



**Citizen Political Participation via Social Media:  
A Case Study of Weibo Use in Hong Kong's 2012 Chief Executive  
Election**

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**by**

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## **Abstract**

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Research into the citizen political participation via social media is dominated by two grand narratives. In the first, new media are seen as empowering society, while the second portrays the Internet as the State's ultimate tool for manipulating citizens. This research employed content analysis, critical discourse analysis and interview to compare and contrast the nature of political participation and deliberation on Weibo in [Hong Kong and mainland] and by [VIPs and causal users] on 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election, and how the online censorship shaped their political participation and deliberation regarding this case. Mixed methods used with theoretical framework (e.g. democracy, digital democracy, deliberative democracy, e-participation and citizenship) in this research has demonstrated the role of Weibo both 'tool' 'forum' and 'object' to understand deliberative democracy while citizens used for political participation and deliberation. Dynamic forms of self-censorship demonstrated how the online censorship shaped the citizens' political participation and deliberation through dynamic explicit or implicit ways on Weibo in this case.

Key Terms: Democracy, digital democracy, deliberative democracy, citizen participation, social media, censorship and self-censorship.

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The paper 'New Media and Democracy: 3 Competing Visions from Cyber-Optimism and Cyber-Pessimism' has been published on the Journal of Political Sciences and Public Affairs. 2:114. doi:10.4172/2332-0761.1000114 in 2014. This paper is published during the period of registration at the University of Leicester and represents work undertaken wholly by me, and it is reworked to in support of this thesis in 1.2 Cyber-optimism vs. Cyber-pessimism: New Media and Politics in order to frame the research questions. Full paper has been printed and presented in the appendix.

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## **Introduction**

This research focuses on Chinese citizen political participation in political communication via social media, and precisely concentrates on the case study of Hong Kong Chief Executive Election in 2012. The following plans to firstly outline research rationale, and then generally present the research background and context debate, in order to demonstrate the aim of the research before addressing the literature review.

## **Rationale for the Research**

There are four points of rationale for the research deserved to be addressed here. Firstly, it is a personal interest researching on political empirical case that are popular discussed on social media, especially I concentrated on researching on the case taken place in 2012 when I planned to do the field work, so Voltmer's (2006) study provided an initial idea for this research which investigated ways in which citizens interpret political messages and the extent to which the media affect political attitudes and electoral behavior. Political communication has been defined as an interactive system which social actors use to communicate on political matters (Voltmer, 2006; Negrine and Stanyer, 2007). This is the initial point inspired this thesis to draw on a range of literature, such as Voltmer's study (2006), which has examined ways of understanding the interdependencies between politicians, citizens and the media. The cultural dimension of political communication must also be considered, given "the relationship between political culture and political communication, which includes the construction and encoding of political messages" (Pfetsch, 2004:345). According to Pfetsch, it is necessary to explore "political systems that can be comprehended as nation states, regional entities, political subsystems" (Pfetsch, 2004:345).

Secondly, regarding to the rationale of choosing Sina Weibo, which was set up in 2009, is the ‘Chinese Twitter’. It is an instant communication tool that allows members of the public to post messages (up to 140 characters), pictures or video. Users can not only post their own commentaries but also follow or repost those of others. The service is enormously popular in Hong Kong and Mainland China; between 2011 and 2012, 100 million new accounts were opened with the service, and by 2012 it had 300 million users, 9% of whom are active daily users (Webtech, 2012). Generally, according to some theorists, media can help citizens better understand politics; some scholars argue that they play a significant role in the process of ‘political socialization’ – that is, “...the developmental processes by which people of all ages and adolescents acquire political cognition, attitudes, and behaviours” (Powell and Cowart, 2003). Others, however, are concerned at what they see as the media’s adverse effect on political participation and ‘social capital’ (Coleman, 1987, 1988; Putnam, 1993, 2000). Norris (1996) found that the more time individuals spend watching television, the less they participate politically, while Putnam (2000) argues that one reason for the decline in social capital may be television. Other studies state that watching TV leads to social alienation (e.g. Hooghe, 2002; Moy, Scheufele and Holbert, 1999). In recent years, political communication researchers have begun to consider how political communication; political participation and social capital are being affected by Internet penetration. Their findings suggest that new technologies such as the Internet, mobile phones and tablets may actually be strengthening civic activism. Remero (2014) argues that conventional methods of political participation (voting, campaigning, community organization and individual outreach) are changing and new forms are emerging with the new technologies, such as e-activism and

transnational activism. Precisely, social media, including sites like Sina Weibo, are having a growing impact on Chinese society. So Sina Weibo could help this study focuses specifically on the role of social media playing to political participate and deliberate in the case of HK Chief Executive Election by comparing with Weibo users from Hong Kong and mainland China used the site to respond to the Hong Kong Chief Executive election campaign of 2012.

Thirdly, the widespread generation of political information has created an extremely complex, competitive online environment in which a wide range of political actors competes for the attention of citizens. It is therefore important to explore what and why certain topics become popular, and how and what exactly citizens respond to these topics. This study focuses specifically on political participation via social media because this is the preferred method for the majority of Hong Kong citizens (*South Metropolis Newspaper*, 2011). It concentrates on Weibo rather than Facebook, because the latter is blocked in Mainland China, making comparison of the views of Hong Kong and mainland users impossible. As Parry and Moyser point out: “As potentially significant to a democracy as the amount of participation is the equality of that participation” (1994:27). There are already 350,000 active Weibo users in Hong Kong (Miss XQ, 2010), but as the mainland’s economy grows, some media outlets are now using Weibo to reach Chinese audiences too. The Chief Executive election is a suitable case study because it allows a comparison of the views of mainland and Hong Kong Weibo users, Hong Kong users are a group of individuals who are less being censored, so the comparison enables testing of the hypothesis that the nature of political discussions that took place on Weibo during the election, was shaped by online censorship and government’s ideology education, also it indicates

the various political discussions on Weibo that playing as important role in helping users become involved into democratic politics through online political behaviours.

Fourthly, researchers in this area have generally adopted quantitative analytical methods to investigate information dissemination by citizens on matters such as official corruption and current affairs (Kwak, Lee, Park and Moon, 2010; Asur, Huberman, Szabo and Wang, 2011; Barash and Golder, 2010; Hassid, 2012; Huang and Yip, 2012). Some have already focused on Hong Kong citizens' participation via Facebook in discussions about Hong Kong elections and the democratic movement (So and Kwitko, 2007; Lo, 2013). Others have researched the social conflicts between Hong Kong and mainland citizens but without case studies (Lo, 2013; Lee, 2012; Kuan, 1995), while recent debate has focused on Mainland Chinese citizens' lack of effective participation in political discussion on social media – the result of serious online censorship in China. As yet, however, there has been little qualitative analysis of citizens' e-participation before it transforms into offline activism. The current research is original and empirical, in that it gives qualitative and quantitative insights into the nature of political discourse between Hong Kong and mainland citizens, and how and why they contributed online during the 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive election. In this way, it contributes to the relatively under-researched area of concerning Chinese citizen participation in political communication via social media.

### **Research Background and Contextual Debates**

This thesis starts from a contextual review of three actors that are involved in the modern election process that could reveal the how the objectivities of this research positioned in an essential way: candidates, the media and

voters. Voltmer (2006) argues that the relationship between the three actors in this so-called 'election triangle' is a complex mix of conflict, compromise and cooperation. The media play a pivotal role in the triangle; they can raise issues in the debate, change the political agenda, raise voters' awareness and affect their decision-making, challenge candidates to remain honest and even help them win office.

As far back as 1952, the US Republican presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower used television advertisements as part of his election campaign. In the UK, TV coverage of political campaigns began in 1959, by which time 75% of UK households could access a television (Scammell, 1995). It is not surprising, then, that since the 1960s, politicians and researchers have increasingly come to understand that the media are the key battleground in any election campaign. Nimmo (1970) was one of the first to point out the value of television as a communication tool, predicting that it would become increasingly important in persuading voters to engage with politics. Devlin (1986) and Pfau and Parrott (1993) subsequently investigated the effectiveness of campaign advertisements on TV, with the latter authors noting that the medium offers a high level of infiltration.

More specifically, regarding to radio and newspaper, candidates can disseminate their campaign message by hiring public relations specialists to arrange political events and activities, and by buying advertising space in newspapers and on radio. Trent and Friedenber (1995) point out that while print advertising in newspapers and magazines gives the candidate the opportunity to set out their arguments, it does not allow them to respond rapidly to an opponent's attacks, and it is more difficult to catch the target audience. Radio is a more flexible intermediary to some extent,

as it is closer to voters, and candidates can use a mix of sound and music to convey their political message more effectively. Many candidates also prefer to use radio because it is cheaper than TV advertising. As for TV, it has become a prime tool for communicating the political message, not only because it is the best way of reaching a large audience, but, unlike radio or hard copy newspapers, TV is able to convey this message visually as well as verbally. Voters are also more likely to trust candidates when they can see them onscreen. Devlin (1986) argues that TV enables candidates to reach undecided and unengaged voters, to strengthen their position and attack opponents, to set the agenda and raise funds, and to target specific ethnic groups and constituencies. But, television can also be more difficult for politicians in the later stages of the campaign, especially when faced with hostile interviewers (Bull, 2000).

Looking at the drawbacks of these media, many now doubt whether the traditional media organizations can produce high-quality political coverage. With the arrival of digital and satellite TV, commercial broadcasting, which is funded by advertising, faces a huge challenge, but even public media organizations have massive commercial obligations. McNair writes about the “conventions, practices and constraints which shape the output of political journalism, in ways which sometimes favour the politician, and at other times subvert him or her” (McNair, 2007:61). Bowman and Willis (2003:13) are more forthright, criticizing traditional media as “an arrogant, exclusive club that puts its own version of self-interest and economic survival above the societal responsibility of a free press”. They argue that this is eroding public trust in traditional media news reporting (Pew Research Centre, 2006). Swanson (2004) asserts that politicians and their professional consultants in effect frame the news to satisfy their own or journalists’ commercial purpose; skilled politicians

may manipulate the media, but they provide an inexhaustible source of stories for journalists forced to compete for readers and advertising revenue. Thus, there is a mutual interdependence between political organizations and media organizations. Schuler (2004) argues that citizen participation has decreased in the US, at least in part because of the concentration of media ownership in private hands. It seems that the traditional media's role as the 'Fourth Estate' (to use Edmund Burke's phrase) has been compromised, and that they offer only limited opportunities for political participation by citizens.

Against this background, new media have helped change the relationship between parties and voters in fundamental ways. According to Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006), new media refers to those digital media which are featured with interactive ways of communication, and involve some form of computing that differs from traditional media, for instance, telephone, radio and TV. Socha (2013) defines new media as encompassing anything co-operates with the Internet which could interplay between technology, images and sound. Candidates take advantage of the new communication channels to shape their image, promote their political ideas and even attack their opponents. Gibson and Ward (2000) argue that politicians simply want to exploit every available media platform to give themselves an advantage over their rivals, but interactive digital technologies such as web pages, bulletin boards, e-mail and online chat rooms give politicians more opportunities than ever before to engage in direct dialogue with voters. UK parties such as Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National Party, Sinn Fein and Labour have already established online referenda and hosted interactive online discussions with leading politicians. Modernizers are well aware of the Internet's potential not just as a communications tool but as an interactive forum for attracting more members (Labour Coordination

Committee, 1997:9).

*Convergence media* have the potential to: “promote distinct informational and interpersonal dynamics that may reinvigorate the democratic process online and offline” (Graber et al., 2004; Krueger, 2002; van Dijk, 2000). The proliferation of new media, especially social media, has provided more opportunities for political participation in societal discourse, leading researchers to speculate on the democratic potential of the new media (Abbott, 2012:77ff; Wright, 2012:6). New media do not merely represent an opportunity for more politician-initiated communication, however. According to Tremayne (2007) and Allan (2009), the emergence of citizen journalism has enhanced citizens’ ability to monitor powerful politicians. In practical terms, citizen journalists have changed the sender-receiver paradigm of traditional journalism; Gunter, Campbell and Touri suggest: “The emergence of independent blogs can lead to a loss of control by traditional news organizations that could lead to a shift away from journalism that is healthy for democracy” (Gunter, Campbell and Touri, 2008). Scannell and Cardiff agree, arguing that the struggle to maintain media independence has contributed to the health of liberal democracy (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991:10).

Even though blogs emerged in the late 1990s, it was after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks that the phenomenon of blogging spread rapidly. According to Lenhart and Fox (2006), the 2006 Pew Internet survey of bloggers found that 2% of bloggers interviewed mainly wrote about politics. There is increasing number of blogs that shed light on President Bush’s subsequent war on terrorism. Bloggers not only satisfy the increasing public demand for constantly updated information, but also provide “alternative sources which [are] at least accessible” (Gunter,

Campbell and Touri, 2008:186). On a number of occasions, they have “influenced, supplanted, surpassed or scooped both traditional media and other social network tools”. For instance, a blog named Vodkapundit.com started to be active four months after 9/11 with a post titled: “Why Aren’t We Bombing Iraq Back to the Stone Age Already?” This is one of the blogs that typically evolved to include popular political discussions, including, notably, extensive discussion of the 2002 and 2004 US elections. Other major news events also fuelled the blogs, including the Asian tsunami happened in December 2004 and 2005 terrorist bombings in London in July. In the case of the Trent Lott/Strom Thurmond scandal<sup>1</sup> (Gill, 2004; Kennedy School of Government Case Program, 2004), for example, when Lott’s remarks were exposed on public broadcasting but ignored by the mainstream media, bloggers reposted them in the blogosphere (Regan, 2003). The ensuing controversy resulted in Lott relinquishing his leadership position. So the case implied that blogging in politics started to challenge the mainstream media on some sensitive topics that might be easily over controlled by mainstream media or other political forces.

Gunter, Campbell and Touri assert that: “News blogs are virtuous”; bloggers and their followers are able to correct mistakes in and add detail to traditional news reporting, enhancing news coverage and reflecting a more diverse range of perspectives than traditional media (Gunter, Campbell and Touri, 2008:185). They “produce frames that divert from the official meanings traditionally sponsored by political elites” (Touri, 2009:173). Most political bloggers link to or give comments on news presented in the traditional media or respond directly to the websites of

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<sup>1</sup> Trent Lott is a formal United States Senator from Mississippi; he reportedly has had a

politicians or campaigns. They may focus on being watchdogs; for instance, they have a preference for tracking what a certain candidate has done or written. Critiques from political bloggers are presented as a form of opinion piece, or as part of a debate among bloggers or in public (Rettberg, 2008). In this context, blogging can “push journalists to richer sourcing, outside traditional halls of government and corporations” (Andrews, 2003).

There is ongoing debate surrounding new media and political participation. Jennings and Zeitner (2003) claim that new media may actually reduce political participation for two key reasons: firstly, it is hard to acquire specific or valuable political information, due to the multiplicity of sources on the Internet; and secondly, most new media users are more likely to be distracted by the entertainment opportunities on offer. On the other hand, scholars such as Bimber (1998, 2000) argue that new media make more (and more diffuse) political information available to users more quickly, reducing the cost of knowledge acquisition and encouraging political participation. It has also been suggested that new media might be particularly helpful in encouraging young people, who are often apathetic towards politics, to become more involved (Sax, Astin, Korn and Mahoney, 1997; Zukin, 1997). Corrado and Firestone (1996) stress that although new media use may temporarily reduce the time spent on community activities and political activity in the real world, the convenience offered by new media may ultimately be more conducive to mobilization and communication, and democratic functioning.

### **Research Aim**

The aim of this research is to examine Chinese citizens’ participation in political communication through social media, which precisely focus on

case study of 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election. Since the nature of this aim required the adoption of an intensive research strategy, a case study was conducted which took as its subject the Hong Kong Chief Executive election of 2012. This approach allowed the in-depth investigation of 1) the extent and nature of political participation and deliberation on Weibo during the election and 2) the extent and ways in which this participation and deliberation was shaped by censorship. For instance, measuring the distribution of citizen contributions over time gave an insight into how Chinese netizens perceived the online censorship and responded to it at different stages of the election in political communication.

This research does not seek to determine which specific level of democracy this kind of e-participation in political communication belongs to; rather, it draws on the concept of deliberative democracy, focusing on the ways in which citizens disseminate information through online debate and discussions on Weibo, and considering the efficiency of citizen participation as a means of strengthening civic society (Schuler, 2004; Hague and Loader, 1999). The research seeks to investigate how users play the role of freedom-seeking netizens through political discussion, making use of Weibo to challenge the Party-State and enhance digital democracy. At the same time, it considers how censorship and self-censorship operate within context-bound of China.

The research draws on Schudson (1997)'s perspective to examine whether or not the conversations on Weibo have important implications for democratic participation. Schudson asserted that democratic conversation is 'essentially public' rather than 'necessarily egalitarian'; thus, 'democratic talk' among individuals with diverse values and from

different backgrounds is likely to be ‘profoundly uncomfortable’ (Schudson, 1997:297-309). In the light of this, the research seeks to explore the various ways in which Weibo users contributed to the deliberative process during the election, such as forwarding, commenting and commenting on comments. It also investigates what kind of users engage in political communication on Weibo and identifies their different levels of online contributions. It pays particular attention to citizens’ responses to posts by opinion leaders from the Chinese news media who actively contribute to online information dissemination. These new opinion leaders are typically of high social standing and influential, so they have a large number of followers on Weibo. They also tend to be the first to post credible information on the site (Li, 2012). Accordingly, again, the study investigates responses for the contributions that were posted by these opinion leaders during the Chief Executive election.

### **Thesis Outline**

The thesis is composed of eight chapters in addition to this introduction. The **Introduction** outlines the research aim and briefly introduces the context of the research, including how traditional media work in elections and how and why new media are playing an increasing role during elections.

**Chapter One** sets out the theoretical framework of the study. It initially reviewed the theories of democracy; digital democracy and deliberative democracy in western concepts then discussed the development of deliberative democracy in Chinese context, before addressing the cyber-optimistic and cyber-pessimistic perspectives on the relationship between politics and new media. It then focuses more narrowly on the citizen-centered approach to e-participation, citizenship and digital

citizenship. The understanding of citizenship in Chinese context has also demonstrated in this chapter. **Chapter Two** reviews some of the previous empirical studies that have drawn on similar theoretical frameworks, to investigate citizen political participation or engagement via social media in western and non-western contexts. It is a fact that empirical studies are normally conducted based on western theories, which provide an opportunity for this research to consider how this research contribute in theoretical dimension.

This is followed by **Chapter Three**, which sheds light on the local context, describing the development of micro-blogging in China and the nature and history of Party-State online censorship before outlining the key features of Hong Kong's political system. The chapter then offers a discussion of the development of Hong Kong's media. Before revealing the strategy of methods conducted in this research, it ends by setting out the research questions and functional research questions that were developed following the literature review.

**Chapter Four** presents the methodology of the study. This chapter sets out the functional research questions and sub-questions before justifying the choice of content analysis, critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews as the main data collection methods and explaining how they were applied for answering the overall research questions.

**Chapter Five** presents the analysis of two sets of data gathered from the content analysis and semi-structured interviews, it concentrates on the identity of the users and the different contributions made by different users. The chapter explains the rationale behind these identities and what

they were trying to achieve in these political discussions. Thus, this chapter is about understanding the identity of the users and their perceived role in this discussion. The first set of results, which were generated by the content analysis, revealed the types of contribution made by Weibo users: showing that forwarding was the most popular type of contribution. They also showed how different user groups (e.g. casual users and VIPs) contributed in different ways, with the reasons explained, therefore, this chapter also play as a base analysis and discussion to support the next two chapters.

**Chapter Six** puts the emphasis on the quality of the online political discussion and the significance of the content that is discussed, and then extend to evaluate the ideology education represented in these discussions in order to reveal the structure, representation, and interaction of political discussion in Chinese macro and micro context. The content analysis firstly demonstrates that two of the most hotly debated topics were Hong Kong's electoral system and party competition within Hong Kong. Sample comments taken from these and other discussions were subjected to critical discourse analysis to give the second lot of results. The three sets of data starts to analyze the nature and extent of Chinese online censorship. This chapter discusses the nature of online censorship in China and the opposition and support for online censorship expressed by Weibo users from different user groups and geographical locations. It shows that users expressed this support/opposition both explicitly and implicitly in 1) their choice of contribution, 2) their preferred online status and 3) their style of political discourse. Thus, the chapter evaluates the relationship between online statuses and online political discussion on Weibo and the dialectical relationship between online political discourse and online censorship in order to imply how ideology educated by the

authority. This chapter also delivered an open discussion, this research evaluated the dynamics of users' perspectives upon topics discussions has revealed a sign of ideological difference; the section discusses the Chinese style of ideological education to show the influence of formal and informal ideology on online political participation by netizens, and considers whether this ideological education affects online dynamics. It also discusses the ways in which deliberative social behaviours (e.g. choosing to forward comments, choosing to adopt VIP or casual user status, and self-censorship) help enrich deliberative democracy and are associated with an ideological education.

**Chapter Seven** combines three sets of data to discuss the issue of censorship more explicitly in order to evaluate the implication of political efficacy and citizen participation on social media, with pessimistic or optimistic, explicit or implicit views. This discussion emphasizes the how believe and confident in users' ability to political participate and enhance the digital democracy in China. The analysis here highlights Chinese netizens' use of rhetorical patterns in online political discourse and discusses the reasons for its use. These identify Weibo users' perceptions of and attitudes towards China's online censorship and self-censorship, and why they chose to discuss certain topics with certain types of contribution, and addressing how practicing self-censorship by netizens in order to reflect the online censorship with reference to the theoretical framework. This chapter also discusses the ways in which deliberative social behaviours (e.g. choosing to forward comments, choosing to adopt VIP or casual user status, and self-censorship) help enrich the understanding of digital democracy, deliberative democracy and citizenship in Chinese context. Moreover, it also demonstrates the role of Weibo as both tool and object for research in this filed.

**Chapter Eight** firstly summarizes what the thesis have done regarding to online political participation by Hong Kong/mainland Weibo users during the 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive election on Weibo, the key findings then demonstrated in order to address the answers of the research questions. The chapter outlines both the contribution of knowledge, originality and limitations, before recommending areas for future study and presenting the post-script.

## **Chapter One: Theoretical Framework: Democracy, Political Participation and Media**

This chapter begins by evaluating the concepts of democracy and digital democracy and the differences between the two. The concept of deliberative democracy is then introduced. Following this, the theoretical debate between cyber-optimism and cyber-pessimism is outlined, before going on to discuss traditional concepts of participation and their application to digital technologies. Then, the chapter addresses the theoretical framework regarding the importance of political participation in the political process, and finally, the chapter describes the development of the concept of e-participation and how this relates to the theoretical notions of citizenship and civil society.

The lack of ‘home grown’ theories means that most studies addressing new media’s political effects in China are either a-theoretical or apply theoretical frames developed in the west, regardless of their suitability in the Chinese context. This research draws on the work of Michael Freedman (1995, 1996, 2005) for instance, who argued that political theories should take into account the unique nature of the Chinese new media context and also hold a question to argue in Chapter 7 upon the concepts of Chinese deliberative democracy, citizenship. In developing a theoretical framework for the study, it has been necessary to ask a number of fundamental but rhetorical questions in order to help shaping the theoretical framework, such as: What are appropriate normative goals for the study? What is the role of theory in this research? Should existing theories be modified to apply to the Chinese context and if so, how? One of the theoretical contributions the study seeks to make is to identify the political effects of the new media in China. While respecting the opinions

of Chinese netizens and China's long history of philosophical and ideological thought, it seeks to critically interrogate how and why existing ideas came into being and their current utility to established power holders.

### **1.1 Democracy, Digital Democracy and Deliberative Democracy**

Democracy is a political theory which encompasses economic, cultural and social conditions. Hague and Loader note that "Democracy has at its heart self-determination, participation, voice and autonomy. It is a political culture that includes a wide range of realms for self-development and mutual collective expression" (Hague and Loader, 1999:6-8). However, Held argues that Hague and Loader's perspective focuses on one simple aspect and is too idealized. He suggests that democracy should be perceived as a "double-sided phenomenon": it not only "re-form[s] state power" but also "restructur[es] civil society" (Held, 1996:316).

Van Dijk (2000, 2013) summarizes the essential concepts of democracy and then explained into two aspects – the first aspect demonstrates that the central goal of democracy is to compare opinion making with decision-making, while the second aspect refers to the manner of democracy, (i.e. representative versus direct democracy). Legalist democracy and competitive democracy are government-centric, while plebiscitary democracy, pluralist democracy (including so-called deliberative democracy), participatory democracy and libertarianism are citizen-centric. Whatever the form of democracy, Shuler (2004: 120) explains that the concept of democracy has three basic elements: firstly, everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in public decision making; secondly, citizens can affect the public agenda, which cannot be 'monopolized and manipulated' by companies or political organizations;

thirdly, ‘democracy requires deliberative public process’, which means there should be sufficient time for citizens to freely discuss issues in the public space.

It has been argued that research on democracy should adopt a broader approach to the concept, taking into account the whole process of information provision and discussion, rather than just the decision making of political institutions (Veltmer, 2006). This is the approach taken in this research, which provides a theoretical base to understand the importance of Weibo netizens’ participation in political discussions, and how their conversations reflect the political effect of digital media.

Since the emergence of computers and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), political scientists and philosophers have launched various utopian visions of how this technology might advance democratic politics. Along the way, the terms ‘democracy’ and ‘digital democracy’ have become rhetorical weapons, representing an ideal rather than something concrete (Boler, 2008:168). Van Dijk (2013) claims that ICT has the power to revolutionize the democratization of politics and society, though Hacker and van Dijk (2000) and Katz and Rice (2002) caution that digital democracy represents both opportunities and risks.

Digital democracy developed alongside the vision of a ‘new democracy’ in which citizens could bypass governmental politics and get involved in the political process via the Internet. Hacker and van Dijk (2000:1) define digital democracy as: “a collection of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions, using ICT or CMC instead, as an addition, not a replacement for traditional analogue political practices”. Astrom supports this view, asserting that digital

democracy is “a title for programmes of democratic renewal based on new ICTs”, and that these programmes have their roots in direct, interactive and indirect democracy (Astrom, 2004:99).

Digital democracy employs multiple ICT-based media to foster citizen participation (either online or offline) in democratic political communication, strengthen civic engagement and turn online communication into offline activism. Zittel argues that digital democracy “shares with the participatory model its general conception of democracy” (Zittel, 2004). The goal of digital democracy is to “make democracy more participatory, to involve citizens more into the political process and to strengthen political community” (Krauch, 1971; Becker, 1981; Slaton, 1992). It is widely perceived as a form of democratic revolution, though some are more skeptical; Siapera, for example, argues that: “The Internet is mainly used for efficiency rather than to add to accountability, transparency and participation, or in other words to broaden democracy” (Siapera, 2012:25), Dahlberg and Siapera also criticized the success of signifier, which refers to the democracy of political legitimacy, “has far exceeded the success of actual democratic practice” (Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007: 1-16). Schudson counters this criticism by arguing that digital democracy facilitates information dissemination by citizens, which is one of the measures of democracy (Schudson, 2004). However, Tsagarousianou (1999, 2000) put forward a criticism upon correspondence between rhetoric and reality in democratic promises of digital democracy, and demonstrate the cultural and structural obstacles in reality are still there even it is argued information dissemination, participation and deliberation has been improved in digital democracy projects. So Tsagarousianou (1999) highlighted there was a long to be done on ‘access’ to hardware and software. Moreover, this research adopts van

Dijk's (2013:6-8) recent redefinition of digital democracy as: "The pursuit and the practice of democracy in whatever view using digital media in online and offline political communication".

There is on-going debate about how to redefine democracy and digital democracy, with opinions being divided on whether definitions should take into account the role of citizen discussion. Yankelovich (1999) argues that dialogue is a necessary complement to deliberation. Tremayne explains that users or readers can participate by leaving comments, but even those who prefer not to comment can feel they are involved by following or reading the conversation of others (Tremayne, 2007). The research aims were partly inspired by Tsatsou's (2014) finding that discussions of digital democracy generally focus on how new media not only help change citizens' political perspectives but also allow them to become actively involved in political discourse.

The concept became part of democratic theory in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kersting and Zimmermann, 2014). However, the idea of deliberative democracy research has been put forward back to 1918 by Paul Kester (1918), he not only questioned there was a need to let international legislative representative's voices to be heard, but also called for returning to individuals the great power, it is too simple without weighting the roots' words, free and open discussions, he even asked for consideration of how to send Mr. Root to London or Washington, whether the Lord would be keen interest and attention. For the others, traditional understanding of democratic deliberation considers politics as a forum only to exchange ideas and discussions (Goodin, 2003).

There are lots of definitions of deliberative democracy (Mansbridge, 2010;

Bächtiger et al., 2011:36; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004:7; Kersting and Zimmermann, 2014; Habermas, 2012), deliberative democracy is expected to serve “as impartial resource and as a catalyst for action” (Scully, 2014:1). Mansbridge (2010: 94) avert democratic deliberation “eschews coercive power” while coming to the final decisions, the core aim is mutual justification. He also use ‘consultative deliberation’ and ‘public deliberation’ to distinguish the precise aim of respective process of discussions. The formal concentrates on discussion aiming to suggest and then result in the final decision, the latter one focuses on the nothing but the process of public’ open discussion. This research supports Steiner’s (2012:4-5) view that democratic deliberation ideally avoids coercion and concentrates on mutual justification before making any decision. Participants cooperate on equal terms and with mutual respect to resolve explicit and potential moral conflicts, this is also consistent with original meaning of deliberative in Latin.

Citizen juries and open forums (Kersting and Zimmermann, 2014; Mansbridge, 2010) are concrete examples of deliberative democracy. Ideally, arguing and bargaining are the two extremes of the deliberative process (Grabetta, 1999). However, Habermas (1998: 35) put forward “pragmatic presuppositions of discourse” is the ideal type of deliberation which in contrast to the ideal type of strategic bargaining. Strategic bargaining refers to maneuver to an outcome in the process of political communication which results in a win-win situation, and Steiner (2012) point out the basic point of strategic bargaining is individual's’ preferences no matter what preferences might be. When considering preferences in deliberation, ideally, political actors are open to convince and being convinced in the political discussions by others. The ‘strategy’ in Strategic bargaining focuses on power structure when individuals deal with their

preference. However, the idea of the real world is always mixed with both of these two ideal types by Steiner (2012) is more convincing.

The concept of deliberative democracy is central to this research because of its emphasis on participation by less empowered citizens (Scully, 2014). Scully (2014) argues that deliberative democracy could help enhance the quality of political communication among citizens. It is difficult to achieve the ideal of democratic politics, but public discussion initiatives – one of the explicit goals of deliberative democracy – can help. These initiatives aim to improve democratic institutions and politics rather than fundamentally reform them (Fung, 2003:339; Scully, 2014). They play a significant role in framing collective or grassroots political action.

This research is inspired from Dahlberg's (2014) claim, who criticized an influential conception of deliberative public sphere<sup>2</sup>. Dahlberg (2014) explored Jurgen Habermas's deliberative structure and examined how it associated with politics, he researched on this poststructuralist-influenced critics and then criticized that should be discussed from a practical argumentation, which including formal (e.g. parliaments) and informal (e.g. civil society) public sphere deliberation with grounding effects, and thus attempt to theocratizing the nature of democratic role of communication. This argument is significant to address the core elements of deliberation in democratic communication, which means the necessary of considering the different grounding while researching on democratic media-communication. 'Grounding' used by Dahlberg (2014) refers to the

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<sup>2</sup> Jurgen Habermas' deliberative public sphere thinking is influential in democratic role of communication, due to it not only takes account of social actor and institution should be involved in democratic process but also provide a practical guidance. He also actively responded much of critique through Habermas (1992a) and his adherents. More discussions please see: Dahlberg, L (2014), *The Habermasian Public Sphere and Exclusion: An engagement with poststructuralist-influences critics*. *Journal of Communication Theory*. Habermas, J. (1992a). Further reflections on the public sphere. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 421–461). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Habermas, J. (1992b). Concluding remarks. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 462–479). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

ontological commitments of a theory, which means conditions of possibility of, in his argument, it refers the public sphere. Dahlberg (2014) demonstrated poststructuralist arguments overlap in a lot of ways with What Habermasian perceiving upon deliberative public sphere exclusion and associated politics, like discourse as constitutive of social life. However, the two interpret in different ways mainly because of their different understanding of the ‘grounding’. Steiner (2012) agreed with this ‘grounding’, and maintained deliberation is a quite fluid concept which timely varies in context-bound. For instance, deliberation in North America or Western Europe differ from the forms of that in Botswana, Madagascar, or Yemen<sup>3</sup>. So there is no exact definition of deliberation which is internationally accepted, which means even this research draw on deliberation concepts from western, there is a necessary to scrutinize the Chinese context while research on Chinese social media and political background.

Political discourse<sup>4</sup> has been the focus of many studies. Hutchby (2011), for example, investigated the key interactional procedures that characterize the hybrid political interview and how these exchanges unfold in the real time speech of participants. Tong (2009) examined the ways in which Chinese newspaper discourse changes, and how Chinese newsrooms employ self-censorship to avoid political risk while maximizing public interest. Montgomery (2011) studied the canonical form of the accountability interview and the way in which politics and politicians are represented in the news, while Clayman and Romaniuk

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<sup>3</sup> See more in Jensen Sass and John S. Dryzek, “Deliberative Cultures”, paper presented at the workshop on the Frontiers of Deliberation, EXPR Joint Sessions, St. Gallen, April 12-17, 2011, p.4.

<sup>4</sup> Dahlberg (2014: 36) states: “Discourse as constitutive of social life, the value imbued nature of knowledge and the fallibility of truth claims, social transformation through political struggle, and the impossibility of the realization of an ideal communicative community”. Discourse is worth to be examined to explore the truth and practice elements in everyday life that might be transformed or associated with politics.

(2011) investigated question design and question prefaces in campaign interviews, with the task of screening the candidates. These authors followed Jackson (2005), who had previously employed critical discourse analysis to demonstrate the means by which language is deployed to maintain power. This is supported by Wu (2012) who examined the power of new media which strengthen normal citizens's citizenship by implicit political expressions online thereby expanding the recognition of the new media's democratic potential.

Numerous studies have sought to measure communication skills and dialogue quality by assessing 'social deliberative behaviour' (Marineau, Wiemer-Hastings et al., 2000; Liu, 2010). Xu, Murray, Woolf and Smith (2014) developed an automatic system to investigate whether participants exhibit social deliberative behaviour in online discussions. To display social deliberative behaviour is to be open to deliberation (that is, tolerant of multiple perspectives) in group interactions (Littlejohn and Pearce, 1997; Rico et al., 2009). Kersting and Zimmermann (2014) researched whether online comments fulfil the deliberative ideal, concluding that online comments, although examples of demonstrative democracy, do not qualify as deliberation. Researchers investigating the dichotomy between the utopian and dystopian perspectives disagree on the deliberative capacity of new media (Kersting, 2005; Kies, 2010).

Therefore, accordingly, reviewing the empirical theoretical studies above helps shape this research would adopt to argue as public discussion initiatives to serve as impartial resource by less empowered citizens, it could help collect attempts to get involve in political process then enhance the quality of political communication before making any final political decisions and thereby practicing democracy through new media. The

following section discusses the division of opinion that exists regarding the relationship between new media and politics. It describes the so-called cyber-optimistic and cyber-pessimistic perspectives and analyses their respective reactions to the practice of politics through digital media. This is an initial step towards identifying the issues upon which any evaluation of the influence of new media on politics must be based.

### **1.2 Cyber-optimism vs. Cyber-pessimism: New Media and Politics**

There are at least three key factors that contribute to the emergence of cyber-optimism and cyber-pessimism. Initially, “the last two decades have witnessed the opening up, through new media, of a new arena for grassroots political debate among individuals from across the political spectrum” (Zhao, 2014:2). To redefine the distinction between traditional media and new media is more complex, and the channels for communication – one to one, one to many, and many to many – have already increased the complexity and intensified the proliferation of information.

Secondly, regarding political communication, the interactions between social actors (media, citizens and political organizations) “are frequently characterized by conflicts and disruptions, but equally by the compromises and cooperation that are required to maintain the relationship” (Veltmer, 2006). New media could theoretically change the relationship between parties and voters by giving citizens a say in party decision making, although there is increasing doubt as to whether or not this will happen in practice (David, 2000; Negrine and Stanyer, 2007). Thus, the discrepancies towards ‘conflicts’ or ‘cooperation’ have indicated the cause of different perspectives between cyber-optimism and cyber-pessimism.

Thirdly, scholars (Tremayne, 2007, Dearstyne, 2005; Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun and Jeong, 2005; Stoll, 1996) “have interpreted the dialectical interactions between technology and society in widely differing ways, from Barlow’s cyber-libertarian vision of a digital utopia, to the dystopian nightmare envisioned by Davies” (cited by Zhao, 2014: 3), “who believes that technology will lead to ubiquitous surveillance. In other words, different people are evaluating the influence of new media upon politics from radically different perspectives”. For instance, Morozov (2012) argued the internet and democracy on the case study of Arab Spring, which demonstrate the important potential of middle ground between cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists. Political communication scholars (Voltmer, 2006; Negrine and Stanyer, 2007; Pfetsch, 2004) keenly concentrate on whether or not new media are strengthening or undermining politics. The respective positions of these so-called cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists in relation to some significant dimensions of the debate are presented in the following: whether new media are facilitating or restricting citizens’ attempts at political participation; and whether politicians utilize new media to control over citizens rather than to convey their message.

Cyber-pessimists argue “that the potential of new media to facilitate democracy will inevitably be limited by the question of access” (Zhao, 2014:3). Hague and Loader demonstrate their concern over the fact that citizens are prevented from participating in political communication through social media on account of: “economic status; geographic location; educational attainment”(Hague and Loader, 1999:9). Similarly, Lelia (2010:2) illustrated that Internet access is restricted to “the richer, better educated, younger, males in the community” in a large part of the world.

Cyber-pessimists also point to the fact of Internet being seriously censored by authorities, for instance, the Internet in China. “The Chinese Communist Party has enforced an intricate system of information restriction known as the Great Firewall<sup>5</sup> of China to control the content of Internet communications” (Zhao, 2014: 02). For example, social media sites like YouTube or Facebook, or international search engine Google are blocked by the Golden Shield<sup>6</sup>’s web filtering mechanism. Indeed fact, there are a large number of Internet users who have begun to engage in blogging activities: “they confine their output to casual, lifestyle-related posts rather than writing political content” (ibid). Based on a study conducted by Hsu and Lin in 2007, no bloggers come from the top 100 in China that explicitly participated in a debate upon Chinese political change or the country’s political system (Hsu and Lin, 2008). Watts, Graham-Harrison and Le (2009) have claimed that the impact the Firewall has brought to citizen participation is negative, both in China and further afield. Digital democracy “is thus limited by strict censorship which severely restrains the creativity and freedom of speech of netizens” (Zhao, 2014:3). This has led the cyber-pessimists to argue that new media are limited in their quest for a bright democratic future, due to their limited use for politics. However, for most people, it is still politics as usual.

Chinese cyber-optimists (Li, 2003; Zhang, 2010) have responded to the cyber-pessimists’ criticisms of Chinese online censorship, by claiming that conducting serious regulation in China is necessary. More precisely,

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<sup>5</sup> Great Firewall, 防火长城 (Chinese), commonly know as wall (‘墙’), it derives from a ironic speaking by an article in Wired magazine in 1997, which is internationally accepted, its connotation refers to the legislation of internet controlled by Chinese government which initiated by Communist Party of China.

<sup>6</sup> Golden Shield, 金盾工程 (Chinese), also called Great Firewall of China, which initiated in 1998 and started to operate five years later by Ministry of Pubic Security (MPS) of Chinese government. It aims to censor, surveille and block the unfavorable data and information from outside of China.

Li and Zhang claimed that it was too dangerous to provide full access without censoring the information for all communication channels to the government, who has to take responsibility for maintaining the stability of the state. Cyber-optimists also claim that the strict censorship prevents outsiders from spying on Chinese political organizations. In addition to well maintain the online environment, cyber-optimists Chen, Wu, Srinivasan and Zhang (2013) shed light on the case of Internet water Army who is paid by individual politicians and political organizations, the authority would like to make use of this group to spread information online in order to balance and guide netizens' online opinions of social and political events. Fung (2002) also observed the state has employed professional writers to assert the authority's voice that help contribute a bottom-up control through managing every corners of online chat rooms in Hong Kong, it led to dramatically reducing the extremely expressions that cyber-optimists celebrate for. Moreover, managing the Internet's content could benefit the CCP, who intent to exploit and improve China's economy. Accordingly, Zhao (2014: 3) asserted that "cyber-optimists maintain that even though control is exerted by the CCP", China is benefiting both economically and politically from the Internet (Li, 2004).

Cyber-optimists- for instance, Gibson and Ward, have responded to criticism from cyber-pessimists "by arguing that citizens can promote or even organize democratic social movements via new media, thereby pushing the democratic agenda" (Gibson and Ward, 2000, cited by Zhao, 2014: 3). Tunisians made use of social media such as Twitter to spread the democratic movement and to counter official propaganda during the Jasmine Revolution in 2010. It could be argued that the subsequent reshuffling of the authority was evidence that the government was indeed influenced by citizen information dissemination via new media. Sassi has

shown that citizens could make use of social media to organize non-governmental activities, which is a crucial element of civic society (Sassi, 2001). This suggests that new media are offering less powerful citizens a new space in which to organize and reflect (less powerful citizens here refers to the individuals who are limited to directly approach the political actors to get involve in the final process of decision making). In China's case, young people first began to challenge the Party-State through new media, their online activities signaling a revolutionary impulse in Chinese society and a desire for moving towards democratization (Yang, 2009: 226; Tai, 2006).

Data published by the Pew Research Center suggests that 66% of "social media users have participated in at least eight online political activities, such as encouraging people to vote or posting comments on politics" (Zhao, 2014). This has led cyber-optimists to argue that e-voters may be shaping election campaign agendas to some extent (Cornfield et al. cited by William, Eveland and Dylko, 2007). These voters could always have their own way in approaching the nominees at the individual level, and new media in turn provides politicians with more valuable opportunities to individually reach out directly to potential voters, as argued by Michael Chin, Marketing Director of social media platform KickApps. For instance, the electoral victory of Barack Obama in 2012 was at least partially built on the successful use of social media sites like My Space and Facebook (Scribd on-line, 2011). During the campaign, 30% of registered Internet voters were encouraged to vote for candidates Mitt Romney or Barack Obama through Facebook or Twitter (Zhao, 2014.). Therefore, according to the cyber-optimists, the votes and candidates have already dramatically affected by new media in the process of US election, through the interactive ways of communication. This communication has

significantly empowered the public to scrutinize and criticize the election system, which crucially playing a role as functioning of the democratic political order (Zhao, 2014).

The frequent use and rapid dissemination of new media (typically social media) used for citizen participation has made many scholars being aware of the enhancement of citizens' democratic participation and the link strengthened between politicians and citizens (Zhao, 2014), in order to promote digital democracy. Dynamic social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter or the Chinese Twitter, namely Weibo, have provided more opportunities and choice for citizens to help shape the public agenda, and have had an effect on public opinion, whether directly or indirectly. Voltmer (2006), highlighted the interdependencies between the three political actors-politicians, citizens and the media, and demonstrated the reasons why some media are more successful in encouraging democratic public participation and deliberations than others. In empirical study of political communication, Kristof refers to an example of a Chinese blogger named Lixiaode, Li, successfully used his blog to expose official corruption in China between 2004 to 2005 (Kristof, 2005). This instance demonstrates how new media empower the citizens to challenge the existing political system in a significant way.

Citizens are allowed to play a role as gatekeepers to participate in political debates through the mutually beneficial cooperation between citizen journalists, bloggers and professional newspeople. There was one citizen journalist, for instance, who was able to report Barack Obama's "lament that small-town Americans clung to God and guns in times of hardship" (Bruns, 2011:34). The development of citizen journalists is best exemplified by the fact that some bloggers have even "become accredited

members of the Washington press corps” (Bruns, 2011:144). In addition, Zhao (2014:3) observes that citizen participation also “extends to the reporting of natural disasters: in more than 20% of China’s top one hundred emergencies in 2012, information was initially spread by citizens through social media”. By looking at the news of the 2012 Sichuan earthquake, for instance, it was found that this event was “relayed on Weibo six minutes earlier than on any other news platform” (Zhao, 2014: 3).

The examples above seem to suggest that democracy is being enhanced by the activities of bloggers and micro-bloggers who are posting political articles, analysing government reports and reporting alongside professional journalists. The trend bears out Schudson’s claim that democracy can be measured by the number of citizens who are involved in disseminating and contributing information (Schudson, 2004). News and political information are spread more quickly, while news agendas setting are being significantly affected by citizens, rather than by news organizations or the authority. These developments suggest that citizens’ political participations through new media play a significant role in the ongoing process of democratization. This leads cyber-optimists to argue that ICT has contributed to the democratic role to allow more opportunities for citizens’ participation. Their maintenance is consistent with the digital democracy, which put forward the notion that “its dialectical or nondialectical relationship with past and existing forms of representative, direct and participatory democracy have been broadly deliberated” (Tsatsou, 2014:89).

On the other hand, there are those who maintain that “the Internet is mainly used for efficiency rather than to add to accountability,

transparency and participation” (Siapera, 2012:25), and Siapera (2005, 2010) criticized any political gains associated with deliberative democracy were just ambiguous insofar, which especially indicated the impossibility of transparent online negotiation or criticism. Zhao (2014:3) points out that cyber-pessimists maintained that politicians, “who have already ceded much of their leadership role, are not interested in providing new platforms for democratic participation”, In fact, they argue that new media have made things worse in the way of online manipulating the citizens (Morozov, 2011). Cyber-pessimists claim that new media-based interaction between politicians and citizens is really an illusion, which suggests a stronger need to put more effort into observing what is lacking between these interactions. Thus, scholars like David have demonstrated the use of media by candidates and elected officials “for the dissemination of information rather than to gather feedback from citizens” (David, 2000:197). Similarly, Hague and Loader suggest that new media are seen by politicians simply as a more direct way to contact and manipulate voters (Hague and Loader, 1999). Cyber-pessimists have cited Hague and Loader’s debates in order to shed light on the criticism of advanced liberal democracies: “politicians too often become isolated from or unresponsive to the individuals on whose behalf they ostensibly act” (Zhao, 2014:3).

More significantly, David claimed that authority rarely allows citizens to participate in what the government considers to be ‘business’ in order to hold its power in case citizens might affect its agenda (David, 2000). Cyber-pessimists’ doubts are corroborated by Schuler, who describes how: “at a Massachusetts Institute of Technology conference, devoted to Democracy and the Internet, Ira Magaziner, the White House’s head internet advisor, extolled the virtues of e-commerce; not a single word was wasted on democracy” (Schuler, 2003:70). Negrine and Stanoyer are

similarly pessimistic, claiming that citizens including citizen journalists or bloggers have done little to use new media to empower civil society at an internal level. The power of new media is still held by traditional political actors. (Negrine and Stanyer, 2007).

