67(3), 255-270.
- Huang, H. & Zhu, Li 黄豁、朱立毅 (2007)。“体制性迟钝”的风险。《瞭望》(24), 6—7页。
- Jiang, M. (2008). *Authoritarian Deliberation: Public Deliberation in China*. Paper presented at the the 6th Annual Chinese Internet Research Conference. Hong Kong.
- Kavanaugh, A., Isenhour, P., Jaideep, G., Cooper, M., Randolph, W. & Midha, A. (2005). *Detecting and Facilitating Deliberation at the Local Level*. Paper presented at the 2nd Conference on Online Deliberation: Design, Research, and Practice, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.
- from <http://www.online-deliberation.net/conf2005/viewabstract.php?id=38>,
- Kerbel, M. R., & Bloom, J. D. (2005). Blog for America and Civic Involvement. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10(4), 3-27.
- Kottke, J. (2003). Weblogs and power laws. Retrieved 11 November, 2006, from <http://www.kottke.org/03/02/weblogs-and-power-laws>
- Krebs, C. J. (1989). *Ecological Methodology*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Kulikova, S. V. & Perimutter, D. D. (2007). Blogging down the dictator? *International Communication Gazette*, 69(1), 29-50.
- Lee, C. C. (Ed.). (1990). *Voice of China: The interplay of politics and journalism*. New York: Guilford.
- Lee, C. C. (1990). Mass media: Of China and about China. In Chin-ChuanLee (Ed.), *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism* (pp. 3-32). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Lee, J. (2006). *Blog agenda: What did they blog about in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election?* Paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication San Francisco, CA.
- Leib, E. J. (2005). The Chinese communist party and deliberative democracy. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 1(1), 1-6.
- Leib, E. J. (2006). Pragmatism in designing popular deliberative institutions in the United States and China. In E. J. Leib & B. He (Eds.), *The search for deliberative democracy in China* (pp. 113-131). New York Palgrave Macmillan.
- Levy, P. (1997). *Collective intelligence: Mankind's emerging world in cyberspace* (ed.). Cambridge, MA: Perseus.
- Li, L. C. (1997). Towards a Non-zero-sum Interactive Framework of Spatial Politics: the Case of Centre-Province in Contemporary China. *Political Studies*, 45(1), 49-65.

- Li, X., Xuan, Q., & Kluver, R. (2003). Who is setting the Chinese agenda? The impact of online chatrooms on Party press. In K. C. Ho, R. Klwer, & C. C. Yang (Eds.), *Asian.com: Asian encounters the Internet*. In (pp. 143-158). London: Routledge Curzon.
- Liu, Y. 劉勇 (2000)。《媒體中國》。四川人民出版社。
- Lowrey, W. (2006). Mapping the journalism-blogging relationship. *Journalism*, 7(4), 477-500.
- MacDougall, R. (2005). Identity, Electronic Ethos, and Blogs: A Technologic Analysis of Symbolic Exchange on the New News Medium. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(4), 575-599.
- MacKinnon, R. (2008). Blogs and China correspondence: lessons about global information flows. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 1(2), 242-257.
- MacKinnon, R. (2009). China's Censorship 2.0: How Companies Censor Bloggers. *First Monday*, 14(2).
- Manin, B. (1987). On legitimacy and political deliberation. *Political Theory*, 15, 338-368.
- Manosevitch, E., & Walker, D. (2009). *Reader Comments to Online Opinion Journalism: A Space of Public Deliberation*. Paper presented at the the 10th International Symposium on Online Journalism. Austin, TX.
- Maratea, R. (2008). The e-Rise and Fall of Social Problems: The Blogosphere as a Public Arena, *Social Problems* (Vol. 55, pp. 139-159).
- Marrow, C. (2004). *Audience, structure and authority in the weblog community*. Paper presented at the International Communication Association conference. New Orleans.
- McLeod, J. M., Scheufele, D. A., Moy, P., Horowitz, E. M., Holbert, R. L, Zhang, W., et al. (1999). Understanding Deliberation. *Communication Research*, 26(6), 743-775.
- Mendelberg, T. (2002). The deliberative citizen: Theory and evidence. *Political Decisionmaking, Deliberation and Participation*, 6, 151-193.
- Meraz, S. (2005). *Lurking in Partisan Space: Analyzing Political Conversation on the Howard Dean Candidate Blog*. Paper presented at the International Communication Association conference.
- Mertha, A. C. (2008). *China's Water Warriors: Citizen Action and Policy Change*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.
- Moore, M. (2008). China's leaders Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao embrace the internet. Retrieved April 12, 2009, from http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/malcolmmoore/blog/2008/09/13/chinas_leaders_hu_jintao_and_wen_jiabao_embrace_the_internet