According to Schuler, “Only if large numbers of people are involved in the movement is there any realistic hope for increased democratization, and only if there is a heightened awareness and a sense of necessity and opportunity can any major change and reorientation occur” (Schuler, 2003:82). The discussion between cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists has informed “the debate over whether democracy should be considered a double-sided concept, serving to re-form national power and restructure civil society” (Held, 1996:316). Whether new media are ultimately judged to have had a positive or negative impact on politics, the debate itself is important to foster an essential sense of belonging to, and sharing in a democratic society (Zhao, 2014).

The debate has helped shape the fundamental theoretical framework of this study with new media and political communication: from the first wave of interactivity through to new media, it then concentrates to the basic concepts of political participation, the citizen-centered approach of e-participation, citizenship and digital citizenship. As mentioned before, this research argues that less empowered citizens’ participation as public discussion initiatives serve as significant attempts to get involved in democratic political process through social media. The following section discusses the citizen-centred approach to political participation, demonstrating its role as a core element of digital democracy.

### **1.3 The citizen-centred approach to E-participation**

Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti (1994) maintain that citizen discussion is a form of deliberative democracy which widens political participation. The term- political participation derives from four spheres of democratic participation: representative democracy, direct democracy, deliberative democracy and demonstrative democracy (Kersting, 2014:60ff). On top of these, Fuchs (2008:235-237) defined three types of digital democracy: representative digital democracy, plebiscitary digital democracy and E-participation or grassroots digital democracy (it is corresponded with the model of participatory democracy).

Supporting Putnam's, Leonardi's and Nanetti's views, political participation is an important part of the democratic process (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, 1994), this research builds on the work of Parry and Moyser (1994) and Putnam etc. (1994), who asserted that conceptualising democracy widely should consider how to evaluate various forms of democratic participation so that it might help widen and digitalize the concept of citizenship. More precisely, dynamic ways of participation varied by different context-bound, the forms of citizenship have also represented dynamically online, the ways of participation in western countries and the ones in China are significantly changed and accommodated. Accordingly, it seeks to evaluate the concept of participation and methods of citizen participation.

According to Parry and Moyser (1994:46), "[T]he more effective the participation, the more the advantaged in society might be able to get the citizen themselves to be heard". They judge this effectiveness in two ways: the extent to which the most active participants represent the concerns of the inactive majority, and "the degree to which the elite appear to respond

to citizen participation” (1994:46). Scholars have traditionally measured the level of political participation using four aspects: voting, involvement in campaign activities, contacting officials and involvement in collective activities (Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001).

It should be noted that in the absence of a theoretical articulation of civic engagement, many researchers use the term interchangeably with other terms (for instance, political socialization, community service, political participation) or simply acknowledge its complexity with no attempt at clarification (Exposito, 2014). Berger (2009:335) asserts that: “civic engagement can mean everything from charitable giving to associational membership, political participation, artistic expressions, or community service”, while Zukin et al. (2006:7) describe it as: “organized voluntary activity for problem solving” and Levine (2007:13) calls it: “any action that affects legitimately public matters as long as the actor pays appropriate attention to the consequences of his behavior for the underlying political systems”. Exposito (2014) sums up civic engagement as an ‘umbrella term’ covering citizen participation, as well as other forms of involvement such as electoral campaigning, volunteering or community service. Since civic engagement is more focused on the decision-making process, it is outside the scope of this research but necessary to clarify here.

Van Dijk (2013) defines e-participation as the utilization of new media to mediate and transform citizens’ relationship with governments and public administrations so as to allow greater participation by citizens (van Dijk, 2010). However, this research focuses on citizen-led e-participation in policy preparation and evaluation (here, policy issues refers to political issues in the broadest sense) via social media. A meta-analytic research

conducted by Skoric and Zhu (2015) has reviewed published work from 2007 to 2013 upon the relationship between social media use and citizen engagement, their findings illustrate there was generally positive relationship between them including its three sub-categories- social capital, civic engagement, and political participation, with informational, expressive and rational uses being of particular importance.

E-participation practice is not without its drawbacks; for instance, van Dijk criticizes the way that politicians “tend to lose their role as executives...and unwillingly adopt the role of political representatives” (2013:11-12), claiming that citizen-led efforts at e-participation are more successful (van Dijk, 2010). The key is citizen control; the ease with which the new communication platforms can be created and used means that more citizen voices are demanding to be heard and civic-activism-oriented communication carried out (Bennett 2010, Graber et al. 2004; Hacker and Dijk 2000, Papacharissi 2002, 2004, 2009; Dijk, 2013).

As public trust in politicians and journalists declines (Ipsos/Mori, 2008; *The Economist*, 2007; YouGov, 2008), it is becoming easier for citizens to make their voices heard on the new communication platforms (Bennett, 2010; Graber et al., 2004; Hacker and van Dijk, 2000; Papacharissi, 2002, 2004, 2009; van Dijk, 2013). Bennett and Entman assert that democratization of the media has empowered citizens because it enables them to express their views more openly and freely (Bennett and Entman, 2000:56; Zuniga, Veenstra, Vraga and Shah, 2010). Similarly, Budge maintains that the fact that citizens are able to choose their own topics is “better than any other political arrangement” (Budge, 1996:7). So even in this form, citizens are able to set the agenda for political discourse or even

activism. Fuchs (2008) goes so far as to suggest that citizen-led e-participation which begins as local could extend to become global.

This research draws on what Zuniga, Veenstra, Vraga and Shah (2010) maintained regarding concepts and phenomena relating with political e-participation by citizens and seeks the citizenship and deliberative democracy more broadly. Most researchers analyse the political discourse of politicians and journalists (both professional and citizen journalists), and this research planned to investigate the nature of political discourse that addressed by netizens. Tolson (2011:61), for example, analyses the use of ironic language in political discourse on TV, while Lorenzo-Dus (2011) shows how members of the public questioning politicians on TV adopt a 'journalistic' style that is either explicitly negative or condescending and scornful. Thus, since the nature of political discourse varies based on different objects within different social and cultural context, this research would consider the ideology expressed in Chinese citizens' political discourse.

Wilhelm (2003) argues that e-participation empowers citizens no more than traditional channels of participation, but examination of citizens' motivations for participating in online political communication shows that they see it as a way of broadening their citizenship (Tsatsou, 2014). In order to understand how deliberative democracy strengthens netizens' citizenship – not just their digital citizenship – the following section discusses the fundamental concepts of citizenship and digital citizenship, and the relationship between participation and the concept of citizenship, thereby identifying the whole theoretical framework that are shaped through the reviews.

## **1.4 Citizenship**

As this research seeks to investigate how social media might help to better understand deliberative democracy, it examines both how citizens participate in politics and the broader implications of this participation for citizenship.

There is an on-going debate about how to define citizenship, which is a term constructed in accordance with historical changes. By reviewing what Marshall (2006) demonstrates as the three discrepancies of the concept in his studies on citizenship, it is noteworthy that he (2006) illustrates how ‘civil citizenship’ in the eighteenth century focused on individual rights to property, liberty, and justice. In the nineteenth century, political citizenship emphasized the right of participation in order to exercise political power. Then, in the twentieth century, a notion of ‘social citizenship’ refers to the right of economic welfare and social security. Throughout history, bottom-up social movements have come about as the result of citizens participating in democratic decision making through civil organizations. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, the emerging middle class formed such organizations to challenge the oppressive control of church and state, and to lobby for freedom of speech. Their actions not only strengthened their awareness of the ‘right’ to practicing citizenship in order to challenge the limitation of civil society at that time, but also helped frame a new model of deliberative democracy (Tsatsou, 2014).

Apart from the argument outlined, citizenship has been discussed by different political positions: In the liberal tradition of thought, citizenship refers to the individual’s pursuit of essential rights and freedoms in a democratic state; the communitarian view highlights the cultural

dimension of citizenship, which refers to how the individuals should hold ontological primacy over the personal; the republican conception of citizenship demonstrates the agency of citizens that extends to acts of political participation.

There are some empirical scholars who have previously given sufficient attention to discuss and define this concept. For instance, according to Janoski, “Citizenship is passive and active membership of individuals in a nation-state with certain universalistic rights and obligations at a specified level of equality” (Janoski, 1964: 35). Marshall agrees with Janoski, asserting that citizenship is a theory that aims to effectively explain legal, political, and social rights (Marshall, 1964). However, Turner (1990) criticizes scholars like Marshall who highlight class as the major element that strengthens citizenship, though Janoski, Turner and Maslow have all argued that other elements are more important, such as status, gender, and race, hierarchy of needs, rationality, social exchange and ethnic group (Turner, 1990; Janoski, 1998; Maslow, 1970). Held then explains the relationship between citizenship and membership as thus: “Citizenship entails membership in the community and membership implies forms of social participation” (Held, 1991:35). His explanation suggests that different forms of participation reveal different conditions of citizenship. Turner extends this idea of participation and further defines citizenship as a set of political, economic, juridical, and cultural practices that “define a person as a competent member of society” and “shape the flow of resources” for them (Turner, 1993:2). Then, Janoski later puts forward the following: “Citizenship processes as they take place within civil society between class and status groups struggling for power are not necessarily citizenship rights, but they do consist of the independent variables that constitute the explanation of citizenship” (Janoski, 1998:11). This

suggests that the creation of citizenship is not only a long and complex process but also part of broader civil society. A strong civil society enhances citizenship. Conversely, citizens may be more easily controlled and dominated by their government if civil society is weak. Even the definition of citizenship retrospect to earlier than half a century ago it is still valuable with its reference to rights and obligations, active and passive membership and equality. I then agree with Janoski, as it applies equally in the cyber context.

Throughout the harvest and flourishing development of ICT, the establishment of a vigorous civil society online may promote the growth of democratic politics, as the ‘new form’ of citizenship encourages ordinary citizens to actively participate in online political communication (Wu, 2013). ‘New’ here refers to different online status to represent citizens’ own online identity; it also demonstrates dynamic possibilities of such new arenas supporting citizens’ participation through un-coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. This comprehension is expanded based on what Hermes (2005) and Miller (2007) maintain; Hermes focuses on an influential branch of the new form citizenship, which refers to “less formal everyday practices of identity construction, representation and ideology and implicit moral obligations and rights” (2005:4), and Miller points out that “citizenship has always been cultural” and that it can only be expanded by an imaginative definition of citizenship (2007:51). Exposito (2014) put forward another point. He states that citizenship education and youth participation have been progressively replaced by political participation with categories called citizenship participation, community involvement, and civic engagement in order to strengthen the ‘new’ form of citizenship through social media.

The Chinese have shed light on a comparative argument of political citizenship by either internal or external press for numerous reasons; for instance, doubts come from the return of Hong Kong and Macau, the political activism for a change of identity about Taiwan, external questioning upon Chinese human rights, and so on. However, Parry (2002) demonstrated Chinese citizenship is worth being examined on its own right on account of China's unique history. Parry's work (ibid) is noteworthy to draw on due to his examination of Chinese political citizenship through both top-down and bottom-up, considering a whole range of political reforms taken place in China. The membership of Chinese citizenship varies along with complex political systems conducted in the imperial days, Maoist era, and contemporary periods, as well as the understanding of inclusion and exclusion of citizenship in Chinese mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. There are some Chinese concepts that need to be clarified here. The term *shimin* (市民), which refers to city people, *guomin* (国民), means nation-state people or nationals. *Gongmin* (公民) refers to public people. All are generally rendered and translated into citizen. Even there are new understandings of these concepts developed or being affected by Western powers, these terms still hold a position to react Western influence regarding to the notion of citizenship in Chinese context. For instance, the term *guomin* represents how political rights were primarily for developing the interests of the authority rather than individuals' (ibid).

In the case of China, there were collective reports illustrated the increasing and urgent crisis of social justice taken place due to the enlarging social gap (Wang and Yang, 2011). These reports identified the casual citizens intent to self-identify their belonging to a less powerful and lower social

class. The grudge maintained by these citizens permeates into dynamic social discourse, including word-play texts for entertainment. This is one of the rationalities to explore this alternative digital citizenship represented in social media of China (Wu, 2012), and how the social media plays a role making them into these citizens, as well as how these citizens exercised their citizenship in their political discussions. These arguments be shed light on to argue how the the nature of citizenship on Weibo constructed and why netizens participate in political discussions on the site, so that it might help widen and digitalize the Western concept of citizenship by looking at Chinese context.

### **1.5 Summary**

There are several theories that the research builds into the framework: Democracy and digital democracy are discussed from either rhetorical or ideal perspectives. It then discusses the cyber-optimistic and cyber-pessimistic perspectives, setting out what they see as the respective benefits and limitations of new media in terms of political communication in order to shape the theoretical framework and main concepts that this research would draw on. In order to broaden the concept of democracy, it requires a deliberative public process which allows citizens' voices to be heard, and plays a critical role in theoretical discussions of this chapter to display its relationship with digital democracy, democratic participation and e-participation. Again, digital democracy being enhanced may be the ideal aim of this thesis, and could be measured through citizen deliberative communication as e-participation by freely time and space through ICT. E-participation and deliberative democracy is closely related with current political development since social media is started to be used by citizens to political discuss in Hong Kong and mainland.

Therefore, a theory-grounded perspective may both reveal the process and factors that shaped the research in political communication with multi-layered, and help understand the aim of this thesis in theory: online political discussions are located in a convenient space of democratic participation, which creates an idea of their democratic usability of social media. Again, arguing as public discussion initiatives to serve as impartial resource by less empowered citizens could help collect attempts to get involve in political process then enhance the quality of political communication before making any final political decisions and thereby practicing democracy through new media. Thus, the theoretical framework could help us make sense of Chinese citizens' online discussion of Hong Kong and mainland politics on social media.

The next chapter considers previous quantitative and qualitative analyses of political communication via social media that have been conducted in western and non-western contexts, in order to identify the place of existing researches with theoretical base, which are relatively under-researched area in this field.

## **Chapter Two: Empirical Research on Social Media and Political Participation**

Based on the definition provided by the AoIR in 2012, the Internet has been described as a “social phenomenon, a tool, and also a (field) site for research. Depending on the role of Internet plays in the research project or how it is conceptualized by the researcher, different epistemological, logistical and ethical considerations will come into play” (Markham and Buchannan, 2012:3). So it is suggested that the research of the Internet uses dynamic Internet platforms or tools as research objects, such as blogging, micro-blogging, social networking sites, or virtual communities. Arguably, agreeing with Tsatsou (2014), the Internet often serves as an “object” and “tool” as well as a “venue” of research in a same project.

This research focuses on the area where the Internet serves both as an object and as a social media tool. According to Tsatsou (2014), social media are attracting increasing interest from researchers because they offer a dynamic platform for collective political expression and public debate. They provide a range of content such as text, image and sound, all of which merit investigation. Social media research in politics has already focused on virtual communities, public communication, political mobilization and participatory democracy (Rheingold, 1993; Bimber, 2003; Carty, 2010; Kellner, 2004; Langman, 2005; Wellman, 2000).

The theoretical framework of this research having been demonstrated in Chapter One, this chapter reviews previous western and non-western empirical studies, both quantitative and qualitative, that examine citizen participation in politics through social media. These reviews seek to evaluate whether social media act as an indicator to understand digital

democracy or deliberative democracy when citizens use them for political participation and deliberation.

## **2.1 Empirical Researches on Democracy, Political Participation and Social Media in Western Cases**

The first study to investigate the political power of Facebook and Twitter in European and US elections was conducted in 2009. Since then, numerous empirical researches have demonstrated that deliberation can influence an individual's opinion (Bächtiger et al., 2011; Fishkin, 2009; Steiner, 2012); however, some have shown that online discussions facilitate the exchange of information and can even change individuals' opinions (Fishkin, 2009:169-175; Kies, 2010:114-115), or that the interactive and instant connection traits of social media enable and encourage citizen political participating and promoting political information-seeking (Edwards, 2000; Hayes, 2009). More pessimistic findings have demonstrated that online discussions can easily be manipulated and dominated by authority (Kersting, 2014:72-74). This section aims to review empirical researches on democracy, political participation and social media with quantitative and qualitative methods in either western or non-western context.

Quantitative studies addressing social media and politics have included William, Eveland and Dylko's (2007) content analysis of major newspapers published during the 2004 US Presidential election campaign. Using Lexis Nexis, they found 175 articles containing the terms "blog" or "weblog" in their headlines or lead paragraphs, from which they concluded that blogging on politics has become a core feature of public discourse. Patrut and Popa (2014:123) are interested in summarizing the logic of these political blogging and analyzing the political actors' actions

or topic discussion orientations from these political discourses in a quantitative way. So they further adopted graph theory<sup>7</sup> into content analysis to examine relevant information from the “valuable” (e.g. some key terms are included) political blogging, by looking at the case study of Obama’s blogs. They contributed a model of analyzing political discourse and asserted that political discourses significantly reveal political, economic and socio-cultural values, but sometimes, it is difficult to follow these values through the politicians’ “wooden language and casual speech”. They argued that graph theory helps researchers identify and link the main topics in political discourse. This output inspired this research to examine the nature and values of political discourse expressed on Chinese social media, for instance, it could help reveal users’ perspectives and political actors’ interests maintained in this discourse.

When Goldbeck et al. (2010) employed content analysis to investigate American politicians’ use of Twitter, they found it was used for five main functions: 1. direct communication, 2. personal messages, 3. information, 4. requesting action, 5. arranging activities, and 6. fundraising. Chi and Yang (2011) found that politicians who were more familiar with new media were usually the first to adopt Twitter; on average, politicians with a Facebook account registered for Twitter roughly six months earlier than those without. Although Twitter is theoretically seen as a platform to communicate directly with citizens and collect issues and ideas from voters, Chi and Yang found that in their study, the conversation between politicians and voters via Twitter was in practice limited. Other researchers have concentrated on the diffusion of Twitter. The Hansard

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<sup>7</sup> Graph theory plays as a tool to visualize and model of networks, it is “expressed by matrices and translated into assumptions”; it aims to explore proof techniques in mathematics that applied in computing, social and natural sciences, especially in social network analysis (Oggolder, C. 2011:335).

Society found that in 2009, 10% of Danish MPs had a Twitter account, as did 7% of Dutch MPs and 12% of British MPs. In 2010, 25% to 30% of US Congressmen had a Twitter account (Goldbeck et al., 2010; Lassen and Brown, 2010). Thus, even these researches just focused on political communication through social media by politicians, but they revealed how politicians made their contributions through social media, and how the social media empower them to improve their online campaigns and as a result they inspired this research to examine the nature of political participation through social media by another political actor-citizens.

The quantitative study conducted by Fraia and Missaglia (2014) investigated how Italian politicians exploit one-to-one communication via Twitter. They found that even politicians in the same party lacked a common strategy towards Twitter. Party affiliation made no statistically significant difference to the results. The same result that was provided by Twitter as “personal media”, which is inconsistent with the traditional relationship between media, politicians and citizens. This output inspired this research to examine citizens and their online social behaviours: whether they use social media as their personal strategy or why they participate in certain topic discussions and how dynamic their political discourse reveals online, whether they contribute to social media on politics individually or see themselves as part of an online community in order to empower and digitalize their civil society.

Fraia and Missaglia’s (2014:73-76) study of Twitter use by Italian politicians in the 2013 election also investigated their functional use of language, taking as variables “the referential, the emotive, the conative, the poetic, the phatic and the meta-linguistic”. They argued that language function analysis could highlight how the process personalized in politics

through Twitter, with a communicational logic of self-centeredness and self-reflection. For instance, a preponderance of emotive posts could be understood as appropriate use of the media in a sense that the users could communicate with the outsider through a non-mediated way, with a demonstration of subjectivity and the “emotional experiences with openness, and authenticity”. Additionally, the result showed the “conative function” was quite low, which generated a limit to stimulate the participation of these events. The lowest were poetic (4.40%) and the meta-linguistic ones (0.02%). The study highlighted that the candidates used Twitter in a tactical way, with tweets being concentrated in the days running up to the election. So this is a case to inspire this research and this could focus on how political ideology is expressed through users’ political discourse on social media, who come from different geographical locations or from different online statuses, and most importantly, it could inspire this research to examine the features of citizens’ political discourse as well.

Another western case in Belgium, D’heer and Verdegem (2014:84-95) adopted theories of agenda setting and mediated democracy to study the linkages/connection between Twitter and other media outlets during the 2012 local elections. They also drew on the hyper linking technique features and used quantitative methods to examine Twitter messages and other interactions among politicians, media actors and citizens, concentrating particularly on the structures of interaction and on how Twitter messages flowed between senders and recipients, in order to evaluate whether they were having an impact on the democratic process. D’heer and Verdegem concluded that there had been no shift in the traditional power hierarchies and that communication remained dominated by the elite. Some of their concluding remarks/questions inspired this

thesis to use functional questions to examine the social media use and the users' reflections to Weibo as well. For instance, they asked whether addressivity markers always reflect interaction or whether this depends on the type of actor to whom the message is addressed. They also wondered whether people expect responses when they address particular actors or whether they just want to stay visible when they are writing about a certain actor. This inspired this research to look at the interaction pattern on Chinese social media and helped shape these research functional questions regarding the types of contributions made by Weibo users and the reasons why they use them for political participation in topic discussions.

Researchers such as Salmons (2013) and Tsatsou (2014) have pointed out the value of qualitative research to gain deeper and richer data. For instance they pointed out online interviews, observation of online behaviors, Critical Discourse Analysis of online content. As user-generated social platforms become ever more popular in western countries, more qualitative research is being conducted to evaluate the use of social media in the western political context. For instance, *Italia2013.me* and *Bachecapolitica.it* post candidates' information, photos of political events and links to social events on Facebook; the variable of "fact checking" which was conducted by citizens' using it to report and measure the candidates' reliability in order to predict the election result approached a high rate through qualitative research (Fraia and Missaglia, 2014). Also in Italy, the *BlogMeter* and *the PolisMeter* software packages were developed by Fraia and Missaglia to conduct semantic analysis of netizen discussions on the Italian Facebook and Twitter during the 2013 political campaign (Fraia and Missaglia, 2014).

Other studies have combined qualitative and quantitative analysis, and it is argued by Tsatsou (2014:176) that the conventional qualitative and quantitative approaches through using digital technologies generate virtual modes of research (e.g. digital researches). Dezelan et al. (2014), for example, combined content analysis and interviews to investigate the use of Twitter by citizens and politicians during the 2011 Slovenian presidential election campaign. They concluded that the use of Twitter revolutionized the “ivory-tower” (top-down) politics in Slovenia.

There are two technique revolutions of the Internet that endeavor providing new research orientations in western academia, which also shaped the object of this research on social media. One is hyperlinks; another is “web archive”. Hyperlinks provide link studies (e.g. De Maeyer, 2013; Park and Thelwall, 2003) and generate new research structures. For instance, this research was inspired by what De Maeyer (2013) and Tsatsou (2014) maintained, hyperlinks studies are categorized into two dimensions in disciplinary of social science, the study of hyperlink networks as well as their properties to help understand its underlying structure. The second is their implication of sociology, and it is significant to demonstrate here because it adopts an important perspective that was illustrated by Hsu and Park (2011: 364), “a hyperlink is not simply a link on the web but has a certain sociological meaning”. A “sociological meaning” which indicates the social importance of hyperlinks, for instance, “hyperlinks as indicators of authority, with heavily linked content being considered authoritative” (De Maeyer, 2013). This idea may help understand the nature and significance of social online contributions by media users, which is inspired from studies by De Maeyer (2013) on “hyperlink styles and strategies of political actors as an important element of political communication and campaigning and also as a sign of

ideological affiliation” (cited by Tsatsou, 2014: 168). In addition, this research aims to examine how the social media technologically contributed as a “tool” to support the citizens’ political participation, which was also drawn on a new study of hyperlinks that looks at “how an actor may be characterized by the types of hyperlinks given and received” and “what types of associations an actor on the Internet can have and the everyday politics of association” (ibids.) Another revolution commonly used for research is “web archive” (Gresham and Higgins, 2012; Cai and Zhao, 2013; Schweitzer, 2008). This is significant to address here, due to the fact that this also helps shape the research aim. This can be achieved by using the technique traits of web archive, that is collecting content from different web pages at the same time or in a period of time. The aim of this is to better understand the specific phenomenon related with the Internet, such as users’ participation in digital democracy.

To sum up, numerous researches (e.g. Salmons, 2013; Fraia and Missaglia, 2014; Patrut and Popa, 2014) have focused on the increasing use of social media for political discourse in western countries. Much of this has been by politicians, many of whom got inspiration from Obama’s successful use of social media during his 2008 election campaign. Having examined western-based research, the next section turns to the quantitative and qualitative studies that have been conducted in non-western countries.

## **2.2 Empirical Researches on Democracy, Political Participation and Social Media in Non-western Cases**

There has been a number of empirical researches investigating social media use in non-western context, particularly since the so-called Arab Spring –it was one remarkable case that occurred in the Middle East and North Africa region that integrates researchers paying attention to it (e.g.

Bamyeh, 2011; Neumont, 2011; Khamis and Vanghn, 2011). Arab Spring was a significant case in non-western countries, where, it has been argued, new media played a greater part in inspiring popular revolution than social or economic factors (Khondker, 2011). The dynamic dimensions upon new media researches on this case has inspired the current study, so that they deserve to scrutinize and review in the following.

Hermida, Lewis and Zamith (2014) used quantitative content analysis to examine patterns of information on social media, using sources cited by National Public Radio Andy Carvin on Twitter during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings in 2011. Their study contributes to the gate-keeping theory by exploring multiple insights to conceptualize journalism through evaluating their social media practices (e.g. citizen journalism and professional journalism). Wolfsfeld, Segev and Sheafer (2013) measured the number of references to the Palestinian Authority political protest made on social media in 20 Arab countries. They shed light on the role of social media in inspiring collective action, demonstrating that social media users prefer to use new media to follow activities rather than initiate them. This finding inspired the current study to concentrate on responses to items posted by the top ten news outlets on Weibo (e.g. following the top ten media organization on Weibo), because news information has a feature that closely relates to offline activities, so that measuring the various responses by citizens to these outlets could examine how netizens make use of Weibo in order to reflect the nature of their political participation and deliberation. The findings also triggered the idea of assessing what motivates Chinese Weibo users to participate in political topical discussions.

Still on the Arab Spring, Stepanova (2011) found that social media have not so much fostered western-style democracy as it encouraged less violent patterns of mass protest; ICT is a developing technical base which is being deployed to revive the use of mass and non-violent protest campaigns. This finding inspired this research to reassess the ideological differences between netizens in western and non-western countries, although this research did not focus on their comparison, but yet, it inspired the current research to investigate how Chinese social media users perceive digital democracy based on their own online practices, how netizens perceive their online political participation and deliberation practices in order to address the relationship between digital democracy and online censorship.

Siapera (2012) argues that the proliferation of blogs and micro-blogs means that: “the scales are turning: politicians, even dictators, are facing constant scrutiny by citizens, who do not hesitate to network and demand changes” (Siapera, 2012:99), Siapera also employed Jurgen Habermas’s ‘inter-subjective construction of the subject’, and Mark Poster’s ‘poststructuralist account of a decentred and fragmented subjectivity’ to research on structure of blogging and demonstrated the loss in poststructuralist criticism, and also highlighted that democratic promise of blogging could be advanced by the necessarily delivering and problematizing the questions of power (Siapera, 2008: 97-109). A number of studies have used content analysis to explore the structure, purpose and themes of blogs, including Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira’s (2012) investigation of Twitter users responses to the 2011 Arab Spring. There have also been numerous content analyses of Twitter use by journalists (Bruns, 2012b; Herrera and Requejo, 2012; Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton, 2012) and non-profit organizations (Waters and Jamal, 2011). Burgess and

Bruns (2010) investigated Australia's 2010 federal election campaign, using computational methods to interpret collective Twitter conversations. These researchers generally code content quantitatively in terms of the structural features found within specific social and cultural contexts, in order to summarize the similarities and differences between samples (see Chapter Four).

As far as China-based research is concerned, numerous empirical studies have been conducted, addressing a range of issues. In their investigation of online censorship, for example, Bamman et al. (2012) found that areas like Tibet and Qinghai, in the west and in the north, are more strictly supervised than in the east of the country. In these areas, 53% of posts are deleted, compared to 12% in the east. Crandall et al. (2007), Xu et al. (2011) and Espinoza and Crandall (2011) have all investigated network filtering by means of blacklisted keywords, while others have focused on the government's use of IP or DNS filtering to prevent Chinese citizens from exploring online resources outside China, such as Google and Facebook (Floss, 2011; OpenNet Initiative, 2009; Roberts et al., 2009). Another focus of research has been the government's use of keyword filtering to censor blogs. Bamman et al. (2012:2) agreed with MacKinnon's (2009) work upon blog censorship and they both found suppressed content varied in similar ways, with the most common forms of censorship being keyword filtering (blocked some articles because of sensitive keywords) and deletion after posting. Crucially, Bamman et al. found that the sensitivity of keywords is determined by current affairs. Fu, Chan and Chau (2013), among others, have investigated the censorship of Weibo micro-blogs by looking at the use of keyword analysis and real-name registration policy. These researches informed the aim of this study to investigate how censorship affects Chinese citizens' political

participation via social media.

Wu, Guo, Zhang and Xie (2011) attempted a mathematical analysis of the competing-window model with human dynamics in Weibo. The competing-window model<sup>8</sup> aims to understand human behaviours associated with micro-blogging, particularly communicating behaviours and processes (individual or collective human behaviours), but its usefulness has been challenged by those who argue that communicating behaviours such as reposting or commenting tends to be stochastic. This research drew on this finding to examine how Weibo users made their contributions (e.g. commenting, forwarding) to political participation during the Hong Kong election.

Moreover, Guo, Lu, Wang and Zhang (2012) drew on Weng et al.'s (2010) study of Twitter to develop a quantitative approach to measure information diffusion and model influence on Weibo. More precisely, previous researches (e.g. Java and Song, 2011; Krishnamurthy, Gill and Arlitt, 2011; Huberman, Romero and Fu, 2011) had simply measured the influence of micro-bloggers in terms of the number of followers, but Weng et al. (2010) argued that the total number of forwarded comments and comments could also be used as a measure. Accordingly, Guo, Lu, Wang and Zhang (2012) extended this further, incorporating micro-blogger online status (e.g. as VIPs) to produce a calculation model that could help predict the influence of different user groups in a specific period. This research inspired the current study to compare and contrast political contributions made by different user groups on Weibo during the election period, thereby measuring the nature and extend of citizens'

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<sup>8</sup> Competing-window model here refers to a model to 'simulate the process of multi-node interactions' and analyzed tweets reading probability in social network (Wu, Guo, Zhang and Xie (2011: 1).

political participation and deliberation as well as how online censorship shaped their online status preferences when they participate.

While Wu (2012: 5) developed “netnography” (“an extension of the traditional ethnographic methods from physical locations into computer-mediated environments”) as her main approach to explore how Weibo users responded to the Wenzhou High speed train crash in China in 2011. Not only was he able to demonstrate the importance of social media for emergency communication, but also her findings highlighted the potential of social media to redistribute power from government-manipulated information sources to citizens.

Several studies have focused on agenda setting or agenda setters on Weibo. This is an important case, which indicates the significance of users’ participation online and more precisely those being involved in the political process. Jiang (2014:1), for example, used the case study approach to investigate the power of “reversed agenda setting” (‘reversed’ refers to agenda setting by citizens or citizen journalism rather than official media) on Weibo. He examined several topics and found these “trended on Weibo but did not impact on the agenda of the state-controlled China Central Television”. He observed that any discussion of the effects of reverse media agenda setting must take into consideration China’s strict online censorship. Other empirical researches have included the network analysis of NGOs’ using Sina Weibo (Sun, 2012) and the influence of the so-called Internet Water Army (users paid by companies to post on Weibo) on other users (Chen et al., 2013).

Several studies have sought to compare and contrast Weibo and Twitter (e.g. Yu et al., 2012; Gao, Abel, Houben and Yu, 2012; Bamman et al.,

2012). Wu (2012) demonstrates that Weibo is easier to use than Twitter. There are some key differences between the two platforms: while Weibo can be used to post text, pictures, videos and links, Twitter can only support text and links; and while Weibo users can post comments without them being rebroadcast to their own followers, Twitter has no such function. The combination of comment and forward on Weibo is represented as “two amalgamated entries: the original entry and the current user’s actual entry which is a commentary on the original entry” (Yu et al., 2012:2). In terms of similarities, both Weibo and Twitter users can mention posts to others as well as mention other users in their own posts by marking @, and messages can be reposted or forwarded on both platforms. Ken (2012) compared the marketing plan of Weibo and Twitter, while Gao, Abel, Houben and Yu (2012) investigated the frequency and nature of posts and reposting behaviour, finding that Twitter users forward more often and more quickly than Weibo users, but that the latter express more positive sentiments. Bamman et al. (2012) found that some sensitive messages that had been censored on Weibo could be found on Twitter. Identifying the characteristics of politically sensitive online discourse in China, they argued that Sina has already provided a way to show the discrepancies that are salient in international political discourse.

The fact that there are fewer international academic studies on Weibo than on Twitter is attributed to a number of reasons. The major limitation for non-Chinese speakers wishing to investigate Weibo is the lack of an English page. Researchers who are confident Chinese speakers generally conduct qualitative case studies, but the majority concentrates on social events rather than politics. On the other hand, large-scale quantitative studies are difficult because access to data is restricted. Bamman et al.’s (2012) study on Chinese censorship of Weibo made use of the public

timeline to gain posts, but the problem with this approach is that it is impossible to be certain that the data are representative. For this reason, this research focuses on micro-blogs since, as Flew explains: “blogs as well as other social networking sites and micro blogging may contribute to the formation of public opinion in the political process” (Flew, 2008:97).

### **2.3 Summary**

This review has juxtaposed some of the empirical studies that were conducted to investigate citizen political participation via social media in both western and non-western contexts. The review highlights that there have been numerous studies examining political communication through Twitter, but that these typically focus on political elections in the western context. In contrast, there is a general lack of empirical research addressing specific cases in non-western contexts, apart from those studies that discuss the Arab Spring. Consequently, election-related political communication on Weibo is relatively under-researched (election refers to HKCE election). There is therefore an opportunity for this thesis to contribute in this field.

The first two chapters compare the cyber-optimism and cyber-pessimism perspectives and previous empirical studies upon new media and politics in order to highlight the complexity of the debate. The discussion in these chapters raises the questions of whether Chinese citizens are achieving democratic participation through their political discussions on social media, and what motivates them to participate politically. The next chapter considers in which context this political communication takes place. It discusses the development of blogging and micro-blogging via Weibo and the nature of Chinese online censorship, before outlining the

chief characteristics of Hong Kong politics and election system and the key points in the development of the country media.

## **Chapter Three: Social Media in Mainland of China and Hong Kong**

The theoretical framework has identified the importance and effects of online communication to get involved into the process of democratic politics, thereby practicing democracy or digital democracy. In this respect there is a necessity to review the nature of new techniques that contribute to the online communication and the quality of the public discussion initiatives in contest-bound. This chapter consists of three sections. It starts by reviewing the development of blogging and micro-blogging on Weibo. It then outlines the main features of Chinese censorship of new media before finally describing Hong Kong's electoral system and the development of its media.

Since the 1990s, the twin forces of a national environmental crisis and an economic boom have shaped civil society (e.g. *Economy*, 2004; Stalley and Yang, 2006; Mertha, 2008). Media production in China has been commercialized and globalized, bringing both ideological (*yi shi xing tai* 意识形态) and structural change (Zhang, 2000; Zhao, 1998). Control over the industry still rests with the State, but there are signs that the information dissemination dimension of journalism and the relationships between Party-State, journalists and citizens are changing. Alongside these developments, Internet use in China has increased exponentially, with 9 million new users emerged between 2008 and 2009 alone. By 2012, which is when the fieldwork for this study was conducted, China had overtaken the US as the world's biggest Internet population with more than 500 million Internet users (China Internet Development Statistics Report, 2012). By 2010, 277 million users were logging on using a mobile phone (China Internet Network Information Centre, 2010). The majority

of users live in large cities, but the biggest demographic group are minors (in 2009, a third of the country's 384 million Internet users were minors, aged under 18).

Two grand narratives dominate research into the development of the Chinese Internet. In the first, new media is seen to be empowering society, whilst the second portrays the Internet as the State's ultimate tool for manipulating citizens (Brady, 2008; Kalathil and Boas, 2003). Zhou, for example, argues that those who see the Internet as democratizing China are "victims of the fallacy of technological determinism" (2006: 231). Both narratives imply a power struggle between State and citizens, and according to Alexander and Pal, this struggle is characterized by "conflict, agenda-setting, and consensus-building" (1998: 2).

### **3.1 The Development of Blogging and Micro-blogging via Weibo**

China's first blogging website (which was named boke zhongguo, or Bokee) was set up in 2004 by Fang Xingdong (Lagerkvist, 2010). Blogging quickly became popular; a TNS survey of 2008 found that Chinese Internet users were contributing more to the blogosphere than users from the sixteen other countries surveyed. By 2010, 55% of Chinese Internet users (231 million) had registered blogs, with 145 million bloggers updating their blogs regularly (CINIC, 2003-2010). The population of Weibo users jumped from 63.11 million in 2010 to 249.88 million by one year, with an annual increasing rate of 296 percent (China Internet Network Information Centre 2012).

Blogging is increasingly being seen in China as a way of ensuring the "accountability of officials at all levels of the political system" (Lagerkvist, 2010:68). As mentioned earlier, Kristof (2005) identifies Lixiaode as the

first blogger ‘watchdog’ to expose official corruption. Having said this, although a large number of Internet users are now bloggers, the majority are only interested in writing about lifestyle-related matters. The blog with a big audience has been that of journalist Li Li, who used it as a sexually explicit diary. Ms. Li’s blog has provoked debate over China’s changing sexual norms, which has in turn prompted research on blogging’s effect on society and politics and led scholars like Damm and Thomas (2006:2) to speak of the potentially “liberating effects” of ICT use in China. Wu (2007) concluded that there was an increasing degree of independence of social media in China that keeps an alternative platform for netizens who are seeking information and to express public opinions. Against this background, the CCP’s strict online censorship of politically sensitive discourse is coming under increasing attack; a number of political scientists and sociologists are now focusing on the battle between media consumers and freedom-seeking netizens on the one hand, and state legislators, party ideologues and law enforcement agencies on the other hand. (Lagerkvist, 2005a, 2006a; Zheng, 2008; Zhou, 2006; Tai, 2006; Yang, 2009)

The political effects of social media in China play an increasing concern in contemporary Asian studies, but as yet, there is relatively less under-researched in the area of political communication and social media has drawn on locally developed theoretical frameworks. This thesis seeks to shed light on the use of social media Weibo for citizens’ political participating and deliberation, as well as the role played with regards to the issue of online censorship. Wu (2012) demonstrated that Weibo has developed a new feature that could enhance web 2.0 for grassroots emergency response in China. It is an ideal platform enabling Chinese citizens to report to grassroots organizations and to express public opinion.

The Weibo platform is actually used by several different companies, including Sina Weibo, Tencent Weibo and NetEasy Weibo, but as 86% of political organizations in China log in to Sina Weibo (Zheng and Ren, 2012), this was chosen as the subject for the case study, additionally, Sina Weibo is the preferred new media platform of most Hong Kong citizens that could communicate easily with citizens in Chinese mainland. It plays a vital role in social network communication in China (*The Guardian*, 2011; Webtech, 2012); not only is it the most popular tool for spreading political news and information, but it also provides an interactive platform for communication between citizens and political organizations. This is borne out by the China Politic Micro-blog Statistic Report (2011), which lists 1,708 political organizations and 720 politicians who use Weibo, including all of the provincial-level administrative regions in China.

Li suggests that as the influence of micro-blogs has increased exponentially, they have become “the second largest source of public opinions” in China (the first one was QQ space until 2012) (Li, 2012:127). As the largest domestic micro-blogging service (Fletcher, 2011; Bamman et al., 2012), Weibo plays a crucial role in spreading public reaction to news events, emergencies and current affairs. I agree with Wu (2012) that social media has opened up a new regime, one that has transformed a political perspective from leader-oriented to reader-oriented. This importantly provides valuable information for the authorities or the public despite the numerous restrictive online sources in China. Moreover, Weibo provides increasing opportunities for netizens bonding and for other participants to demonstrate their social capital and active citizenship. During 2012 alone, more than twenty major news events were first reported through Weibo, including the explosion at Jiangxi Fuzhou and the Shanghai subway collision (Li, 2012). In response, the Nanjing

government has announced its intention to develop its own micro-blog: “for monitoring public opinion, public communication and image restoration in order to obtain the victory of public relations in crisis” (Liu, 2012:218).

However, since the new President Xi Jinping took office in 2012, online censorship has been significantly exercised in China, and especially focused on social media systems. In the following section, the focus will be on Chinese Internet, and the characteristics of party state that have shaped online censorship. It is significant that the central feature of Chinese media vis-à-vis other democratic countries is a heavily imposed online censorship system. Providing some examples of western online censorship helps our understanding of Chinese Internet censorship.

### **3.2 Party-State Online Censorship, Chinese Self-Censorship and Ideology**

“Whether we can cope with the Internet is a matter that affects the development of socialist culture, the security of information, and the stability of the state”.

Ex-president Hu Jintao

“The Internet is God’s present to China. It provides the best tool for the Chinese people in their project to cast off slavery and strive for freedom”.

Veteran dissident Liu Xiaobao

Online censorship may be defined as the deliberate limiting of access to post material (Bamman et al., 2012). Online censorship is one main focus in this research in order to address the nature of online censorship in

China: how it is exercised, the online effects of self-censorship. This research was employed via the Hong Kong Chief Executive Election case to demonstrate the advantages and shortcomings of self-censorship on social media. One of the earliest attempts at online censorship was in the US, which sought to forbid the transmission of pornography to under 18 year olds on the grounds that it constituted the communication of ‘indecent’ and ‘patently offensive’ material. (Reno v, 1997) However, this was eventually overturned by the US Supreme Court as an infringement of the right to freedom of speech. Australia was more successful when it launched the Broadcasting Services Amendment Act (1999), which restricted minors’ access to sites by instituting a government-controlled verification system. A more dramatic example of online censorship was the Egyptian government’s shutdown of Twitter during the 2011 protests.

The central difference between online Chinese media and those in democratic countries is the nature of the censorship system. Censorship is achieved in two ways in China: by laws and with the use of active filters. The CCP’s first legal step to tighten its control over the Internet was in 1996 with the promulgation of the *Interim Provisions Governing Management of Computer Information Networks in the People’s Republic of China Connecting to the International Network*. Two highly controversial pieces of legislation followed in 2000; these concerned foreign investment and Internet service providers and Internet content providers. All websites were required to have a domain name and a licence, while any discussion forums “spreading rumours, defamation or publishing harmful information, inciting the overthrow of the country’s government, the socialist system or a division of the country” would be deemed guilty of cyber-crime or cyber dissidence (Review of China, n.d.: 2). More than twenty laws and regulations have been implemented in

China in order to supervise information providers and related institutions, and with these laws being enforced by overlapping agencies. The government has also established a voluntary *Public Pledge of Self-Regulation and Professional Ethics for China's Internet Industry* and a site where citizens can report any illegal online content.

The second censorship mechanism is active filtering. Also known as 'soft' censorship (Stevenson, 2007), and this involves policing content. Thus, access is allowed, but anything "hateful, threatening, or pornographic" is deleted, as is anything that "incites violence; or contains nudity or graphic or gratuitous violence" (Facebook, 2011). The CEO of Sina Weibo, Charles Chao, has claimed that the company employs at least 100 censors to filter content, though others have suggested that the number is in fact higher (Epstein, 2011). There are two categories of Chinese Internet censorship, depending on whether the material originates outside or inside the Great Firewall. Media platforms outside China such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Google Search are simply blocked by the government; with domestic sites, the government can delete the content, take down the site or even shut down the data centre.

Online censorship in China is the most advanced in the world (Stevenson, 2007), though it is by no means the only country to employ a filtering system. Iran and Burma also employ highly sophisticated systems, while Saudi Arabia is even more proactive about filtering Internet content; its citizens were only allowed to access the Internet in 1999, when the government was satisfied it had established an effective enough filtering mechanism (Stevenson, 2007). China's determination to regulate the Internet is evident in its reference to 'Internet sovereignty' (ibid.). Compare its approach to Internet governance with that of the US: while

Washington supports a single, global Internet, Beijing seeks to impose virtual territorial borders (Jiang, 2010:73); and while the US State Department's approach is "individual-based, rights-centered, and market-driven", the approach of China's State Council Information Office is "state-centered, individual responsibilities over individual rights, maximum economic benefits and minimal political risk for the one-party state" (ibid.). The Communist Party's Internet strategy is pragmatic; following the principle of 'guarded openness', it seeks to keep out harmful influences which it deems may threaten social values and national integrity (Zhao, 2009). Nonetheless, at the same time, CCP wants to use the Internet to hasten economic development (Li, 2004). Accordingly, while social media platforms, such as Weibo are subjected to censorship in order to maintain social and political stability (Human Rights Watch, 2006), entrepreneurs and businesses are being encouraged to go online. However, social media organizations currently in the US are required to censor child pornography and libelous material and to enforce media copyright significantly (Bamman et al., 2012).

Self-censorship could be defined as a conscious or subconscious negotiation between various layers of norms in a surveillance society. A comparative study of Lagerkvist's (2010) and Cook & Heilmann's (2013) researches upon interactions of censorship and self-censorship, Lagerkvist (2010:146) identifies three forms of self-censorship: the first is described as "a conscious, resigned acceptance", which is more difficult to accept; the second is "full compliance and conscious acceptance of the status quo"; the third kind of self-censorship refers to users who are conscious of the socio-political boundaries but who when expressing their resistance online address themselves ironically. However, Cook & Heilmann (2013) identifies the self-censorship from a different angle: public and private,

which enable clarify the complexities of censorship and self-censorship. Regarding to public self-censorship, the public agent, for instance, Government or public authority, is the censor whilst private people or corporations are censees; in terms of the private self-censorship, both the censee and censor are the same target. Cook & Heilmann (2013) have developed two understandings of private self-censorship through proxy and self-constraints. This result is contrary to Rose (2006) who has identified that the principle of free speech is a standpoint against self-censorship provoked by implied threats or intimidation. Arguably, they concluded that the principle of free speech is not directly applicable in terms of private self-censorship.

Online censorship implementation and online self-censorship exercising are one of CCP's survival strategies, especially through ideological education that helps to maintain citizens' self-censorship. According to Mao Zedong, "getting to grips with the leadership of thought control is the first priority in maintaining overall leadership" (Mao, 1991: 435). CCP has put much effort into renewing and improving an ideological discourse commensurate with social/cultural changes of society.

There are certain concerns that ideology is obsolete in contemporary society (Dreyer, 2012: 330, 360; Lynch, 1999:10; Misra, 1998; Ramo, 2004). There is a history of ideological transitions within the Communist Party of China, especially via the economic reforms initiated in 1978. The contradictions and cleavages of Chinese ideological history mean that China is a transitional society. This has helped CCP to maintain its leadership, and though pro-authoritarian (Zeng, 2014) China has sought to establish a harmonious and modern society without succumbing to the full force of westernization. Based on Dotson's statement, the leadership

transition in 2012 of Communist Party of China is “one of the very few examples of an authoritarian state successfully engineering a peaceful, institutionalized political succession”. (Dotson, 2012: 4)

No single definition of ideology could be applied to fully explain the different institutional contexts. Ideology refer to “ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power” or “the link between theory and action” or “sets of ideas by which men posit, explain and justify ends and means of organized action”. In Chinese context, the term could mean “it is essentially a set of ideas with a discursive framework which guides and justifies policies and actions, derived from certain values and doctrinal assumptions about the nature and dynamics of history” (cited by Khampa, 2000). Due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, ideology is no longer rigid, unimaginative, ossified, and disconnected from reality (David, 2008). China is not solely synonymous with communism, and is framed through numerous formulas of party theory; for instance, Three Represents<sup>9</sup> put forward by Jiang Zemin and Scientific Outlook of Development<sup>10</sup> by Hu Jintao. Both are quite important to CCP, for ruling the party and the society. Zeng (2014) has demonstrated that the power of ideology derives from the citizens’ faith in a political system rather than a centralized party.

This research asserts that CCP has implemented two ideological strategies: one is formal and one that is informal. The formal strategy refers to

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<sup>9</sup> *sangedaibiao* (三个代表), it is a socio-political guiding theory put forward by former president Zemin Jiang, at the Sixteenth Party Congress in 2002. The official ideology states the Communist Party of China (CPC) should be representative to advanced social productive forces, advanced culture, and the interests of the overwhelming majority. Chinadaily.com.cn

<sup>10</sup> *kexuefazhanbiao* (科学发展观), it is one of socio-economic principles of the CPC and put forward by former president jintao Hu and his administration, it associates with scientific socialism, social welfare in order to create a Socialist Harmonious Society, to minimize social conflicts among social groups.

official ideological discourses that serve CCP's ruling class, for instance: *Marxism's Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Zhao Ziyang's first stage of socialism, Jiang Zemin's Three Represents, Hu Jintao's Scientific Outlook of Development*. With regards to informal ideology, popular sentiments serve to justify the CCP's transitions according to social change. According to white paper of China's state council:

The CCP leadership and rule is needed for making the state power stable. China is a vast country with a large population. There are great disparities in terms of development between urban and rural areas, and between different regions. It is of unusual significance for China to have a stable state power. Only then can China concentrate on construction and development, and only then can the country's development strategy and goal of modernization be pursued for a long time and through to the end (Council, 2005).

Deng Xiaoping (1994: 284) has demonstrated that "in China, the overriding need is for stability. Without a stable environment, we can accomplish nothing and may even lose what we have gained". Jiang Zemin (1997a) supports this view and once said "without stability, nothing can be achieved". Hu Jintao (2005) agrees and has illustrated that we can only move on when we have ensured the social stability. Much research has studied stability in China vis-a-vis ideology (Sandby-Thoma, 2011; Breslin, 2012; Zeng, 2014; Marinelli, 2013). It is evident that formal or informal ideological factors have helped to stabilize Chinese society.

This research focuses on how Chinese netizens reflect online censorship as a form of self-censorship. There exist a range of individual reactions to a public censorship, for instance, their own political contributions,

political discourse and political ideology. The interaction of censorship and self-censorship reveals Chinese social media to be a barometer for understanding digital democracy and deliberative democracy. For instance, the popular Chinese talent show *Super Girl*, Wu (2013) is not only an explicit political texts that contributes to digital democracy; the implicit expression of political views in less censored contexts (even in popular entertainment shows) is evidence of digital democracy and its democratizing potential.

Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin (2003) maintained that while individuals perceive that there is something useful to say, they prefer to keep silence over voice. Detert and Edmondson (2011: 462) accepted but maintain individuals could have “withholding relevant ideas for self-protective reasons (self-censorship) can occur even while voice (of another kind) is being offered”, this is quite important to clarify this two distinctions above, which refers either voices expressed or not, there is a necessary to understand the timely input of the process to voice express, such as whether or not there is something deserve to contribute. Thus, implicit voice theory corporates with exercising self-censorship is noteworthy to be drawn on in this research which would explain below.

Implicit voice theory is also worth to be reviewed. Indeed, implicit theories aim to examine individuals’ moral beliefs Studies and have its own way corporates with psychological theories of human morality (Bacharach, Bamberger, & MaKinney, 2000). Numerous scholars have decried its nature – for instance, Heider (1958), Kelly (1955) calls the implicit voice theory either: ‘naive’, ‘lay’ and ‘commonsense’ theories, or ‘logic action’ (see Bacharach, Bamberger, & MaKinney, 2000). Detert and Edmondson (2011) concentrate on self-protective (self-censorship)

implicit voice theories, which means how knowledge and structures constructed by individuals to avoid risks while speaking to authorities.

With regards to implicit voice theory, it is proposed that a potential risk may occur when evidencing what is voiced in a hierarchical institution; For instance, it might harm someone's reputation or reduce self-esteem, or even reduce promotion opportunities. Moreover, the studies from scholars Bacharach et al. (2000) focus on individuals' practicing self-censorship in the context of avoiding trouble from the authority. In this respect, they criticized implicit theories for independently driving a variety of social behaviors. This is best illustrated in social psychology literature wherein 'the voice' is only mentioned in the workplace. However, Detert and Edmondson (2011) found out implicit theories are often weakly articulated due to individuals seldom discuss it, individuals tend to ignore the influence affected by the theories on their behaviors no matter they agree or not.

Self-Protective Implicit Voice Theories are particular to be drawn on and help elaborating in this research while examining the relationship between censorship and self-censorship in China, because it concentrates on voice linking with certain issues or certain types of situations to risk (Detert and Edmondson, 2011). Self-protective Implicit voice theory has demonstrated that 'psychological safety' that works as a mediator to when negotiating antecedent variables and voice behaviors (ibid.). 'Antecedent variables' in this research refers to online censorship in China, and 'voice behaviors' refers to how Weibo users practicing online self-censorship. This fosters an appreciation of the variable reasons why citizens practice self-censorship.

Levy et al. (2006) asserted that implicit voice theory allows people to make prior predictions. Implicit theories are generally poorly articulated (Levy et al., 2006). In terms of self-protection implicit voice theories, Milliken et al. (2003) has put forward the reason why the individuals remain silent and instead implicit expression. Such a response significantly shapes this current in terms of why citizen prefer self-censorship and how they perceive the online censorship for their own political participation and deliberation. Self-protective implicit voice theories refer to the voice as being linked to specific types of risk situation and identify individual's behavior accordingly to automatically driven judgments. (Detert and Edmondson, 2011) In the next section, the basic information and background of politics and media in Hong Kong will be reviewed.

### **3.3 Hong Kong Politics and Elections: One Country, Two Systems**

Letters Patent issued by Queen Victoria in 1843 officially approved the establishment of the colony of Hong Kong. The letters set out provisions for establishing a colonial political system (Tsang, 2004:18-19) that was quite different from that of other colonies in that the Governor of Hong Kong was the actual ruler. As the Queen's representative, he was solely responsible for both the executive and the legislature: "All civil and military officials and people in Hong Kong should be subject to the Governor" (Guan, 1995). This pattern continued for 150 years; to maintain its colonial authority, the UK adopted the policy of appointing senior government officials not from the local Hong Kong population but from the UK or other Commonwealth countries. (Guan, 1995; Miners, 1981) When China resumed sovereignty over what it calls the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in 1997, the territory retained its semi-autonomous status and its own political/legal system. The capitalist

system was left unchanged, thereby creating what is essentially ‘one country, two systems’ (Wong, 2004).

Deng Xiao ping’s political promise upon the policy ‘one country, two systems’ has always been cited while arguing for Hong Kong political reform: “Hong Kong will be administered by people in Hong Kong. The administrators will be elected by the people there.” It implied the relationship between mainland and Hong Kong is unique, since Deng Xiao ping announced the twin-strategy of reform and ‘opening up’ (*gai ge kai fang* 改革开放). The principle of “one country, two systems” was transpired into Sino-British Joint Declaration and Basic Law of Hong Kong. Based on a Centre for Communication and Public Opinion survey conducted by The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the survey investigated how far the citizens are satisfied with the central government carrying out the policy of “one country, two systems”. The results showed that the participants’ satisfaction with a 4.99 average (0 indicates completely unsatisfied; 10 is fully satisfied). In addition, 37.8% of respondents tend to be “satisfied” at the moment with the practice of “one country, two systems” in Hong Kong (6 to 10 points), 11.5% responded to 10 points, which feel “fully satisfied”; 36.1% of respondents favoring “not satisfied” (to give From 0 to 4 points), 14.2% of them provide 0 point, which feel "not satisfied"; 23.4% satisfaction “General” (5 points) (香港民意与政治发展调查结果, 2014-12-08).

#### The Basic Law

On the 1st of July, 1997, the People's Republic of China resumed sovereignty over Hong Kong based on the “one country, two systems” policy. Since 1997, the Hong Kong Basic Law, Special Administrative Region constitutional and political system was established, reflecting the

meaning of sovereignty in Hong Kong (Wong, 2004). The new political system is under the sovereignty of the Chinese People's politics that embodies the basic requirements of modern democratic politics. However, after 1997, Hong Kong was named as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China. The Basic Law established in Hong Kong protects the sovereignty of the Chinese people's political participation (Ghai, 1999; Wong, 2004). Typically, article 26 of the Basic Law demonstrates that: "Hong Kong permanent residents are legally entitled to vote and stand for election" (Lee, 2014). The law achieves the desire that "Hong Kong people rule Hong Kong". Subsequently, Hong Kong residents have managed their own affairs.

Under the Hong Kong Basic Law, the Special Administrative Region (SAR) constitutional and political systems have been established in Hong Kong. Article 26 of the Basic Law states: "Hong Kong permanent residents are legally entitled to vote and stand for election" (Basic Law Drafting History Online). Article 45 and 68 of Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China prescribed the universal suffrage of the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council: "The Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall be selected by election or through consultations held locally and be appointed by the Central People's Government", and "The method for selecting the Chief Executive shall be specified in the light of the actual situation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress. The ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures". Given that individuals are looking forward to the achievement of full suffrage in

the next election, mainland Chinese citizens are envious of Hong Kong's special sovereign status.

#### Election committee

A number of factors can influence the campaign process, including the electoral system, the system of party competition, the legal boundaries of electoral campaign practices, the degree of professionalization of electoral campaigning, the media system, the national political culture, and the degree of modernization in society (Plasser and Plasser, 2002). In Hong Kong, the process is largely determined by three key factors: the decisive role played by Beijing; how successful candidates are in managing public opinion; and what the local population expects (Wong, 2004; Guan, 1995).

The Election Committee is made up of 28 Functional Constituencies, which is elected by half to occupy the Legislative Council. The Functional Constituencies, which are determined by occupational category, are made up of a mix of corporate representatives and employees. In total, they include more than 200,000 voters. "To form the Election Committee, the 28 Functional Constituencies are rearranged a bit to become 32 of its sub-sectors. These are divided into three main sectors, plus a fourth filled with political representatives. Each sector (EC Sectors: First: business, industry; Second: professions; Third: labor, etc.; Fourth: political) has 300 members" (Ron, 2012). The first sector contains almost all of Hong Kong's most important financial figures, while sector three is made up of a mix of "labor unions, farmers, fishermen, social welfare, and representatives of all the main religions, sports, performing, arts, publishing. Sector four contains political representatives of many kinds including all 60 Legislative Councilors and a selection of district

councilors” (Ron, 2012). Most importantly, a third of sector four is pro-Beijing loyalists (Hong Kong’s 36 delegates to the National People’s Congress and 55 of its representatives on the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference).

They have lots of doubts about the composition of The Election Committee. There are two sides to this issue: a number of HK citizens angrily questioned whether 1200 members could represent the whole HK population. The responses from mainland Chinese citizens varied; while some sharply pointed out that 1200 members is much more representative than 2000 members standing for 1.4 billion, as is the case in mainland China, others were more conciliatory, pointing out that Hong Kong Islanders should be happy with what they have. So there is no doubt that the nature of the electoral system in Hong Kong has had a dramatic effect on electoral campaign strategies as well as raising the major argument among political discussion – the most important of which is that the electoral system and party politics are always the critical force contributing to democratic movements and political arguments among citizens.

#### Political Parties

In terms of the political parties in Hong Kong, most of them became established during the original sprouting of representative democracy in 1980s. However, Hong Kong’s current political system exists under limited democracy because political parties are broadly divided into two camps: the fight for more democracy in the form of the pan-democratics, as well as the support for the HKSAR Government’s pro-government camp. (Cheng, 1999) In addition, there is an on-going debate on the characteristics of the Hong Kong SAR regime. One side maintains that the

Hong Kong SAR regime is an executive-led system and disagrees with the separation of a power system. The other side insists that the Hong Kong SAR regime disagrees with the executive-led system. The two camps both attract a lot of supporters, and incite a certain amount of political wrangling. Party politics has a certain impact with regards to the dissolution of the absolute executive-led government of the former Governor of Hong Kong. With a represented folk voice in parliament, the parliamentary discussion is able to better reflect the views of the general public. Based in Leung, the executive branch achieves a greater political impact than the legislative branch that failed to achieve a separation of powers. (Leung, 1998)

#### Universal Suffrage

Discussion should initial turn on the statement of Article 25 in terms of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Diamond, 2014: 38): “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, with any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions... (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections, which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors”. This shows any restrictions, which obstruct the free expressions upon electors’ will are undemocratic; if a candidate could secure a significant public support and be barred from contesting for election, then the system is not democratic either. Secondly, the nomination methods should be democratic and require the less restrictive election entry for different political parties. Thirdly, if the nomination system for the chief executive is based on maximum qualifications, for instance civic nomination, then the system is not discriminatory for any political orientation. (Diamond, 2014) Therefore, there is no single and decisive nominating system that

could be considered to be democratic. For instance, election in Iran is based on universal suffrage even its body is undemocratic (the Guardian Council). Diamond (ibid.) criticized the current Hong Kong chief executive election for its failure to meet the international standards of democracy and the expectations in Article 25 of ICCPR due to its undemocratic composition of the Election Committee. There is always a serious tension between the constraints of the Basic Law and the will of realizing democracy. Rimsky Yuen - the Hong Kong's Secretary for Justice - has argued that the Basic Law has ruled out both the civic nomination and political party nomination of chief executive candidates, as he stated:

The method for selecting the chief executive shall be specified in the light of the actual situation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress. The ultimate aim is the selection of the chief executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures.

Professor Sing criticized Hong Kong as a semi-autocratic form of government, with the current Chief Executive campaign promoted by the central government and which refers to the mainland of China. Moreover, the democratic development of Hong Kong is blocked by the central government, especially "Beijing's Liaison Office here is engaged in behind-the-scenes election planning and mobilization" (WWP, Nov. 30). For example, the emergence of social democratic movements, such as the 2007 Umbrella Unfurling Campaign (which demanded that Hong Kong's citizens have the right to elect the territory's highest official and its legislature by 2012), is evidence of the long fight for full democracy – and

full universal suffrage – in the territory. Despite the calls for a one person, one vote system to elect the Chief Executive and Legislative Council, the 2012 Chief Executive Election was again decided by the members of the Election Committee, and the main accountability of officials were appointed by the Chief Executive. Pan-democrats insist that an election system, which is not representative of the public voice, is weak, and so question whether the resulting government is biased towards specific social interest groups when implementing policies. Indeed, a number of government officials have been accused of colluding with businessmen in the transfer of benefits. Since the establishment of the Hong Kong SAR Government in 1997, several opinion polls have shown government authority to be in decline, and that the implementation of new policies has been repeatedly opposed. (Cheung, 2010, 2011; Chong, 2011; Fung, 2011) Finally, the proposal for the full universal suffrage has been delayed until the 2016 election for the Legislative Council, and the 2017 election for the Chief Executive. (BBC News, 2011)

According to the Basic Law, the ultimate purpose in Hong Kong politics is to realize universal suffrage, which is believed as the most democratic procedure of nominate the Chief Executive (The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative region of the People's Republic of China), so there is an ongoing wish among the Hong Kong community to realize this dream. However, the 2012 Chief Executive Election of the Hong Kong SAR has also failed to be elected by a universal suffrage system, but was instead elected by members of the Election Committee, with the main accountability of officials appointed by the Chief Executive. According to the perspective of pan-democrats, they assert that this kind of election system is weak due to a lack of supporting public opinion; and moreover, they question whether or not the government is biased towards individual

social interest groups. Additionally, the government is often accused of officials and businessmen colluding with the transfer of benefits. Since the establishment of the Hong Kong SAR Government in 1997, several opinion polls show the government authority is in decline and the implementation of new policies has been repeatedly opposed. (Cheung, 2010; Cheung, 2011; Chong, 2011; Fung, 2011)

### Chief Power and Beijing

Researchers such as Madison have contended that the separation of powers is necessary and he maintained that the “separation of powers and checks and balances” are two interdependent principles (Madison, 1788). The reason why the Hong Kong SAR regime belongs within the scope of the separation of powers is because this regime in line with two requirements. The governance rights of the Hong Kong SAR is granted from the central government in Beijing, according to the relevant provisions of Chapter IV of the Basic Law of Hong Kong, and the administrative power of the Hong Kong SAR is divided into three aspects of the executive, legislature and judiciary, which exercise under the Chief the government headed by the Executive, Legislative Council and the Court. Hong Kong SAR regime has distinctive executive-led characteristics, and headed by the Chief Executive power which is placed in a dominant position relative to the powers of the Council. The Chief Executive has a dual identity, “for he is both the head of the HKSAR and the head of the SAR Government who leads the SAR Government. This shows that his legal status is higher than the legislature” (Wong, 2004: 35).

### Beijing power

In the years leading up to the handover, the CCP sought to enlist the support of Hong Kong's business elite by establishing the Preliminary Work Committee, Hong Kong Affairs Advisers and District Affairs Advisers to solicit their position regarding the future leadership in Hong Kong (Chu, 2010). In the year before the handover, Beijing's prospective leadership candidates and local people prepared for both the handover and the election of a Chief Executive, though the media frequently called it a selection rather than an election. (Chu, 2010) Only 400 members of the Selection Committee were able to vote for the first Chief Executive. The job finally went to Tung Chee-hwa in 1996 (he received 70.1%) after the Director of the HKMAO, LuPing, announced: "The candidate must be a patriot who loves China" (ibid: 113).

#### Criticism of Hong Kong to please Beijing

Insight can be gained into Hong Kong politics by looking at how academics have reacted to the influence of Beijing. Ever since the first Chief Executive was criticized for being too close to Beijing (Chu, 2010), academics in Hong Kong have understood that the territory is engaged in an asymmetrical political struggle. According to one lecturer from the Chinese University of Hong Kong: "People are wary that Beijing are getting more and more hands-on in Hong Kong affairs...which may mean more control on Hong Kong's freedom" (AFP). There is concern that power is concentrated in Beijing's hands, and that Hong Kong's one-country, two-system guarantee only extends to 2047. It has even been claimed that: "the government is kowtowing to Beijing and sacrificing the basic right of the Hong Kong people to please Beijing" (Kwok-hung, 2012). These academics believe that pro-Beijing forces and their allies in fact dominate Hong Kong's formally autonomous political system. They see the system as being in constant motion, and feel the pressure to

conform on many fronts. The criticisms levelled at Chief Executive Tung regarding the Provisional Legislature, the revision of civil liberties laws and his relations with key Beijing officials (Chu, 2010: 133) all featured in the discussions on Weibo and thus helped shape the research questions.

### **3.4 The Development of Media in Hong Kong**

The media in Hong Kong has brought in sufficient experiences from British media due to its historical base before handover, so a unique news media landscape has emerged in Hong Kong after 1997, which shaped by the intersection of British and Chinese cultures. Lau and To (2002) argue that Chinese media will not develop in the same way as the media in Hong Kong, but Fish (2012) asserts that Hong Kong's media has development in itself an achievement and even their shortcomings are highly instructive. Thus, it is worth examining how Hong Kong has regulated and managed its media outputs.

Throughout more than one hundred years of colonial rule, it is said that Hong Kong media had “freedom without democracy”. (Hughes, 1976) The British Hong Kong government, in order to maintain its authority, developed strict legislation to control journalism in the colony, while at the same time adhering to the tradition of the British media. In other words, it adopted a “strict legislation, loose enforcement” approach (Wong, 2004: 3). Tsang explains that in this period, as long as a news-organization was not doing anything illegal or endangering the basis of British rule, it had freedom of speech and the freedom to operate (Tsang, 2004).

With the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the distance between the British and Chinese governments became even more apparent.

Although the British extracted a commitment from Beijing that it would maintain the status quo, they were highly wary of the Chinese Communist regime. Keen to prevent its influence from becoming strong in Hong Kong, they tightened newspaper regulation. Radio and TV were controlled even more strictly, on the grounds that almost everyone could receive and be influenced by radio and television, while only those with a certain educational level were likely to be affected by newspapers. (Adatto, 1990) Hong Kong's legal system followed the British legal system, but throughout these years, the news media were regulated more than their UK counterparts. (Wesley-Smith, 1993)

From 1984 onwards, Britain promoted democracy in Hong Kong in the hope that this might influence China's treatment of Hong Kong after the handover. As part of this strategy, the British Hong Kong government revoked press regulation and readjusted government propaganda system so as to give more press freedom to Hong Kong (Hughs, 1976) (although this freedom was not allowed to threaten government's control). Just as the regulation of the media in Hong Kong had a tremendous impact on the industry, so too did deregulation. The news media boomed, but this expansion did not lead to improved quality. On the contrary, as the media became increasingly market-oriented, journalistic ethics were distorted by fierce competition and the pursuit of commercial interests. (Wong, 1998; Pippert, 1988)

Hong Kong legislation contained no specific law restricting news media development, only a general prohibition against subverting the government. As long as they did not violate this, Hong Kong media had the privilege of freedom of expression. (Chung, 1995) Thus, foreign missionaries could publish newspapers promoting their religious doctrine;

Chinese citizens could publish business newspapers; royalists could publish newspapers supporting constitutional monarchy; bourgeois revolutionaries could publish revolutionary newspapers; and Chinese Communists could publish patriotic newspapers. A range of political views existed at the same time: revolutionary and reactionary, progressive and conservative. Citizens had the freedom to choose (Chung, 1995), with their choice being influenced by factors such as class status, economic interests, personal preferences, special interests, political views and attitudes. A considerable number of newspapers occupied the middle ground. Papers such as the *Oriental Daily News*, for example, took an impartial, objective position to appeal to the widest possible readership. (Wang, 1992: 73) The result was a news media landscape in which most reporters and readers were accustomed to making their own judgment from the facts and were reluctant to accept political preaching.

However, since the handover, self-censorship by journalists has impacted on press freedom. (Hassid, 2008) Hong Kong is the bridge between China and the international community and the vanguard of China's modernization. It is also the most direct and convenient window for international values to enter mainland China; thus, any movement in the Hong Kong media directly or indirectly affects the development of the mainland media. (David, 2008) However, the majority of media practitioners in Hong Kong arguably do not realize the significance of their role; owners and investors, driven by commercial interests, have made concessions to the Beijing government (Esarey, 2005), while journalists have erred on the side of caution in their reporting. This self-censorship, in fact, reflects a lack of forward thinking and a lack of clear understanding of their responsibility. The one country, two systems

model actually represents an opportunity for Hong Kong media to extend their reach and influence and to explore a new path.

These developments reflect the complex relationship between Hong Kong media and politics. (Chan, 2007) The operation of the media has of course been affected by the social and structural changes, but the professionalism of journalists, commercial considerations and international factors ensure that Hong Kong media remains relatively autonomous for there is still a degree of press freedom. Radio and television have not become the government's mouthpiece, and many media workers still adhere to the journalist's creed of providing accurate information, monitoring the government and speaking their mind. (Chan, 2007) Under the one country, two systems model and the promised "high degree of autonomy", China and the SAR government have undertaken to safeguard Hong Kong's press freedom. However, with the pro-government businessmen acquiring more and more of the media, the attitude of the media the public to China is changing. The media's handling of Chinese news is not as critical as it once was. In this environment, the media's discussion space is slowly narrowing. (Lee, 2004)

However, the apparent acceptance of mainland media values does not mean that Hong Kong has been completely assimilated. The media continue to protest at crucial moments, especially when the freedom of the press is being threatened, or the central government threatens local interests. Indeed, they may even challenge the Beijing government. (Lau and To, 2002) The mass media continue to be actively involved in public affairs, directing the public's attention and triggering the expression of public opinion. However, as Hong Kong becomes increasingly reliant on the economic development of the mainland, its media will face growing

political and economic pressure. Hong Kong's ability to preserve the freedom of the media depends, of course, on the implementation of the one country, two systems model and the democratization of the political system (Williams, 2000), but it also depends on media organizations and journalists maintaining their professionalism and the public defending press freedom.

The latest phase of media development has been the proliferation of new media. This has had a positive impact on Hong Kong's political development, helping to mobilize people politically, raising participation levels and overcoming political apathy to reduce some of the bias inherent in the political system. In the 2012, Hong Kong Chief Executive election, for example, supporters of the three candidates took to new media to set up interactive websites (although critics argued that any interaction between citizens and politicians is largely an illusion in Hong Kong). Siu-Kai points out that in the absence of universal suffrage, candidates use new media for information dissemination rather than to gather feedback from citizens. (Siu-Kai, 2012) New media has been widely used to push the democratic agenda. In the 2004 Legislative Council elections, for example, candidates posted their manifestos online, while the political organization Civic Exchange (part of the Hong Kong Policy Research Institute) has established websites disseminating election information in order to encourage voting. New media supported the 'get-out-the-vote' campaign in 2004 (Civic Exchange Annual Report, 2005), while in 2006, candidates Alan Leong and Donald Tsang both set up election blogs (which became the most popular blogs on Yahoo). Most compellingly, in 2012's mock election, more than 130,000 individuals voted online. (Peiyuan, 2012) Internet voters, to some extent, may be shaping campaign agendas.

### **3.5 Summary**

Not surprisingly, scholars and experts are increasingly interested in evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of new media technologies with regards to political participation. The first three chapters explore the theme by focusing on the question of whether or not new media technologies have the potential to enhance digital democracy through deliberative democracy. Generally, discussions of this issue are dominated by the competing views of cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists. This review juxtaposes western literature with Chinese literature on this subject. The local context was also reviewed in terms of the development of blogging on Chinese social media, which can be seen to be empowering society. Chinese netizens are using social media for information dissemination or to participate in online communication at the same time that internet is being used by governmental authorities for politically manipulating citizens. To address this, it is necessary to outline the nature of Chinese online censorship comparative to other countries. Theorizing the social media and political communication research is significant to research on interdisciplinary study with empirical case, and is especially appropriate when considering the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches for problem solving.

Therefore, it was necessary to begin by identifying the various types of citizen participation on Weibo and the different forms of contributions, and they reflect popular topics discussed during the election. It was also necessary quantitatively to investigate the orientation of the opinions expressed in these topic discussions. The research seeks to investigate whether Weibo represents a new, more egalitarian form of political

participation *vis-a-vis* deliberative democracy or digital democracy, and whether it is fostering a more participatory form of citizenship.

### Research Questions and Approaches

It was therefore necessary to combine qualitatively and quantitatively analysis of the nature of netizens' political contributions, political discourse and their perspectives of political participation. Thus, the following research questions are addressed:

#### **Research Questions**

- 1) What is the extent and nature of political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the HK Chief Executive Election?
- 2) To what extent and in what ways does censorship shape political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the HK Chief Executive Election?
- 3) What role of Weibo plays in the citizens' political participation and deliberation regarding the HK Chief Executive Election?

To answer these three research questions, this research plans to compare and contrast the reflections of Weibo communication by Hong Kong/mainland and VIPs and causal users who political participated in 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election. The following are the associated functional questions:

#### **Functional Research Questions**

- Who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election?
- What did they discuss, and what forms did their contributions take for the HKCE Election?

- Why did they participate in Weibo discussions on the HKCE Election?
- What evidence is there from the discussions of the role censorship played in discussions of the election?
- What role did participants say censorship played in the extent and nature of the participation in Weibo discussions on the election?

A mixed method strategy was employed involving content analysis, critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. A quantitative approach (content analysis) was used to analyse the different types of contributions made to topical discussions by Weibo users, with different online statuses and within different geographical locations. Qualitative methods (critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews) were then employed to evaluate the attitudes and ideologies expressed in the topic discussions. Data was gathered on users' geographical locations and Weibo status in order to reveal the relationship between political participation and geographical locations and online statuses. This also allowed identification of any differences between mainland and Hong Kong users.

## **Chapter Four: Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter explains and justifies the research methodology, which was used in this project, drawing on the literature review in Chapters One, Two and Three. According to Tsatsou (2014), who has examined the history of Internet research and methodological innovation since 1990s, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches addresses the traits of Internet research and helps to challenge the limitation of existing online research. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques was employed to explore the nature and extent of political participation and deliberation of social media users from mainland and Hong Kong when responding to Hong Kong's 2012 Chief Executive election on the Weibo social media platform, and how the online censorship shaped their political participation and deliberation, in addition, how the role of Weibo playing with in this case study.

This chapter addresses the mixed methods used in this study and tackles specific research functional questions according to three sets of data: quantitative content analysis, critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative content analysis was used for analyzing the person who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election, specifically focusing on what types of contributions. Before conducting a semi-structured interview, critical discourse analysis was applied to further evaluate the ideologies of different user groups, revealing the relationship between discursive structure (including lexical agency and rhetorical patterns) and Hong Kong's complex political and cultural developments then to answer the functional questions -what did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE

Election by Weibo users. This study adopted a mixed methods approach, with the interview results analysed alongside the outputs of the content analysis and critical discourse analysis. So the output of content analysis and critical discourse analysis would help shape the design of interview functional questions. Semi-structure interviews were used in the last stage to collect the perspectives, motivations and experiences of Weibo users with the following functional questions in mind: Why did they participate in Weibo discussions on the HKCE Election? And what role did participants say censorship played in the extent and nature of the participation in Weibo discussions on the election?

The next section defines the concept of content analysis and describes in detail the sampling method employed and the four variables chosen for the analysis. In part Two, the discussion of critical discourse analysis (CDA) draws extensively on the work of Fairclough (1989; 1992; 1993; 1995a; 1995b; 1999) and van Dijk (1988; 1991; 1993; 1995; 1998a; 1998b), acknowledging the importance of their findings and how these informed this research. Based on literature reviews on the intention of using rhetorical patterns in political discourse, for instance, irony expressions within Chinese context, a premonition of irony expressions occupied the majority of rhetorical use. It would be helpful to incorporate the verbal irony principle (VIP) put forward by Burger et al. (2011) to further examine the insight of political discourse in civil society of China. Part Three sets out the rationale and design of the interviewees and interview questions. The interviews allowed further exploration of some of the data from the content analysis and critical discourse analysis.

## **4.2 Content Analysis**

In order to answer the two research questions, the research focused on the posts made during the election by Weibo followers, giving attention to the different types of contributions, the structural characteristics of comments and the topic discussions (e.g. the dimension of the electoral system in Hong Kong, the coverage by Chinese media, the system of party competition, the political culture in Hong Kong etc.). It also considered topic orientation in order to demonstrate the nature and extent of citizen participation, and to examine whether the nature of the contributions altered according to the extent of online censorship. The content analysis concentrated on four variables: the type of contribution made by users; the geographical location of users; their Weibo status; and discussion topics. Accordingly, the two research questions were implicit to the research: Who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election? What did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users? What evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election?

### **4.2.1 Definitions of Content Analysis**

Quantitative content analysis normally focuses on representative samples of content, using specified units of analysis and variables to reliably measure the similarities and differences between samples. According to Selltitz, Jahoda, Deutsch and Cook (1967) and Berelson (1952), content analysis is a systematic description and examination technique for the purpose of objective and quantitative interpretation. Berelson often cited the definition as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” Berelson (1952: 18) while Kolbe and Burnett’s (1991:243) statement referred that content analysis is “an observational research method that is

used to systematically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication. These communications can also be analyzed at many levels (image, word, roles, etc.), thereby creating a realm of research opportunities”. Each step in the analysis should follow explicit rules and procedures. There are a number of advantages to content analysis: the most important is that it is more objective and unobtrusive than interviews or participant observation (Berelson, 1952). It is the most effective way to clarify who is involved, what they are doing, why, and to what effect (Holsti, 1969: 25).

The aim of quantitative content analysis was compared and contrasted with the political topics given by Hong Kong and mainland users, so as to test the discrepancies between the two in terms of political participation. SPSS helps within the content analysis, which was used for data storing and to measure the different types of contributions made either through commenting, commenting on someone else’s comments or sharing or forwarding the posts that made by the other Weibo users, within a range of online statuses (e.g. VIP of persons, VIP of organizations, Weibo Got Talent, casual users).

#### **4.22 Sampling Method**

Holsti (1969: 24-26) argues that: “A good research design makes explicit and integrates procedures for selecting a sample of data for analysis, content categories, and units to be placed into the categories, comparisons between categories, and the classes of inference which may be drawn from the data”. Sampling helps the researcher to draw its conclusions or findings from the features found within the random sample. Krippendorff (2004) argues that sampling enables the researcher to select sufficient data while minimizing the risk of delays and biased outcomes.

According to McMillan (2000) and Weare and Lin (2000), the vastness of the Internet makes identifying representative online samples challenging. However, there was fast-changing array for social media to develop the new model of communication, such as the use of hash tags based on different social contexts enabled the exploration of representative online samples of topic discussions. The availability of tools such as Wget, MySQL and phpMyAdmin has made it easier for researchers to study Twitter, but there has been much less research on Weibo. This is due to Sina API's refusal to allow unrestricted access to data, and the limited software available for computational content analysis – a state of affairs that is partly attributable to Sina-Weibo's relatively recent arrival in the market (it was launched in 2009) and partly to Chinese censorship. Consequently, most of the research on Weibo that has been conducted so far has employed manual coding or qualitative case studies.

There are numerous ways of gathering data from Weibo. In this study, the general Weibo Search Tool was first used to gather retrospective data. To identify the sample for the study, a key word search was conducted for the terms: *Hong Kong election*, *Chief Executive election*, *Liang Zhenying* and the dates 20/03/2012-30/03/2012 (The election day is on 25<sup>th</sup>, so one week before and after it could help identify the trends and collect the data as appropriate). There were 24,541 messages on Weibo that related to the *Hong Kong Chief Executive election* and 707,644 messages on *Hong Kong election*. It was not feasible to gather data from all these matches, which were likely to include significant duplication.

The next possibility was to focus on official hash tagged content; however, according to Shamma et al. (2009) and Boyd et al. (2010), such content is

of limited use. The study bore out Anstead and O'Loughlin's view that: "Hashtagged content will only be a subset of a broader discussion taking place online" (2011: 446). Potentially useful data that has not been hash tagged may be lost. For example, the most popular opinion leader, Qiuluwei Lv, has 2,371,053 followers so far, and has posted 35 tweets related to *Hong Kong election*. In contrast, a search for hash tagged messages relating to *Hong Kong election* yielded only one result, a message posted by a Miss Lv. It was therefore decided to abandon this as a criterion.

According to Herbst, researchers, politicians, activists and citizens prefer "reliable indicators of public opinion in order to make the most effective arguments they can" (1998:14). Thus, the decision was made to concentrate on 'representative' communications; that was, to code all Weibo user responses to the ten most powerful media organizations represented on Weibo over the period 20<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> of March. According to research conducted by the Renming website, 17,221 media organizations and 92,945 media professionals were represented on Weibo in 2012. The ten most powerful were selected based on Weibo's own formula: effect = activity + propagation force + coverage (<http://data.weibo.com/top/help#tag5>). Activity was determined by the number of daily posts, the number of posts that were actively forwarded and the number of active comments; propagation force referred to the extent of the user's influence, based on the number of passively forwarded posts and the number of passively commended posts; and coverage was determined by the number of active followers. These ten most powerful media organizations were chosen as the sources from which the sample would be drawn. These top ten media sources were: Breaking News, CCTV News, Renmin News, Sino Entertainment, Caijing Website,

Morning News, Southern City, Sino Finance, New Weekly, and China News Weekly. Thus, criteria were justified in terms of the political actors' participation in political communication.

Ng (2013: 31) used “the browser automation library Selenium and the HTML parser Nokogiri to extract data”. In this study, the names of the top ten media organizations were stored in a database and a similar script was employed to automatically open the browser window, and navigate to weibo.com and login. The names and content of these top ten media organizations could then be read from the database. An advanced search could then be conducted to gather data, using the key words *Hong Kong* and *election*, for the period 20<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> of March.

**Figure 1 Ten most powerful media organizations in China (March to April 2013)**

Rank/ Name/ Power/ Background/ Following



It might be criticized that the nature and characteristics of the media sources had a potential to affect the attitudes and orientation responses from followers, and empirical studies discussed in the earlier chapter

reveals that netizens prefer to follow the information rather than to precede it (Wolfsfeld, Segev and Sheafer, 2013). Regarding the value of online news resources, which is more about creating the possibilities for netizens to respond, they derive from the earlier review that Hermida, Lewisand and Zamith (2014) concluded. This is one of the reasons the digital debate could emerge to conceptualize the journalism and the new space for citizen expressions.

The sampling process was useful in order to classify the objects and this generated rapid and indicative findings in preparation for the in-depth citizen participation study. An advanced search of the top ten media sources using the search terms *Hong Kong* and *Election* showed they collectively produced 124 new posts from 20<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2012. These posts generated 22,172 responses (excluded the messages for advertising and non-relevant topic discussions), including forwards and comments and comment on comments, which were gathered for coding. The data was subjected to unit analysis using the SPSS software package. There was a censorship issue which limited access to the data, which meant some more posts that had already been deleted before the data could be collected, while an obvious system notice demonstrated: “This post has been deleted due to its disobey the Chinese internet online regulation and principle”. Nonetheless, this research is not researching on the content that has been deleted. Therefore, this research can certify that the 22,172 posts were representative and reliable samples due to it provided the same possibility for either researchers or the public to gather these data.

#### **4.23 Unit of Analysis**

The next step involved the matter of selection: what would be included and excluded before coding (Holsti, 1968). The retweets and comments posted in response to these top ten sources between 20/03/2012 and 31/03/2012 were categorized into four groups by three different types of contributions: messages from VIP of organizations, messages from VIP of persons, messages from Weibo Got Talent activists and messages from casual users. These four groups were further divided into four sub-groups: users from Hong Kong, users from mainland China, overseas users and others (i.e. those with no identified geographical location). The three types of contributions referred to comment, comment on comment and forwarding. In the selection process, where researchers are able to access public data on social media nowadays, for example by using the Application Programming Interface to collect public tweets, software is limited in being able to code such large volumes of data in China. This limitation was also noted by Boyd and Crawford (2012: 669) and Lewis, Zamith and Hermida (2013) who all used content analysis in their research on Twitter.

The following variables would be introduced in detail and design for answering the functional research questions in order to address the main research questions:

Who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election?

What did they discuss, and what forms did their contributions take for the HKCE Election?

Why did they participate in Weibo discussions on the HKCE Election?

What evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election?

What role did participants say censorship played in the extent and nature of the participation in Weibo discussions on the election?

#### *4.231 Variable one- discussion topics*

The first variable was the topic being discussed, which was the central aspect of coding scheme in this research. This variable was significant, because it provided a potential to compare and contrast the main conflicts, values and perspectives upon politics in order to demonstrate the nature of political participation and deliberation on Weibo between Weibo user groups. Holsti (1969) argued that thematic variables might be the most useful kind of variable in content analysis, as they can be used to examine the values, attitudes, beliefs and other internal states of the communicator.

The study deployed both deductive and inductive content analysis, with the aim to examine what topics of discussions was made by Weibo users according to a range of online statuses and different geographical locations. Inductive content analysis was conducted when there was no existing knowledge to give a frame of reference, while deductive content analysis was used to structure the analysis based on previous studies (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Another phenomenon associated with the deductive approach is “extended monologues from the person who has introduced the topic” ... “and yet, this has often been observed to be the result”, which refers to inductive approach (Ron et al., 2012: 97-100). The inductive approach was used to explore the conclusions in terms of the related categories; three key dimensions were identified after the inductive study: the electoral system, the system of party competition and the national political culture. Therefore, inductive and deductive categories was employed to highlight the categorisation of material into topic areas

through a combination of pre-designed categories, and categories that emerged from reviewing the content.

Inductive Analysis:

The inductive study suggested that even when the discussion stuck to the original topic of a post, different sub-samples tended to have different outlooks, so part of themed categories emerged in the process of presenting the findings, and some codes emerged from the raw data through repeated examination and comparison. It is important to note here that the initial processing of the information by the researcher could offer an opportunity to make sense of potential themes in the raw data, and this research normally started with a lot of themes, and then gradually reduced to fewer ones. In this research, some parts of the categories were identified initially with 300 posts collected, but more categories might be added in the process of actual coding, for instance, in the category of 'The Election Committee', because the key word '1200 people' were mentioned and repeated frequently, so any terms related to the population or structure of election committee were added in the actual coding of 'The Election Committee', full categories would be represented in the outcome of next chapter.

More precise:

Inductive Analysis- Electoral system

In terms of the electoral system, there were two main discussion topics: the Election Committee, which is made up of 1200 voters (a1), and the subject of universal suffrage (a2). The nature of the election committee and Weibo users' expectations in terms of the possibility of universal suffrage emerged as recurring themes in the inductive content analysis.

Inductive Analysis - System of party competition:

There were three discussion topics within this dimension: the Communist Party of China (b1), pro-Beijing candidate and CCP supporter Leung Chun-ying (b2) and the other candidates, He Junren and Tang Yinnian (b3). Particular attention focused on Leung Chun-ying, whose opposition to the Pan-democrats provoked strong debate between democrats and his own supporters.

Inductive Analysis - The national political culture:

There has been an on going debate in China, ever since the 1997 handover, about whether the one country, two systems policy has supported the democratization of Hong Kong or plunged it into recession. This was borne out in the inductive content analysis, which identified five recurring discussion topics. These were: the democratization of Hong Kong (c1), the one country, two systems policy (c2), the 'fall' of Hong Kong (c3), the mock election (c4) and 'civic protest or political parade' (c5).

Inductive analysis helps in the understanding of what topics are popular and were allowed to be discussed on Weibo, and how they are discussed. Either deductive or inductive analysis could be tested independently, but orientation expressions were also examined in order to classify three categories for each topic. This helped to answer the functional question in terms of what was did they discussed and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users.? What evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election? What role did participants say censorship played in the extent and nature of the participation in Weibo discussions on the election?

**Deductive Analysis:**

There were three categories guided by deductive approach, which was introduced in the beginning of conducting content analysis, in order to clearly test the related supporting arguments or documents. The deductive analysis identified three categories: Government censorship of Weibo and how this affected participation (d1). The second was Weibo’s role in the dissemination of information (d2), testing how respondents perceived the ability of Weibo with regards to information dissemination, and the extent to which it encouraged or allowed free political communication (d3). The latter required an evaluation upon how it connected with different online statuses of Weibo users and what the nature of its political discourse. Deductive analysis helped to answer the following questions: what evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election? And what role did participants say censorship played in the extent and nature of the participation in Weibo discussions on the election?

A combination of deductive (topic-first) categories and inductive (topic-delayed) categories helped to minimize the ambiguity of the content (Scollon, et al., 2011). This was important to combine technique when using a hybrid thematic analysis (Fereday, 2006). Therefore, this approach complemented the identification of what popular topics upon HKCE Election but based on Chinese Weibo context, by combination of data-driven inductive analysis and the deductive a priori template of categories, the codes are all displayed as below:

<b>Inductive codes</b>	<b>A1</b>	<b>The Election Committee</b>
	<b>A2</b>	<b>Universal suffrage</b>
	<b>B1</b>	<b>The Communist Party of China</b>
	<b>B2</b>	<b>Leung Chun-ying</b>

	<b>B3</b>	<b>He Junren, Tang Yingnian</b>
	<b>C1</b>	<b>Democratization in Hong Kong</b>
	<b>C2</b>	<b>'One country, two systems' policy</b>
	<b>C3</b>	<b>The 'fall' of HK</b>
	<b>C4</b>	<b>Mock election</b>
	<b>C5</b>	<b>Political movement</b>

<b>Deductive Codes</b>	<b>D1</b>	<b>Government censorship of Weibo</b>
	<b>D2</b>	<b>Weibo's role in the dissemination of information</b>
	<b>D3</b>	<b>Free political communication on Weibo</b>

Three orientation categories included: (1) explicit support, (2) neutral or unclear (3) explicit opposition. Here, this research focuses on any words, terms or phrases that highlight the explicitly expressions on these orientations. The aim of examining orientations was to compare and contrast the responses between Weibo users from Hong Kong, mainland, overseas and the others, by commenting, commenting on someone else's comments and forwarding or sharing the others' posts, with a range of different Weibo's statuses. Apart from the three, there was another category 'rhetorical use' that considered due to it emerged with a high frequency through the process of coding. Specifically, the category 'rhetorical use' included 'rhetorical and oppositional' or 'rhetorical and supportive' or 'rhetorical and neutral'. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, and thus exemplifying how is it an example of self-censorship., how self-censorship is exercised in China and why. The critical discourse analysis then added to help further explore the insight of ideology expressed by these Weibo groups.

#### ***4.232 Variable two- geographical location of user***

On the line of topic discussion categories, the discussions on Weibo provided a potential to compare and contrast the responses between Hong Kong and mainland users, in 2012, there was 300 million users on Weibo, and 350,000 from them are active Hong Kong users (Webtech, 2012), which occupied 1.13% of all active daily users on Weibo. According to Statistic Report of Hong Kong, there are over 3 million Internet users of Hong Kong in 2012 while China has Internet population with more than 500 million Internet users (China Internet Development Statistics Report, 2012). Following the initial sampling, two more categories were added: users from overseas and the others. Overseas referred to users who marked themselves as living or temporarily living outside China, even some of them might still come from Hong Kong or mainland. The others included the users who had not marked their location in their profile of Weibo. Overall, it is necessary to clarify the users from different geographical locations within the four categories to minimize the uncertain factors in terms of geographical locations might have affected online discussions, when in order to answering the functional research question: Who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election? Additionally, the output could prepare for answer what did these people discussed and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users, and why did they participate in Weibo discussions on the HKCE Election.

There were two ways for identifying the location of someone posting a message. Clicking the personal profile would show the information, but this button was not obvious, and it required the researcher to go through individual profiles to gather the data. The second way was clicking the user name; this brought up the user's basic profile, including location.