- Muhlberger, P. (2006). *Building a Deliberation Measurement Toolbox: the Deliberative Democracy Consortium*.
- O'Hara, K. (2002). The Internet: A tool for democratic pluralism? *Science as Culture*, 11(2), 287-298.
- Ó Baoill, A. (2004). Weblogs and the public sphere. Retrieved March 6, 2007, from http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/weblogs_and_the_public_sphere.html
- Pan, Z. 潘忠黨 (1997)。大陆新闻改革过程中象征资源之替换形态。《新聞學研究》(54), 111-139页。
- Papacharissi, Z. (2004). Democracy online: civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups. *New Media & Society*, 6(2), 259-283.
- Prior, M. (2005). News vs. entertainment: How increasing media choice widens gaps in political knowledge and turnout. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(3), 577-592.
- Prior, M. (2007). *Post-broadcast democracy: How media choice increases inequality in political involvement and polarizes elections*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Qian, G. 钱钢 (2009)。“3C”的2.0版。Retrieved August, 1, 2010 from [www.hku.hk/sociodep/foss0001/Week_9_\(Qian_Gang\)_abbrev.ppt](http://www.hku.hk/sociodep/foss0001/Week_9_(Qian_Gang)_abbrev.ppt).
- Rawls, J. (1993). *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Reese, S., Rutigliano, L., Hyun, K., & Jeong, J. (2007). Mapping the blogosphere: Professional and citizen-based media in the global news arena. *Journalism*, 8(3), 235-261.
- Roberts-Miller, T. (2004). Parody blogging and the call of the real. *Into the Blogosphere*. Retrieved February 23, 2007, from http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/parody_blogging.html
- Rogers, R. (2006). *Information Politics on the Web*. The MIT Press.
- Rong, J. et al. 荣敬本等 (2008)。从压力型体制向民主合作体制的转变：县乡两级政治体制改革。中央编译出版社。
- Rosenberg, S. (2006). Human nature, communication, and culture: Rethinking democratic deliberation in China and the West. In E. J. Leib & B. He (Eds.), *The search for deliberative democracy in China* (pp. 77-111). New York Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ryfe, D. M. (2005). Does Deliberative Democracy Work? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8(1), 49-71.
- Ryfe, D. M. (2002). The Practice of Deliberative Democracy: A Study of 16 Deliberative Organizations. *Political Communication*, 19(3), 359-377.