This was much easier, as it was not necessary to go through the whole profile page. However, there was still a potential that people might mark their locations anonymous, which was one of the limitations of data collection in social media research.

#### ***4.233 Variable three- Weibo user status***

According to variable one and two, this research focused on VIP of person, VIP of organization, casual users and Weibo Got Talent activists for a numerous important reasons. Firstly, there might be a factor to motivate Weibo netizens who preferred the online status to be involved in the activities on this platform, the reasons need to figure out in order to identify why they participated in Weibo discussions on the HKCE Election; secondly, in order to answer the functional research questions, who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election? And what did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users? There was a need to focus on what range of different online statuses that were technically provided by Weibo technically, thereby eventually investigating how far their online status could have an effect on the nature of political participation and deliberation in this case.

It could be claimed that it might not have the same weight of distributions by VIP, Weibo Got Talent and casual users while comparing and contrasting the extent of their contributions, for instance, there might have a considerable discrepancies when of their effect considering the number of passively forwarded posts and the number of passively commended posts. However, in this research, it was not focus was not on evaluating the offline influences made through online distributions upon discussion of Hong Kong Chief Executive Election over time by Weibo users with

different online status, rather, it aimed to investigate the relationship between different types of contributions, the nature of political discourse, and political topical discussions covered with different online statuses. There is another justification should be pointed it out, in that this research did not concentrate on the interactions between VIP, Weibo Got Talent and casual users, for instance, whether or not the distributions made by VIP's forwarding had an effect on Weibo Got Talent's forwarding was not included in this study. Overall, this research focused on different online statuses' individually rather than including their effects that intend to answer the functional questions: Who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election? What did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users? The overriding questions were: again, it could help prepare answer - Why did they participate in Weibo discussions on the HKCE Election? What evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election? What role did participants say censorship played in the extent and nature of the participation in Weibo discussions on the election?

Weibo users could choose to be casual users (non-the definition of being a casual user is that who are not a members), Weibo Got Talent activists, VIPs or Weibo members. They could simultaneously be Weibo members and VIPs, or Weibo members and Weibo Got Talent activists (or casual users). Weibo membership was purchased and brought privileges in terms of getting more followers. Both organizations and individuals could apply for VIP status by submitting official documents to prove their social position or business values. Celebrities and politicians were most likely to apply for individual VIP status, which was marked with a yellow 'V', while companies and organizations were given a blue 'V' (see Figure 4.2).

The blue ‘V’ was seen as confirmation of a company’s status, and the company might use its Weibo postings to advertise its services. A poster’s status could be checked by clicking their personal profile, while clicking the ‘identified user’ option that brings up a list of all ‘V’ users (see Figure 4.2). A third way to check user status was to look at the symbol after the name, but the symbols were a mix of identified and non-identified users. In this case, the second option – clicking the identified user option – was sufficient for gathering the required data.



**Figure 2 Finding identified users (VIP = VIP for person + VIP for organization)**

The non-identified category included casual users and those with Weibo Got Talent status (see Figure 4.3). The latter were individual Weibo activists: they must be non-VIP; they must use a genuine photo and no pseudonym; the account name should connect with the user’s phone number; and they must have at least 100 followers and more than 30 r-followers. Those achieving this status could earn privileges depending on the number of Weibo Got Talent credits they have. These were earned according to the number of pictures and messages they posted, how many discussions they participated in, the time they spent on Weibo and the number of posts they forwarded or comments they made. The more credits they accrued, the more privileges they had – Weibo would give

them more information about other users who lived in the same city or who had the same habits.



**Figure 3 Finding non-identified users (non-identified users = casual users + Weibo Got Talent activists)**

#### ***4.234 Variable four- types of contributions***

The type of contribution was one of important index of the coding frame in this research, with the variable representing the different technical ways to contribute by users. The importance of measuring the different types of contributions on the ground that it could help further investigate importance of measuring the different types of contributions was on the ground that it could help further investigate the relationship between the nature of online political discourse and online statuses. It was initially intended to code for four types of contributions: comment, comment on comment, forward/repost and combined repost/comment (see Figure 4.4). In this design, it would help investigate types of contributions did by different types of users [in HK and China] make on Weibo regarding the HK Chief Executive Election, then prepare to answer with regards to the functional questions:

- What did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users?
- Why did they participate in Weibo discussions on the HKCE Election?

- What evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election?

A repost is when a user forwards and shares a post originally generated by another author, with or without adding his or her own content. In a comment, a user might express their own view or enter a discussion with other followers who have also commented. The comment on comment type of contribution could be viewed by clicking on the *dialogue* button, which showed what the user had discussed, when and with whom (see Figure 4.5). The combined repost/comment variable was ultimately abandoned, because of the difficulty of identifying such messages. For instance, if users deleted the symbol ‘//’ when forwarding, the message might be misinterpreted as a comment.



Figure 4.4: Identifying the four types of contribution ↵



Figure 4.5: Identifying 'comment on comment' messages ↵

Figure 4 Identifying 'comment on comment' messages

### **4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Qualitative approach allows the examination of individual consumer messages (McNair, 2007), a way to investigate detailed descriptions of context, activity, individuals, interactions, direct quotations from individuals' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs (Patton, 1990). This section sets out the research aims and questions before discussing how critical discourse analysis and verbal irony procedure were employed in the study. Then it planned to outline the nature, development and principles of these two methods. The output of critical discourse analysis and verbal irony procedure would combine with two other relevant data of methods to reveal the characters of political discourses demonstrated upon 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election.

#### **4.3.1 Research Functional Questions**

In order to explore what the extent and nature of political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the HK Chief Executive Election, and to what extent and in what ways censorship shaped political participation and deliberation, content analysis provided a quantitative output, and CDA was employed to analyze the discussion orientations and ideology expressions of Weibo users.

- What did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users?
- Why did they participate in Weibo discussions on the HKCE Election?
- What evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election?
- What role did participants say censorship played in the extent and nature of the participation in Weibo discussions on the election?

#### **4.32 Rationale of Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

The core traditions of discourse analysis – critical and post-structural – were appropriate (Jackson, 2005) for the research. Critical discourse analysis was applied in this study to make sense of the link between discursive practice and Hong Kong Chief Executive Election's complex social and cultural developments and structures. It seeks in the first place to examine the way that language is used for particular purposes. Being 'critical' in discourse analysis refers to the evaluation of structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control in the text. Verbal Irony Principle was added later in the process of analyzing discourse by CDA.

As Critical Discourse Analysis is concerned with examining how discursive sources are reproduced within specific cultural, political and social contexts, it has also been called 'socio-political discourse analysis' (van Dijk, 1993). However, CDA is more focused on examining the links between discourse structures and power structures. The fact that it is 'critical' implies that it goes beyond descriptive analysis to uncover the hidden determinants of the power in discourse (Fairclough, 1989: 5). It provides crucial theoretical and methodological impetus to examine language from a closer integration with new developments. After the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, the political dimension of transition in Hong Kong was indicated in various ways through discursive means. CDA differs from other forms of discourse analysis in that it is an explicit sociopolitical stance, which exists within both levels of microstructure and macrostructure of context (van Dijk, 1993). CDA could be used to demonstrate a view for better understanding how public discourses highlighted in some respects of the practise of Hong Kong case context

and what particular purposes the way of language was used upon Hong Kong election. The critique of discourse implies a political critique of “those responsible for its perversion in the reproduction of dominance and inequality” (van Dijk, 1993: 252); such a critique should concentrate on groups and be based on the general and structural rather than the individual or incidental.

#### **4.33 The Development of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Fairclough (1993:135) defines CDA as:

Discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony.

The underlying principles of CDA were firstly developed by a group of linguists and literary theorists (Trew, 1979a; Fowler et al., 1979; Kress & Hodge, 1979) studying critical linguistics (CL) in the late 1970s (Sheyholislami, 2001). CDA emerged in its own right in the late 1980s, spearheaded by Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk and others (Sheyholislami, 2001). According to CDA’s practitioners (Hodge & Kress, 1979; Fowler, 1991; Fowler et al., 1979; Fairclough, 1989; 1992; 1993; 1995a; 1995b; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999), language is a ‘social act’, there is a link between social and linguistic structure, and vocabulary and grammar choices are determined by the ideological stance of the speaker.

Numerous researches that went on within CDA ranged diversely from the engagements of social theory (Lemke, 1995; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) to direct political interventions. Major contributors to the enhancement of CDA include Wodak (1995; 1996; 1999), van Dijk (1988; 1991; 1993; 1995; 1998a; 1998b) and Fairclough (1989; 1992; 1993; 1995a; 1995b; 1999). This study follows van Dijk's (1993) principles of critical discourse analysis, outlined below, to analyse the orientation and ideology expressed by Weibo users during the HK Chief Executive election. Van Dijk is the most frequently referenced practitioner of CDA (Sheyholislami, 2001). He sought to arrive at a thorough analysis, which both highlighted the textual and structural dimensions of discourse and extending to productions and receptions or comprehension level (Boyd-Barrett, 1994).

Another complication addressed by van Dijk (1995: 30) was the relationship of macro and micro in sociology and examining the relations between society, discourse and social cognition. Ideology analysis played a central role for van Dijk: "Ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs and movies" (1995:17). Cognitive analysis is what distinguishes van Dijk's CDA from that of other authors. Fairclough focused on *text*, *discourse practice* and *sociocultural practice*, which are consistent with the three levels of ideology analysis put forward by van Dijk. Although Fairclough (199b: 59) criticized Dijk's focus on the second dimension, *discourse practices* and the way to mediate between discourse and the social rather than *sociocognition*, their two approaches were similar in conception. In terms of social cognition, it could be understood that the

process of mind management for exercising the power which resulted in accessing the public mind: “Discourse, communication, and (other) forms of action and interaction are monitored by social cognition.... which involve the influence of knowledge, beliefs, understanding, plans, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values” (van Dijk, 1989a; 1993: 257).

#### **4.34 Application of Critical Discourse Analysis**

After content analysis was conducted, Weibo users with a range of online status selected the CDA sampling through the output of topical categories. The specific CDA techniques used in this study through lexicality and modality are based on a Chinese traditional and cultural context. The central aim of van Dijk’s (1993: 258) CDA was to give: “A detailed description, explanation and critique of the ways dominant discourses (indirectly) influence such socially shared knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, namely through their role in the manufacture of concrete models”. There was necessary to concrete the principle drawn from Dijk (1993): to operate in the orientation of sentiments, attitude, perspectives, and ideology as expressed by Weibo users in different geophysical locations and with a range of Weibo status.

The application adopted in this research is:

Firstly, *access*. According to Dijk (1993; 1998b: 61-63), access is justifying or legitimating the reproduction of dominance: it was “just” “necessary” or “natural” that *we* had privileged access to a valuable social resource. ‘Access’ is significant in this study on the grounds of social change occurring in Hong Kong since 1997 handover. As their ideology and ideological processes are revealed (Trew, 1979a), ‘access’ helps to illuminate the explicit and implicit sociopolitical stance of these discursive sources of power. So, the first step was to examine the context of the

discourse, for instance, when coding ‘one country, two systems’, the ‘access’ in this research would reveal from exploring the text background of ‘one country, two systems’ in a micro way, then examining the historical, political or social background of a conflict between Hong Kong and Mainland China that related to ‘one country, two systems’ in macro way, or its main participants like Hong Kong citizens who have right to vote their leaders, and the citizens in Mainland who do not have the right to vote the leaders.

Secondly, *social inequality*. Social inequality may be defined as an ‘abuse’ of power. Both power and dominance confer privileged access to discourse and communication. Van Dijk (1993: 258) regarded power as giving its holders control over both action and cognition; in other words, a powerful group might not only minimize others’ freedom of action, they might also aim to affect their minds. In this research, social inequality could reveal from two power structure analyses, firstly, the relationship between the speaker and Weibo users who might read the content, secondly, the relationship between the speaker and the authority, the authority refers to either the Hong Kong government, or the Chinese government, or the online censorship. The Chinese government applied serious online censorship, and the language used in this context was implicit, and so the second step was to analyze groups, power relations and the conflicts involved, and to identify positive and negative opinions – for instance, by demonstrating ‘our’ tolerance, help or sympathy, or by emphasizing on “negative social or cultural differences, deviance or threats attributed to ‘them’” (ibid.). The nature of ironic expressions are best exemplified to demonstrate the social inequality in Chinese power relations, especially when speakers considering online censorship who keeps an eye on their content, they are still looking forward opportunities

to express, this study would explore the features of these expressions by CDA and then investigated the reasons behind why citizens prefer such expressions by interviews.

Thirdly, *structure*. According to Van Dijk (1993; 1998b: 61-63), examining the properties of the text itself – “all formal lexical choices and syntactic structure – in a way that helps to (de) emphasize polarized group opinions”. In terms of Chinese language use, the pun, or the terms approvingly used derogatory are frequently employed to demonstrate their feeling, meaning, and emotions. So the next step is to analyze topics, local meanings, style and specific rhetorical figures, such as hyperbole or metaphors, or irony.

Fourth, *conclusion*. Making explicit the presupposed and the implied. CDA applied in this research is based on the online netizens’ political discourse with a focus on discursive strategies and rhetorical patterns that embody potential ideological meaning. However, over time, two major concerns were raised: that CDA focuses on the analyst’s understanding and interpretation, rather than those of the intended reader/listener, and that researchers were concentrating on textual analysis when this analysis should be intertextual in scope (Sheyholislami, 2001). Fairclough (1995b) argued that the majority of CDA analysis assumes that the reader has the same understanding as the analyst, and thus ignores the interpretive practices of audiences. The current study seeks to address this by prioritizing Weibo users’ interpretations and evaluations over the researcher’s presuppositions. Therefore, some samples of Weibo users’ posts were selected randomly and then asked the interviewees’ specific perspectives, understanding, and evaluation for these discourse. The researcher would gather the responses.

Finally, van Dijk (1993: 270) highlighted that CDA for the exercising of dominance and provided clear and explicit evidence that “is not – and cannot be – neutral”; the point of CDA is to take a position. Additionally, based on frameworks outlined by CDA practitioners (Fairclough, 1995a; Kress, 1991; Hodge & Kress, 1993; van Dijk, 1993, 1998a; Wodak, 1996) and multimodal critical discourse analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006; Machin and Van Leeuwen, 2007; David Machin, 2014), this research would adopt their empirical intentions. CDA calls for a dialectical relationship between writer and reader, through conscious or unconscious interpretations/evaluations and explanations, as well as a need to “examine the role of social representations in the minds of social actors”. So this part of analysis would accompany the interviews, which examined how interviewees understood and commented on others’ discussions, whilst exploring how the interviewees’ comprehensions of discourse orientations, implications, and intended evaluations under the nature of social power and dominance.

The critical aspect is to put ‘taken-for-granted knowledge’ into questions. The term ‘critical’ is itself opaque. CDA was the toughest challenge by far in the discipline because: 1) the requirement of multidisciplinary; 2) the complexity of text, social cognition, power, society and culture (van Dijk, 1993: 253); 3) an intricate relationship and balanced use of observation, description and explanation (Fairclough, 1985). Measuring the success of CDA depends on the effectiveness and relevance (van Dijk, 1993: 253). Van Dijk not only asserted that there was no need to worry about the interests of persons in power, but also criticized that some may even cynically and directly collude with dominance, thus leading to the mixing scholarship with ‘politics’.

In terms of ideology analysis in the Chinese context, the discussions of ideology have been neglected in English literature *vis-a-vis* contemporary China studies (Zeng, 2015). Marxism, Mao's thoughts, Deng's Theories, Jiang's Three Represents and Hu's Harmonious Society are five major ideologies in China, with Marxism predominant. Socialist Core Value System<sup>11</sup> is a new popular proposition to strengthen the attractiveness and cohesiveness of socialist ideology (Zeng, 2015). Zeng maintained the new system as ideological adaptation, and this research on political discourse is concerned with this form of adaptation. Thus, the Socialist Core Value System will be used in this ideological analysis.

While evaluating the rhetorical patterns in the process of critical discourse analysis, the researcher figured out rhetorical expressions, especially irony through reviewing literatures (Zhang and Shoemaker, 2013; Czubaroff, 2011; Wen, 2013; Langford, 2013; Bitzer, 2009; Varnali and Gorgulu, 2014; Alon, Brunel and Fournier, 2013). In the following, Verbal Irony Procedure as put forward by Burger (2011) was employed to further analyze irony expressions upon numerous topical discussions.

Given the picture that is presented in the literature of political discourse in the Chinese Internet and media, it was reasonable to include it as a potential feature of online political discussion in this case study. Resonating with the discovery of Tong (2009) and Reyes, Rosso and Veale's (2012) pervades online-communications, irony is on the increase as a way of reducing the political danger whereby the speaker's interests conflict with those of the authorities. The reason to employ Burger's VIP

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<sup>11</sup> Socialist Core Value System (*Shehui zhuyi hexin jiazhi tixi*), Jinghan Zeng, (2015) *The Chinese Communist Party's capacity to Rule: Ideology, Legitimacy and Party cohesion*. Long: palgrave.

on the ground of, it is the first systematic method for identifying irony in natural discourse; it helps other coders who disagree on some more complex cases that were marked as irony by explicating steps in procedure to explain why the utterances were identified as ironic while the others were not. Accordingly, that is why the research used specific technique-Burger's Verbal Irony Procedure (VIP) (2011) to evaluate how did the political discourse employed rhetorical expressions revealed in different topics discussions, especially the use of irony among Weibo users in the case study. Again, it is important to demonstrate here this research aims to employ Burger's VIP to merge critical discourse analysis as an innovative methodology, in order to reveal the complexity of Chinese citizens political online discourse on social media.

While Twitter users can highlight comments as ironic by using the #irony hashtag, users of Weibo rarely self-annotate in this way. Since it can be expressed via numerous forms, identifying self-annotation is one of the biggest challenges in irony research. Eisterhold, Attardo and Boxer (2006) took the standard definition of irony (i.e. saying the opposite of what you mean) and employed an outsider to judge whether the sample utterances they had collected were ironic (though Eisterhold does not mention the specific criteria used). Grice (1978) and Kotthoff (2003) suggest that evaluation is the main way to identify ironic utterances, while Kohvakka (1996: 189) maintained a different perception - pattern deviation by argument theory to identify irony, which referred to "utterances as ironic when they do not support the conclusion of a text, instead, when these words or utterances only support the conclusion when they are ironically interpreted". However, this method was unable to clarify the extent of the deviation. Majority researches concentrated on clarifying distinctions between irony utterances – for instance, hyperbole, jocularly, and

understatement could be recognized as subcategories of irony (Gibbs, 2000), whereas they have been seen as being necessarily ironic (Pexman and Gill, 2009). Some researchers detect irony when the utterance is followed by laughter (Partington, 2007; Pelsmaekers & van Besien, 2002), though this obviously only applies to audio recordings. Moreover, not all humorous utterances are ironic (Gibbs, 2000; Burger, 2011). Carvalho et al. (2009) claim that emoticons, onomatopoeic expressions and special punctuation and quotation marks may be indicators of irony, while Veale and Hao (2010) suggest that figurative comparisons may give clues. Burger et al. (2011) follow Attardo (2000a) in asserting that *irony factors* and *irony markers* can be the first step to identifying various verbal ironies utterances.

Its operational definition could be “an utterance with a literal evaluation that is implicitly contrary to its intended evaluation” (Burger, 2011: 202). Drawing together the various definitions of irony, Burger (2011) concluded that: 1) they are all evaluative; 2) they all assume the ironic utterance is incongruent with the context; 3) they all assume a reversal of valence between the literal and intended meaning; 4) they all assume the utterance is aimed at some target; and 5) they all relate to the communicative situation in some way. Thus, he defined irony as: “An utterance with a literal evaluation that is implicitly contrary to its intended evaluation” (Burger, 2011: 190). This definition is also supported by Kawakami (1998) and Partington (2007), who say that irony could be understood as “an implicature with a reversal of evaluation”. Burger’s definition has the advantage of being able to deal with implicit examples of irony, making it suitable for this case study. His verbal irony procedure (VIP) has four stages, which is to be employed in this research.

The sampling of irony analysis would be selected through identification in the process of critical discourse analysis, in order to demonstrate the nature of ironic political discourse addressed by Weibo users with a range of online statuses. And then the output of VIP would be revealed by combination of three sets of data in the findings. To explain the principle of VIP (Burger, Mulken and Schellens, 2011), it used ‘I love people who signal’ as an example to demonstrate each step as follows:

Firstly, *read the entire text* and make sense of the specific stance the author of the text has taken. For instance, the discourse maker of ‘I love people who signal’ is a passenger, the discourse target is about a driver.

Secondly, *Description or evaluation?* Re-read individual paragraphs of the text and examine different utterances. Each utterance should be judged on whether it is descriptive, evaluative, or descriptive with connotations of evaluation. Only the first group (purely descriptive) may be exclusively considered as ironic. For instance, an utterance is evaluative because in the context of ‘I love people who signal’ where a driver is criticized by a passenger for turning without signaling.

Thirdly, *Does the literal evaluation fit the context?* VIP could help identify something implicit in the evaluation, so the researcher should determine what the evaluation is. Burgers highlighted that it was significant to reveal the literal evaluation explicitly to judge whether it fits to the co-text. For instance, the literal evaluation did not fit the context of ‘I love people who signal’, because the literal interpretation of the utterance gives a positive evaluation about signaling, so it has an ironic potential.

Fourthly, *Could the literal evaluation be contrasted with a contrary intended evaluation about the same object?* If the literal evaluation does not fit the context, the utterance may be ironic, so it will be necessary to construct a scale of evaluation; if the utterance is evaluative, this scale can be constructed using certain terms from the utterance. If the utterance has an evaluative connotation, it will again be necessary to design a scale of evaluation. The scale should cover both positive and negative domains and the literal evaluation should be placed in one or the other domain. Both the literal and the intended evaluations should refer to the same object. If it is plausible to locate the intended evaluation in the opposite domain to the literal evaluation, the utterance is ironic. For instance, in the context of ‘I love people who signal’; however, given the absence of the signalling person in the discourse situation, the intended evaluation can only be interpreted as a negative evaluation of the driver.

Based on principles above, Burger’s VIP was applied to rhetorical patterns of critical discourse analysis in order to investigate the ironic utterances collected in this study. So that answer what did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users? And what evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election? Based on the results of reliability analysis of VIP conducted by Burger, Mulken and Schellens (2011), two coders agreed on 97.3% of the total corpus (1,152 utterances), and it showed that good reliability and VIP scores could reliably help identify irony. However, there are various forms and shapes of irony (Gibbs, 2000), including ironic metaphors, ironic hyperboles, ironic understatements and ironic rhetorical questions (Burger, Mulken and Schellens, 2011: 202). VIP helps to demonstrate and clarify ironic and non-ironic forms of rhetorical speech, whether explicit or implicit to the

verbal utterance. In the following, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the perspective and ideas that motivated the participants during the political discussion in 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election, as well as what role participants say censorship played in the nature of the participation in Weibo discussions.

An example might be helpful to explain how to apply critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Verbal Irony Principle (VIP) in this research.

*Civic Governor Leung!*

Example 6.12: Weibo Got Talent activist Q's forwarding post

[1] *Civic Governor Leung!*

In this post, I interpret the word 'Civic Governor' as local officials (*gong wu yuan*) on the mainland, based on Van Dijk's definition of 'access' to reveal the basic text background. Local officials (*gong wu yuan*) on the mainland are given the title of Civic Governor or Secretary of the Municipal Party Committee. Although this post consists of just three words (according to the third step of the application of CDA 'structure' and the first step of VIP, 'read the entire text'), there is still a space to further explore, it is then decided according to the second step of VIP (*description or evaluation?*), as [1] is an implicit evaluation and literal positive, which suggests it is complex enough to require an evaluation scale. I expand the evaluation by looking at Chinese political structure, power and dominance, and how these construct the conflict in this discourse through Van Dijk's suggestion of 'social inequality' (the second step of CDA). Hence, this discourse is evaluated as suggesting that 'Chinese politics pays careful attention to official titles, as Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region (SAR), Mr. Leung's official title should be Chief Executive of SAR Leung, not 'Civic Governor'.' Then, according to the third step of VIP (*Does the literal evaluation fit the context?*), it then

analyzes the user's implication: the user literally congratulates Mr. Leung on his success, but these congratulations involve a double meaning as they address him as the Secretary of the Municipal Party Committee rather than the Chief Executive. Finally, according to Van Dijk's last step, '*conclusion,*' and Burger's VIP final step, '*Could the literal evaluation be contrasted with a contrary intended evaluation about the same object?*', this post suggests the following conclusion: By calling him Civic Governor Leung, this contributor R is implying that Hong Kong will not retain its capitalist system under Mr. Leung's leadership. Thus, it is rhetorical and ironic because the literal meaning hides critiques and needs to be evaluated for its intentions. Its sarcasm is directed towards the CCP, Mr. Leung, and the one country, two systems policy. Again, it is important to demonstrate in this research that employing Burger's VIP to merge Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis is an innovative methodology to reveal the complexity of Chinese citizens' political online discourse on social media.

#### **4.4 Interview**

This section outlines the steps involved in preparing, conducting and analysing the qualitative semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996). It aims to show: 1) why the semi-structured, in-depth interview instrument was adopted; 2) how the research purpose, interviewee samples and interview functional questions were conceptualized; 3) what the practical procedures of the interviews, and 4) the conceptual approach for analysing the interview data.

##### **4.4.1 In-depth Semi-structured Interview**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were selected as the most appropriate method to answer the functional question. It is a qualitative method that

enables not only the collating of sufficient useful, relevant and important messages (Brennen, 2013:26), but also for accessing participants' stories. As Mears states: "Storytelling and story-hearing offer a meeting ground for deepened connection, clearer understanding, and mutual learning" (2009:14). Brennen (2013) sees respondents as significant meaning-makers rather than "passive conduits for retrieving information" (Warren, 2002:83), while according to Seidman (2006), interviewees prefer to choose details of their lived memories when telling their stories, and these experiences derive from their "stream of consciousness". For instance, memories of both Hong Kong and mainland netizens can be intersected according to the social, cultural or political dynamics in Hong Kong. According to Mears: "Uncovering insights from the impacts of a situation, or a program, or a policy as revealed in human terms and then communicating them in ways that could be used by the people who created the situations, or design the programs, or write the policies" (2009:16) – interviews enable the researcher to cross the boundaries of understanding that can divide interviewer and interviewee.

The semi-structured approach allows the researcher to vary the order of questions and to "delve more deeply into some of the topics or issues addressed" (Brennen, 2013: 28) and to gain insight into respondent's political views. Through guided conversation, the interviewer can explore interviewees' feelings, emotions, experiences and values within their "deeply nuanced inner worlds" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002a: 57). In this case, the interviews explored how the respondents discussed the election via Weibo, why they contributed to the discussion in specific ways, their attitudes towards political discourse and Weibo, what they thought of China's online censorship, and their understanding of the concept of digital democracy.

#### **4.42 Sampling Criteria**

Following content analysis of Weibo discussion posts before, during and after the election, 24 participants were selected to represent a cross-section of Weibo users. Interviewees were selected according to:

1. Weibo users who used Weibo to a minimum degree in relation to the political discussions during the 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election. The minimum refers to the basic Sina Weibo official requirement when applying to the four Weibo online statuses.
2. Their Weibo user status should be either VIP, Weibo's Got Talent activist or casual user. The sample for each status was selected randomly, and this research did not measure whether or not all the VIP are in the same weight. The question whether the sample of VIPs in the interviews could represent the weight of all VIPs was excluded as the research focused on the effect of VIP, and the reciprocal effects between VIP and their followers.
3. Their geographical location from either Hong Kong or mainland-China. In terms of the socio-demographic profile: men and women, and there is also no age criteria. Based on the research aims and PhD study time limit, it could only focus on citizens from Hong Kong and mainland in general, but a post-doc study would consider other demographic profiles.

The final interview sample comprised eight VIPs, eight casual users and eight Weibo Got Talent activists. Within each group, four came from Hong Kong and four from Mainland China. The reason why the sample chose equally rather than according to the proportion of the population of each groups circulated in content analysis. The rationale of samples chosen was because there was a considerable discrepancy between the population in Hong Kong and mainland users via Weibo. The most

important was, it made it possible to compare and contrast the responses from these two users groups with sufficient information.

Table as below has presented the demographic features of interviewees in this research:

Interview Number	Weibo Status	Geographical Location	Gender	Age	Education Background	Job
MCU1	Casual	Mainland	F	20	Bachelor	Student
MCU2	Casual	Mainland	F	20	Bachelor	Student
MCU3	Casual	Mainland	M	30	Master	Banker
MCU4	Casual	Mainland	M	27	Bachelor	Teacher
HCU1	Casual	HK	F	19	Bachelor	Student
HCU2	Casual	HK	M	24	Bachelor	Student
HCU3	Casual	HK	F	26	Master	Business
HCU4	Casual	HK	M	25	Bachelor	Student
MVU1	VIP	Mainland	M	24	Bachelor	Business
MVU2	VIP	Mainland	M	32	High school	Officer
MVU3	VIP	Mainland	M	31	Bachelor	Journalist
MVU4	VIP	Mainland	F	26	PhD	Lecturer
HVU1	VIP	HK	M	30	Bachelor	Journalist
HVU2	VIP	HK	M	31	Master	CEO
HVU3	VIP	HK	F	26	Master	Host
HVU4	VIP	HK	F	33	Master	Editor
MWU1	WGT	Mainland	F	23	Bachelor	Student
MWU2	WGT	Mainland	F	26	Bachelor	Student
MWU3	WGT	Mainland	M	33	Bachelor	Data Analyst
MWU4	WGT	Mainland	M	21	Bachelor	Student
HWU1	WGT	HK	F	20	Bachelor	Student
HWU2	WGT	HK	F	20	Bachelor	Student
HWU3	WGT	HK	F	23	Bachelor	Student
HWU4	WGT	HK	M	20	Bachelor	Student

#### 4.43 Interview Procedure

Initial attempts to contact the Sina Weibo gatekeeper were unsuccessful. Prospective interviewees were emailed via their Weibo account and interviews were conducted via Facetime or Skype and audio recorded. Each interview took 25-30 minutes, and all participants remained anonymous. Interviews were transcribed first into Chinese and

subsequently translated into English for analysis. Interviewees were sent summaries and asked for comments, but full transcripts were not sent unless requested. NVivo 10.0 was used to organize the collected data by themes, interviewee status and location.

To carry out the interviews, a necessary procedure was to ask interviewees to sign information sheets and consent forms at the beginning of the interview so as to avert any potential ethical issues. In order to protect the interviewees “from physical and emotional harm”, it was important to explain at the beginning of each interview what the research study was about and how their interview material was to be used (Brennen, 2013: 29). Respondents were also reminded that they could refuse to answer any question. Interviewers should be neutral but not too dispassionate: “Interviewers should restrict themselves to asking questions to elicit the stance, opinion or account of the one being questioned, but do so (at least technically) without bias, standpoint or prejudice” (Greatbatch, 1998). Listening is the core skill in qualitative interviewing (Brennen, 2013); questioning must be flexible enough to allow the researcher to follow up on participants’ answers and knowledge. Qualitative interviews should not yield simple yes-or-no answers; meaning is garnered from the actual details. When interviewees gave generalized answers, they were asked to be more specific or to give concrete examples to help explain what was meant. The aim was not to show off the researcher’s knowledge but to encourage (without pushing) the interviewees to describe their feelings and experiences.

#### **4.44 Interview Functional Questions**

Mears (2009) argues that in order to construct meaning, the researcher must have a solid understanding of the relevant concepts and theories. The

background, literature and theories reviewed in Chapters One to Three provide this understanding and give insight into what Mears (2009:80) called: “the key factors, constructs or variables and the presumed relationships among them”. At the beginning of each group of functional questions, the purpose was accordingly explained to the interviewee. Brennen (2013: 32) suggests that this helps respondents to see the relevance of the topic in order to spark an in-depth discussion. The design of the interview was intended to answer the main functional questions. A series of basic questions were initially put to respondents in order to help interviewees ‘open up’ and to feel more relaxed and comfortable. They explored in broad terms how the interviewees used social media for political communication, how they thought Weibo differs from other social media, and what specific political issues they were interested in when using social media. Then it explored when respondents had used Weibo (before, during or after the election) and why, as well as the political aims and expectations at different points during the election. The third round of questions investigated the extent of Weibo users’ political participation, what the interviewees saw as the differences between different types of contributions, which was their preferred type of contribution and why. In an addition, the following round of questions aimed to examine the interviewee’s personal opinions about the relationship between user status and opinion dissemination through Weibo. Van Dijk (1993: 250-252) argues that researchers need to “examine the role of social representations in the minds of social actors”. Combining the principles of van Dijk and Fairclough, this following section aimed to: 1) examine how interviewees understood and commented on others’ messages, and to explore how the interviewees’ comprehensions of discourse orientations, implications, intended evaluations under the nature of social power and dominance; and 2) explore how interviewees

expressed themselves online, why they expressed themselves in this way, and whether they thought their contributions were affected by their user status or geographical location. The sixth section explores the relationship between the nature of political discourse on Weibo and censorship, whether users practiced self-censorship and whether they were aware of any social or political boundaries. It also explores whether or not they supported Chinese online censorship and why. Then it examined the extent to which interviewees were interested in specific topics. The topics were identified following content analysis of the preliminary findings. The questions explored how and why interviewees participated in these topic discussions. Finally, The questions examined what the interviewees understood the concept of digital democracy to be, based on their own online experiences and practices, and whether they saw the Weibo election discussions as an example of digital democracy. During the final part of the interview, the questions were more flexible and open-ended.

Eisner (1998: 28) argues that interview frameworks are guided by themes, and “what we experience is shaped by that framework. Thus, the questions we ask, the categories we explore, the theories we use, all guide our inquiry...Language shapes, focuses, and directs our attention...”. The framework here was guided by the research questions in order to make sense of the in-depth information and individual insights. To this end, eight rounds of questions were designed in advance, although where new topics or thematic areas arose in the course of the interviews, these were noted down and used to formulate follow-up questions.

The interview questions were originally drafted in English, but it was occasionally necessary to express them slightly differently in Mandarin and Cantonese so as to take account of the Chinese cultural context. For

instance, Q24: ‘Have you ever been censored on Weibo? If yes, how do you feel about that? If not, why do you think this is?’ was rephrased as: ‘Have your posts on Weibo ever been deleted?’ Or: ‘Has your Weibo account ever been blocked?’ This helped netizens to make sense of the research questions in an informal fashion. The decision was also made that interviewees who were puzzled by Q10 and 11 (their expectations of Weibo) would be given more time to think about their answers, and that they would be asked more specific questions such as: ‘What sort of political information did you like to read and follow at each stage of the election?’ some other questions would be asked like How do you like to contribute to the discussion and why do you suppose they prefer to do it this way? (Give the interviewee some examples of topics.) Or do you prefer to express yourself explicitly on Weibo? Do you use irony when participating in political debate? Do you think there is any difference to post these orientation comments when you are a VIP or casual? (Do you think it is easier (or more difficult) for VIP users to post comments than casual users? Or...do you think VIP users’ comments are received differently from casual users’ comments?). Lastly, the full list of questions was provided in an appendix.

#### **4.45 Analyzing the Interview Data**

When all the interview information had been transcribed, the researcher worked with NVivo to check understanding, identify insights and outline the key concepts, themes, opinions and patterns. According to Brennen (2013: 37), the researcher should seek to assess each interview in such a way specifically for advice so as to “enrich an aspect of our understanding of the relationship between media and society”. The theoretical framework gives contextual guidance, for as Gubrium and Holstein (2002a: 673) explain: “Each theoretical perspective implicates a set of procedures or

ways of organizing, categorizing, and interpreting data. There is no single approach to qualitative analysis.” The interview data was conceptualized following mix-methods (e.g. combined CDA) rather than a thematic analysis of interview data. The output of interview, was combined with relevant data of content analysis and critical discourse analysis, thereby addressing the main findings in the study.

To simply summarize and synthesize the gathered information was to risk losing “the intricacies and nuances of understanding by negating the authority of the voice” (Mears, 2009: 122). NVivo helped the researcher to create an excerpted narrative to tell the story; according to Seidman (Mears, 2009: 122), using excerpted quotations displayed in paragraph form enables the researcher “to preserve the meaning and reflect the personhood of the speaker”. However, it is also necessary to give the “contextual frame of reference from which the interview quotations are interpreted” (Brennen, 2013: 38). This contextual knowledge also helps the researcher to see the significance of the information.

#### **4.5 Summary**

The research methodology determined how data was accessed and collected, and how it was analyzed with regards to the choice of epistemology. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods increased the chances that the study would adequately answer the intended research questions:

1. What is the extent and nature of political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the HK Chief Executive Election?

2. To what extent and in what ways does censorship shape political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the HK Chief Executive Election?
3. What role does Weibo playing as for citizens' political participation and deliberation regarding the HK Chief Executive Election?

The adopted approach was selected on the grounds for allowing the researcher to access and analyze the data from different angles – for instance, the combination of data from content analysis, critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews highlighted the findings from quantitative sources giving insights in turn to the qualitative perspective. The order in which the methods were applied, and how they were linked together, was essential as well to the critical strategy. Therefore, the dimensions considered in the study included:

1. the social behaviours in which online contributions were made
2. the orientation of expressions addressed
3. the lexical agency and rhetorical patterns of political discourse
4. and users' motivations, or perspectives for postings by Weibo users with different online statuses in [Hong Kong and mainland China.

The nature of Hong Kong Chief Executive Election in 2012 had a distinctive characteristic and made it possible to compare and contrast the political discussions, political discourses addressed by Hong Kong and mainland users. There are naturally some limitations of methodology in this study because of the working nature of a doctoral stage – the data was coded manually and the themes were identified by one person, and discussed with supervisors.

The following three chapters addressed three main dimensions of discussion this research aims to concentrate, the chapter five plan to focus on the Weibo users who are participated in political discussions regarding 2012 HKCE Election, Chapter six encountered the content of such political discussions and chapter seven shed light on the political efficacy of such political discussion via Weibo in this case of 2012 HKCE Election. The three chapters draws on three sets of data – gathered from content analysis, critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews – to present results in order to answer what the extent and nature of political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the 2012 HKCE Election is, and what extent and in what ways the censorship shaped political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the 2012 HKCE Election.

## **Chapter Five: Weibo Users: Identity, Contributions and**

### **Rationale**

In this chapter of finding, the output would present with three parts, the first part concentrated on the content analysis output of different types of contributions made by different types of users [in HK and China] make on Weibo regarding the 2012 HKCE Election, especially focused on answering who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election. The second part shed light on interview analysis associating with the output of content analysis upon the same question but concentrate on a qualitative insight. The third part aimed to discuss the relationship between the users' status and their political participation in Chinese context.

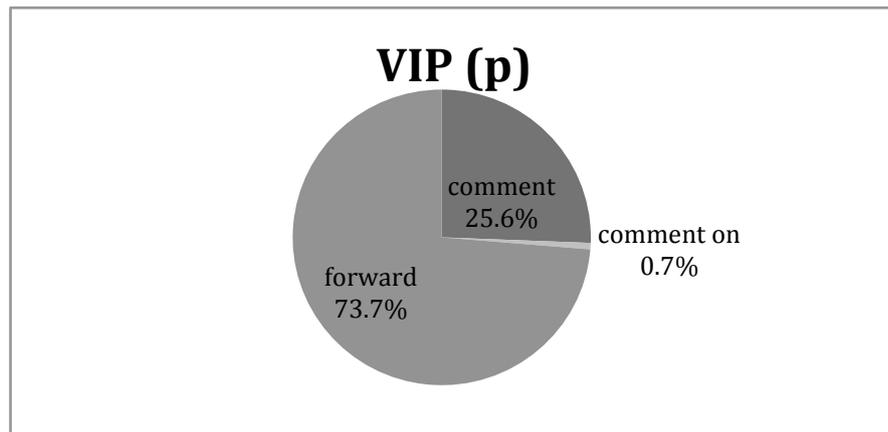
### **5.1 Content Analysis Results**

To answer who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election and what forms did they contribute, it started to represent from a big picture from content analysis on types of contributions were made by Weibo users in different geographical locations. In general, the total contributions made by the four user groups across the three time periods is: The VIP (person) group made a total of 3003 forwarding posts, the VIP (organization) group made 71, Weibo Got Talent members made 3824 and casual users made 8530. There were far fewer comments on comments, with the four user groups making 28, 0, 175 and 519 contributions respectively. They left more original comments, however, posting 1045, 13, 1851 and 3112 respectively. Surprisingly, the VIP (organization) group made no comments on comments. The biggest gap was that between the number of comments on comments left by the VIP (organization) group (0) and the number of forwarding posts contributed

by casual users (8530). The big differences suggest that there was a relationship between Weibo netizens' online statuses and contributing behaved habits.

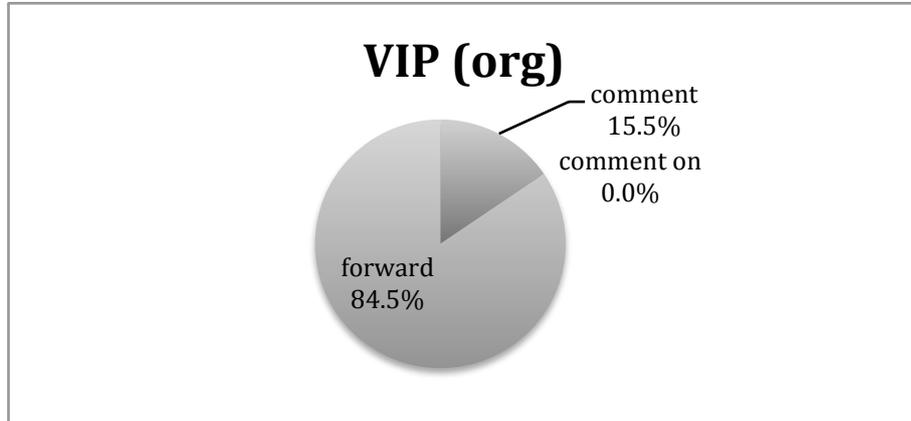
This result drew first on the data of the content analysis: Figure 5 to Figure 8 summarized the types of contribution made by the four user groups in the sample, while Figure 9 to Figure 11 summarized those made by users in different locations. The first key data result was that by far the most popular type of contribution among all user groups was the forwarding post (see Figure 5):

**Figure 5 Ratio of contributions made by VIP of person (VIP (p))**



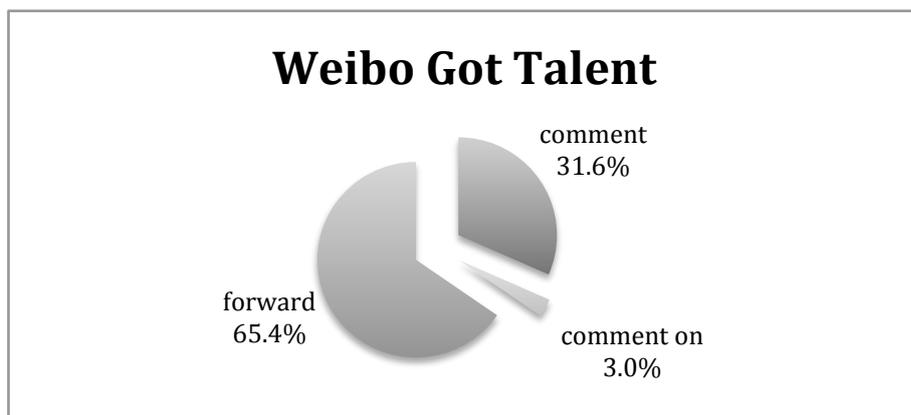
In general, VIP (p) users contributed almost three times as many forwarding posts as comment and comment on posts combined; they less preferred commenting on comment in order to incorporate with a more interactive conversation that responded to other online content by users.

**Figure 6 Ratio of contributions made by VIP of organization (VIP (org))**



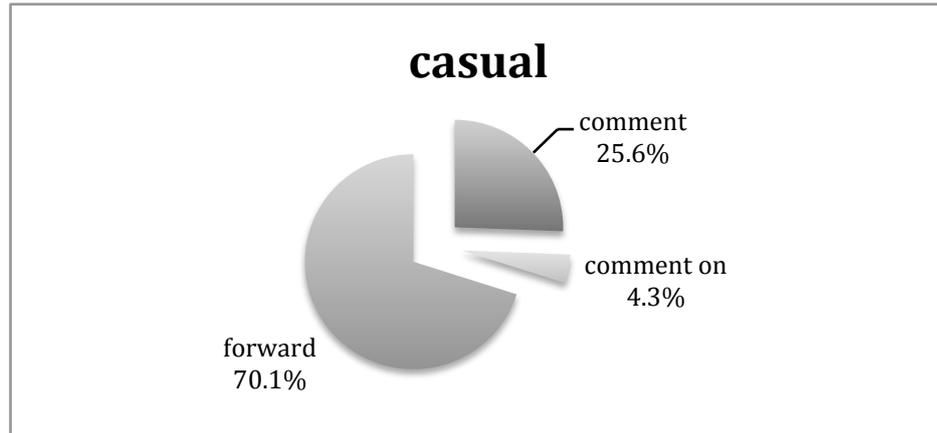
VIP (org) users contributed six times as many forwarding posts as comment and comment on posts combined. Comparing with VIP (p)'s that mentioned above, VIP (org) made no commenting on comments, they did significantly much more forwarding rather than commenting, which meant they did not keep a flow conversation with other users' comments.

**Figure 7 Ratio of contributions made by Weibo Got Talent**



Weibo Got Talent activists contributed twice as many forwarding posts as comment and comment on posts combined. Again, Forwarding was still preferred above all others by WGT, and they did more comments and commenting on comments than that by VIPs.

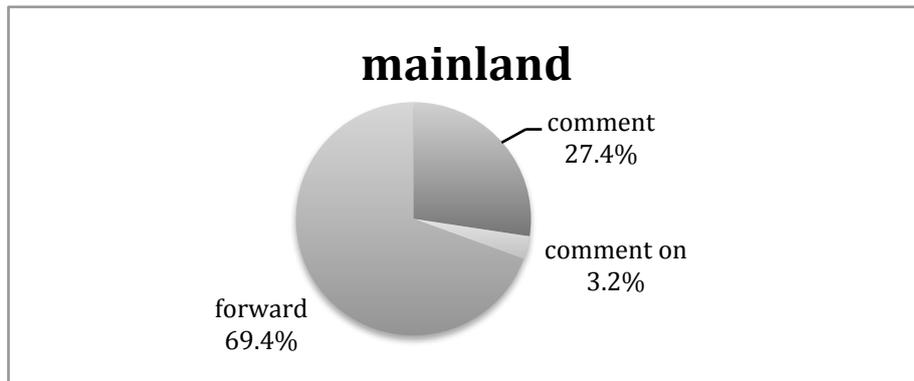
**Figure 8 Ratio of contributions made by casual users**



Casual users contributed four times as many forwarding posts as comment and comment on posts combined. In fact, casual users contributed more forwarding posts than the other three groups combined.

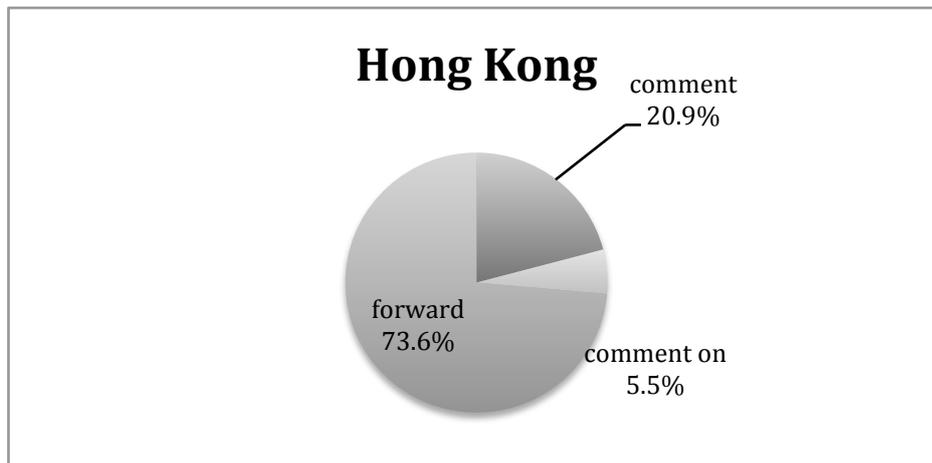
The same trend was evident among users from different geographical locations (see Figure 9 to Figure 11): in total, mainland users contributed 14723 forwarding, 5812 comment and 686 comment on comment; and Hong Kong users made 433 forwarding, 123 comment and 32 comment on comment; in terms of the other users, they made 23 forwarding, 12 comment and only 3 comment on comment.

**Figure 9 Ratio of contributions by mainland user**



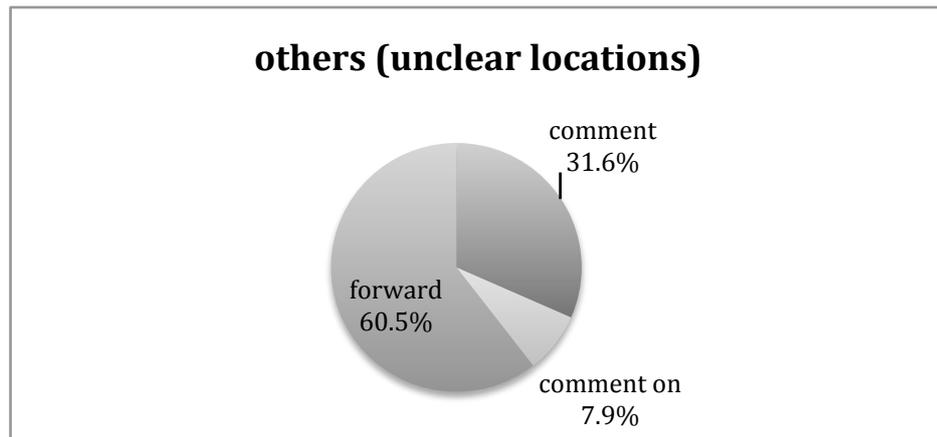
Mainland users contributed more than twice as many forwarding posts as comment and comment on combined. Mainland users contributed more than twice as many forwarding posts as the other three categories combined.

**Figure 10 Ratio of contributions by Hong Kong users**



Hong Kong users contributed almost three times as many forwarding posts as comment and comment on combined.

**Figure 11 Ratio of contributions by the other users (unclear locations)**



The remaining group (those who did not identify a location on their file) contributed almost twice as many forwarding posts as comment and comment on combined. Accordingly, the first result has answered VIPs (either individuals or organizations), Weibo Got Talent, and a large number of casual users [in Mainland and Hong Kong] are the person who participated in Weibo discussions. Much more forwarding, less comments and comment on comments were the forms that they contributed to take for 2012 HKCE Election by Weibo users.

According, there were some questions hold here but their answers revealed in the next part, for instance, why the different users prefer forwarding, what forwarding means to them when political participate. Is it just for information dissemination or not, this would reveal some sort of answers from interview, in order to identify different ways of Weibo contributions addressed various meanings by Weibo users, then it would combine with other results in the following to consider for discussing in detail in the third part.

## 5.2 Semi-structure Interview Results

The following data drew from interview identifies how the different user groups perceived themselves and the other groups when participating in online political discussions during the election. These results are related to the interview output to explain some of the questions hold in content analysis, revealing their precise perspectives of 'who' contributes in the political discussions.

The big differences from the total contributions made by the four user groups imply a sign there was a relationship between Weibo netizens' online statuses and contributing behaved habits. It then draws on the interview results to give some insight into the reasons why users preferred some contribution options over others. It is also important to explore the differences between different online statuses of Weibo users to participate in these political discussions. Drawing from interview data could help identify how the casual users, Weibo Got Talent and VIPs perceived themselves and each other when participating in the online political discussions. The variable 'Overseas' in geographical locations did not generate any statistically significant difference in the obtained data for this research aim, this research did not concentrate to report any findings related with overseas variable. But it would not affect any bias for the output of the study.

Seeking to investigate whether there is a relationship between online statuses and the extent of political participation in order to address the research aim- how the citizens with different statues reflects to online censorship while they political participate into online discussions, I asked interviewees whether they would have liked to change their Weibo user status during the election campaign, in this way, it could help explore the

answer how the participants perceive themselves to participate in these topic discussions, in order to imply the reason that motivate them online political participations. Surprisingly, only one interviewee, a casual user from mainland China (MCU4<sup>12</sup>), was interested in changing to VIP status, on the grounds that more functions are available to VIPs. This user felt he would have more influence as a VIP: ‘Others would not ignore my words’ and ‘I could use my power to attract more netizens to establish a discussion’ (MCU4). However, other casual users and Weibo Got Talent activists preferred to keep their status rather than become VIPs (mentioned by 15 respondents). One saw the social network as a private space for the recording of personal ideas and attitudes, regardless of followers (MCU2), while another maintained that it did not matter whether they were a VIP or not, it only mattered whether they could be involved in the topic discussions (MCU3). Variations on this answer included they can communicate freely even if I am not a VIP (MWU1<sup>13</sup>, MWU3) and they are still visible when you participate in a topic discussion, even though you are casual user (MWU4, HWU3,<sup>14</sup> MCU2). Another participant was concerned that it was dangerous to become a VIP because lots of people would have access to their personal, their friends’ and even their family’s information (HWU4). Other objections to VIP status were: ‘I do not want to be limited by Weibo and get more pressures while being more visible’ (MWU3) and ‘I do not want to make enemies’ (MWU1). A Weibo Got Talent activist from Hong Kong pointed out that VIP status brings greater responsibility (HWU3). Others saw no need to become VIPs, given the existence of alternatives such as Facebook and Twitter (HCU3, HCU4).

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<sup>12</sup> MCU4: M=mainland China C= casual U= user

<sup>13</sup> MWU1: M=mainland China W=Weibo Got Talent U=user

<sup>14</sup> HWU3: H=Hong Kong W=Weibo Got Talent U=user

In addition to one interviewee admitted that he could not give up his VIP status because it was his job identity (MVU1), while another maintained that the VIP status made him more influential even though there were some limitations on what he could say (MVU2). Consequently, this interviewee deployed irony in his posts, believing that his audience could understand the implied meaning. Others argued that VIP or not, it is not hard to identify users, so everyone should be careful what they say online, or be deliberately vague or ironic (MVU4). One response from a VIP in Mainland China set out the advantages and the potential pitfalls of being a VIP and of the virtual culture as a whole:

“Weibo and the Internet represent an anonymous culture, which encourages netizens to speak and tell the truth, but at the same time, it also makes it possible to slander others and spread rumours. However, if all netizens were to mark themselves as VIPs, that anonymity would be lost; if they could be easily identified, there would be less rumor and defamation” (MVU4).

When the interviews were conducted, most of the mainland casual users who were interviewed claimed that they were more likely to comment rather than forward or comment on (MCU1, MCU2, MCU3). Several reasons were given for this: ‘This is a process which allows in-depth communication with others’ (MCU1); ‘I could communicate with my favourite public figure if they had already commented’ (MCU2); and ‘It is a chance to persuade people of opposing views’ (MCU3). However, the majority of VIP interviewees, from both Hong Kong and the mainland, did indeed prefer to forward the posts of others (MVU1, MVU2, HVU2). One VIP admitted that he only forwarded posts without adding his own view to avoid misleading the public or taking responsibility (HVU2); others felt it was not appropriate for them to express a point of view, or

saw forwarding as more convenient (MVU1). Yet others felt that forwarding was enough to express support – they saw comments as more likely to be used by those wanting to express extreme political views (HVU3). Some maintained that there was no sense in commenting unless they aimed to host a political protest (MVU4, HVU4). One VIP observed that forwarding is a good way of disseminating information widely (MVU2). This interviewee liked to forward posts and link to his page, thereby attracting his followers to participate in the discussion (MVUS). In general, the most popular reason for forwarding among most of the other user groups was to encourage users with similar views to get involved (mentioned by 12 interviewees).

One VIP user from Hong Kong (HVU2) asserted that he would consider the language and his identification on Weibo only if he was forwarding, because forwarding represents a more formal and strong attitude than commenting (this is interesting as it contradicts the findings mentioned earlier). Another VIP (MVU2) was even more wary; he cited the new policy announced recently by China's Supreme Court: 'Any unauthorized posts "clicked and viewed more than 5000 times, or reposted more than 500 times" on Weibo will be regarded as serious defamation, which will generally be punished with at least three years in prison'. As a VIP, this respondent was particularly aware of the need for self-control online, which indicates the rationale of self-censorship that could get rid of political risking, which would be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The majority of interviewees felt that online political participation is affected by users' status and geographical location. One Weibo Got Talent activist described how VIPs are more likely to be criticized by the public; the more followers they have, the more criticism they receive (MWU3).

One casual user from Hong Kong said that: ‘Sometimes I will express myself ironically if I am using a mainland platform, where I need to be careful, but I can express myself explicitly now because I am in Hong Kong’ (HCU1). Another VIP user, also from Hong Kong, pointed out that as a journalist, his responsibility was to change society through ‘productive discourse’, he noted that ‘If I were just a normal casual user, I would spend my time reading gossip and joining in with irrational debates. So I have to admit that my identification does have a major effect on my Weibo use’ (HVU2). The interviewee (HVU2) suggested that he would be more relaxed if he were only a casual user. A Weibo Got Talent activist agreed with him, observing that if he expressed explicit attitudes he might be misunderstood or even quoted, so he preferred to remain safely neutral or ambiguous (CWU1).

According to data from content analysis and semi-structure interview, it discussed as below to illustrate how the role of Weibo status contribute to the online protection or resistance with theoretical support, it revealed how citizens perceive online censorship through social media Weibo by holding different Weibo statuses.

### **5.3 Weibo Status: Online Protection or Resistance**

In restructuring all the results emerging from three sets of data together to address how various Weibo statuses netizens react to this censorship by exercising self-censorship; the section explores how this self-censorship can be either conscious or subconscious, positive acceptance or negative acceptance, and how it affects users’ political participation online, thereby addressing the nature and extent of citizens’ political participation and deliberation, as well as how censorship shapes their political deliberations.

It is important to conclude there are dynamic ways of preferences to VIPs, WGT and casual users that contributed to participate in different topics discussions, their preferences indicate different reflections of their political participation through Weibo while discussing popular topics. There are explicit traits that could summarize here: firstly, forwarding is the most popular type of contributions for all statuses of users; forwarding is also the most popular preferences to participate in all popular discussions because it allowed netizens to disseminate information widely and attract more followers. The results of analysis demonstrates that forwarding comments was the most popular type of contribution, rather than initiating comments or making comments on comments, and that there is a considerable difference between the forwarding carried out by casual users and that effected by Weibo's Got Talent users, VIPs, or VIP organizations within Weibo.

Secondly, both Hong Kong and mainland users said they were curious to see the different ideas posted on Weibo, with Hong Kong users highlighting that Weibo is the only channel of communication between mainland users and themselves. The variable 'time period' did not generate any statistically significant differences in the obtained data.

Thirdly, casual users are the most active Weibo users. There was a significant difference between casual users and VIPs in terms of the number of contributions they posted on political topics. As mentioned before, there is a sign suggested that there might be a relationship between online statuses and the ways of political participation which would affect their preferences of online contributions. This would reveal the answer in the interview and discussed later.

Generally, the biggest gap between total contributions was that of the number of comments on comments made by the VIP (organization) group and the number of forwarding posts left by casual users. The major difference suggests that there might be a relationship between Weibo netizens' online statuses and contribution habits. Individuals' online identity serves to theorize and explain one of political participation behaviors. Online identity may be defined as "...the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this groups membership" (Tajfel, 1972: 292). Arguably, this research did draw on online identity to argue that Weibo's online status could have an effect on political participation behaviors, in order to measure the role that censorship played in citizen's political participation behaviors through social media, and in turn, how they perceived online censorship from different online statuses whilst using Weibo for political participation, which would discuss this dimension in the following chapters.

The majority of posts in the election were made by casual users, a few of whom did not see their online political participation as being influenced by their Weibo statuses. However, others felt that this status did have an effect, explaining that they chose to post as casual users because it gave them the freedom to say what they wanted, especially when they discussed some sensitive political topics that have been presented in last chapter. This is consistent with the pursuits from casual users. When being asked to interpret their understanding of digital democracy, it indicates that individuals could freely express themselves online and unlimited to receive either "right or wrong information" (MCU1, MCU2, MCU3, MCU4, HCU1, HCU2). Some casual users were happy to maintain their statuses in order to retain their advantage of speaking freely. Only one

casual user wished to upgrade to VIP status to receive more Weibo functionality and expand his influence on Weibo (MCU4). Another objection to VIP status was: “I do not want to be limited by Weibo and get more pressure while being more visible” (MCU3). Therefore, the statuses that casual users chose aimed either to resist visualizing widely or to protect opportunities for political expression significantly.

There are several possible reasons why casual users made more posts than other user groups. Again, these possible reasons come from predictions by researchers according to the existing literature. No attempt was made to discover whether the accounts sampled in the study were genuine, and styles of comment that might be suggestive of the fact that a number of casual users were members of the so-called Internet Water Army (Chen et al., 2013). These users are paid to post negative comments and fake news in order to affect the perceptions of other netizens and influence the direction of public discussions. Yu (2012:4) explains that even though these may account for only 1.08% of total users, they can be responsible “for a large percentage of the total retweets for the trending keywords”. While the Internet Water Army is paid by commercial organizations to post, other netizens are paid by the CCP to disseminate information and influence the topical agenda by posting under the guise of casual users. This group, called *Wumao Dang*<sup>15</sup>, has a significant impact on research into new media and political communication. Fung (2002) observes that the Chinese government’s strategy of employing professional writers to interject the government’s voice in all Internet discussions on Hong Kong issues is a form of implicit online censorship, as it allows the state to interfere in bottom-up political communication. Finally, the styles of

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<sup>15</sup> *Wumao Dang* (50 Cent Party), 五毛党 in Chinese, it refers to online commentators who are hired and paid by Central Government. This group aims to publicize favorable comments, articles, and information which leads and shape the public to communicate online.

comment suggest that a number of casual users in the study may have been the so-called angry youth of China, who always react strongly to current affairs. These are idealists who believe that they can change society and even the world through the weapon of a laptop. From a technological point of view, they are sufficiently proficient to bypass political ‘minefields’ (Tong, 2009:593) in order to discuss politically sensitive topics. For instance, according to interview results, some online discussions have a radical distrust of the CCP (or called *feng zhong bi fan* 逢中比反). This is best exemplified by a Weibo Got Talent activist’s comment: “You are clowns that oppose everything related to China!” (*feng zhong bi fan* 逢中必反)).

VIPs, both in organizations and individuals, are more wary than casual users about participating in political discussions, especially when discussing the dark side of politics, scandals or sleaze. It was especially striking, for example, that the VIP (organization) group in this study only made forwarding posts in the pre-election period, while only one VIP from Hong Kong (HVU1) interviewee had had posts deleted. One VIP user from Hong Kong (HVU2) asserted that he would consider the language and his identification on Weibo only if he was forwarding, because forwarding represents a more formal and strong attitude than commenting. One VIP from mainland (MVU2) was even more wary; he cited the new policy<sup>16</sup> announced recently by China’s Supreme Court: “Any unauthorized posts clicked and viewed more than 5000 times, or reposted more than 500 times on Weibo will be regarded as serious defamation, which will generally be punished with at least three years in prison”. Whether or not it is unauthorized post is identified by Cyberspace Administration of China. Another participant was concerned that it was

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<sup>16</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/mrdx/2013-09/10/c\\_132706207.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mrdx/2013-09/10/c_132706207.htm)

dangerous to become a VIP, because many people would have access to their personal, their friends' and even their family's information (HWU4). Most VIPs were too careful to test online censorship by posting some sensitive topics or terms. Arguably, as Lagerkvist (2010:146) explains, VIPs are normally more "aware of socio-political [boundaries]" than younger netizens or casual users. They may exercise self-censorship, implying a "conscious, resigned acceptance", and avoid ideological contributions which might be offensive to the authorities. They may also disagree with comments made online, but they are more likely to keep quiet than risk what they have achieved by becoming politically active. One of the VIP respondents from the mainland from interview suggested that Internet providers should implement a real-name system to minimize rumours and defamation. Ultimately, VIPs are more concerned with protecting themselves and avoiding risk. This could be exemplified by one response from a VIP in Mainland China, who set out the advantages and the potential pitfalls of being a VIP and of the virtual culture as a whole: "Weibo and the Internet represent an anonymous culture, which encourages netizens to speak and tell the truth, but at the same time, it also makes it possible to slander others and spread rumours. However, if all netizens were to mark themselves as VIPs, that anonymity would be lost; if they could be easily identified, there would be less rumour and defamation" (MVU4).

Thus, there was a significant difference between casual users and VIPs in terms of the number of contributions they posted on political topics; the latter were much more cautious because they can be more easily identified online. Some of those that did post – from all user groups – employed rhetorical patterns, especially irony, in order to be able to speak reasonably freely, while minimizing the risk of online censorship, so

Weibo users has a explicit preference to maintain their status while political participating in discussion on Weibo, which also illustrates *the role of online censorship shaped more serious and significant manipulation on VIPs' political participation behaviors through social media than casual users'*.

#### **5.4 Forwarding: More Than Just Disseminating Information**

Forwarding was the most popular type of contribution among all user groups (VIPs, Weibo Got Talent and casual users). There were far fewer comments, and comment on comments. This echoes the finding of Yu, Asur and Huberman (2012:1), who note that: “retweets are much more common in Sina Weibo and contribute a lot to creating trends”. There are two arguments that are addressed here to demonstrate forwarding, which is used more than simply for information dissemination.

Firstly, forwarding can have both an explicit and implicit purpose; it was seen as the best way of disseminating information widely, but was also seen as an indirect way of indicating support or endorsement for another's post. Macskassy and Michelson (2011) investigated the behaviour of Twitter users, concluding that they tend to repost topics or information “which is complementary to the topics about which they themselves publish micro posts”. This is supported in the case of Weibo users by a VIP interviewee, who saw forwarding as the most appropriate way of expressing a point of view and emphasizing their support (MVU1). Others, however, felt that forwarding was sufficient to express support – they saw comments as more likely to be used by those wanting to express extreme political views (HVU3). which is inconsistent with a perspective from one VIP user from Hong Kong (HVU2); he asserted that forwarding represents a more formal and strong attitude than commenting. Yu, Asur and

Huberman (2012:2), meanwhile, suggest that users forward posts to make themselves “more visible to other users”. Thus, forwarding not only helps explicitly in spreading messages online, but also indicates implicit sentiments expressed by Weibo users.

For instance, in a similar case study, Fu (2013:28) found that posts discussing controversial issues relating to the Hong Kong government were considerably more likely to be retweeted. This was borne out in the 2012 election campaign, when some news items posted by media organizations were much more likely to be forwarded than others. These more popular items included pieces on the scandals surrounding the three candidates, the likelihood of an abortive election (if the majority of the Election Committee members returned blank voting papers, necessitating another vote), the announcement by the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong that it would support candidate Leung, the restriction of the vote to 1200 committee members, and the University of Hong Kong’s mock election.

Secondly, forwarding is not just for information dissemination, but helps create an online community within which Weibo users can digitalize and widen their sense of citizenship. One of the most important reasons to make this happen was based on a technique of revolution- hyperlinking, featuring the contributions of forwarding, which has been demonstrated by De Maeyer (2013). Hyperlinks play a role in tracing public debates and also help make sense of numerous blogs. This idea adopted from Hsu and Park (2011: 364), namely that “a hyperlink is not simply a link on the web but has certain sociological meaning”, has mentioned in chapter 2. Forwarding is a social behavior contributed to by the technical revolution of the hyperlink.

Arguably, in agreeing with hyperlinks' social significance as suggested by De Maeyer (2013), forwarding is a hyperlink style and strategy of political actor here, which means forwarding is an indicator social media users' aims to link or participate with outsiders, Additionally, it is an indicator of the significant element of political communication, implies the ideological affiliation too. In addition to this, the means and social significance of forwarding (as well as commenting/comment on comment) are good examples to support the new objects of study conducted by Digital Methods Initiative (DMI)<sup>17</sup>, which examines "how an actor may be characterized by the characterized by the types of hyperlinks given and received", "what types of associations an actor on the Internet can have and the everyday politics and association" (cited by Tsatsou, 2014: 168). Thus, the contributions of forwarding imply far more information dissemination, and also involve a sense of online community for bonding and bridging.

For instance, Lomicka and Lord (2011) found a similar sense of community among Twitter users. In online communities, netizens "share norms of behavior or certain defining practices, actively enforce certain moral standards, and coexist in close proximity to one another" (Varnali and Gorgulu, 2014:4). Similarly, Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) demonstrate that netizens often feel a kinship to other Internet users, and follow the norms of interactions in virtual society. Lomicka and Lord (2011) employ Short et al.'s (1976) theory of social presence to illustrate that individuals choose a certain type of online communication depending

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<sup>17</sup> The DMI is a collaboration of the New Media TEMPLab, University of Amsterdam, and Govcom.org Foundation, Amsterdam, with support from the Mondriaan Foundation. It comprises a new media PhD (training) program, as well as a new media research group, and it is based at the University of Amsterdam. For more information, see <http://wiki.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/DmiAbout>.

on the extent to which they are aware of the potential audience. The theory posits that where there is a strong sense of audience, interactions are likely to be more dynamic and discussions more in-depth (Polhemus et al., 2001). This study agrees with Lomicka and Lord (2011) that the sense of social presence is enhanced in the online community or a strong sense of social presence is necessary to strengthen the online community. Weibo users employing forwarding express their involvement in different ways, which both strengthen their sense of belonging and widen virtual citizenship according to their insistence on maintaining their own online statuses enable them to contribute their participation, thereby reinforcing their sense of commitment to a cause and their sense of empowerment.

Therefore, arguably, the fact that Netizens prefer to forward rather than comment or comment on upon this case study may help in understanding deliberative democracy, which could be affected and measured by citizens (netizens) who concentrate on contributing more widely, disseminating information and completing information (Schudson, 2004). Completing information here could be argued as either indicating implicit sentiments expressing by Weibo users, or digitalizing citizenship in terms of a sense of online community for bonding and bridging as discussed above. Thus, *either explicit or implicit aims and effects of forwarding help to identify the role of Weibo as an indicator in understanding and enriching deliberative democracy when various citizens are used for political participation, which has also revealed how the censorship shaped the citizens' political participation and deliberation.*

Both explicit and implicit aims and effects, as well as the large populations of forwarding, have attracted the mainland government's attention. Regulations announced on 9th September 2014 show that the

State wishes to extend its control over the expression of public opinion, and especially, limit the information dissemination through the Internet, particularly social media. In an effort to avert what it sees as “tangible threats to social order” at “society’s meso-level” (Lagerkvist, 2010:144), the government has announced that:

Any untrue posts clicked and viewed more than 5000 times, or reposted more than 500 times on Weibo will be regarded as serious defamation, which generally will be punished by (longer than) three years in prison.

(China’s Supreme Court, 2014)

*This awareness of mainland government by taking actions on censorship started to shape citizens’ political participation through social media.* Thus, the government started to limit the power of forwarding due to it works far more than information dissemination.

## **5.5 Summary**

This Chapter was to evaluate ‘who’ have political participated and deliberated through analyzing their own status on social media and how its related with their types of contribution, in order to explore how it contributed to understand how online censorship operated in this context. This employed contributions made by different types of contributions and various Weibo statuses thereby addressing the extent of Weibo users’s political participation and deliberation in either explicit or implicit ways. This chapter has focused on discussing the features of Chinese online censorship that includes evaluating the most popular type of contributions-forwarding, Forwarding can have both an explicit and implicit purpose; it may be seen as the best way of disseminating information widely, but it could also be construed as an indirect way of indicating support or endorsement for another’s post; and analyzing the Weibo identity, the

relationship between their Weibo statuses and online political expressions. Their mode of political expression could be affected by their Weibo statuses, which either aim to protect themselves or resist online censorship.

## **Chapter Six: Political Discussion: Quality, Significance and Ideology Development**

To answer what did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users? What evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election?, the remaining data, which are displayed thematically, show the content of Weibo users in different groups and locations responded to the various discussion topics with both output from content analysis, critical discourse analysis and interview. More precisely, this chapter shed light on the results of content analysis of topic discussions on ‘election committee and universal suffrage’ and ‘Communist Party of China; Chief Leung; the other candidates’ as well as ‘online Weibo censorship’, contributed by different types of Weibo user [in HK and China] regarding the 2012 HKCE Election. Additionally, it also revealed how the topic discussed with different orientation expressions respectively, in order to answer the functional questions, especially focus on answering: What did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for 2012 HKCE Election by Weibo users? What evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election? The second part employed CDA to demonstrate the nature of political discourse and its ideology expressed upon these popular topical discussions thereby highlighting the political discourse in Chinese context, how the nature of rhetorical agency in political discussions employed by netizens in order to respond what evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election? What role did participants say censorship played in the extent and nature of the participation in Weibo discussions on the election? Then to address

how online censorship shape political participation and deliberation upon 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election.

### 6.1 Content Analysis Output

The results of the content analysis reveal *what* the various of topics discussions Weibo netizen groups (VIP (p), VIP (org), Weibo Got Talent activists and casual users) from Hong Kong and Mainland China posted in terms of forwarding posts, comments and comments on comments. To answer what did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for 2012 HKCE Election by Weibo users? This result draws first on the data of the content analysis upon different types of Weibo users' orientation expressions to the first two discussion topics -the Election Committee and universal suffrage.

Figure 12 Orientation of contributions on topic a1 (current Election Committee)

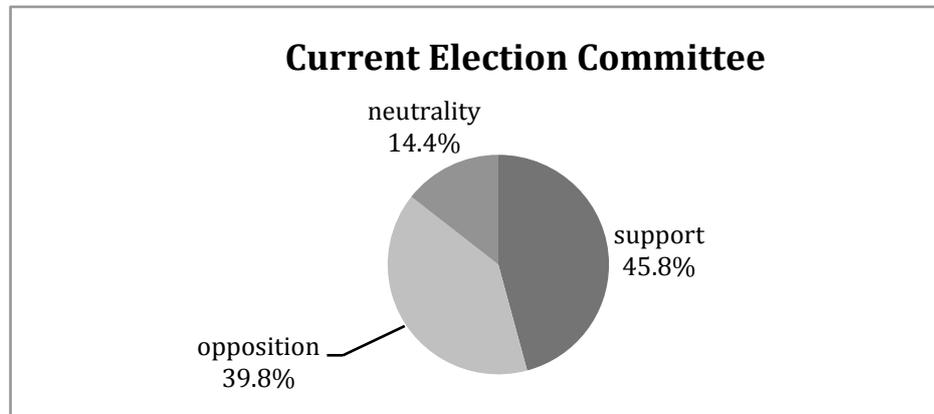


Figure 12 shows the range of responses that were posted by Weibo users on the topics of the Election Committee. In general, more than half posts expressed explicit opposition to the Election Committee as supported it, specifically, This type of contribution was favoured by 39.8% of those

expressing opposition to the Election Committee, 14.4% of those expressing neutrality, 45.8% of those expressing explicit support.

**Figure 13 Contributions to topic a1 (current Election Committee) by user status and orientation**

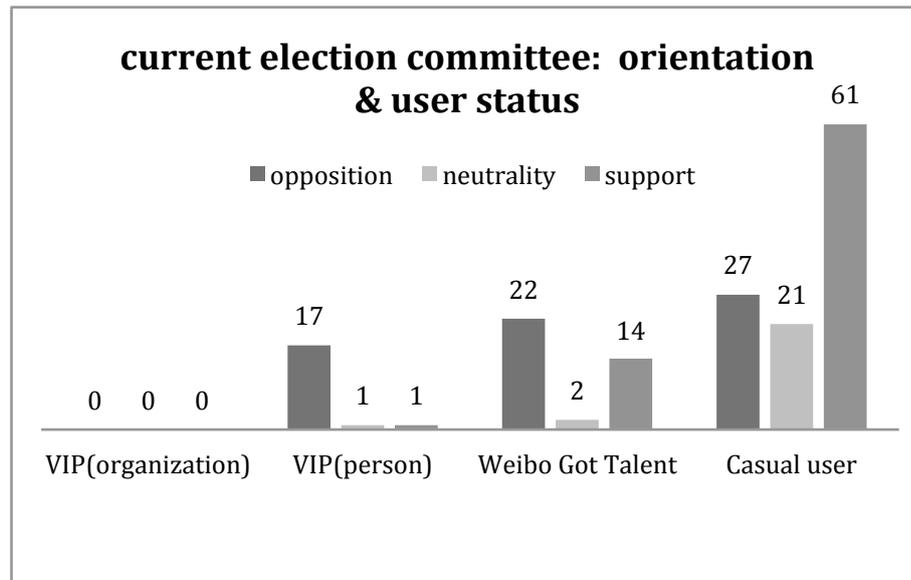


Figure 13 reveal the VIP (org) users made no contribution to topic discussion of current election committee. VIP (p) users made 17 contributions expressing explicit opposition, 1 each expressing neutrality and explicit support. Casual users posted far more contributions on this topic than the other user groups. They posted 27 comments conveying explicit opposition, 21 conveying neutrality, 61 expressing explicit support on the subject of the Election Committee.

Figure 14 Orientation of contributions on topic a2 (universal suffrage)

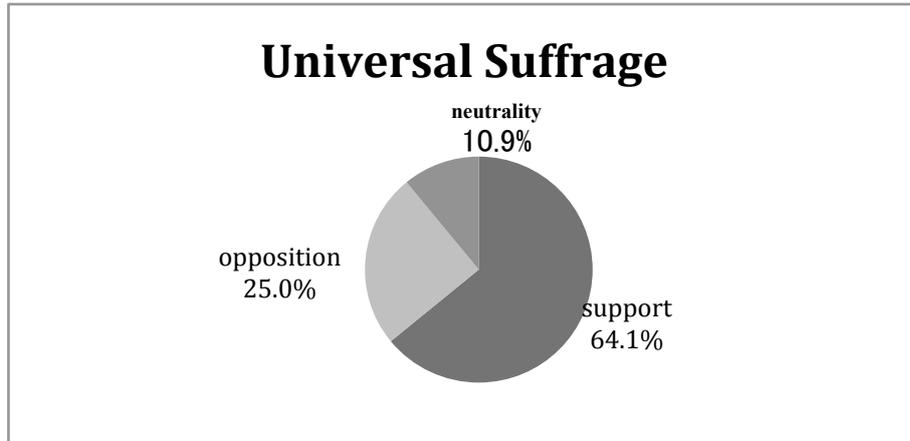


Figure 15 Orientation of contribution on topic a2 (universal suffrage) by four online status users

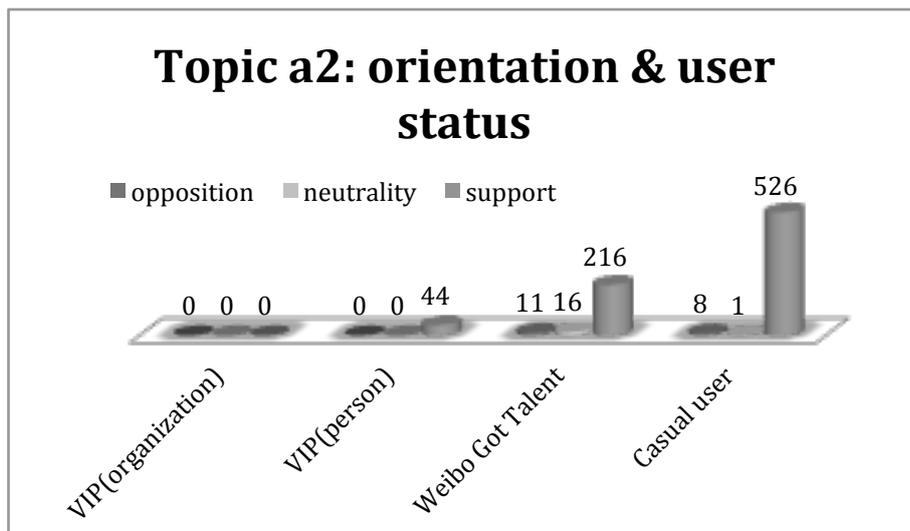


Figure 14 shows the range of responses that were posted by Weibo users on the topics of the universal suffrage. Almost three times as many expressed explicit support for universal suffrage as opposed it. Specifically, figure 15 displayed that VIP (org) users made no contribution to this topic discussion, VIP (p) users made 44 contributions expressing explicit support on the topic of universal suffrage; On the topic

of universal suffrage there was a significant gap between the number of posts left by casual users and the other user groups, particularly in terms of explicit expressions of support; there were 44 expressions of support from VIP (p) users, 216 from Weibo Got Talent activists and 526 from casual users.

This result is based on the comparison and contrast of contributions (both type and orientation) made by different user groups on the topics of China's Communist Party/the political system in mainland China; the Chief Executive, Leung Chui-ying; and the other election candidates. The section begins with the quantitative data describing total contributions and sentiment orientations.

**Figure 16 Ratio of total contributions for topics 'Communist Party of China', 'Chief Leung' and 'the other candidates'**

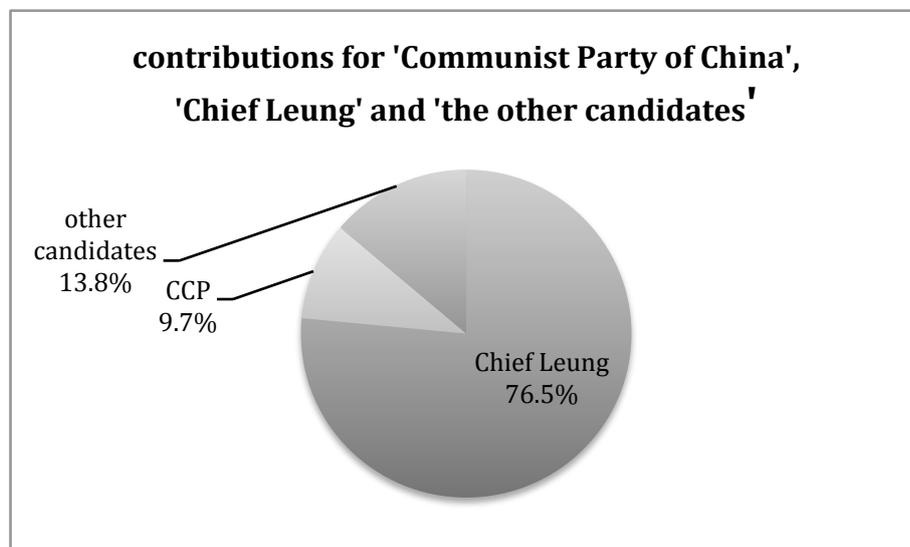
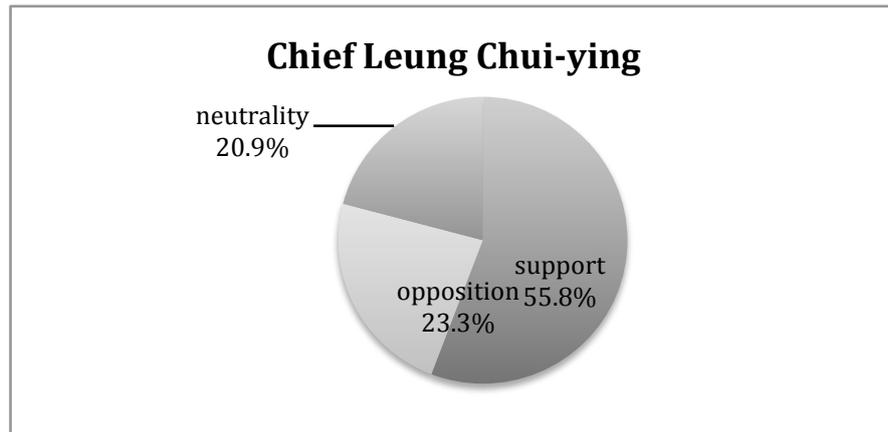


Figure 16 reveals that three quarters of contributions featured Chief Leung in total, far more prominent than either any named candidate or the CCP. It is interesting to figure out the largest gap between contribution made on

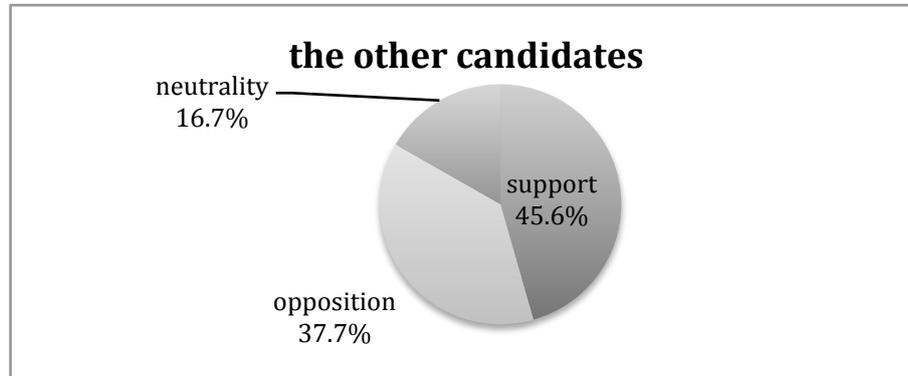
CCP and Chief Leung, The content of their political discourse would reveal later by CDA in order to evaluate further their social deliberative behaviors specifically.

**Figure 17 Ratio of total orientation contributions for topics 'Chief Leung'**



A large number of contributions were posted discussing the Chief Executive, Leung Chun-ying. In total, users posted 3825 comments, 424 comments on comments and 9556 forwarding posts; 2356 of the contributions expressed explicit opposition, 2109 expressed neutrality, 5637 expressed explicit support. These data are important; it shows (Figure 17) the number of posts expressing 2.5 times as many supported Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying as opposed him by all users, mostly through forwarding. It inspired to review how exactly the users describe or criticize him in order to address their reflections of political participation on Weibo.

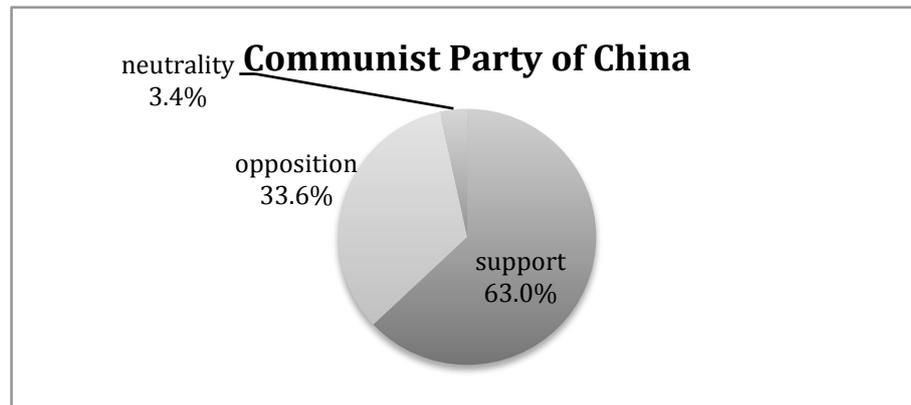
**Figure 18 Ratio of total orientation contributions for topics 'the other candidates'**



Turning to the other candidates in the election – Mr He Jun-ren and Mr Tang Ying-lian (pro-Beijing loyalist) – there were 707 comments, 276 comments on comments and 1625 forwarding posts. 782 of the contributions were expressions of explicit opposition, 347 expressed neutrality, and 944 expressed explicit support. All of the contributions were posted before the election or on Election Day. Among the forwarding posts, for example, 242 expressions of opposition, 42 expressions of neutrality, 78 expressions of explicit support were made before the election; while 183 expressions of opposition, 185 expressions of neutrality, 555 expressions of explicit support were made on election day. If a rank order is applied, the expression of explicit opposition to the other candidates dropped from the top to the bottom of the ranking, while the expression of explicit support climbed from third to first position. The rank order is important and worth noting here, because it implies various potential reasons contributed to the Weibo netizens' political participation and somehow the online political participation reflects to the offline. It is worth to keep an eye on online expressive participation for either politicians or political organizations during the process of election. The

number of posts expressing 1.4 times as many supported the other candidates as opposed them (See Figure 18).

**Figure 19 Ratio of total orientation contributions for topics 'Communist Party of China'**



As for the orientation of the contributions that were made on the topic of China's Communist Party/the political system in mainland China. Users expressed explicit opposition through 45 comments, 45 comments on comments and 58 forwarding posts. There were only 2 comments on comments and 13 forwarding posts that expressed neutrality on this topic. In contrast, users highlighted their explicit support for the CPC and the political system of China through 59 comments, 36 comments on comments and 182 forwarding posts. The number of posts expressing support for the CCP/mainland China's political system was almost double the number expressing opposition (see Figure 19); across all three topics (see Figure 17 to Figure 19), there were more explicit expressions of support than explicit expressions of opposition from all user groups. Therefore, according to these, it has answered- What did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users by revealing the results on the five topics.

**Table 1 Rank order of the total number of posts made by the various user groups on the CCP, Chief Leung and the other candidates.**

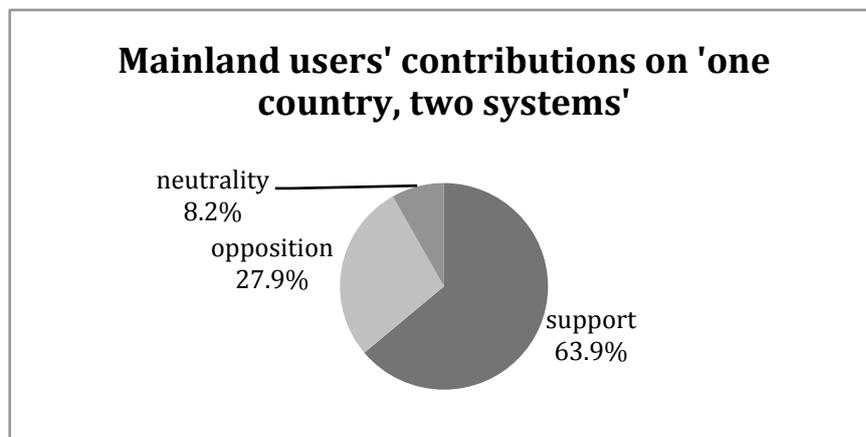
Rank	Topic	Amount	Topic	Amount	Topic	Amount
	CCP		Chief Leung		Other candidates	
1	Casual	1258(11.9%) (71.8%)	Casual	7718(73.3%) (55.9%)	Casual	1557(14.8%) (62.4%)
2	WGT	384(8.9%) (21.9%)	VIP(p)	3102(72.1%) (22.5%)	WGT	827(19%) (33.2%)
3	VIP(P)	111(3.5%) (6.3%)	WGT	2970(93.1%) (21.5%)	VIP(p)	110(3.4%) (4.4%)
4	VIP(o)	0(0%) (0%)	VIP(o)	14(100%) (0.1%)	VIP(o)	0(0%) (0%)
<b>Sum</b>		1753 (100%)		13804 (100%)		2494 (100%)

To answer what did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users? The following plans to compare the contributions made by the four status groups (see Table 1) on this three party-related topics, then it also prepare to answer what evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election by corporation with results from CDA and interviews. It was surprising that VIP (org) users made no contributions on the subject of the CCP or the other candidates, it was surprising because they concern a lot about their online statuses that may be exposed, which they mentioned in the interviews (More details would be explained later). Even on the topic of Chief Leung, there were only 14 contributions. Within this group, expressions of support outnumbered those of neutrality by 6 to 1. There was a big gap between the number of contributions made by casual users and VIP users. Especially VIP of organization made

85.7% post expressing explicit support and 14.3% for neutrality, none of explicit oppose posts were made for the topic of Chief Leung Chui-ying.

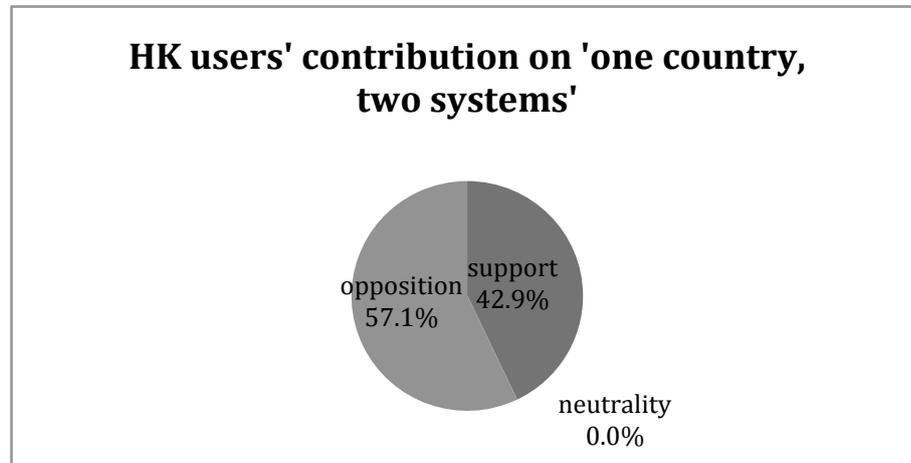
The following will represent data from content analysis that focuses on another popular topic ‘one country, two systems’ policy. The one country, two systems policy was one of the key discussion topics in either Hong Kong or mainland politics, as it has been ever since 1997. In general, content analysis revealed that VIP of organizers only made one posts expressing explicit opposition while VIP of persons expressed 13 explicit opposition, 2 neutrality and 8 explicit supports. Far more posts were made by Weibo Got Talent and Casual users. Weibo Got Talent made 90 explicit supports and only 6 explicit opposition, casual users contributed 107 explicit opposites and 166 explicit supports on this topic.