- Scheufele, D. A., Hardy, B., & Wang, Z. (2005). *Defining Deliberation: Key Determinants and Distinct Dimensions*. Paper presented at the International Communication Association. New York, NY.
- Schudson, M. (1997). Why Conversation is Not the Soul of Democracy. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 14(4), 297-309.
- Scott, J. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Shirky, C. (2003). Power laws, weblogs and inequality. Retrieved 23 February, 2007, from http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw_weblog.html
- Simpson, E. H. (1949). Measurement of Diversity. *Nature*, 163-688.
- Steenbergen, M. R., Bächtiger, A., Spörndli, M., & Steiner, J. (2003). Measuring Political Deliberation: A discourse quality index, *Comparative European Politics*, 1, 21-48.
- Su, N. M., Wang, Y., & Mark, G. (2005). *Politics as Usual in the Blogosphere*. Paper presented at the 4th International Workshop on Social Intelligence Design (SID). Stanford University, Stanford, CA.
- Tan, Q. (2006). Deliberative Democracy and Village Self-government in China. In E. J. Leib & B. He (Eds.), *The search for deliberative democracy in China* (pp. 197-215). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Thompson, C. (2006). Google's China Problem. *The New York Times Magazine*, April 23.
- Tremayne, M., Zheng, N., Lee, J. K., & Jeong, J. (2006). Issue publics on the web: Applying network theory to the war blogosphere. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(1).
- Wallsten, K. (2007). Agenda setting and the blogosphere: An analysis of the relationship between mainstream media and political blogs. *Review of Policy Research*, 24(6), 567-587.
- Williams, A. P., Trammell, K. D., Postelnicu, M., Landreville, K. D., & Martin, J. D. (2005). Blogging and Hyperlinking: use of the Web to enhance viability during the 2004 US campaign. *Journalism Studies*, 6(2), 177-186.
- Wu, G. (1994). Command communication: The politics of editorial formulation in the People's Daily. *The China Quarterly*, Summer (194-211).
- Xu, Y. (1994). Professionalization without guarantees: Changes of the Chinese press in post-1989 years. *The International Communication Gazette*, 53, 23-41.
- Yamamoto, M. (2006). *Weblogs as Agents of Political Participation: Mobilizing Information in Weblogs and Print Newspapers* Paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. San Francisco, CA.
- Yang, G. 杨国斌 (2009)。悲情与戏谑：网络事件中的情感动员，《传播与社会学刊》，第九期，39-66页。

- Yardley, J. (2005). An unlikely pop icon worries China. *International Herald Tribune*. Retrieved December 3, 2010, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/04/world/asia/04iht-super.html>
- Yu, D. 于德宝 (2006)。当前群体性事件的特点和原因。《中国党政干部论坛》，第6期。
- Yu, J. 于建嵘 (2009)。当前我国群体性事件的类型与特征。《中国政法大学学报》第6期。
- Yu, J. 于建嵘 (2008)。谁在承受截访的成本？《凤凰周刊》第20期。
- Yu, J. & Yu, D. 于建嵘、于德宝 (2008)。China Civil Society Report: Mass Incidents in China. *Policy Forum Online* Retrieved May 5th, 2010 from <http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/08065YuYu.html>.
- Zhang, W. (2007). *Diverse and Regulated? A Study on the Relationship Between Online Deliberation and Structural Design*. Paper presented at the Conference Papers -- International Communication Association.
- Zhao, Y. (2000a). From commercialization to conglomeration: The transformation of the Chinese press within the. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 3-26.
- Zhao, Y. (2000b). Watchdogs on party leashes? contexts and implications of investigative journalism in post-deng china. *Journalism Studies*, 1(4), 577-597.
- Zhao, Y. (2004). Underdogs, lapdogs and watchdogs: Journalists and public sphere problematic in China. In E. Gu & M. Goldman (Eds.), *Chinese intellectuals between the state and the market* (pp. 43-74). Landon: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Zhao, Y. (1998). *Media, Market and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Zhou, X. (2009). The political blogosphere in China: A content analysis of the blogs regarding the dismissal of Shanghai leader Chen Liangyu. *New Media & Society*, 11(6), 1003-1022.
- Zhou, Y. & Moy, P. (2007). Parsing Framing Processes: The Interplay Between Online Public Opinion and Media Coverage. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 79-98.

Vita

Jia Dai received the Bachelor of Arts degree from Hunan Normal University in 1999 and her Master of Arts degree from Wuhan University in 2003. She entered the doctoral program at the University of Texas at Austin in 2004.

Permanent email address: jiadai@utexas.edu

This dissertation was typed by Jia Dai.