**Figure 20 Orientation of mainland users’ contributions on ‘one country, two systems’**



To answer who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election? What did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users? content analysis precisely showed that the majority of mainland users (see Figure 20) supported the one country, two systems policy – almost triple the number opposing it.

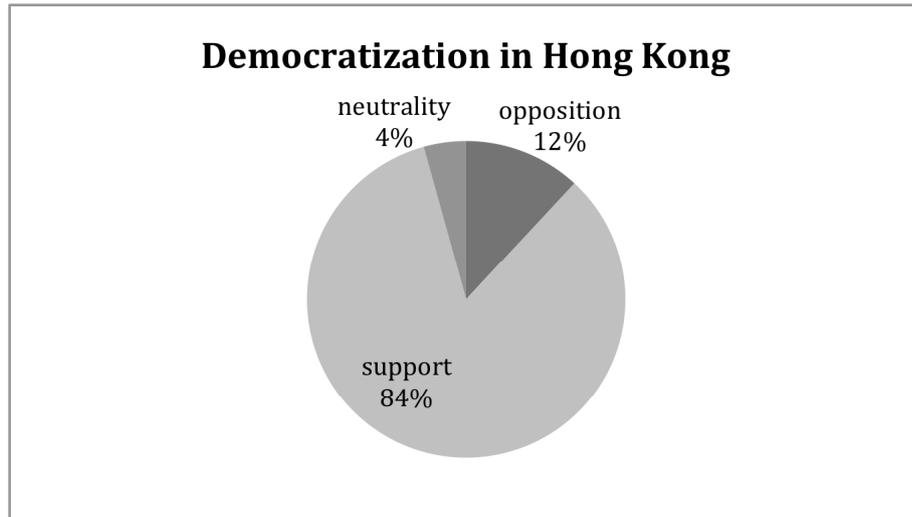
**Figure 21 Orientation of Hong Kong users' contributions on 'one country, two systems'**



Conversely, more than half of Hong Kong contributors opposed it. Interestingly, no Hong Kong users were neutral on this policy; all expressed an explicit, often strong opinion (Figure 21).

In the discussions about the one country, two systems policy and the fall of Hong Kong, only Weibo Got Talent and casual users in content analysis made 45 explicit oppositions and 41 explicit supports upon the fall of Hong Kong, none of VIP of persons participated in this topics.

**Figure 22 Orientation of users' contributions on 'Democratization in Hong Kong'**



According to the output of content analysis upon whether or not the various netizens support the democratization of Hong Kong, 83.8% of the total expressed explicit supports, which is more than seven times than the one made for explicit oppositions, citizens who oppose it refers to Hong Kong is not democratic any more or Hong Kong should not maintain the democratic system which the same as it handover before (Figure 22).

This result draws on quantitative data to reveal Weibo users' perceptions of the site and their attitudes towards online censorship. The section presents quantitative data, derived from content analysis, describing the orientation of user contributions on the topics 'Weibo: censorship', 'Weibo: information dissemination' and 'Weibo: free political communication', first in general terms and then by user group. Accordingly, it could help answer -Who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election? What did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users?, in order to address the extent and nature of political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the HK Chief Executive Election.

To answer what evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election? What role did participants say censorship played in the extent and nature of the participation in Weibo discussions on the election?, the following revealed content analysis result upon orientation of contributions posted on the topics ‘Weibo: censorship’, ‘Weibo: information dissemination’ and ‘Weibo: free political communication’ by different types of users [in Hong Kong and mainland].

Before discussing respondents’ practices and views about censorship, it is worth reflecting on the formal rules regarding Internet use in China. A white paper on Internet policy, the Chinese State Council Information Office sets out the basic principles governing Internet use in China:

Within Chinese territory, the Internet is under the jurisdiction of Chinese sovereignty. Internet sovereignty of China should be respected and protected. Citizens of the People’s Republic of China and foreign citizens, legal persons and other organizations within Chinese territory have the right and freedom to use the Internet; at the same time, they must obey the laws and regulations of China and conscientiously protect Internet security. (State Council Information Office of People’s Public of China, 2010)

**Table 2 Orientation of contributions posted from Weibo content on the topics ‘Weibo: censorship’, ‘Weibo: information dissemination’ and ‘Weibo: free political communication’, by percentage**

Orientation of post	Topics		
	Weibo: censorship	Weibo: information dissemination	Weibo: free political communication
<b>Support</b>	-	<b>86.8%</b>	<b>98.1%</b>
<b>Opposition</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>1.9%</b>
<b>Neutrality</b>	-	-	-
<b>Sum</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 presents the overall percentages for the orientation of contributions on ‘Weibo: censorship’, ‘Weibo: information dissemination’ and ‘Weibo: free political communication’ which comes from the data of Weibo content. The result is important to help identify research question upon what extent and in what ways does censorship shape political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the HK Chief Executive Election through measuring their quantitative orientations of contributions. On the question of whether or not Internet should implement censorship by authority, the only contribution that was posted expressed explicit opposition, which comes from 14 posts. There are totally 54 posts on talking about whether Weibo should support free political communication; just 1.9% of posts addressing the question expressed explicit opposition (this was one forwarding post), while the remaining 98.1% were explicitly supportive upon Weibo should be an indicator to support free political communication. Most users that occupied 66 posts supported Weibo’s role already played effectively as a disseminator of information, with only 13.2% (10 posts) expressing opposition. Therefore, the data above imply the importance of Weibo for netizens that should play a role as free

indicator to political communication and information dissemination without serious online censorship, more details would be explored as followed.

**Table 3 Orientation of contributions, by status group and percentage, on ‘Weibo: censorship’, ‘Weibo: information dissemination’ and ‘Weibo: free political communication’**

	Weibo: censorship		Weibo: information dissemination		Weibo: free political communication	
	Support	Opposition	Support	Opposition	Support	Opposition
<b>VIP(o)</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>VIP(p)</b>	-	-	3.9%	-	5.5%	-
<b>WGT</b>	-	21.4%	5.3%	-	7.4%	-
<b>Casual</b>	-	78.6%	77.6%	13.2%	85.2%	1.9%
<b>Sum</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>100%</b>		<b>100%</b>	

As for who participated in Weibo discussions of the HKCE Election? What did they discuss and what forms did their contributions take for HKCE Election by Weibo users?, Table 3 could reveals the Orientation of contributions, by status group and percentage on these three topics- that No VIPs – either personal or organizational – posted on the question of government censorship of Weibo. One fifth of the expressions of opposition came from Weibo Got Talent activists with the rest coming from casual users. Significantly, no VIP (org) users contributed on Weibo’s role as a forum for free political communication or information dissemination either. VIP (p) users contributed only 3.9% of the support for information dissemination (only 3 expressions of support) and 5.5% of the support for free political communication. The majority of those who agreed that Weibo is an effective way of disseminating information were casual users. Among this group, expressions of support on this topic

outnumbered expressions of opposition by almost six to one. The number of casual users supporting (85.2%) Weibo's role as a forum for free political communication also massively exceeded the number opposing (1.9%) it.

It is worthy to precisely focusing on the question of government censorship of Weibo, which is one of popular topic and important element that links with contributions to other topic discussions by various statuses of users, more would be explained by revealing interview data in the following. Here (see table 2 and table 3), as mentioned above, the only contribution on this topic was posted expressed explicit opposition, which comes from 14 posts; no posts were contributed by VIP (org) or VIP (p) users upon this topic. There were only 3 expressions of opposition from Weibo Got Talent activists; and 11 posts expressing opposition. Thirdly, casual users supplied 20 post contributions on Internet censorship and 47 post contributions on whether Weibo should support free political communication, 69 posts on Weibo information dissemination.

The content analysis illustrates in quantitative terms that the majority of these Weibo users explicitly supported the role the site is already playing as a forum for information dissemination and free political communication. However, the wide gap between VIP and casual users indicates that these two user groups had very different attitudes on this issue.

## **6.2 Critical Discourse Analysis Results**

Among all topics coded in this research, there are some topics deserve to further explore to reveal what the users discussed and what the evidence is from the discussions in order to reveal how the censorship played in their

discussions. In the following, it planned to concentrate five topics analyzed by critical discourse analysis critical discourse analysis with examples taken from the discussion gives further insight into their ideology and perspectives. They are ‘1200 voter/ current election system’ and ‘Universal suffrage’; ‘one country, two systems’, ‘Chief Leung’, and ‘Communist Party of China’.

The thematic results of the critical discourse analysis in this section cooperating with content analysis result above help answer what the content they discussed through exploring the discursive strategies used by Weibo netizens, it would reveal how the strategies are constructed in political discourse and what is the relationship of the strategies between social reality, especially the social factor which is independent of discourse but reveals through discursive practice or rhetorical patterns, then demonstrate the nature of political discourses on the HK Chief Executive Election used by different types of Weibo user [in HK and China]. Accordingly, it could help prepare to answer what extent and in what ways does censorship shape political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the HK Chief Executive Election, which discussed later.

Example 6.1 is a discussion between a casual user from the mainland and a Weibo Got Talent activist from Hong Kong, which was taken from the discussion about the electoral system in Hong Kong.

A (Weibo Got Talent): Do you really have the right to appoint the Chief Executive?! Could you respect the political system of Hong Kong? There is no doubt that the Hong Kong 1<sup>st</sup> July Protest will happen!

B (Casual User - comment on A): The election is ruled by The Basic Law.

A (Comment on B): The Basic Law should ensure that the Chief Executive of Hong Kong is appointed by the Hong Kong people, unlike the ‘fake’ election in mainland China. The Chief Executive should not be an underground CCP nominee.

B (Comment on C – another casual user): There will be universal suffrage at the next election, and the appointment process will be governed by the Basic Law; it’s nothing to do with democracy.

C (Comment on B): This term ‘appointment’ is just disgusting. Who needs your appointment when I can elect my own candidate? All you need to do is show support. Otherwise you can just say you handpicked our leader. The Taiwanese know all about this!

B (Comment on C): This is an issue of sovereignty, not democracy. Only an ‘appointment’ can show that Hong Kong is subordinate to PRC, not some ‘independent kingdom’...

D (Comment on C): There are too many self-appointed fighters for democracy only too willing to demonstrate their ignorance. He doesn’t even have a clear idea about sovereignty. Why waste time trying to enlighten him?

B (Comment on D): Real democracy is ruined by this very type of pseudo-democracy retard.

Example 6.1 is a dialogue between Hong Kong users and mainland users (A: Hong Kong user, B: mainland user, C: Hong Kong user, D: Hong Kong user), The Weibo Got Talent activist from Hong Kong questioned the legality of the Communist Party of China (CCP) appointing the Chief Executive (see example 6.1), while the casual user from the mainland tries to explain to him the relationship between The Basic Law and one country, two systems, and the rationale behind the Chief Executive election. The fourth message in the dialogue, the casual user’s comment on another

casual user's comment, implies his 'hope' that universal suffrage will be realized by the next election. The exchange is a frequent debate between Hong Kong citizens and mainland citizens upon mainland-Hong Kong relationship discussion. There are explicit differences between Hong Kong and the mainland in terms of political systems, particularly election systems; mainland of China is socialist country while Hong Kong follows the capitalist system that the same as Hong Kong handover before.

In Example 6.1, the Weibo Got Talent activist feels the CCP should not have the privilege or the social power to control the nomination of the Chief Executive; rather, he argues that this privilege should belong to Hong Kong citizens themselves. This writer implies that the ongoing conflict between Hong Kong users and mainland users will only be sorted out by the promulgation of universal suffrage, as this is the only political arrangement that will fully empower and meet the needs of Hong Kong citizens.

In terms of lexical agency, writer A in example 6.1 uses the word 'fake' to refer to the unfair or manipulated elections that have allowed the CCP to maintain control over the mainland. Another lexical strategy used here – 'underground CCP' (*di xia dang*) – has its roots in Chinese history. After being driven underground by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists in 1927, the so-called 'underground CCP' spent several years quietly organizing revolution in China's rural communities before finally coming to power. Although 'underground CCP' is generally a neutral or even commendatory term, in the context of the Chief Executive election, this Hong Kong citizen uses it to express their sense that the CCP sought to manipulate the political system from behind the scenes.

In terms of ‘This result of election is consistent with the will and expectations of the citizens (here refers to the voters), so when will the politicians of China be elected the way as they are in Hong Kong?’, example 6.2 is a comment by a casual user from the mainland F, which was also taken from the discussion about the electoral system in Hong Kong. The (mainland) casual user F in example 6.2 admires the election system in Hong Kong because he is dissatisfied with the system on the mainland. The casual user from the mainland (example 6.2) has a positive impression of the Hong Kong Election and is implicitly critical of the CCP’s manipulation of elections, which could not fulfil the expectation of voters and is inconsistent with the ‘will of citizens’.

Although the casual user F in Sample 6.2 also assumes that the election was manipulated by the CCP, he nevertheless believes the result to be consistent with the will of Hong Kong’s citizens. ‘The will of citizens’ – or *min yi* – has become an increasingly fascinating term within the Chinese political dimension in recent years. One manifestation of China’s democratization, the phrase refers to public opinion; that is, the values and desires of *all* citizens rather than just those of the elite, upper class or politicians. This user’s comment implies that election results in the mainland may not represent the will of citizens.

G (Comment on H): We support all voters who cast blank votes and cause elections to be aborted until universal suffrage is introduced in five years’ time.
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Example 6.3: Casual user’s comment on comment (from Hong Kong)

Example 6.3 is a comment on comment from a Hong Kong casual user G, which was also taken from the discussion about the electoral system in

Hong Kong. Sample 6.3 reveals a similar faith in universal suffrage with example 6.2 and expresses Hong Kong citizens' support for voters who cast blank votes as a form of political protest. Dissatisfaction with the current political system in Hong Kong is best exemplified by the 1<sup>st</sup> July Protest, which is an annual protest led by the Civil Human Rights Front to demand democracy, universal suffrage and the protection of freedom of speech and to express opposition to Basic Law Article 23.

Example 6.4 is a Hong Kong casual user (I)'s comment, which was also taken from the discussion about the electoral system in Hong Kong. Example 6.4 illustrates a typical feature of Chinese online political discussion. Critical discourse analysis and Verbal Irony Procedure help decode the underlying ideology of these speakers.

Yes! The result of the Chief Executive election is consistent with the results of the mock election! We can cheer up and celebrate – ‘Hong Kong is not dead’!
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Example 6.4: Casual user (I)'s comment (Hong Kong)

The sample text may be separated into three utterances, thus:

*[1] Yes! [2] The result of the Chief Executive election is consistent with the results of the mock election! [3] We can cheer up and celebrate – ‘Hong Kong is not dead’!*

[1] is descriptive, not ironic; [2] and [3] are explicit evaluation. The literal evaluation of [2] fits the co-text, so this is not ironic. However, the evaluation of [3] does not fit the co-text. ‘Hong Kong is not dead’ could be seen as a positive statement insofar as it seems to celebrate the fact that Hong Kong has survived. But critics have complained that Hong Kong has declined since the 1997 handover because its chief executives have

been pro-Beijing. The user agrees with this criticism that expect the current chief executive could be appointed by Hong Kong citizens themselves, which was consistent with the results of mock election. The writer indicates the mock election was a triggered activity that caused by accumulated social conflicts since 1997 handover. The mock election organized by citizens who unsatisfied actual Chief Executive Election in Hong Kong. So it implied the negative mood of citizens toward the failure of Hong Kong governance as ‘us’. Although ‘Hong Kong is not dead’ is literally positive, it implies that the territory has declined, so this utterance is ironic.

The six examples discussed below were drawn from the online debate about the system of party competition in Mainland China. Following the principles of CDA (access, social inequality, structure and conclusion) and Verbal Irony Procedure, the analysis investigated discursive and rhetorical strategy the speakers use to reveal their ideologies upon Chinese conflicts between parties, in terms of topic ‘CCP’ and ‘Chief Leung’.

Examples 6.5 ‘what is the soul of Hong Kong democracy? Mr. Leung is the Pro-Beijing loyalist, he is the person who suggested [the police] open fire with tear-gas to control the political parade, and censored the free speech of citizens, so how can he stand for the soul of Hong Kong [democracy]?’ (Casual user (J)’s comment on comment from Hong Kong) reveal that Mr. Leung is seen by the Hong Kong casual user as pro-Beijing. This contributor J feels that the fact that Mr. Leung had the power to suppress civil protesters with tear gas and to censor online communication was against the ‘soul’ of democracy (‘soul’ here means the core value of Hong Kong). Besides, ‘What’s the soul of Hong Kong democracy?’ This question involved a lot of doubts upon Hong Kong’s sovereign by Hong

Kong casual users. Kwong and Yu (2013) provided an instance that Cantonese and English are Hong Kong's official language not Chinese however; Hong Kong was shut down of international negotiations impending directly for themselves, and the mainland government is the only one who could stand for negotiating Hong Kong's benefits in an international stage. Kwong and Yu described the situation of democracy in Hong Kong is quite irony.

The term 'loyalist' suggests dog-like obedience to Beijing; Dog-like (走狗, 比喻阿谀奉承或谄媚的人) here is a metaphor for rhetorical use, it could be understood as a lackey or flunkey in English. It derives from Chinese literature '范蠡遂去, 自齐遗大夫种书曰: '飞鸟尽, 良弓藏; 狡兔死, 走狗烹。'(《史记·越世家》). Hence this user's questioning whether Mr. Leung could properly represent Hong Kong's core value. This situation recalls the experience of the first Chief Executive to take office after the handover, Tung Chee-hwa. When he tried to implement an article in the Basic Law requiring the government to draw up anti-subversion legislation, Hong Kong citizens, concerned about the curtailment of their freedom, called for his resignation. Then Tung was also widely believed to have been forced to step down for an excuse of health by Beijing but actually because of his unsatisfactory performance (Cheng, 2014).

'Mr. Leung is the underground CCP; his success abuses [the spirit of] one country, two systems. The on going political parade, and more and more protests, how dangerous Hong Kong is! But look at the news reports from Mainland China; all are representing how flourishing Hong Kong is! How poor it is!'

(Example 6.6: Hong Kong Casual user (K)'s comment)

This is a comment (Example 6.6) made by casual user K in Hong Kong; the main idea of it refers to the main conflicts between citizens and the Hong Kong government over the implementation of universal suffrage and freedom of speech, especially ‘...On going political parade’ and ‘more and more protests’ reflects to how serious and flourish offline social movements taken place in Hong Kong. ‘Underground CCP’ in example 6.6 is once again employed by a Hong Kong user who is suspicious that the CCP control Hong Kong from behind the scenes. Activists want to retain the capitalist economic system, a free press and freedom of worship, arguing that both the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law stipulate that Hong Kong should maintain a high degree of autonomy under Chinese sovereignty, which includes keeping its way of life. The result has been growing conflict between the CCP and Hong Kong’s Pan-democracy party ever since the 1997 handover. In fact, according to Cheng (2014), the Chinese authorities have already established their resources in Hong Kong community as a good foundation for the pro-Beijing political groups by the mid-1990s. Since the first Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa, they are criticized by citizens as pro-Beijing, according to Cheng (2014), For instance, in the last year of Donald Tsang administration, The University of Hong Kong conducted a survey upon the popularity of Donald Tsang, the result revealed the sharply fell of his popularity ratings because of this (Cheng, 2014). Cheng (2014) maintained that social activism is always disappointed with the pro-democracy camp, because they only have eighty seats in the HKSAR’s eighteen District Council out of a total of over 400, which means they are the minority in the every District Council, since the system of the Basic Law provide a safe majority support for the administration in the legislature, the pan-democracy political groups loose the policy-making process since 1997 handover. That is one of the main

reasons why there is ongoing protest and conflicts organized in Hong Kong.

The disappointment and unsatisfactory by Hong Kong citizens expressed like ‘Spy’ in example 6.7 ‘You should know that Mr. Leung is a Chinese spy’ (Casual user L’s forwarding post); ‘socialism’ in example 6.8 ‘the feature of socialism in this face is too damn high’ (Weibo Got Talent activist M’s comment) and ‘puppet’ in example 6.9 ‘Bonjour, puppet!’ (Casual user N’s forwarding post) are all neutral words that have a root in Chinese history. ‘Puppet’, or *kui lei*, originally referred to the Punch and Judy show (people control the puppet to perform), but the meaning has evolved over time and it is now also used to refer to an individual or government that seems outwardly independent but that is actually being manipulated by someone else. In this context, the writer N sees Chief Leung’s government as a puppet being manipulated by the central government in Mainland China. ‘Chinese spy’ (*te wu* or *jian die*) is a derogatory term suggesting that Chief Leung is secretly working for the CCP and sacrificing Hong Kong citizens’ rights to become the CCP’s right-hand man. The metonymic use of the word ‘socialism’ in example 6.8 is a criticism of Chief Leung’s pro-Beijing attitude and his inability to manage Hong Kong, which the writer feels should retain a capitalist economic system. The writers J, K, L, M, N in examples 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8 and 6.9 all see Hong Kong’s citizens as ‘us’ and Chief Leung and the CCP as ‘them’. Conversely, the writer O in example 6.10 ‘grassroots Chief Executive, here comes another inspirational example’ (VIP (p)’s comment) has a positive opinion of Chief Leung. The English word ‘grassroots’ (*cao gen*), another example of metonymy, draws an analogy between the unseen but steady-growing roots of a plant and middle- and lower-income groups who lack privilege or wealth but who have the drive to see things

change. In this context, the term ‘grassroots Chief Executive’ suggests Chief Leung is one of ‘us’ who has been given the power to fight against control by the CCP – the negative ‘them’.

The contributors’ political views are also expressed using irony, or a mixture of irony, metaphor and metonymy. This is best exemplified by the following three examples:

*Mr. Leung received an imperial edict!*

Example 6.11: Casual user P’s comment (from mainland China)

[1] *Mr. Leung received an imperial edict!* ‘Imperial edict’ in [1] is an implicit evaluation and literally positive because of receiving an imperial edict was an honor that derives from Chinese history). However, it is necessary to construct an evaluation scale. The casual user P maintained that Mr. Leung should not receive the imperial edict due to he should obey the ‘Hong Kong people administrating Hong Kong’ policy. Hong Kong should maintain a high degree of autonomy even under the Chinese sovereignty. The contributor P is implying that Mr. Leung is part of the underground CCP and has given up Hong Kong’s right to manage itself. So the imperial edict is not an honor to him but a shame. As the literal claim is the reverse of the intended evaluation and is incongruent with the co-text, the utterance is a mixture of sarcastic and ironic.

*Civic Governor Leung!*

Example 6.12: Weibo Got Talent activist Q’s forwarding post

[1] *Civic Governor Leung!*

[1] is an implicit evaluation and literally positive. Although it consists of just three words, it is complex enough to require an evaluation scale.

Chinese politics pays careful attention to official titles; as Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region (SAR), Mr. Leung's official title is Chief Executive of SAR Leung. Example 6.13 expresses a similar attitude:

*Congrats to the Secretary of the Municipal Party Committee in Hong Kong!*

Example 6.13: Casual user R's comment

The user R literally congratulates Mr. Leung on his success, but these congratulations involve plural meaning as they address him as the Secretary of the Municipal Party Committee rather than the Chief Executive. Local officials (*gong wu yuan*) on the mainland are given the title of Civic Governor or Secretary of the Municipal Party Committee. By calling him Civic Governor Leung, this contributor R is implying that Hong Kong will not retain its capitalist system under Mr. Leung's leadership. Thus, it is rhetorical because the literal meaning hidden critics and needs to be intended evaluated. Its sarcasm is directed towards the CCP, Mr. Leung and the one country, two systems policy.

The analysis identified three main characteristics of Weibo netizens' political discourse upon this topic. Firstly, Weibo contributors employed a range of rhetorical strategies to express their disagreement with the government, including casting Mr. Leung as the enemy. Their use of metonymy, while allowing them to express their anger more forcefully, also enabled them to reduce the risk of online censorship. Thus, deployment of this strategy may also be seen as a form of self-censorship, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Secondly, the Hong Kong contributors' criticism of the CCP, mainland government and even Chief Leung himself was not solely attributable to a strong desire to see universal suffrage; it may also have had its origins in an irrational hostility

to the one country, two systems principle and the Basic Law, or other financial reasons (Cheng, 2014), but it is just a sign to speculate which needs further examine in the interview. Thirdly, those citizens who were implacably opposed to China's central government (this general opposition is called *feng zhong bi fan* 逢中必反) were inclined to distrust everything it does on principle. Numerous studies have demonstrated that an individual's political attitudes and behaviours are consistently related to both their political knowledge and psychological processes (Borgida, Federico & Sullivan, 2009). It is therefore necessary to examine how Weibo contributors criticized the competition between the parties during the election and the nature of their arguments.

The critical discourse analysis gives insights into the ideology and attitudes of the speakers by focusing on lexical and rhetorical analysis. Example 6.18 'One of my comments has been he xie<sup>18</sup> [censored], let us roar!' is a comment on comment posted by a WGT activist S, highlighting his anger at the deletion of his post by the Chinese authorities.

*T to U: Votes are just the bright side of the moon! [Means voting does not make any sense].*

*U to T: Could you explain more?*

*T to U: I am so unhappy, because one of my comments has been he xie [censored]*

*U to T: Oh yeah, you see, that is Weibo! But I would like to hear more from you...*

Example 6.19: Dialogue between a Weibo Got Talent activist (T) and casual user (U)

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<sup>18</sup> he xie, 和谐 in Chinese, it derives from Harmonious put forward by formal president Hu Jintao's signature ideology, to develop Confucianism. There is Internet slang using like River crab (pinyin: [héxiè](#)), which refers to the online censorship.

Example 6.19 refers to a similar incident, but the casual user U's response ('Oh yeah, you see, that is Weibo!') suggests that although this contributor dislikes the limiting of free speech, he is resigned to online censorship. Both of the two examples that their helplessness and the anger reflect a negative attitude towards Chinese online censorship.

*He xie* in example 6.18 and example 6.19 is a contemporary Chinese word often applied to the Internet environment. It derives from the phrase for 'harmonious society', which itself comes from combining the Confucian principles of 'harmony despite difference' (*he er bu tong*) and 'harmony as the most precious value' (*he wei gui*) (The Confucian Analects Lunyu, Chapter 1-12). In this context, Chinese netizens use the term as a phonetic pun to refer to the censorship or deletion of citizens' online discourse. There are three ways in which a Chinese netizen can alert his readers that his posts are being censored and express his anger for online censorship at the same time. First, it could use the way of Chinese phonetic alphabet (pin yin)- *he xie*. However, *he xie* sometimes may be traced by active filtering when lots of people use it. Secondly, the word for 'river crab' sounds like that for harmoniousness in Chinese (phonetic pun), so river crab is being used as a kind of code to warn the readers that the post has been censored; character is used to replace 'harmoniousness', which makes use of phonetic pun. Thirdly, the image of river crab is even used as a kind of ironic reflection by citizens to symbolize the fact of online censorship. Therefore, the lexical agency used by Chinese netizens reveals their negative attitude towards online censorship.

The development of the Chinese Internet and new media has been highly criticized by domestic commentators. Citizens have in the past been given

limited opportunity to participate in political discussion via new media. Example 6.20 ‘If actual voting for election could be cooperated with Weibo, it would be more effective and convenient’ (Casual user V’s forwarding post), example 6.21 ‘Never doubt the power of new media!’ (VIP (p) W’s forwarding post), and example 6.22 ‘This is freedom of the press in action!’ (Casual user X’s comment) all derives from Weibo content suggest that citizens see new media as an instrument of empowerment that will help them expand their social resources and minimize social inequality. Even though there is strict online censorship in China, netizens feel that new media can help broaden political communication in various ways. Thus, the casual user V in example 6.20 wants the Chinese political establishment to engage with social media to enhance citizen participation. The contributors W and X in examples 6.21 and 6.22 both use exclamatory sentences to emphasize the benefits of Weibo use. There is no doubt that both of these users (one casual user X and one VIP (p) W) see Weibo as having a role to play as a disseminator of information and forum for free political communication.

The CDA focused on the orientation of Weibo users’ contributions on censorship and the ideology constructed in discursive structure of discourse. Two conclusions emerged accordingly: Chinese netizens oppose the government’s manipulation of online discourse; and they have a positive image of Weibo as a platform for free political communication and information dissemination. The qualitative data indicates that both supporters and opponents of online censorship deploy a range of arguments to justify their position. Most importantly, Weibo has already become a symbol – for both citizens and the government – of social media’s potential power as a forum for information dissemination and

citizen participation in political communication, which would be further identified in responses from interview.

### **6.3 Semi-structure Interview Result**

Sections 6.1 and 6.2 have illustrated the content of political discussions among various users regarding 2012 HKCE Election in both quantitative and qualitative ways, the output of interview support both of the output to look further about the reasons why the users contribute to such content with evidence thereby answering the research questions.

In terms of addressing the reasons why the interviewees participate into specific topic discussions, one interviewee, a casual user from the mainland, explained that he had contributed to the Election Committee discussion because he did not see how 1200 votes could be truly said to represent the whole electorate even it is said the electoral system is democratic (MCU2), while a mainland Weibo Got Talent activist asked: ‘Who are the 1200 voters? Where do they come from? Who do they represent? Could they be affected by the citizens or media outside?’ (MWU2), One VIP from Hong Kong pointed out that the 1200 voters were the lynchpin of the whole election, deciding on candidates and appointing the Chief Executive, and that they should be the first thing to go in the move towards universal suffrage (HVU3).

Moreover, it draws on CDA output and analyzed the interview data to illustrate the nature of Weibo users’ online political discourse on the CCP, Chief Leung and the contentious subject of ‘one country, two systems’. Interviewees from the mainland saw it (one country, two systems) as essential to preserve the different political systems of the mainland and Hong Kong (MVU2, MVU3, MVU4, MWU1, MCU1), while Hong Kong

interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the policy (HWU2, HVU2, HWU2). When asked whether it was the main reason for the decline of Hong Kong, or whether it has driven the democratization of the territory, one casual user from the mainland (MCU1) said that the one country, two systems policy had made the fall of Hong Kong inevitable. However, two VIP of person from the mainland took a different view (MVU3, MVU4); one commented that the policy has moved the island towards democratization, and that Hong Kong citizens should see it as a ‘win-win’ situation (MVU3), while another VIP of person from the mainland argued: Hong Kong citizens have been naturally resistant to the CCP, but the CCP has allowed Hong Kong to remain independent. Although we [the CCP] have tried to minimize disagreements between Hong Kong and mainland citizens over policy and ideology, it is still hard to please Hong Kong citizens. It is irrational to blame the government for everything. The democratization process is further ahead in Hong Kong than in the mainland, although it cannot approach the same level as in western countries. It is necessary to understand that a political system like the western democratic system will not suit every country and everyone. The one country, two systems policy was a wise move; it has resolved the problem of ideology as well as territorial disputes. It’s not true that Hong Kong has collapsed (MVU4).

This interviewee (MVU4)’s comment acknowledges the tendency of many Hong Kong citizens who participated in online discussions have an radical distrust of the CCP (or called *feng zhong bi fan* 逢中比反), it is best exemplified by another example - a Weibo Got Talent activist’s comment: ‘You are clowns that oppose everything related to China!’ (*feng zhong bi fan* 逢中必反). There was evidence of this distrust in the online comment posted by one casual user from Hong Kong (example 6.14: ‘Most voters

are encouraged by the CCP, it is fake democracy! Fake one country, two systems!'), who suggests that most voters in the election were manipulated by the CCP, and that in exercising its power, the CCP has created social inequality. 'Fake' here refers to the negative effects of this power; the contributor feels that the CCP's control over the development of Hong Kong is contrary to the spirit of one country, two systems, and against the soul of democracy. Surprisingly, a similar scepticism towards the one country, two systems policy is also evident in example 6.15 'One country, two systems is a joke after all.', which was posted by a casual user's comment from the mainland.

Several of the interviewees argued that Hong Kong's government is only semi-autonomous (MCU1, HWU2, HWU3). One journalist (MWU1) complained that the Chief Executive campaign was a fake election, managed by the central (mainland) government. Others (HWU2, HCU2, HCU1) argued that the democratic development of Hong Kong is being blocked by the central government, especially Beijing's Liaison Office, which is consistent with 'engaged in behind-the-scenes election planning and mobilization' (WWP, Nov. 30). The writers of examples 6.14 and 6.15 are similarly sceptical; they are satirically suggesting that Hong Kong has lost its autonomy and become just like any other Chinese city, which is the same what HCU1 perceived.

This view was echoed by one of the Hong Kong-based VIPs (HVU4), who claimed that there is less political democracy in Hong Kong than people imagine. She told how bosses at her company and others canvassed employees before the election and made deals with them for their votes. She went on to suggest that the final result was a foregone conclusion, and

that those who admire Hong Kong's 'democracy' and 'free communication' do not know the whole story.

To answer why did they participate in Weibo discussions on the HKCE Election? What evidence is there from the discussions themselves of the role censorship played in discussions of the election? What role did participants say censorship played in the extent and nature of the participation in Weibo discussions on the election? Interviewees were asked about their experiences of online censorship firstly. Significantly, only one (HVU1) of the Hong Kong-based VIP interviewees had had posts deleted. His account was blocked for more than a month when he discussed the Jasmine Revolution online. He described his attitude as 'contradictory'; he was outraged at being blocked, but knew that Jasmine had been mentioned so many times, so it would inevitably be blocked, but he just tried to test the online censorship on purpose. The other interviewees who had had similar experiences all came from the mainland. They described feeling as if they had been dismissed: 'Fine...I have touched the political mine and been "*he xie*", I feel so disappointed!'; 'When my words were blocked, I felt depressed that I could not speak out what I wanted to say!' (MCU1); when their some extreme and sensitive words were deleted, they thought these only showed that there was the truth that to be hidden (MWU1, MWU3). Others had avoided being censored, having learned from their friends' experiences, though it left them feeling helpless (MWU1, HWU3).

Several interviewees (MCU3, MVU4) said that they were optimistic that there would be greater freedom of speech in the future in China when talking about politics. However, they unlikely would be happy about the current state of affairs. For instance, they had even tried to challenge

online censorship by deliberately inserting sensitive words, because they were curious to see what would happen. For instance, a VIP from Hong Kong (HVU3) was blocked when she tried to post comments on the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest. Another casual user from Hong Kong (HCU2) was blocked when he tried to comment on the corruption of the sons of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, as well as the relationship between President Xi Jinping and his wife.

VIPs from Hong Kong (HVU1, HVU2) saw censorship as normal on the mainland even they disagree with that. One mainland VIP countered (MVU1) that: ‘No one can delete mine, because I am the person who can delete others’ posts. Our censorship system obeys rules; for example, we will delete messages which combine references to Taiwan or Tibet with reference to China’. When asked how the censor deals with posts that employ irony to avoid using sensitive words, the interviewee admitted that current technology means the censor is unable to detect posts that avoid using key words or that rely on pictures, ‘...so when we do find these, we have to delete them all’.

Those opposing online censorship saw the limiting of free speech as against the spirit of democratization. Some criticized online censorship because of what they had seen on Facebook: ‘The comments on Facebook are even more extreme and harsh, but they are never blocked’ (HWU4). Others argued that online censorship destroys a platform which should allow free communication (HWU4, HWU1, HWU2 etc.); and that everyone has the right to express themselves (HVU3). One interviewee came up with the interesting observation: ‘If the truth has been deleted, then no one can know the reality...however, when comments are deleted, this makes people more curious, and it might push them to try and find the

truth and the messages that have been deleted’ (MWU1). A few interviewees were neutral on online censorship (MVU3, HVU1, MVU4), called it ‘Chinese characteristics’ (*zhongguotese*, 中国特色) (MWU4); one VIP from Hong Kong (HVU1) and one from the mainland (MVU4) suggested that there is currently no other strategy for managing online rumours and valueless information.

The interviews gave following insight into the reasons why Weibo users support or oppose online censorship in China and their understanding of the relationship between online censorship and digital democracy in the Chinese context.

The explicit supporters of online censorship saw it as being for the protection of citizens, and/or a necessary tool of government to be employed for the good of the state as a whole (MVU1, MVU2, MVU4). They argued that online censorship is an effective deterrent to netizens wanting to do something destructive or refusing to take responsibility for their online opinions, and a good way to lead and supervise public opinion (MVU1, MVU4, MWU2, and MCU3). Given the large number of Chinese netizens, it would be dangerous to let everyone express himself or herself freely online (MVU2); as one casual user (MCU3) activist put it: ‘There are still lots of children and junior students among the netizens; they should be considered’. VIPs from the mainland (MVU1) were more inclined to support online censorship. Some maintained that censorship is necessary because, for instance (MVU1), as the classic Chinese story *da yu zhi shui*<sup>19</sup> tells us, rivers have to be guided to avoid floods; in other words, online censorship could lead users to a right way of thinking.

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<sup>19</sup> *da yu zhi shui*: 大禹治水 (in Chinese), Great Flood of Gun-Yu (China), it is a significant and major flood event that traditionally dated to the third millennium BCE, during the reign of Emperor Yao, it lasts for two generations and resulted in great population displacement. The story of the Great Flood praised

It was also argued that the Chinese government needs to manipulate the virtual discussion through online censorship in order to hold onto its unique position and stability: ‘The situation of China is complex; online censorship is needed for the Chinese government to rule’ (MVU1); ‘This is a Chinese characteristic! We need it!’ (MWU4). One VIP interviewee (MVU1) argued that it is the responsibility of our leaders to help us consider more carefully. He wanted to discuss issues in a peaceful and rational environment, without upsetting people, and the main aim of online censorship is to protect and maintain the whole of society.

Then the interviewees are asked to interpret their own understanding of the digital democracy while they are discussing online censorship, a VIP from mainland, all Weibo Got Talent from Hong Kong, all casual users from mainland as well as two casual users from Hong Kong perceived digital democracy indicates individuals could freely express online and unlimited to receive either ‘right or wrong information’ (mentioned by 11 interviewees), a few (MVU2, MVU3, MWU2 and HVU1) of them agreed partly but put forward that the information online should be supervised to maintain online environment safe and clean, more than one (MVU4, HCU2 and HWU2) asserted that it was hard to implement digital democracy in China, because before pursuing digital democracy, it is basically ensure that we could secure the netizens who are capable to value anything online independently and objectively. Apart from that, a Weibo Got Talent from mainland (MWU1) and a casual user from Hong Kong (HCU4) additionally demonstrated that digital democracy also included the opportunities that citizens could be equally involved in political discussion online.

Then the interviewees had different opinions of the relationship between online censorship and digital democracy, depending on their own practical experience. Only two respondents (one WGT activist from Hong Kong (HWU1) and one casual user from the mainland (MCU2)) felt that Weibo makes no contribution to digital democracy because of online censorship, although they acknowledged that it provides more opportunities than before for citizens to better understand and talk explicitly about social and political affairs.

One VIP from Hong Kong highlighted that:

It is a free platform, which has improved digital democracy; we know freedom is relative rather than absolute. There is no doubt that Chinese new media are becoming more open about sensitive topics such as Tibet and the affairs of the CCP Central Committee. If we could achieve universal suffrage, I am sure Weibo would help millions! ... the most important thing is, it doesn't matter what you say; the diversity of opinions reflects social development, that is the core of digital democracy, the central aim of citizen political participation (HVU1).

VIPs from the mainland (MVU2, MVU4) also saw Weibo as a good online platform and as representing the development of the whole country. These interviewees argued that online platforms like Weibo are a way for citizens to empower themselves and to push politicians, and that the strict online censorship is in fact an indicator of how seriously the government takes 'digital democracy'.

One of the VIP interviewees (MVU1) from mainland went on to explain that, in addition to censorship, the CCP has also learnt to manipulate online discussion to achieve its political aims:

The CCP is now focusing on micro-blog platform penetration of soft environments. On the one hand, they use strong-arm tactics such as deleting posts and restricting sensitive words, but they can also distort the picture in other ways.

To illustrate his point, the interviewee (MVU1) told the story of a recent visit made by the Chinese President to the Qingfeng Baozi cafe<sup>20</sup>. Pictures of the visit were quickly posted on a micro-blog. Weibo users, thinking the pictures had been posted by a bystander, forwarded them, but it subsequently emerged that the first blogger to forward the images was in fact within the CCP. At this signal, commentators at CCTV news and the *People's Daily*, who already had the story ready to go, went live. Xinhua News Agency reposted within seconds, while the *People's Daily* was able to post eight pictures of the President within half an hour under the title: 'Netizens encounter China's top man in Qingfeng Baozi cafe'. The Sina website and Phoenix website then reposted the news, sending it via apps to millions of subscribers' mobile phones. A few non-party online media organizations expressed doubt that this was a genuine news story rather than a publicity stunt, but their opinions were quickly blocked and deleted. The general public, meanwhile, was left thinking that the story had emerged as a result of a spontaneous, friendly encounter between a netizen and the President.

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<sup>20</sup> Qing feng bao zi is one of top and time-honored restaurants in Beijing, it became a political campaign when president Xi came cross the restaurant on December 2013 without any formal official notice to the public. He queued and ordered the food there as the same as casual citizens in Beijing. The mainstream media in China demonstrates the characteristic of President Xi is an approachable leader to the Chinese citizens.

To summarize the interview outputs, the examples and the interview comments suggest firstly, that Hong Kong's electoral system is a source of social conflict between it and the mainland, and that the hostility felt by many Hong Kong citizens towards the Chinese government arises from perceived social inequalities and failures in Hong Kong governance. Secondly, Hong Kong citizens' calls for universal suffrage have brought them into direct opposition with the territory's officials. Thirdly, citizens from both the mainland and Hong Kong are critical of the Communist Party of China. Accordingly, it suggests figuring out how Weibo users perceived this election through political discussion on Weibo. Arguably, these political topics are popular and key political issues locally, which not only reveal the extent of what users could political discussed on Weibo, but also corporate as evidence from the discussions to demonstrate the role censorship played in discussions of the election, which would be discussed further in the following chapter. In addition to that, the features of political discourse and comments related to these topics imply the how Weibo netizens reflect to perceive the online censorship. This section demonstrated some of the points of conflict between parties that were discussed by Weibo users during the election. It finds that users from both the mainland and Hong Kong expressed explicit, sometimes radical, opposition to the one country, two systems policy, and that this opposition resulted in hostility towards the CCP and Chief Leung. The rhetorical strategies employed in the online political discussion reveal the nature of the social conflicts in Hong Kong, as well as features of political online discourse in China. This finding is quite important to help measure the implicit way that users employed for political participation and deliberation in order to understand online censorship and self-censorship, which would be discussed in the following chapter. Apart from this, the quantitative data indicates a high level of opposition to online censorship.

#### **6.4 Structure of Online Discussion and Ideology Education**

The content analysis was the foundation of the analysis; the quantitative data it yielded suggested areas for the subsequent critical discourse analysis. The CDA facilitated the examination of how Weibo users expressed their ideology through discursive structure and rhetorical agency. While the interviews reveal the users' various reasons for participating in election-related discussions, they also reveal that Weibo users employ rhetorical expressions not just to avoid online censorship – in other words, it serves as a form of self-censorship – but also to express their dissatisfaction more forcefully. These are fully discussed in the following section and chapter within the context of stated research questions and the theoretical framework.

The analysis demonstrates the certain topics popularly discussed on Weibo, as well as how the different statuses of Weibo users respond to these topics. The dynamic online debates and contributions between mainland and Hong Kong-based users reveal that the one country, two systems policy and universal suffrage are the main points of disagreement between these groups. It indicates a relationship between online status and their extent of political participation in these topics. Moreover, online censorship is seen as a double-edged sword; it protects the online environment but limits free political communication. Findings from Chapters Five and Six demonstrate *diversification (Duo yuan hua) stratagem as an important index to represent the development of digital democracy in China*. Diversification could be a mirror to shape how 'tolerant' the social media maintained in China is in holding diverse online communication, an idea supported by scholars like Krauch (1971) Becker (1981), Slaton (1992), Siapera (2012) and van Dijk's (2013). They

illustrate that digital platforms make democracy more participatory, strengthen online community, and maximize the practices of democracy in whatever views and forms.

More precisely, in the inductive analysis, the three sets of data above prove that the most popular topics discussed on Weibo concentrate on Chief Leung Chui-ying (10101 posts in total), the other candidates (1959 posts in total), and ‘universal suffrage’ (822 posts in total). Most rhetorical expressions focus on ‘Chief Leung Chui-ying’ and ‘Communist Party of China.’ Apart from this, the biggest gap between the number of explicit supportive statements and explicit opposition statements is found in the discussion of ‘Democratization in Hong Kong’ (Figure 22); the most balanced discussion topic is ‘The Other Candidates’ (Figure 18). The biggest gap of orientation among HK users and mainland users is about ‘One Country, Two systems’ (Figure 20, 21). As a deduction, the most popular topic discussion sheds light on whether Weibo could play a role in information dissemination; however, it also attracts the most rhetorical expressions. The majority of participants support it, and support for Weibo could be a positive platform to help free political communication (Table 2 and 3). In addition to what Chapter 5 illustrates, the role of online censorship shapes a more serious and significant manipulation of VIPs’ political participation behaviors through social media than that of casual users. Thus, there are diverse topics discussed, diverse orientations expressed, and diverse statuses of users participating in political communication through social media. These kinds of forms of diversification practice the pursuit of digital democracy, which allows citizens to get actively involved in political discourse (Tsatsou, 2014). This implies the development of digital democracy in China, which associates positively with online censorship. It is significant to

demonstrate here, as this research aims to enrich and deepen the understanding of the concept of deliberative democracy in the Chinese context.

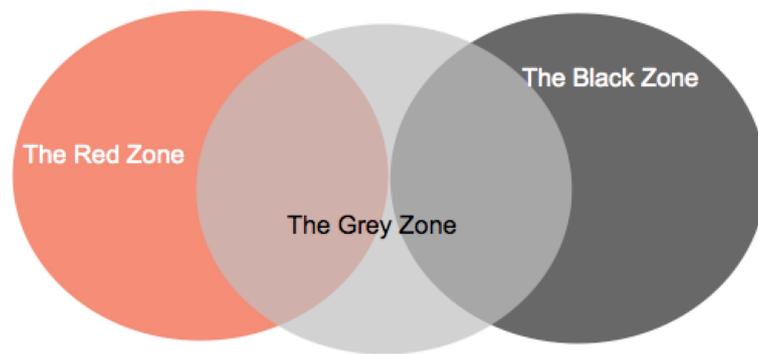
Along with analyzing these findings, there is a need to contextualize this case study in macro and micro ways. The *structure* of online political discussion could be divided into three dimensions in China when drawing from what president Xi in China has suggested, namely the ‘Three Zones’ (*San Ge Di Dai*): the Red Zone<sup>21</sup>; the Grey Zone<sup>22</sup>; the Black Zone<sup>23</sup> (Zhang, 2015). The Red refers to the mainstream and pro-Beijing media, for instance, *Chinadaily* (*Ren Min Ri Bao*), CCTV, and party newspapers, including their either traditional channels or new methods (such as Weibo, Wechat, mobile applications), and so on. The Red Zone positively leads the public to help understand the complexity of the problem-list of state governance, which aims to strengthen the cohesion of social consensus for social issues by disseminating rational and professional information and expressions. The Black Zone indicates those minor online platforms that concentrate on discussing extremely sensitive topics, expressing intense and radical criticism, and disseminating negative and pessimistic information. The Grey Zone refers to media platforms like Sina Weibo, Tencent Wechat, and BBS, which have both positive, pro-Beijing information, but also have critiques or negative comments from casual citizens or opinion leaders. Even though the ‘Three Zones’ developed with overlaps, interactions, and transformations, they are relatively independent, fragmented and differentiated, as well. Thus, the fluid development of the ‘Three Zones’ are noteworthy here in helping understand the structure of online political discussion in China in a new way.

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<sup>21</sup> The Red: *Hong Se Di Dai* (紅色地帶)

<sup>22</sup> The Grey: *Hui Se Di Dai* (灰色地帶)

<sup>23</sup> The Black: *Hei Se Di Dai* (黑色地帶)



In addition to The Grey Zone, there are also specialized portals, such as *Gong Shi Wang* (共识网) and *Yanhuang Chunqiu*(炎黄春秋), websites in favor of liberalism. Furthermore, there are intellectual accounts on commercial platforms, such as Weibo or Wechat, for instance, the ‘Dissidents’ (*Zhengjian* 政见). Thus, both these examples and the findings from three sets of data have demonstrated the flexibility provided by these online social media platforms for citizens’ political participation, reflecting the resilient strategies the state uses to govern online political discussions. The government could then tolerate these diverse platforms and allow the citizens to politically participate. Discussing the relationship between citizens’ political participation and the strategy of online censorship conducted by authorities is the most important part of this research, especially in concentrating on the citizens who interactively represent their perspectives in negotiation with online censorship. Therefore, this research concentrates on the Grey Zone to explore how diversification enriches the concept of deliberative democracy in China and represents digital democracy in a new way (the cross-tabulated method of explicitly, implicitly, pessimism, and optimism has been sufficiently discussed before).

The following section opens discussions based on these research results in order to inspire future studies and invite more comments. Particularly when discussing Chinese online censorship, there are doubts that focus on the rationale of the existence of online self-censorship of Weibo netizens and the importance of using Chinese philosophies to explain the Chinese political context rather than Western theories. Additionally, as it is a popular topic, the reason for there being complex controversies in using Western theories to explain Chinese political cases and for discussion of the Communist Party of China will also be considered. To look at the rationale of Chinese citizens' online self-censorship, it is necessary to discuss the strategy of CCP for online censorship, for instance, ideology education and ideology adaption.

This research has claimed that rigid online censorship in China not only affects how Weibo users choose to contribute and their choice of online status, but also their responses and ideology adoption; this is because ideology could be learned and affect individuals' minds. For instance, a VIP user, also from Hong Kong, pointed out that as a journalist, his responsibility was to change society through 'productive discourse'; he noted that if he were just a normal casual user, he would spend his time reading gossip and joining in irrational debates. So, he had to admit that his identification, as well as the whole virtual environment, did have a major effect on his Weibo use in order to politically participate (HVU2). This claim is consistent with Varnali and Gorgulu's (2014) findings, namely that one's identity plays an important role in driving political participation on Twitter, in particular, by examining the case study of Turkey's Gezi Park protest. Thus, it is interesting to figure out the nature of online discourse, in which the forms of political participation have been limited by online identity due to their shaping by online censorship. The

adoption of ideology and issues around education will be discussed in the following section.

In evaluating the citizens' different ways of political participation and deliberation shaped by online censorship in China, it is worth further discussing and exploring how CCP strategy shaped the way in which online self-censorship by citizens is practiced. This could further explain the existence of online censorship. Ideology education conducted by an authority could explain, firstly, why it is necessary to establish online censorship to maintain online environments. CCP uses ideology to educate citizens in awareness of online censorship. Secondly, ideology education, incorporated with the CDA result, may reveal the significant difference of perspectives between users from Hong Kong and the mainland in terms of political discourse, which derives from whom has received different ideological education. Thirdly, ideological education could help to explain the relationship between online censorship and online self-censorship in another way. Thus, this section aims to discuss a better understanding of the nature and rationale of Chinese citizens' political participation and deliberation through social media.

This research concentrates on Schull's (1992; 1996) idea that ideology is a form of discourse. For instance, it could be revealed through political language, so that individuals may hold the same ideology but express different individual beliefs. Hence, power of ideology includes, but is not limited to, faith, but is also based on respect. Either explicit or implicit ways of political participation by netizens in this research demonstrate how citizens construct their key ideology through practicing various forms of political participation and deliberation. For instance, Chinese netizens oppose the government's manipulation of online discourse by using

rhetorical expressions, and they have a positive image of Weibo as a platform for free political communication and information dissemination by choosing to ‘forward’ posts. However, most netizens may find their own way of practicing online self-censorship in order to be involved in political participation and deliberation, which is demonstrated in explicit and implicit ways: the orientation of Weibo users’ contributions on censorship and their ideology constructed in discursive structure of discourse, as analyzed in Chapter Seven. The different online statuses and different types of contribution they prefer in order to politically participate also indicates how the ideology education works on citizens’ political participation and deliberation in explicit or implicit ways.

Regarding the way in which CCP strategy has been adopted in terms of managing citizens’ political participation and deliberation, the political discourse expressed by Chinese netizens in the case of the Hong Kong Chief Executive Election implies that ideology dominates the nature of the citizens’ political participation in the political discussions and affects their choice of which contributions to involve in political communication. The form of ideology could have not only a wide effect on either insider or outsider views of China, cultivating their political beliefs, but also hold socialist conventions that could help justify the CCP’s rule. In this sense, ideology is ever developing and it is far more important to CCP than it was before in the contemporary world. There are some explanations which illustrate the renewal of ideology for legitimizing the CCP, thereby making it more stable, being supported and accepted (Bondes and Heep, 2012; Bondes and Heep, 2013; Brady, 2009; Brown, 2012; Gilley and Holbig, 2010; Holbig, 2009; Holbig, 2013; Sausmikat, 2006; Su, 2011; Sandby-Thomas, 2011) by either casual citizens or party members, but it is not the primary focus of discussion here.

As previously discussed, Weibo could be either a “tool” or “object” to help understand deliberative democracy when citizens used for it political participation and deliberation, as claimed by some Weibo users. For instance, one VIP on the mainland (MVU1) has maintained that it is important for the Chinese authority to maintain the stability of the online environment with a cohesive strategy, so CCP has already been using soft power to maintain the online penetration. Soft power here is claimed to refer to ideology education and adaptation in order to empower oneself. Thus, this research asserts that CCP has implemented two ideological strategies: one is formal and one is informal, as introduced in Chapter Three. Either of them could have an explicit or implicit effect on the whole of society. According to the review, the formal refers to those official ideological discourses that serve the CCP’s ruling, for instance, Marxism’s Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Zhao Ziyang’s first stage of socialism, Jiang Zemin’s Three Represents, and so on.

Again, informal ideology refers to those popular ideas that could justify the CCP’s adaptation to social change, either by the party or citizens, for instance, the promotion of nationalism or patriotism. There is a cohesion and an inter-related relationship between the formal and informal ideology. This is similar to Sandby-Thomas’s (2014) perspective, but it is a pity that he does not provide any details. He also divides ideology into formal and informal dimensions. For example, he defines official ideology as “reform and opening up” and the informal ideology as “market liberalism.” All in all, ideological reform has been made in China since Deng Xiaoping demonstrated that “during the last ten years, our biggest mistake was made in the field of education, primarily in ideological and political education—not just of students but of the people in general” (Deng, 1989). So, the

CCP has increasingly realized the importance of ideological education in order to maintain its power.

Arguably, this research has claimed that the sense of exercising online censorship could be considered as formal ideology in this research. The formal ideology aims to establish the leading role and improve the party's credentials and authority in the development of China. It aims to explain the meaning of socialism with ongoing development through ideological orthodoxy. It further provides a basic guide to what should follow and what should not be opposed in current society. Top leaders in China all have a sense that ideological discourse is quite important; for instance, Jiang Zemin mentioned that "the first thing for strengthening the party is to grasp ideological and political work, because solving ideological and political problems is the premise and foundation for other works" (Jiang, 2005). Then, Hu Jintao illustrated that "ideology is an important front that we fiercely fight against hostile forces; if this front has some problems, it might lead to social turmoil and even the fall of our regime" (Literature, 2006: 318). Later, Xi Jinping stressed that "ideological work is extremely important" (Ni, 2013). Normally, formal ideology is constructed through communist language by officials in order to communicate with each other. Official communist language was not previously produced for utilisation by the casual user; however, it is increasingly concerned with consumption by individuals. For instance, the Scientific Outlook of Development put forward by Hu Jintao consists of popular contemporary language, like the "primary stage of socialism," "Three Represents." This change indicates the desire of CCP reforms, namely to develop with the widespread use of the Internet. These deserve to be illustrated here as they highlight how the CCP practised their formal ideology education on citizens. As they are aware of the importance of ideological work online,

they utilize online censorship to shape citizens' self-censorship practises on social media. The 'practises' in this research refers to the nature of citizens' political participation and deliberation on Weibo.

There is another instance, too, where Chinese authority shows concern about the strategy of online censorship in order to educate the citizens in a more adept way. Bamman et al. (2012), researched 11 million posts in Chinese from Twitter and 56 million messages on Sina Weibo. More than sixteen percent of posts were deleted out of 1.3 million checked. Bamman et al. (2012) concluded that a series of politically sensitive terms presented in a message that leads to a significant rate of deletion. They also found that the rate of message deletion was not only anomalous, but also non-uniform throughout the state. For instance, the messages coming from Tibet or Qinghai reveal a notably higher rate of message deletion, as opposed to those from Beijing.

Recent attempts to investigate the nature of online censorship in China include two empirical experimental studies conducted by Gary King at Harvard University in 2013 and 2014. It is important to mention this here, as this study illustrates how online censorship has been utilized by the authority to be more acceptable. This reveals something of the Chinese leadership's intentions and how the government controls information. One pessimistic individual VIP from Hong Kong (HVU1) in the current research opposed online censorship on the grounds that it is explicitly and entirely focused on political manipulation; he argued that the censorship is applied only when someone says something against the authorities or the CCP. However, this was not King's conclusion (2013). He contrasted censored and uncensored messages posted on 85 topics over time and found that Chinese online censorship suppresses collective action by

silencing posts that “represent, reinforce or spur social mobilization, regardless of content” (2013:1). Interestingly, the government’s strategy of online censorship allows both positive and negative comments about China, its policies and leaders, suggesting that the CCP shares Dimitrov (2008) and Egorov et al.’s (2009) view that the state collapses when citizens stop criticizing it. Censorship seems to be a way for China’s leaders to legitimize the regime and maintain stability and power.

Informal ideology aims to justify the party’s rule among Chinese society to supplement formal ideology, in order to maintain a stable social order (Zeng, 2014). Thus, informal ideology is normally expressed through popular discourse by authority or citizens. Implicit ideology could be educated through ubiquitous places like school education, poetry, movies and so on. For instance, in this research, one of the VIP interviewees (MVU1) from the mainland went on to explain that, in addition to censorship, the CCP has also learnt to manipulate online discussions to achieve its political aims:

“The CCP is now focusing on micro-blog platform penetration of soft environments. On the one hand, they use strong-arm tactics such as deleting posts and restricting sensitive words, but they can also distort the picture in other ways.”

To illustrate his point, the interviewee told the story of a recent visit made by the Chinese President to the Qingfeng Baozi cafe. Apart from this, CCP produces implicit ideology through numerous political discourses to discredit liberal democracy. For instance, the establishment of the national security commission in 2014 was directly under the leadership of Xi Jinping, which aimed to prevent the Chinese Arab Spring influenced by the West (Hayashi, 2014). Therefore, Chinese online censorship is

increasingly implemented within China in order to establish a strong centralized state power; otherwise, China would be easily devastated, therefore repeating its history (Lei and Hou, 2013).

Either formal or informal ideological education is making an effort to stabilize the entire Chinese society. Based on the output of interviews in this research, VIPs have a stronger sense of social and political boundaries than casual users. This then leads to a significant gap in contributions made by them, as VIPs has been more ideologically educated than casual users.

This research thus reveals orientation of the contributions made to the topic of China's Communist Party/the political system in Mainland China. Users expressed explicit opposition through 148 posts. There were only 15 posts that expressed neutrality on this topic. In contrast, users highlighted their explicit support for the CCP and the political system of China in 277 posts. The number of posts expressing support for the CCP/mainland China's political system was almost double the number expressing opposition; across all three topics upon CCP, Chief Leung and the other candidates, there were more explicit expressions of support than explicit expressions of opposition from all user groups. Comparing this output with what Peter Sandby- Thomas (2011) has researched on three large events in China (the protest of 1989, the anti-Falun Gong campaign in 1999, and the anti-Japan demonstrations in 2005), he measured the (in)stability discourse by researching articles in People's Daily from 1989 to 2007, He hence demonstrates that the strategy of CCP concentrates on manipulating (in)stability discourse to guide the citizens in the importance of a stable social order and thereby strengthen the legitimacy of CCP. Similarly, the CCP make use of online censorship strategy to supervise

netizens' political discourse in this research, even though they allow dynamic expression orientations online, especially as they allow rhetorical expressions, like irony, online to criticise themselves.

In this research, although the movement towards representative democracy in Hong Kong sprang up in the 1980s, the region's political system still exists within a framework of limited democracy, with political parties being broadly divided into two camps: the pan-democratic camp fighting for more democracy, and the pro-government camp (Cheng, 1999). The two camps both have a great many supporters, and cause a certain amount of political wrangling. This may be the important reason why there are diverse arguments during the election between citizens of Hong Kong and the mainland, because citizens from Hong Kong and the mainland are ideologically educated in a significantly different way. It is best to analyse post-reversion discourse or discriminatory discourse in a cognitive way, as some doubt the projects hold in terms of whether pro-Beijing discourse promotes patriotic feelings among Weibo's HK-based users, whether the debates between mainland users and Hong Kong users are evidence that Hong Kong Chinese are carving out a new identity, whether Hong Kong users still feel negatively towards their brethren over the border in mainland China, and if the discourse on Weibo is promoting an image of Hong Kong identity to the international community. These doubts are put forward here not because we have to answer them, but as an opportunity to think though these questions while discussing features of topics related to the 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election contributed by Weibo users. Citizens in Hong Kong and mainland demonstrated their own views and concerns about the relationship between Hong Kong freedom and the control of mainland of China.

Arguably, the above discussion is closely related to the uniqueness of China, and has demonstrated the structure of ideology adaption explaining the existence of online self-censorship of Weibo netizens. Most importantly, this research is not focused on comparing and contrasting Western or local theories adopted to explain the data. Yet, adopting Western theories to evaluate the Chinese case is not enough; using Chinese cultural and political theories is also important, as well, as to open horizons and to re-examine the objects of research. It points to the importance of why using Chinese philosophies to explain the Chinese political context and discussion of the Communist Party of China are the popular topics in this case. Arguably, this section is claimed as a finding implication, due to its raising of a new research question for future study. The next chapter will discuss the presentation, interaction of Chinese political participation and deliberation in a micro and strategic way.

## **6.5 Summary**

This chapter has represented the quantitative outputs from content analysis and qualitative results from critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. Data has been reported in order to answer the functional questions. Then, it addressed the extent and nature of political participation and deliberation on Weibo by either Hong Kong or mainland users in 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election, and how the censorship shaped to the citizen political participation through social media. The discussion focuses on dynamic perspectives and orientations on popular topic discussions, in terms of “universal suffrage,” “one country, two systems”, “democratization in Hong Kong,” and the “digital democracy of the Internet” on Weibo. It has supported two concepts: Firstly, their dynamic has provided a database to support an ongoing

debate on the extent and nature of citizens' political participation and deliberation in the Chinese political context. Moreover, it supports the evidence of as to what extent the role of censorship shaped discussions of the election, as well as how the self-censorship practices on Weibo have supported what Held (1996: 316) mentions, namely, that democracy could be regarded as "double-sided phenomenon": it not only 're-form[s] state power' but also 'restructur[es] civil society.'

On the other hand, the Chinese authority allows various ways for political participation in politics in the process of deliberative democracy enhancement that corresponds with formal ideology education. Ideology education plays an important role in the process of affecting netizens' online deliberative behaviours, especially contributing to practising the online self-censorship by Chinese authority, thereby stabilizing Chinese society as a whole. Therefore, ideology adaption is discussed to explain the nature of online self-censorship of Weibo netizens.

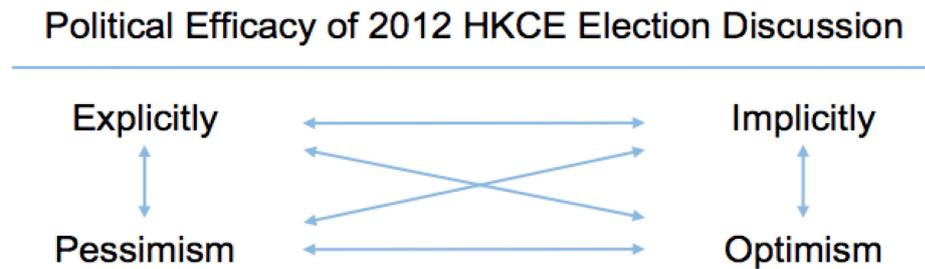
The section openly discussed what the findings suggested, and implies the strategy and structure of digital democracy conducted by the authorities, using ideology education and ideology adoption to explain the relationship between online censorship and self-censorship.

## **Chapter Seven: The Political Efficacy, Citizen Participation, and Social Media**

This chapter discusses the implication for political efficacy in The Grey Zone, according to three sets of data output from Weibo regarding the 2012 HKCE Election. This discussion helps better understand the individuals' beliefs and their confidence in their own ability to influence political activities online. By restructuring the results above, a line has been found that links the results, namely how netizens prioritize their political contributions and self-manage political discourse on Weibo under the 'threat' of online censorship. This enables this research to reflect on the political efficacy of Weibo communication by types of users [in HK and China] who politically participated in the 2012 HKCE Election. This line helps to address the research aims in terms of shedding light on the nature and the extent of citizen political participation through social media. Hence, this chapter explores the role of social media playing as 'tool,' 'forum,' and 'object' in helping to understand digital democracy and enriched deliberative democracy, which citizens use for online political participation and deliberation through implicit or explicit, pessimistic or optimistic ways. Additionally, this research investigates how social media, such as Weibo, were increasingly being seen as playing a significant role in the struggle to attain freedom of speech in the face of state power in China; moreover, it demonstrates the extent to which, and how censorship shaped political participation and deliberation on Weibo. Moreover, it helps to understand how citizens perceive online censorship in the process of their online political contributions. It argues that the results showed that self-censorship acts as a mechanism for negotiating power relations in the Chinese media platform. It supports what Van Dijk (1991) has

demonstrated, namely that the unsaid can sometimes be more revealing than what has been said.

This discussion has been shaped by cross-tabulated results, as shown below:



This figure frames the complex relationship of users' thinking, perspectives, orientations to practice, and underpins their online participation that enables working with online censorship, which reflects the flexibility social media could provide in order to allow the citizens to politically participate. Roughly 600 million Chinese are connected to the Internet through various digital media (Chen, 2013). According to Internet policy, whether the Internet should be regulated to some extent is the subject of ongoing debate among politicians, journalists, scholars and netizens. Discussions regarding the extent to which, and in what way censorship shaped citizens' political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the HKCE Election is explored by the competing views of cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists on rhetorical expressive participation and online self-censorship, as well as the explicit and implicit views on Chinese citizen political participation and deliberation. The output of three sets of data is made to the functional mechanism of political efficacy; the results show that online censorship could affect the process of people's political selection, thinking and motivation of political

activities, as well as the process of shaping their emotion upon the whole political environment.

This chapter consists of three main sections to evaluate citizens' political participation and deliberation with China's online censorship and Chinese self-censorship. More precisely, it begins by showing perspectives from cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists on practicing online self-censorship through expressive participation on Weibo, using the case of the 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election. It then analyzes the nature of citizens' online political discussions on the 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive election. A close analysis of these discourse allowed the research to put forth some concrete theoretical and methodological insights. The second section focused on Chinese netizens' negotiation of the censorship of social media in either implicit or explicit ways. Negotiation in this research is used in the sense of navigating one's way through something, usually an obstacle or problem; it is a balance, a tradeoff, or a sense of arriving at an agreement or compromise. For instance, forwarding is an explicit way of disseminating political information and attracting more followers, while their choice of online status is a way of protecting their online identity and achieving some measure of free speech. Thirdly, it focuses on the findings' implication from previous chapters, which explore the insights of political efficacies contributed by users and how it relates to the online strategy conducted by the authority. Thus, the following discussions are dominated by two narratives, social media are considered as empowering to society, while the second portrays the Internet as the authority's ultimate tool for manipulating citizens.

## **7.1 Political Efficacies and Online Censorship: Pessimistic vs. Optimistic or Implicit vs. Explicit?**

*'I am emotional' – casual user from Mainland (MCU2)*

*'I feel helpless' – a VIP from Mainland (MVU3)*

### **7.11 Pessimistic vs. Optimistic views of Online Censorship in Macro Way**

In order to consider the evidence from the discussions themselves of the role that censorship played in discussions of the election and the role that participants said censorship playing in the extent and nature of the participation in Weibo discussions on the election, there were two main arguable contexts related to the political efficacy to online censorship in this research. Each of these promoted a discussion of online censorship on citizens' political participation, and whether this was seen as pessimistic or optimistic.

Again, there were two main views that optimists hold regarding how online censorship shaped their political participation and deliberation: firstly, national security protection; secondly, dynamic freedom.

Regarding the first view, national security protection, some optimistic respondents claimed that online censorship is an effective and accessory mechanism to help protect Chinese netizens and the state as a whole (MVU1, MVU2, MVU4, MWU2, MCU3). Security services and police periodically blocked out online information and news as a way of positively managing the political opposition. In other words, the government could employ the Great Firewall not only to shut down public blogs, websites and chat rooms and to block e-mail, but also to control the political messages being received by citizens. One example was a

response from a VIP of mainland (MVU1) who put forward a story about Qingfeng Baozi to illustrate how central government smartly made use of social media to develop their image in an implicit and friendly way. Supported by the observation conducted by King (2014) who also researched on the question of censorship of discussions on top Chinese leaders, such as in the same case of Qingfeng Baozi, he found that 18% were censored among posts that criticized Present Xi, and 14% were censored among supportive posts. The opposing ones even included strong criticism of President Xi and his related policies. The rate of deleting the supportive ones was almost the same, which means the authority makes use of online censorship to balance the online comments rather than rudely over-control. King (ibid) concludes that, regardless of content, online censorship is used to forbid collective activities that might occur in terms of social mobilization. Thus, optimists believed that managing censorship could help maintain the whole of society.

Moreover, this research showed positive attitudes to posts on Weibo referring to real-world events that could help predict the current and future for protecting the citizens and the authority. This was understood by some respondents in this study, who supported online censorship on the grounds that "We need it!", and "The government needs it" for security protection reasons. For instance, the Qingfeng Baozi case and the mock election discussion could help supervise online discussions, to anticipate potential collective action. Wu (2013) agreed, claimed that the Great Firewall was developed to eliminate any threat to the government by censoring sensitive language and provocative posts. In an empirical study of text censorship on social media, King etc. (2014) tested whether 'collective action potential' theory was correct, and asserted that the government allowed social media to flourish through either negative or positive

comments in the state. However, most importantly, the government used online censorship to demonstrate that the government aimed to limit the spread of information that might lead to collective action. They also found that China's central government employed a range of methods and technologies to censor social media. Regardless of how these methods and technologies varied, the results were uniform for individual coders afterwards in terms of censoring. This echoed the observation made by a mainland VIP in this research, namely that the CCP has already learned, it could control social media by penetrating micro-blog platforms.

In terms of the second dimension—dynamic freedom speech adoption, one interviewee from VIP of mainland (MVU1) mentioned the strategy of Chinese government deleting posts was varied by 'soft' censorship. Because of the various systems of online censorship conducted in China, optimistic netizens could employ various ways to political participate based on their own aims. This will be discussed in more detail in the following sections on rhetorical expression participation and online censorship, for instance, ironic expression to be used in high frequency by Weibo users to avoid political mine. Apart from this, more optimists like Chen (2013) argued that political censorship notwithstanding; online communication has already opened up more possibilities for citizen participation. This was borne out in the current research, which found that the majority of Weibo users saw the site as a forum for information dissemination, and it was a good start point to allow free exchange of political ideas. Additionally, more than one interviewee (MCU3, MVU4) said that they were optimistic that there would be greater freedom of speech in the future in China when talking about politics. This was supported by Ogden (2002) who demonstrated that since the 1990s, Chinese intellectuals, and new media have already started to criticize

government's failure, and the government also provided an increasing tolerance on individuals' freedom speech.

On the other hand, even though there were several optimistic interviewees that support online censorship, the only contribution that was posted in content analysis expressed explicit opposition, which demonstrated that the Internet should not implement censorship by authority. On the question of whether Weibo should support free political communication, nearly all (98.1%) of posts were explicitly supportive that Weibo should support free political communication. This supported pessimistic scholars like Watts, Graham-Harrison and Le, who have criticized online censorship as having had a negative impact on citizen participation. Watts claims that censorship of social network platforms was an act of conscious political manipulation (Watts etc., 2005), while Graham-Harrison and Le have demonstrated that Weibo's political function has been steadily weakened under the Chinese government's strict control, with the government sometimes blocked this and other social networking sites at crucial moments (Graham-Harrison and Le, 2009). For instance, one (HVU1) of the Hong Kong-based VIP interviewees had had their posts deleted. His account was blocked for more than a month when he discussed the Jasmine Revolution online. Other interviewees who had had similar experiences all came from the mainland. They described their feeling as if they had been dismissed: "Fine...I have touched the political mine and been '*he xie*', I feel so disappointed!"; "When my words were blocked, I felt depressed that I could not speak out about what I wanted to say!" (MCU1); when their some extreme and sensitive words were deleted, they thought that these only showed that there was a truth that had to be hidden (MWU1). These criticisms implied that censorship of new media was undermined digital democracy by preventing citizen participation.

Thus far, this section has discussed how citizens perceive the online censorship in a macro ways, either optimistically or pessimistically. In the following section, it is planned to discuss another aspect of how online censorship shaped citizens' political participation and deliberation through the practicing of online self-censorship- citizens' rhetorical expressive participation online in a micro way.

### **7.12 Online Self-censorship and Citizens' Rhetorical Expressive Participation**

This section discussed how Chinese netizens used rhetorical devices such as irony or sarcasm or satire to achieve a measure of free speech implicitly within the context of online censorship, from either a pessimistic or optimistic viewpoint. Ironic or caustic expressions were commonly used as rhetorical patterns in Chinese online political discourse; examples have already been given in the Findings from CDA (6.2). Apart from the three orientation categories (explicit support, explicit opposition and neutrality or unclear), a further category 'rhetorical use' was considered, due to its emerging with high frequency through the process of coding. More specifically, the category 'rhetorical use' included 'rhetorical and oppositional' or 'rhetorical and supportive' or 'rhetorical and neutral'. The result showed major rhetorical expressions were focusing on topics of 'Chief Leung' and 'Communist Party of China', which occupied 45.8% and 16.9% respectively, this research did not shed light on this in a quantitative way but concentrated on a qualitative way, the content of such discourse have precisely analyzed in the section 6.2 by CDA and interview. Again, this research considered how rhetorical expressions such as irony, sarcastic or satire serve as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, they was an example of

self-censorship, as well as how self-censorship was exercised in China and why. It also asked what were the benefits and dangers of self-censorship, and whether self-censorship could be considered as government soft power, in order to address the research questions of how censorship reflected the netizens' political participation through social media.

“Due to the arbitrary and therefore quite effective nature of Chinese media regulations, self-control and self-discipline among BSPs (Blog Service Provider) exist, if to a varying degree” (MacKinnon, 2008: 48). Even though the government and online media managers agreed that the Great Firewall was necessary to maintain a healthy and harmonious Internet environment, there are ongoing debates about the benefits and danger of self-censorship by different social communities. Self-censorship may be understood as a conscious or subconscious negotiation between various layers of norms in a surveillance society. As this research has shown, Lagerkvist (2010:146) described three forms of self-censorship: the first was described as “a conscious, resigned acceptance”; for instance, one VIP, a Hong Kong journalist (HVU4) refused to take the risk of discussing anything politically sensitive on Weibo. He felt helpless, but negatively accepted the fact. The second, meanwhile, showed “full compliance and conscious acceptance of the status quo” (Lagerkvist, 2010:146); in other words, the second implied a level of agreement. Different media platforms enforced the regulations to different degrees: a sensitive term may be blocked by Sina Weibo but not by Sohu (Ken, 2012). This example indicated that self-censorship practices were quite subjective, due to various degrees of censorship by the platform. This was also consistent with what Cook & Heilmann (2012) identified as private self-censorship by self-constraint. The third kind of self-censorship was more complex. Users who were conscious of the socio-political

boundaries but who wanted to express their resistance online might express themselves ironically or ambiguously. This was the main form that this research identified, through which Weibo netizens had to self-censor when engaging in political participation, as discussed below.

In order to investigate what Rose (2006) has identified, namely that the principle of free speech adopted a standpoint that went against self-censorship, caused by threats and intimidation, and the interviewees were asked whether they thought such censorship threatened political discussion. Some interviewees, especially VIPs, demonstrated their feeling as “being threatened by online censorship” (HVU1, HVU2, HWU4), while most felt that it was not threatened, but that it is definitely affected (MVU4, MWU3, HWU2, HCU2, HCU3). These results suggested that measuring censorship could be more or less successful. Cook & Heilmann (2012) stated that they could succeed in ‘brainwashing’ all censees in a way that established a boundary regarding what was permitted to be expressed and what the actual expressions of censees were; however, they may not change any of the private attitude of censees. In some extreme cases, this was also maintained by a casual user from Hong Kong (HCU1) and a VIP interviewee from the mainland (MVU4).

One casual user from the mainland (MCU2) explained that he assumed that the effect of online censorship was there in his mind. As there was a risk that the messages might be deleted, he played safe, because he wanted people to hear his voice and ideas. Users like him found their own ways of circumventing the CCP’s information filtering and control systems to make observations about the government and the political environment. For instance, some micro-bloggers mocked CCTV (China Central Television) by posting images, while others criticized politicians without

ever mentioning their names, instead referring to them who using homonyms of Chinese characters. Another instance was that some of the interviewees such as MVU3 admitted using rhetorical strategy for fear of online censorship and a form of exercising self-censorship, which agreed with the third form put forward by Lagerkvist (2010). One VIP (MVU2) was even more wary; he cited the new policy announced recently by China's Supreme Court: "Any unauthorized posts 'clicked and viewed more than 5000 times, or reposted more than 500 times' on Weibo will be regarded as serious defamation, which will generally be punished with at least three years in prison". As a VIP, this respondent was particularly aware of the need for self-control online, which indicates the rationale of self-censorship that can bypass political risk-taking.

The danger of practicing self-censorship could be self-reinforcing; the more citizens and journalists that practiced self-censorship, the more conservative the media become, and the less likely users were to express themselves freely. One Weibo Got Talent from Hong Kong interviewee (HWU2) called this 'hidden rule' (*Qian Gui Ze* 潜规则). One pessimistic Hong Kong VIP (HVU1) saw Chinese online censorship as more like 'a chronic strangle' that led users to censor themselves. He argued that this self-censorship was itself highly dangerous; if netizens felt unable to mention topics such as the Jasmine Revolution or democracy, they would eventually stop thinking about them. This was supported by Wu (2013), who argued that self-censorship was a form of soft control, as it inhibited the expression of diverse or unorthodox views which might bring about actual political change. The interviewee (HVU1) continued that he knew some might support online censorship and self-censorship; they may argue that China would be a mess if everybody could say anything they wanted, but he criticized the fact that this mess could be caused by some words

used on-line. If online censorship was to be conducted, in his view, then online censorship should be applied not only to the political system, but also other fields. Now, however, it was all about politics, especially when someone said something against the authorities or the CCP. Thus, he concluded that online censorship was clearly not about protecting the online environment, but was merely for political ends.

However, arguably, this research maintained that there were far more necessities or benefits to practice self-censorship in China. One interviewee from mainland (MVU4) stated that he suggested that citizens could analyse this issue of online self-censorship from the positive side; it was an explicit improvement that citizens could voice their opinions on different social platforms, because it was hard to imagine that this could have happened five or ten years ago. MVU4 also mentioned some netizens who argued that online censorship put pressure on them and forced them to express themselves indirectly, for instance, by using ironic expressions to avoid the political risks, but this was not a problem to him (MVU4). He concluded that the point was that citizens could express themselves in the first place, rather than the way in which they did so. This view was supported by Tong (2009), who asserted that self-censorship was efficient in various ways; for instance, findings have showed rhetorical use, grammar and lexical strategy, she demonstrated that practicing self-censorship which associated with online censorship in China is not a restricted 'NO' policy, online self-censorship could either minimize political risks to maintain political safety, or maximize opportunities for political participation or expression.

The results of the study showed that optimistic and pessimistic Weibo users employed rhetorical expressions like ironic, caustic, or sarcastic

comments in different ways and with different aims during the 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive election. This result of rhetorical expressions featured frequently in the topic discussions, especially when the subject was over-control of Hong Kong by the CCP. For instance from a VIP (p)'s forwarding post "Chief Leung is quite moved and appreciates the help from the CCP, especially their support during the election. He will try his best to realize the great renewal of Hong Kong as a legal and democratic system with Chinese characteristics". The full text may be broken down as follows:

[1] Chief Leung is quite moved and appreciates the help of the CCP, [2] especially their support during the election. [3] He will try his best to realize the great renewal of Hong Kong as a legal and democratic system with Chinese characteristics.

[1], [2] and [3] were all implicit evaluations. Although they were literally positive, their literal meaning was incongruent with the co-text. The contributor, who was a Pan-democracy supporter, was criticizing the CCP's autocratic leadership and its explicit support for Mr. Leung as contrary to The Basic Law, which stipulated that the residents of Hong Kong could manage their own affairs. Thus, the literal claim needed the intended evaluation, including a hidden criticism, making it caustic and sarcastic. Posts about Chief Leung by a VIP (p)) showed that users could employ rhetorical expression to minimize political risk when discussing sensitive topics, but it was also a way of making their mockery of politicians more caustic.

Particular attention focused on Leung Chun-ying, the candidate for Pro-Beijing, who supported the Communist Party of China (CCP) and the competitor of Pan-democrats. Users placed considerable weight on

discussion about Chief Leung, rather than the CCP. In particular, one third of interviewees who came from mainland users mentioned that they were not familiar with political candidates and the system of Hong Kong, but preferred to demonstrate their attitude towards the mainland implicitly. In this context, most Chinese citizens claimed strong support for democracy while there was a strong need for satisfaction with the country's authoritarian regime as well. Shi and Lu have sought to explain such contrary sentiments as lying in the survey methods themselves and in defining a Confucian concept of democracy (Shi and Lu, 2010: 123). For instance, Chief Leung was evaluated by Weibo users with varied political discourse in this research, particularly in his attempt to criticize his pro-Beijing identity. For instance, Weibo users from Hong Kong expressed their dissatisfaction with him through rhetorical use of political discourse (e.g. 'Spy' *te wu* 特务或者间谍 'puppet' *kui lei* 傀儡). Chu (2010) criticized Beijing for not selecting any members of the Hong Kong leadership from the United Democrats of Hong Kong, who maintained opposing views to CCP strategy. For example, in the Hong Kong Chief Executive election 2012, Leung Chun-ying was suspected of being involved in "black gold politics". This candidate was likely to provoke a strong debate between democrats and his own supporters. Ogden (2002) has criticized the fact that his biggest danger during the election was how he could balance interests between democrats and his own supporters. Ron (2012) then suggested that Mr. Leung, who had the potential support that came from democrats, should be 'nipped in the bud', and should recognize the need to regain his loyalist-conservative footing by provoking them. Based on the results of the content analysis the majority of Weibo users explicitly support him, so he might survive successfully with his Hong Kong candidacy and Beijing credentials intact. He was indeed supposed to

succeed in the final competition of the Chief Executive (which has been approved by the final result of 2012 HKCE Election).

In the discussion surrounding the loyalty of Chief Leung and the legality of his nomination, irony variously appeared in the form of hyperbole, jocularity and understatement. Netizens were also good at using lexical patterns to express their anger, revealing their feelings by playing on words. It would seem that Chinese consumers did not overly concern with politics, but readily take to the Internet to express their personal opinions on current affairs. For pessimists, rhetorical expressions such as irony were not just a way of minimizing risk, but of venting frustration and mocking the political establishment. For instance, one VIP user (MVU3) found irony limiting: “because we could not say what we wanted to say explicitly”. In fact, only two Hong Kong interviewees (one casual user and one VIP) said they had employed irony, but not often (HCU2, HVU2). The majority of Hong Kong interviewees preferred explicit expressions of support or opposition, on the grounds that they looked forward to highlighting the reasons why they agreed or disagreed with a point, what their position was and why. Others rejected irony because they saw it as a less rational mode of expression. One interviewee (MWU4) commented thus: “I prefer to be neutral and objective”, to “tell the truth rather than going on the attack or being extreme”. One VIP user from Hong Kong (HVU3) highlighted that he was too disappointed to make fun of the situation – he did not support the one country, two systems model and did quite concern about the development of democracy in Hong Kong. Some mainland users, on the other hand, did not use irony because: “I am so in love with my country, I do not want to make fun of it” (MCU3); “Their ironic expressions seem indirect and circumlocutory, but actually it is childish behavior” (MVU3); and “I prefer to be neutral and list both sides

of the argument in order to encourage the public to discuss things rationally” (MVU2).

For optimists, Weibo was an empowering tool that allows them to express their online citizenship and construct their own civil society in the online world. For instance, in Example 7.1 “I prefer not to talk here, just have a look, and of course the reason why I do not want to talk is because I am scared of being he xie on Weibo” (Casual user’s forwarding post). The text may be divided into as follows:

[1] I prefer not to talk here, [2] just have a look, [3] and of course the reason why I do not want to talk is because I am scared of talking on Weibo.

[1] and [2] were descriptive clauses, while [3] was an implicit evaluation which needed to be evaluated. This contributor feared censorship and was wary of talking about politically sensitive topics on Weibo. Thus, the literal claim was not the reverse of its intended evaluation, and the literal meaning was congruent with the co-text; the post was not ironic but an explicit expression of opposition to the claim that Weibo allowed free political communication. Moreover, the interviewees said they used irony for two main reasons: fear of online censorship and because it made posts more entertaining and acceptable to others. As ordinary citizens, they had a limited ability to affect political events, and could only express their opinions online. However, even this carries risks – posts might be given a warning, deleted or blocked if they contained certain sensitive words. Irony could help minimize these risks. VIP and Weibo Got Talent users were particularly aware that their online statuses made them more visible, so they felt safer in using rhetorical strategic expressions like irony. Two VIPs (MVU1, MVU4) explained that the best way to avoid online

censorship when expressing opposition was to use ironic statements or a humorous tone. This was also seen as a good communication strategy because it was a mild and indirect way to express disagreement with someone else; one VIP (MVU4) suggested that the use of irony made online debate more acceptable both to the authorities and within Chinese culture.

The participants' understanding of irony as a rhetorical device was further investigated in interviews, when they were asked to interpret and evaluate examples of ironic contributions posted by other Weibo users during the election. The majority of interviewees evaluated the samples they were shown as 'ironic', 'critical', 'jokey', 'circumlocutory', 'indirect', 'negative', 'self-mocking' and 'explicitly ironic'. Almost all interviewees understood the implied meanings of these ironic contributions. This was consistent with the comment made by one VIP that he employed irony, because: "I believe that my audience can understand the implied meaning". Thus, humor was not only one of the communicative goals of irony (Gibbs, 2000; Roberts and Kreuz, 1994). As previously discussed in the literature review, citizens defined their citizenship through adherence to a specific set of political/cultural practices (Turner, 1993). Weibo netizens adopted rhetorical expressions to make their comments more acceptable to other users. Natanson (1965:17-18) compared the rhetoric of convincing and the rhetoric of persuading, concluding that the former aimed to manipulate while the rhetoric of persuasion maintained "rhetoric in this sense is the branch of philosophical inquiry whose chief object is the illumination of the relationship between theory of argumentation and the nature of the self". Weibo netizens' use of rhetorical discourse either to convince or persuade could be understood as a transforming way to measure their active and passive roles of citizenship in the cyber context (Janoski, 1998).

Thus, the use of convincing or persuading in rhetorical discourse was a way for researchers to measure whether they were active or passive citizens.

The effect of rhetoric use has been approved in the report of Committee on the Scope of Rhetoric and the Place of Rhetorical Studies in Higher Education. Rhetoric may be used for “human symbolic inducement either through forms or functions”, which meant rhetoric was a pattern of talking that seeks to maintain an on going communication challenge (Anderson, Cissna, and Clune: 2003:5). Optimistic Weibo users employed rhetorical devices to respond to what Anderson, Cissna and Clune hold. For instance, interviewees (MVU4, MCU2) mentioned that regardless of the lexical or rhetoric strategy they used, it was important for them to a way to participate. Thus, this proved the report, which claimed participation should be on equal terms and maximizing participants' involvement in political discussion. Similarly, Johnstone (1971:83) showed that rhetoric had always been used as a technique or strategy to participate widely, rather than ontologically.

In regards to irony, one of the important patterns of rhetorical expressions in this research, De Brahm was the first of numerous scholars to propose ways of identifying irony. This was a pressing issue, given its pervasiveness online and the fact that the media were becoming increasingly social. Ironic contributions were often humorous (Matthews, Hancock and Dunham, 2006), and made an effort to create a sense of harmony between the speakers (Burgers and Van der Plas, 2011), but Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) criticized the fact that not all humour was ironic. Irony made other contributions too; for example, it could play an important role in sentiment analysis (cf. Reyes et al., 2009), and could

even contribute to decreasing or improving critique (Dews and Winner, 1997; Matthews et al., 2006), or addressing direct or indirect opinion mining (Sarmiento et al., 2009), or revealing vague sarcasm for advertising only (Kreuz, 2001).

In China, satire (e-gao in Chinese) was popular among young and idealistic netizens, who used satirical comedy to deconstruct the political and social culture, which was also an example of self-censorship. According to Huang (2006), this satirical subculture was characterized by “humor, revelry, subversion, brass-root spontaneity, and defiance of authority, mass participation and multi-media high-tech”. Two examples emerged in the study: the use of the character for river crab to represent online censorship; and the representation of Chief Leung as a Civic Governor and ex-president Hu as a Qing dynasty king to imply the hierarchical relationship between Hong Kong and the mainland. Other examples have appeared on the Chinese Internet, including a video entitled Sparking Red Star: Pan Dongzi Competing in Singing Contest on China Central Television. The video used clips from a patriotic film of 1974, but these were redubbed, so that rather than being urged to join the Cultural Revolution, the hero was encouraged to seek fame in a singing contest. The video attracted the censor’s attention, and led SARFT (the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television), one of twelve government agencies were involved in censoring the Internet, to set out new regulations to censor online videos (Beijing News, 2006).

More VIPs interviewees demonstrated that their contributions were “threatened by online censorship” (HVU1, HVU2, HWU4) and played safe in regards to political participation, yet it might be speculated that casual users tended to be young, and less be aware of self-censorship

(Lagerkvist, 2010), which meant they were less likely to self-censor or were less aware of its existence, and were subconscious of political boundary which differed from that of VIPs. Optimists among casual users saw Weibo as not only expanding transnational solidarities and identities, but as empowering and transformative. The optimists in this research suggested that despite online censorship, free speech was still possible through the use of irony, which could be used to express opposition or anger more forcefully. This meant that they could make use of irony as either a weapon of resistance, or as a form of self-censorship. This supported Gibbs (1986) and Kreua and Link's (2002) conclusion that irony was mostly used in situations where the speaker intended to imply a negative meaning, while expressing a view that was literally positive. Irony was seen as an acceptable way of expressing opposition on the Internet, while avoiding political mines.

The result of the significant weight of posts in the election on topics using rhetorical expressions demonstrated users' awareness of using Weibo in a more strategic and implicit way, which was consistent, with the result of Fraia and Missaglia's (2014: 73) research, in terms of the majority candidates in Italy utilizing Twitter in a tactical way, concentrating on their electoral campaign, and the dramatic reduction of posts in the post-election period, with some candidates' accounts even becoming idle. To sum up, this research found that rhetorical strategy, like irony, was one of the main implicit ways of resisting online censorship, and one way to reflect online censorship with both benefits and limitations. Therefore, it was the best way of avoiding political mines, so that it might help contribute to the digital democracy in Chinese context. Accordingly, the role of Weibo might be an effective indicator to understand deliberative

democracy and digital democracy when used by netizens for political participation.

## **7.2 Deliberative Democracy, Digital Democracy and Citizenship in Chinese Context**

Based on Chapter Two, which reviews the case study conducted by Stepanova (2011), who suggests that social media has not so much fostered Western-style democracy as encouraged less violent patterns of mass protest, this research has also demonstrated that it was not enough to simply use the Western context to measure Western theory. Non-Western scholars need to put more effort into examining local political context in order to ascertain whether theories could be understood or applied internationally.

The following concerns need to be considered: Namely what do global standards and the rules about digital democracy require of them to enable them to fairly judge either Western or Eastern contexts. It is not enough to draw on Western context alone to examine the theories of political participation and deliberation; again, this research argues three methods of output supported and enriches the understanding of the theories of digital democracy and deliberative democracy in the Chinese context.

Exploring the orientations of Chinese researchers who investigated the local political context in terms of theoretical framework is noteworthy, as it could help identify the discrepancies and similarities between Western and Chinese research on political communication. China has been the second largest economic country in the world since 2011 with an average seven-percentage increase of GDP growth annually. There was an increasing interest in whether or not a country governed by Communism

could lead the world. Thus, there was an increasing analysis outside of China that concentrated on drawing upon the Chinese past to explain the present (Zeng, 2016). The concept of democracy in Chinese context was always in relation to the “China Model” or “Chinese Exceptionalism,” which implies that the Chinese government has always found its own ways to modernize as well as to educate the Chinese citizens. Chinese scholars frequently promoted the typical culture of China and demonstrated the concept of harmony overlap with democracy based on Chinese history (Zeng, 2016).

On the other hand, the Chinese argument was more strongly affected by Western theories than its own ideologies. Numerous literature has proven Chinese culture made it possible to legitimize the country without implementing liberal democracy, which claims the Chinese cases might be better evaluated by China’s own culture or ideology. Liberal democracy has been evaluated as “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” and “the final form of human government” (Fukuyama, 1989). For instance, Zeng (2016) highlights that Chinese individuals’ understanding of democracy did not match the definition of liberal democracy; their understanding is significantly affected by Chinese unique culture. This was also proven through interview output in this research on the interpretation of digital democracy by interviewees (see chapter 6.3). For instance, compared with what VIPs perceived, almost all casual users from both Hong Kong and the mainland perceived digital democracy indicated individuals could freely express themselves online, and no censorship worked on online messages, no matter whether the information they received was right or wrong (MVU1, HWU1, HWU2, HWU3, HWU4, MCU1, MCU2, MCU3, MCU4, HCU1, HCU2), and all the online public discussions should be considered in the deliberative process

of political communication. This was supported by Scully (2014)'s perspective in terms of deliberative democracy, which emphasizes participation through public discussion initiatives by less empowered citizens. Thus, it is still beneficial to frame collective political actions through "either right or wrong" but still have open information. However, senior users like VIPs and Weibo Got Talent were more wary of the difficulty of achieving deliberative democracy based on the Chinese context. For instance, they ascertained that basically we could secure netizens who were capable of valuing anything online independently and objectively (MVU2, MVU3, MWU2, HVU1, MVU4, and HWU2). This was why this research maintains that online expressive participation by Chinese netizens could help enhance the quality of political communication and maximize the opportunities to practice the communication skills for political participation, with implicit or explicit ways or aims.

Many empirical works (Shi, 2010; Shin, 2011) have strongly positioned China as somehow exceptional and established other philosophies from the ones of Western states. However, it was interesting to find that only 2 percentage of empirical Chinese scholars articles draw on Chinese philosophies concerning political legitimacy, compared with 19 percentage of ones that considered the ancient Western philosopher Aristotle, for instance, Max Weber, Jurgen Habermas, Samuel P. Huntington or Seymour M. Lipset. This output has disagreed with What Shi (2010) and Shin (2011) demonstrated above. Thus, even though there was an increasing effort to promote Chinese philosophies, there is still a long way to go to modernize the Chinese theories.

Nevertheless, there was an agreement that the Chinese political context could not be simply justified by Western theories (Zeng, 2016; Harding, 1984; Zheng, 2012). Again, this research does not aim to compare and contrast the Western theories or local theories in this case; again, it just demonstrates that drawing on Western theories alone is not enough to measure the Chinese context. Simply, there are several main arguments that compare the Western deliberative democracy and Chinese Political Consultative System (*zhong guo zheng zhi xie shang zhi du*) or Chinese Deliberative Democracy: One was that the Chinese Political Consultative System was more developed than Western one; the Western one could not be fully adopted in China. However, it is argued that there was lots to learn from Western deliberative democracy in terms of the aims, the forms, and the representation and so on, which could associate with the democratic development of China (Shi, 2011). It is consistent with Mansbridge's (2010) argument, which made use of 'consultative deliberation' and 'public deliberation' to distinguish the precise aims of respectively process of discussions. Shi (2011) demonstrated the commonalities in a comparison of the Western deliberative democracy and Chinese Political Consultative System (*zhong guo zheng zhi xie shang zhi du*), both of them encourage the citizens to widely political participate, and both of them demonstrated the social significance of discussion and deliberation, either online or offline.

The following concludes what this research argues in regards to the Western concepts of deliberative democracy, regarding the case study of the 2012 HKCE Election: the 'strategy' in strategic bargaining in the process of deliberation concentrates on power structures where people deal with their preference. This research concretized the 'strategy' by analyzing the cross-tabulated ways of citizens' political participation and

then demonstrating what Steiner (2012) maintained; ‘grounding’ was the core element when researching on democratic media-communication. Chinese netizens’ online expressive participation could help enhance the quality of political communication and achieve the ideal of democratic politics, through implicit or explicit ways. Implicit or explicit aims or ways of political participation and deliberations found on Weibo demonstrate the diversification represented from online discussion, supporting and enriching the Western understanding of deliberative democracy and participation.

More precisely, this research did not concentrate on the effects of collective public opinions online but their process of expressions and discussions. This research has addressed the arguments by looking at different roots’ discourse side by side, which agree with Steiner’s (2012: 3) suggestion: “The real world of politics in most often a mixture of the two ideal types.” To demonstrate how to enrich the understanding of deliberative democracy, there are either explicit or implicit ways to achieve as explored in this research. By supporting and expanding what Marineau et al. (2000) and Liu (2010) maintain, deliberative democracy could be enhanced by measuring communication skills and online interactions. For instance, Chinese netizens utilize implicit ways, such as rhetorical expression, to improve their freely expressed opinions, thereby being involved in the process of political discussions on popular political topics. This is a communication skill; either visualizing their participation as well as improving the possibilities for expressions and discussions, or delivering what users aim to express and perceive. Thus, rhetorical expressions acts as a strategic communication skill to widely improve the opportunities of online discussions and avoid touching upon the political mine at the same time. Additionally, the data indicate the citizens on

Weibo use rhetorical expressions to invite followers who shared the same feelings or perspectives for interactive communication. Rhetorical expressions like irony were sometime quite critical or aggressive according to the CDA results. Schudson (1997:297-309) perceived that users who had diverse values might contribute to “profoundly uncomfortable,” yet democratic talk.

Another example demonstrated in this research in terms of looking at the different preferences of contributions made by various users could help understand how they tried to “complete” the information deliberation put forward by Schudson (2004), and also strengthen the relationship between deliberative democracy and digital citizenship in Chinese case study. Schudson (2004) maintained that democracy could be measured by the number of citizens who participate in political information dissemination and contribution, as well as the way of how they delivered. For instance, different forms of contributions (e.g. forwarding, commenting or choosing different Weibo statuses) incorporated with various traits of Weibo provide different ways for either information dissemination or involvement in online political participation. Therefore, the implicit ways in this research make a contribution to enriching the theory of deliberative democracy by assessing social deliberative behavior, supported by scholars like Marineau, Wiemer-Hastings et al. (2000) and Liu (2010). They have maintained, again, that implicit ways of political participation and deliberation were important to be considered as the way of ‘completing’ the information put forward by Schudson (2004).

Another contribution made to notify the importance of deliberative behaviors through social media in order to achieve democracy is that more research focuses on collecting online political discussions and messages.

The evidence in this research maintained what Tsatsou (2014) ascertained, namely, that due to social media being considered as a dynamic platform for collective political expressions, public debates were closed to offline activities. For instance, during the pre-election period (one week before the election day) in 2012, Hong Kong University held a simulated poll or mock election that was open to everyone; the ‘simulated poll’ was discussed before the start of official voting. The majority of posts were contributed during the pre-election period; 89% of posts expressed explicit support. It was hard to measure whether discussions about the mock election had a direct effect on voting in the official election, though they may well have had an indirect influence as collective public opinions. According to Tremayne, “bloggers could influence events as a collective” (2007:xiii). Most importantly, according to Herbst, individuals regard their dialogue with friends, family and strangers as “a supplement to poll data, which they did mention as an accurate source of public opinion” (1998:138). Therefore, the process of expressive participation through social media in an implicit way, as a form of deliberative social behavior, could help demonstrate the social importance of deliberative democracy.

Regarding the concept of digital democracy, this research claims what Boler (2008:168) asserts, namely that the terms “democracy” and “digital democracy” are simply rhetorical weapons that represent an ideal rather than something concrete. Weibo users demonstrated explicit or implicit aims of different types of contributions and preferences of online status which could either be used as rhetorical weapons or to concretize what they understand as digital democracy. This means that no matter how the social media determined the users’ online behaviors through technical methods, they could establish their own ways to maximize the opportunities to participate politically. This is their understanding of

democratic participation, which helps contribute to digital democracy. To sum up, this research generally supports what has been argued in Chapter One, namely that research on democracy should adopt a broader approach to the concept of democracy, taking into account the whole process of information provision and discussion, rather than just the decision making of political institutions (Voltmer, 2006).

Based on the discussion above, this section will then suggest how to govern the Chinese Internet in order to maintain Chinese citizenship and contribution to the digital democracy. Precisely, through conducting a resilient strategy, the authority could allow a flexible management way in order to let the public opinion affect the public itself. The groups of people in Grey Zone have traits in terms of being young and diverse, critical and even aggressive (Zhang, 2015); so it is better to conduct implicit ways and implicit censorship to educate these individuals, providing a space to let the public opinions modify themselves in the process of open debate and argument. In relation to citizenship, scholars point out that individuals in a more advantaged social position prefer to better control the desired rhetorical style, for instance, the ability of rational-critical reasoning and the use of logic (Dahlberg, 2007). This ability of making use of the desired rhetorical style would thus have more effects on public discourses, which leads to the direct result of heavily class-related resources (Wu, 2013). This research also proved that there are positive effects when citizens self-censor. Thus, this strategy could help ease tension between the state and the citizens, as Chinese citizenship functions as mechanism for political claims against the authority (Keane, 2001). Regarding redefining Chinese citizenship, a widespread lack of understanding on this concept has been confirmed (Parry, 2002; Keane, 2001). Chinese Citizenship, either being interpreted as *guomin* or *gongmin*, could be

considered as a benefit granted by the State on birth in the People's Republic. Hence, in contrast to citizens in the West, Chinese citizens were obligated to participate in the social affairs linked with national development. Hence, the rights of citizenship are embodied as a function of cultural development, which was the guided process of raising the cultural level (*wenhua shuiping*) and the 'quality' (*suzhi*) of the whole population, as suggested by Keane (2001). To sum up, conducting a resilient strategy that allows either explicit or implicit ways of diversification in political participation and deliberation could help the Chinese to practice citizenship in order to enhance the awareness of the development of digital democracy.

### **7.3 The role of Weibo: a tool, forum and object**

In regards to the general contributions of social media, based on my project, Weibo acts as an object, a forum, and a tool to research this field. This finding is supported by Tsatsou (2014) who demonstrates the Internet often serves as an "object" and "tool" as well as a "venue" of research. Furthermore, through sufficient arguments provided by the AoIR in 2012, a study advised that the Internet be used as a social phenomenon, a tool, and also a (field) site for research. To discuss these aspects of Weibo, this research plans to address these with hyperlink studies, as mentioned in Chapter Two.

More precisely, Weibo is regarded as a tool, a forum and a platform. This research also confirms that Weibo, as one of the most popular social media platforms, could help collect public texts, images, perspectives, and so on. In addition, the structure of Weibo technically determines the features or functions provided for use, and also had an effect on the nature of designing research, for instance, how to collect the sample depending

on the services Weibo provided in terms of Weibo users' statuses or types of contributions. This indicates the revolution of social media underlying the structure or services for offering new research topics and questions regarding social media studies. Meanwhile, in agreeing with Tsatsou (2014), these new topics were associated with the advancement of social media, which could answer old research questions that could generate new research methods.

Apart from this, in terms of the object, Weibo acts as an indicator to enable us to understand deliberative democracy and digital democracy when citizens used it for political participation and deliberation. The "indicator" here refers to a sign of social significance used by Weibo users. This idea incorporates what Tsatsou (2014) and De Maeyer (2013) maintain regarding the social meaning of hyperlinks. Forwarding, commenting or commenting on others comments is hyperlink style. The flexibility and variety of choosing these were hyperlink strategies by political actors. It is argued that the styles or strategies of hyperlinking by users is considered a significant element of political communication, which also implies a sign of ideological affiliation (De Maeyer, 2013, cited by Tsatsou, 2014: 168). Chinese Weibo users utilised it to "complete" (Schudson, 2004) information through its functions. 'Completing' here referred to a rhetorical way of finalising the information to be delivered or approached.

Moreover, another important point is that Weibo provides the opportunity to collect data from users of different statuses, helping to clarify and compare citizens' political participation from different online identities. This is also assisted by hyperlink studies, but more focused on hyperlink network study. Weibo users utilize its hyperlinking and web archive

function to form their own online civil society, as well as widen their online citizenship. Apart from this, analysing different perspectives from either optimism or pessimism in regards to how online censorship shapes citizens' political participation and deliberations on Weibo also demonstrates the role of social media contributed as a "social phenomenon" to political participation and deliberation. Therefore, Weibo plays as a tool, forum and object that maintains these distinctive features that contributed to this research, compared with other social media platforms in 2012.

Multiple levels of analysis from quantitative to qualitative methods have been addressed in this research. In term of similarities and differences of studies that focused on social media and political communication in a Western context, there is some quantitative research also focused on analysing the logic or feeling from political discourses or the motivation of using social media in political communication, but just by using content analysis (Eveland and Dylko, 2007; Patrut and Popa, 2014) and more focus on politicians (Patrut and Popa, 2014; Goldbeck et al., 2010; Chi and Yang, 2011; Fraia and Missaglia, 2014:73-76); however, my research not only used content analysis but also CDA to reveal the lexical strategies employed to demonstrate their feeling in these political discourses. Apart from this, my research was similar to D'heer and Verdegem's (2014:84-95) quantitative research, which investigates the case of Belgium. They also drew on a hyperlinking feature that concentrated on the interaction between senders and receivers, as well as considering their perspectives on the different types of participation used, thereby highlighting the social significant role of new media as a transformative power to improve democracy. My research also expands on their research by employing interviews to further investigate participants' views on different types of

contributions. Therefore, in agreement with critics (e.g. Salmons, 2013; Tsatsou, 2014) on the importance of qualitative research in this field to gain richer data, this research confirms that qualitative methods could be incorporated with quantitative ones in order to investigate multi layered research questions.

In regards to studies focused on social media and political communication in a non-Western context, especially in a Chinese bound-context, further research investigates the features of Chinese online censorship, but more research had focused on the strategies of CCP in terms of how they managed online censorship in quantitative analysis (Bamman et al., 2012; Floss, 2011; OpenNet Initiative, 2009; Roberts et al., 2009; MacKinnon, 2009). This research aims to reveal the issue of online censorship from a user-centred aspect, which had demonstrated how the online censorship shaped their online deliberative behaviours, and revealed how they perceived the online censorship through evidence.

To sum up, there are similarities and differences of methodology used in political communication and social media between existing research and this research, Western research focuses more on politicians when compared with research in China, reviewed in Chapter Two. But this research adopted mixed methods in order to broaden the horizon of research on the nature and extent of Chinese citizens' political participation and deliberation through social media. Additionally, in terms of social media itself, this research demonstrates how social media generally contributes to citizens' political communication based on this project. It does so in terms of Weibo which acts as an object, forum, and tool to research this field. It was suggested that it might be a distinctive platform for this research when compared with other platforms, so it could

then become vital to future studies for comparing different social media platforms in such research. Most importantly, however, this research establishes that Weibo technically provided associates with an insight into how the users' utilization had shaped the nature and extent of political participation and deliberation. Therefore, Weibo itself enabled citizens to democratically participate in political discussions.

#### **7.4 Summary**

This chapter consisted of three sections: the first one discusses the competing views of pessimism and optimism on citizens' political participation and deliberation with online censorship, as well as rhetorical expressive participation, especially dynamic rhetorical use of online self-censorship. Therefore, demonstrating optimistic or pessimistic views in online discussions for politics may enhance the quality of political communication and broaden the understanding of Chinese online citizenship. More importantly, either the explicit or implicit aims of rhetorical expressive participation could enhance the understanding of digital democracy, as well as deliberative democracy. The second referred to the theoretical discussion of digital democracy and deliberative democracy and citizenship in the Chinese context. It contributed to enrich the theory of deliberative democracy through two sides: less empowered netizens make use of either explicit or implicit online participations that contribute to deliberative social behaviors, thereby enhancing the quality of political communication and achieving deliberative democracy. Therefore, this research contributes to and expands the theory of deliberative democracy by measuring communicating skills and the diversification of online representation of digital democracy. Apart from this, this research further claims that it is not enough merely to draw upon Western theories to examine political participation and deliberation in the

Chinese context, it also illustrates how the local ideology could help indicate the relationship between online censorship and self-censorship. Theoretical discussions based on the output of three sets of data also redefine the conducting resilient strategy that allowed either explicit or implicit ways of diversification to political participation and deliberation. It could aid in the practicing of Chinese citizenship in order to enhance the awareness of development of digital democracy. The third focused on a methodological discussion with quantitative or qualitative research, demonstrating the originality through comparing empirical studies in Western and non-Western contexts. The highlighted methodology of this research contributes a form of mixed-methods to explore greater insights in this field. In particular, it revealed how Weibo contribute as ‘tool,’ ‘forum,’ and ‘object’.

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contributed to deliberative social behaviors thereby enhancing the quality of political communication and achieving deliberative democracy. Therefore, this research contributed and expanded the theory of deliberative democracy through measuring communicating skills and the diversification of online representation of digital democracy. Apart from this, this research further claimed that it was not enough merely to draw upon western theories to examine political participation and deliberation in Chinese context; it also illustrated how the local ideology could help indicate the relationship between online censorship and self-censorship. Theoretical discussions based on the output of three sets of data also redefined that conducting resilient strategy that allowed either explicit or implicit ways of diversification to political participation and deliberation could help practicing Chinese citizenship in order to enhance the awareness of development of digital democracy. The third focused on methodological discussion with quantitative or qualitative researches, demonstrated the originality through comparing empirical studies in western and non-western contexts, and highlighted methodology of this research contributes a form of mix-methods to explore greater insights in this field, and in particular, it revealed how Weibo contributed as both 'tool' and 'object'.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

### **8.1 Summary**

This thesis aimed to evaluate the nature of citizens' political participation and deliberation on Chinese social media, it concentrated on examining the case study of discussion upon Chief Executive Election contributed on Weibo by different status of users. Thus, the research questions focused on:

- 1) What is the extent and nature of political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the HK Chief Executive Election?
- 2) To what extent and in what ways does censorship shape political participation and deliberation on Weibo regarding the HK Chief Executive Election?
- 3) What role of Weibo plays in the citizens' political participation and deliberation regarding the HK Chief Executive Election?

To answer these questions, the first three chapters of this thesis reviewed the theoretical debates surrounding the key concepts and empirical studies in this study. The literature review, in particular, focused on a theoretical framework around citizens' online political discussion, which is derived from theoretical arguments concerning different understandings of the essential concepts of democracy and digital democracy, as well as on different forms of democratic participation; especially demonstrated in deliberative democracy playing a crucial role in the comprehension of citizens' political participation and deliberation through social media. Either through extreme forms in terms of arguing or bargaining, or rational communication, deliberative democracy significantly and positively serve, rather than determine politics by enabling citizens to

express, demonstrate, persuade or debate. Citizens make use of social media to transform their will related to politics through e-participation, thereby acting upon and widening their citizenship.

In order to address the theoretical framework, the literature review demonstrated dynamic theoretical debates and responses to the relationships between politics and social media in general through cyber-optimism and cyber-pessimism. On the question of citizen blogging, cyber-optimists maintain the view that social media provides citizens the opportunities to challenge the traditional journalistic process, shape the news agenda, and provides ever increasing opportunities to interact with politicians. Cyber-pessimists state that political actors like politicians are actually more interested in the information dissemination than participate in democratic interaction. Regarding to democratic movements – or the expansion thereof – are concerned, cyber-optimists put forward that citizens are able to utilize social media to self-organize, yet, cyber-pessimists criticize that the enhancement of the democratic agenda is constrained by the doubts on access. While cyber-optimists claimed that voters could manage the election agenda through using social media, cyber-pessimists assert that candidates could still be dominant force that works in the election process. Finally, even though cyber-optimists have illustrated that social media allows more opportunities for minor parties to visualize themselves and aim to challenge the major parties; cyber-pessimists have proved that major parties still hold an advantage. This comparison provided an initial idea for this research, and then focused on citizens' political participation and deliberation through social media.

To better understand deliberative democracy, this research has reviewed three fundamental theories as a triangle, namely democracy, digital democracy and deliberative democracy, and has narrowed them down to the traditional concept of participation in digital use, which is called e-participation. Additionally, evaluating the motivated factors involved in citizenship that contributed to exploring the concept of digital citizenship and its relationship with civil society can help to understand how online censorship has shaped citizens' political participation, as well as how they perceive online censorship when they participate politically and deliberated. Therefore, the theoretical discussion reviewing the empirical research demonstrated the two basic narratives in this research; social media is seen as empowering society, while it also portrays the Internet as the State's ultimate tool for manipulating citizens in the Chinese context.

The mixed methods used as the basis for the theoretical framework of this research have demonstrated the role of Weibo as an indicator in understanding deliberative democracy where citizens utilize this for political participation, by looking at a case study of the 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election. Quantitative content analysis as well as the qualitative methods in terms of critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interview have helped to evaluate the pessimistic and optimistic perspectives of online censorship and citizens' political participation and deliberation, and forms a starting point in the discussion focusing on this research. In addition, the way in which citizens used rhetorical expressive participation to work as online self-censorship practice is the second step in discussing the way in which online censorship shaped the citizens' political participation and deliberation. Dynamic forms of self-censorship such as types of contribution preference or online status in Weibo demonstrated how the implicit and explicit aims

and ways of citizens' political participation and deliberation are shaped by online censorship.

## **8.2 Key Findings**

To sum up, this research has investigated the role of Weibo as an indicator in understanding deliberative democracy and digital democracy when citizens use it for political participation and deliberation. It also examines online censorship shapes the citizens' political participation and deliberation through social media through a dynamic of online self-censorship practice, which depicts the nature of citizens' political participation and deliberation as quite *dynamic, explicit* and *implicit*.

Examining the identity of users and the different contributions made by these different users has revealed the significant difference contributed by casual users and VIPs. VIPs are much more cautious and contribute less to discussions due to their fear they would easily be identified by the authorities. Casual users feel freer to deliberate in the discussion on Weibo. The number of casual users' contributions demonstrates how much they intend to protect the opportunities of political expression. Significantly, this is another important explicit and implicit way for citizens to make use of Weibo as an indicator in order to help them enhance the opportunities to be involved in political participation and deliberation, which demonstrates that *the role of online censorship more seriously and significantly shapes VIPs' political participation behaviors through social media than Weibo ('s) Got Talents' and Casual users' on Weibo*. Therefore, this indicates how censorship online shapes the citizens' political participation and deliberation by maintaining online identities.

To summarize the influence of users' identity on political discussion, the mode of political expression could be affected by their Weibo statuses, which either aim to protect themselves or resist online censorship. The users' methods of participation have also been included, and forwarding has been found to be the most popular type, with both explicit and implicit purposes in regards to social media. It is seen as the best way of disseminating information widely, and it is also seen as an implicit way of indicating support or endorsement for another's post, visualizing the contributors, or a rhetorical way of expressing irony by them, thereby demonstrating the social significance of forwarding. *Either explicit or implicit aims and the effects of forwarding help to identify the role of Weibo as an indicator in understanding and enriching deliberative democracy when various citizens are used for political participation, which has also revealed how censorship shapes citizens' political participation and deliberation.*

The next finding concentrated on the quality, significance and ideology of online discussion, and found that the most popular topic discussed on Weibo concentrates on Chief Leung Chui-ying, but the significant disagreement derives from the topics of one country, two systems and universal suffrage. Evaluating the online political discussions, it found there are dynamic perspectives and orientation expressions on "universal suffrage", "one country, two systems," "democratization in Hong Kong," and "digital democracy of Internet." A consideration of the relationship between identity of users and their contributions and the quality of online political discussion has illustrated that *diversification (Duo yuan hua) stratagem is an important index to represent the development of digital democracy in China. The most important is that the quality, significance and ideology of online political discussion identifies the dialectical*

*relationship between diversification and online censorship.* Moreover, the Three Zones (The Red, The Grey, and The Black) have demonstrated the macro-structure of online political discussion in China. The fluid development of these three zones helps understand how ideology is taught by authority and revealed through these online political discourses. The Grey Zone concentrated on in this study represents the diversification that has enriched the understanding of deliberative democracy in China with cross-tabulated effects of explicit, implicit, pessimistic, and optimistic contributions.

This research also found that a rhetorical strategy like irony is one of the main implicit ways to resist online censorship, and one form to reflect online censorship works on citizens' political expressive participation with both benefits and limitations used by Weibo users. Hence, it is the best strategic way to avoid political mines for them, in addition to it helping contribute to digital democracy in the Chinese context through various popular political topical discussions and dynamic political orientation expressions. Accordingly, the role of Weibo could be an effective indicator to understand deliberative democracy and digital democracy when Weibo netizens use it for political participation and deliberation in implicit ways. Additionally, it demonstrates how online censorship shapes their approach to political participation and deliberation. The contributions and limitations of the research may be summarized in the following.

### **8.3 Contribution of Knowledge, Originality and Limitation**

This research has made several contributions to the field of political communication and social media in order to demonstrate its originality as a PhD-level thesis. In terms of theoretical contributions of knowledge, this research has contributed to enrich an understanding of the theory of 1)

democracy 2) deliberative democracy 3) citizenship and 4) the perspectives upon the dialectical relationship between the role of social media and the authority, 5) the relationship between censorship and self-censorship with an empirical Chinese case study, which is the relatively less-researched area in China.

Precisely, contributions made to these five key dimensions above have been linked with each other and presented as a whole of a triangle. In regards to the relationship between censorship and self-censorship, this research identifies the main form of self-censorship in China as represented by users' conscious of the socio-political boundaries, but who wanted to express their resistance online ironically or ambiguously. In regards as to what extent they practice self-censorship, this research concentrated on the way of contribution and the quality of political discourse, which varied significantly by the online identity of participants maintained, whether dynamic, explicit, or implicit ones. Conducting these resilient strategies meant the authority used a flexible management method in order to let the public opinion self-modify. This also proved that there were positive effects, because the citizens' self-censorship through this strategy could help ease tension between the state and the citizens, as Chinese citizenship functioned as mechanism for political claims against the authority. Additionally, Weibo netizens' use of rhetorical discourse either to convince or persuade could be understood as a transforming practice to measure their active and passive roles of citizenship in the cyber context.

Dynamic, implicit, or explicit strategies of participation expand and concretize the 'skill' and 'interaction' in measuring communication skills and online interactions, which could enhance deliberative

democracy. Conducting resilient strategies that allow either explicit or implicit ways of diversification to political participation and deliberation could help practice Chinese citizenship in order to enhance the awareness of development of digital democracy. Therefore, regarding the concept of digital democracy, this research claims what Boler (2008:168) asserted, namely that the terms “democracy” and “digital democracy” are simply rhetorical weapons that represented an ideal, rather than something concrete. Weibo users demonstrate explicit or implicit aims of different types of contributions and preferences of online status, which could either be used as rhetorical weapons or to concretize what they understood as digital democracy.

Thus, these contributions reveal a remarkable divide between the Western theoretical framework on democracy, digital democracy, deliberative democracy, and the Chinese understandings and context based on its own cultural heritage. This means it is not enough just to draw on a Western context to examine the concepts of political participation and deliberation, but also to consider the Chinese nature of citizens’ political participation and deliberation. Accordingly, this provides another suggestion for what Zeng (2014) maintained, namely that there was a significant increase in the suggestion that the Chinese government should improve bureaucratic efficiency and transparency due to the significant level of citizens’ political participation and deliberation, citizen participation and deliberation also encourages the development of civil society in China.

In terms of methodological contribution, this research demonstrates that an innovative mixed methods used can be used for research on citizens’ political participation and deliberation, as well as social media, in particular, the mixed use of the CDA and Verbal Irony Principle to

investigate the in-depth insights and macro-micro structure of political discourse in China. Moreover, the technological contributions made by Weibo for citizens' political participation have demonstrated the complex role of Weibo, which reveals how popular social media is acting as an object, forum, and a tool for research on political deliberation and participation. More precisely, at the beginning, what was contributed by netizens in this research enables us to understand that deliberative democracy and online censorship are based on the specific technological functions of Weibo. Hyperlinking studies that have been discussed in this research demonstrate the 'tool' role that Weibo contributed. Apart from this, either the explicit or implicit aims of preference of types of contributions and online statuses help to identify the 'object' role of Weibo as an indicator to understand deliberative democracy citizens used for political participation. For instance, preferring to forward rather than comment or comment on posts made by netizens in the case study could help to understand the implicit way of completing the information in regard to enhancing deliberative democracy. Completing information here could be argued to either indicate implicit sentiments expressing by Weibo users or to digitalize citizenship in terms of a sense of online community for bonding and bridging in order to improve the opportunities for political participation and deliberation, as discussed above.

Apart from this, this case study research has sought to fill an area that is relatively under-researched, namely the nature of online political participation and deliberation in Hong Kong politics through Chinese social media. The annual Thematic Household Survey (THS) on IT Usage and Penetration, undertaken by the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department in 2006 (Census and Statistics Department, 2009), as well as the annual Hong Kong Internet Project conducted by the City University

of Hong Kong in 2000 (City University of Hong Kong, 2009), did not concentrate on online public opinion. This study has contributed to revealing the different political perspectives from the mainland and Hong Kong netizens through an empirical case study of the Hong Kong Chief Executive Election in 2012, which has responded to “what is lacking” in research on Hong Kong online political opinion put forward by Central Policy Unit’s official report (2011): A Study on Understating and Analysing Online Public Opinion in Hong Kong cyberspace. Thus, this research has contributed to identifying the role of Weibo as an indicator to understand deliberative democracy and digital democracy when citizens use it for political participation and deliberation, and online censorship is shaped to citizen’s political participation through social media through the dynamics of online self-censorship with explicit and implicit ways.

It is significant to recognize the nature of the case study and its sampling limitations. The online censorship’s influence has also revealed the potential limitations of this thesis. For instance, the full access of all data collection or the nature and characteristics of online discussion by Chinese citizens, as well as their perspectives on Chinese digital democracy might be affected by online censorship. Additionally, the findings must be treated as context-bound, and should not be generalized to political participation in Weibo in general.

#### **8.4 Future Research**

There are several future dimensions for research that could be inspired by this thesis: firstly, during the Central Occupy movement in 2014, in a survey conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong asking the citizens whether or not they support the bill of 2017 Chief Executive Election through universal suffrage being passed, 43.1% of respondents

felt the bill should not be passed if it secured candidates who had a consistent political opinion with the central government in the election, 38.3 percent of the participants supported the bill (香港民意与政治发展调查结果, 2014-12-08). However, the number that opposed the bill would double the number of people that supported the bill in September at the very beginning of the Central Occupy movement. Then, in December, the gap reduced, and the opposition only reduced by 4% to the supporting (43.1%: 38.3%). In future studies, there is the potential to explore how online social capital reflects offline activities. In his case, the evaluation of netizens' orientation expression with offline activities could be the next step to investigate why citizens are motivated to participate in political expressions and discussions through social media, with other theoretical bases, such as different levels of online social capital or soft power.

Secondly, based on this research, further investigations are needed to explore the theoretical discrepancies based on public opinions on social media in China. For instance, what is the meaning of universal suffrage in the Hong Kong context and in the western context? Should Hong Kong aspire to be a democracy, at least as it is understood in the West? What kind of political system in Hong Kong could be acceptable and effectively workable to Mainland China that could maintain a stable relationship between the mainland and the Hong Kong SAR?

Thirdly, Chinese online censorship has significantly changed in 2012 when President Xi took over the role of leader in China. The development of Weibo has rapidly decreased by citizen preference due to its increasingly serious online censorship, and has extended commercial use by companies. So there might be more outputs when research on citizens' political participation through social media by looking at Chinese political

case after 2012. There are some politicians who have put their own points forward about the development of citizen's freedom of expression. For instance, "The cause of human rights in China is still facing many difficulties and challenges, and there is still a long way to go before achieving the lofty goal of the Chinese citizens fully enjoying human rights" (Wang Chen, head of the State Council Information). Meanwhile, senior leaders, for instance, Premier Wen Jiabao, periodically promise Chinese democracy and human rights, the last five years in particular have been marked by a sweeping crackdown on dissidents and activists.

Moreover, with the development of social media used in political communication and participation, more challenges will arise in the academic field, some of which have already attracted attention that needs to be seriously considered and discussed: for instance, the ethical challenges on 'public' or 'private' space, the flux to distinguish the nature of data that belongs to public or private, especially when more dynamic virtual identities held by participants. Digital literacies, along with new technologies developing, require researchers to step into another challenge of holding more professional and interdisciplinary abilities.

To recapitulate, this PhD degree research focuses on citizens' political participation and deliberation through social media: a case study of the 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election. It has enriched both a theoretical understanding of digital democracy, deliberative democracy, and a methodological contribution for combining quantitative and qualitative research in this field. Either the conclusions or the limitations might suggest the future research directions, the development of digital technology in modern society help social media research contribute to a more complex but dynamic 'interdisciplinary' research outcome.

### **8.5 Post-script: Hong Kong Central Occupy in 2015**

*“That the struggle for universal suffrage was so long and so difficult is often forgotten today; it is unlikely that the democratization of democracy is going to be any easier.”*

*Carole Pateman*

*(2012:15)*

Hong Kong’s economy is booming, but its government is facing a public that is increasingly frustrated by its policies, along with soaring property prices. Analysts warn that the level of discontent is likely to continue rising. There are already social-political movements pushing for change in Hong Kong, such as the Jasmine Revolution and the annual democratic protest in July. Demonstrations have so far been peaceful and moderate, but while some are happy to accept even minor results from these demonstrations, others, like Curedom Chun, argue that there must be radical political reform if the government is to improve in Hong Kong such as the 2015 Hong Kong Central Occupy protest, which is worth a brief review here for future study.

Whether or not the Weibo netizens support the political movement is a key topic in this research, with 96 percent of posts expressing explicit support for mobilizing political movements due to dissatisfaction or failure of universal suffrage, and one country, two systems. Related to the current affairs that happened in Hong Kong, the issues discussed above lead to a spontaneous civic protest in Hong Kong named the ‘Umbrella Movement’ or ‘Occupy Central’(反占中) on September 26, 2014. The name ‘Umbrella Movement’ has its origins in the fact that a large number of protesters used umbrellas to prevent themselves from pepper spray and tear gas in the process of sporadic scuffles with police (Macleod, 2014).

This suggests the basic context for the forthcoming 2017 Hong Kong democratic chief executive election (Kaiman, 2014), the activism has implied the future of Hong Kong politics as well as its political promise of “one country, two systems”. Comparing news reports from the mainland and Hong Kong, the arguments should focus academically on how to define universal suffrage. You will see the media in the mainland and Hong Kong have a different role and position in this case. In the following, it plans to review the context of how the movement came about, what is specifically called for and the key debates contributed to by different media and positions.

The ‘Umbrella Movement’ or ‘Occupy Central’ is a recent protest group action which has attracted both domestic and international focus, which initially emerged from students in Hong Kong on September 26, 2014. In the Civic Square outside the Central Government Offices, the students escalated a fight with the police force, then activism spread over to the vicinity of Admiralty, the eastern extension of the central business district which led to a widespread protest called ‘Occupy Central’ which covered the Central District, Causeway Bay, and Mong Kok (Jacobs, 2014; CHINAREALTIME, 2014-09-28; CTV News, 2014-09-30). There were two kinds of occupier involved in the movement, the pro-democracy group represented by Occupy Central with Love and Peace, which called for the government to adopt an open-minded attitude to civil nomination, and the pro-Beijing group represented by the Silent Majority for Hong Kong, who disagree with the Occupy Central Movement and pursue ‘democracy without chaos’.

The movement was caused by a new political framework announced by the Beijing government at China’s Standing Committee of the National

People's Congress (NPCSC) (Cheung, 2014). In December 2013, the former issued the *Consultation Document on the Methods for Selecting the Chief Executive in 2017 and for Forming the Legislative Council in 2016* to officially commence a five month public consultation upon related questions and electoral methods. Then, in June 2014, the State Council in China issued a white paper on the implementation of the "one country, two systems". In terms of the newly passed NPCSC's political scheme on August 31, 2014, the Hong Kong Chief Executive Election is criticized as a small circle election, which is opposed to universal suffrage. All eligible candidates require approval that comes from "at least fifty percent of the 1200 members in the nomination committee, mostly generated from pro-PRC functional and occupational groups" (Hill, 2014: 123). If the election system were implemented, it would be criticized that Beijing would secure a pro-PRC candidate elected to keep control over most of the members of the nomination committee (BBC News, 2014-10-07). Therefore, the occupiers call for Hong Kong's electoral system to undergo reform that would ensure a Chief Executive and Legislative Council members democratically elected in a process of 'real universal suffrage' (真普选). The organizers of the movement stated that this is "a civil disobedience campaign that fights against Beijing's deliberate distortion of Deng Xiao ping's promise of "One Country, Two Systems"" (Chi, 2014: 24). The activism focuses on a key political agenda- their request of 'real universal suffrage' (真普选).

From the Beijing side, all the official news or reports have demonstrated that there is nothing undemocratic in the NPCSC's political scheme, due to all the democratic elections in the mainland context conducting a similar electoral system to elect a loyalist to the Communist Party of China (O'brien and Li, 2014: 101-125). It is quite important for Beijing to

secure its reign over Hong Kong through this electoral system. Kirk (2014), in particular, has mentioned that the Chief Executive might be held out of Beijing's control without being handpicked by PRC, so implementing a CCP-led electoral system might be the best way for CCP to hold the power. Regarding this protest, Beijing kept quiet on the movement officially, and only showed a desire to keep the new political framework intact. Lee (2014) criticized this because it meant that there is no room for any concessions in terms of the electoral system, which sends a message that the situation in Hong Kong is undemocratic.

From the side of (the) current Hong Kong SAR administration, they are in an embarrassing position, because they need to resolve the conflict between the local citizens and the mainland, however, there is limited space for them to negotiate with Beijing if Beijing is not inclined to accept compromise (The Guardian, 2014-10-12). 52.8% of citizens support the fact that the government should make a concession in order to solve the current problems, while 36.7% think that there is no need (香港民意与政治发展调查结果, 2014-12-08). The Hong Kong Bar Association was anxious about the white Paper. Firstly, they believe the rule of laws means more than doing things according to the law, which lacks self-restraint and judicial independence in terms of the theme of resolutely safeguarding the authority of the Constitution of China and the Basic Law. Secondly, they are worried about the State Council categorizing judges and judicial officers that might lead the citizens to think that 'Courts are part of the machinery of the Government and sing in unison with it'.

On the citizens' side, 42.3% of them who joined the survey conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong have revealed their opposition to the movement, 33.9% demonstrated their support, while 21.6% showed

their neutral orientation towards the movement (香港民意与政治发展调查结果, 2014-12-08). From the occupiers' side, there are students, intellectuals and opposition who are involved; the leaders of students groups finally had a conversation with the government to discuss a potential resolution, and yet even now no agreement has been reached, at least no substantial political concession. The student leaders have received an increasing number of complaints concerning the inconvenience caused by the movement impacting on individuals' daily life. 76.% of participants in the survey stated that the occupiers should evacuate immediately, while 6.5% state that the occupiers should not evacuate, and the rest were neutral (香港民意与政治发展调查结果, 2014-12-08). The latest context revealed that a disagreement comes from the supporters of 'Central Occupy' movement who suggested the need to rethink, the effects of a protest that could contribute to the political reform in Hong Kong (South China Morning Post, 2014-10-16) and reconsider whether or not the fact has being still consistent with the original political goal of this movement (BBC News, 2014-10-22), even though the suggestions have been opposed by the student leaders who are not going to give up until they get the potential positive feedback from the Hong Kong government. In the survey conducted by the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, in comparing the orientation upon 'How do you trust the government in Hong Kong?' with 'How do you trust mainland government?', even though the amount that distrust exceeds the number that trusts the government, from September to December, the percentage of distrust (49.7%) for the local government is more than double that of trust (22.5%) for the local government in September. In December, the percentage of distrust (40.3%) was quite similar, to the trust of the local government (36.5%). It was quite similar to the case of orientation of citizens to central government, even if there

are double the numbers of ‘distrust’ compared to ‘trust’. In September, the disparity reduced to 7% difference in December (41.3%: 34.7%) (香港民意与政治发展调查结果, 2014-12-08). Eventually, even though all the participants involved in the movement share the same goal, they prefer to pursue different strategies in the process of movement. Thus, only students still insist on going to the street, as others have already changed their political agenda.

Ten Lee (2014) put forward a strategically possible solution, which suggests the students should put themselves in the middle, and they could suggest a more acceptable electoral system of reform for Beijing. For instance, decreasing the approval percent of candidate eligibility, enlarging the social functions of the composition of the nomination committee in order to reduce the scale of political manipulation. Even if the authority might not agree, this could reveal how Beijing could treat the Deng Xiao ping’s political promise “one country, two systems”. Apart from this, the Law Society of Hong Kong<sup>24</sup> (2014) also suggested that the white paper reiterated “unambiguously that the rule of law and judicial independence are essential for maintaining the principle of one country, two systems”. This research has revealed that there is a serious negative sentiment between Hong Kong citizens and the mainland in relation to future cohabitation with China, referred to as domestication. In fact, such sentiment is a growing source of social discontent which leads to the root of anti-Chinese feeling by Hong Kong citizens who are against Hong Kong’s assimilation into Chinese political, economic, social and cultural arenas (Zhu, 2011).

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<sup>24</sup> The Law Society of Hong Kong, (2014), Submission on the White Paper on the Practice of "One Country, Two Systems" Policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region'.

Apart from these, more international powerful men stand out to support the movement. For instance, the British Prime Minister David Cameron has broken the UK government's silence concerning the protest, in order to demonstrate his support for Hong Kong democracy, and has mentioning that 'Real universal suffrage does not just mean the act of voting, it means the proper choice' (Lynch, Internal Business Times, 30-09-2014). The British Foreign Secretary George Osborne also called for the Chinese government to find a peaceful way to solve this situation. He criticized the Hong Kong government's use of tear gas and pepper spray on peaceful protesters. This was the first time Lynch (ibid) had evaluated for the British government to show a seriously dissatisfied view on central government since Hong Kong's handover in 1997.

There are unpredictable effects that might be caused by the Central Occupy movement. For instance, to all investors in Hong Kong, political stability is quite an important consideration. "The uncertain political situation might lead to a perfect financial storm", said John Tsang, Hong Kong's financial secretary in August 2014. Yeung and Huang (2014) have evaluated that John Tsang's demonstration might be supported by a study from the investment bank UBS in April. If the concession is unsatisfactory for the 2017 Chief Executive Election, then much like the unrest in the Thai capital of Bangkok, a prolonged political incident might lead to stock market volatility, which runs the risk of the city taking a long time to recover confidence.

Compared with the media report upon the movement, there are supporting reports by Apple Daily (苹果日报) and Ming Bao (明报), entitled 'The beginning of Central Occupy contributes to withdraw The Decision' (Apply Daily, 2014-09-28) 'The Three Son of Central Occupy Announce

the Movement's Beginning' (Ming Bao, 2014-09-17). on the other hand, the opposing views come from Oriental Daily (东方日报), Star Island Daily (星岛日报), Wenhui News (文汇报), Dagong News(大公报), Cheng News(成报), for instance, titled 'Central Occupy is the grave of universal suffrage' (Star Island Daily, 2014-09-28) 'A terrible Central Occupy' (Dagong News, 2014-09-29). As for international news reporting, a majority of them expressed their sympathy for the Hong Kong citizens: for instance, the BBC reposted a report titled 'How the humble umbrella became a HK protest symbol' (2014-09-29), CNN reported '7 hours of midnight: Inside Hong Kong's Umbrella Revolution' (2014-09-29). Compared with mainstream media in Hong Kong, there is a significant increase in independent media who are active through both their Facebook fans page and their own website during the movement, such as 'Hong Kong Independent media Network' 'independent media (Hong Kong) Hong Kong - In media', 'Tip', 'Blood Times', 'SocREC Social Channel Record', 'Silent Majority for HK'. Most of them criticize the current government and show their sympathy towards the occupiers; in particular, 'Blood Times' is explicitly supporting the movement, and reveals their anti-Beijing sentiment concerning its control over Hong Kong; conversely, 'Silent Majority for HK' is an independent media that explicitly opposes the Central Occupy movement.

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香港特别行政区政府统计处 2014: *香港统计数据一览二零一四年编订*, 资讯及通讯科技的接达情况 Accessed 13/3/15 <http://www.censtatd.gov.hk>

## **Appendix 1 Publishing Work**

Zhao Y (2014) New Media and Democracy: 3 Competing Visions from Cyber-Optimism and Cyber-Pessimism. *J Pol Sci Pub Aff* 2: 114. doi:10.4172/2332-0761.1000114

### **Introduction**

Recent years have witnessed both the critical improvement of new forms of media and their proliferation; from their emergence as the obscure and arcane province of an elite few, they have spread and are now used by millions. Not surprisingly, scholars and experts are increasingly interested in evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of new media technologies for political purposes, and a range of approaches are being employed to investigate the topic. This paper will explore the theme by focusing on the question of whether or not new media technologies have enhanced digital democracy. Generally, the discussion of this issue is dominated by the competing views of cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists. The main body of this paper has been divided into two sections. The first section outlines the development of cyber-optimistic and cyber-pessimistic perspectives, as a first step towards identifying the issues upon which any evaluation of the influences of new media on politics must be based. The second section analyses the respective accounts given by supporters of these two positions in relation to the practice of politics through new media. In general, the purpose of this paper is to critically evaluate whether or not new media enhances digital democracy by exploring both sides of the argument, with reference to specific examples.

### **How Did Cyber-Optimism and Cyber-Pessimism Emerge?**

Three main factors have contributed to the emergence of the positions referred to as cyber-optimism and cyber-pessimism. First of all, the last two decades have witnessed the opening up, through new media, of a new arena for grassroots political debate among individuals from across the political spectrum. This has broken down the boundaries to define the audiences between mass media and new media, and the channels for

communication-one to one, one too many then many to many-have both increased the complexity and intensified the proliferation of information. According to Lievrout and Livingstone [1], new media is 'those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication, and involve some form of computing as opposed to old media such as telephone, radio and TV', then Socha [2] further defined 'new media' is a term englobing 'all that is related to the internet and the interplay between technology, images and sound'. Interactivity is the core feature of new media, which could be defined as new model for communication, relying on digital technology; the 'new' component of the title highlighting a contrast with traditional forms of media such as television and printing newspapers. Secondly, according to media experts Voltmer, Negrine and Stanyer, as far as political communication is concerned, the interactions between social actors (media, citizens and political organizations) 'are frequently characterized by conflicts and disruptions, but equally by the compromises and cooperation that are required to maintain the relationship' [3,4]. New media has an effect, for instance, on the shifting of relationships between parties and voters, typically including the voices of citizens in party decision-making, although there is ongoing discussion about whether this is happening in practice [5,4].

Thirdly, scholars have interpreted the dialectical interactions between technology and society in widely differing ways, from Barlow's cyberlibertarian vision of a digital utopia of the future, to the dystopian nightmare envisioned by Davies, who believes that technology will lead to ubiquitous surveillance. In other words, different people are evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of new media upon politics from radically different perspectives, the interrelationships between actors involved in political communication through new media warrant close scrutiny. That is to say, the emergence of conflicting views between cyber-optimism and cyber-pessimism is inevitable. To better explore these competing notions about the benefits and limitations new media technologies may bring to political participation, this paper will look broadly at how

democracy might be improved or not via political participation by new media in the following section.

### **New Media and Democracy**

Political communication scholars are keenly concerned with the extent to which new media is affecting politics. This question can be explored by examining the current debate over whether the new interactive media are strengthening or undermining politics through the creation of a 'digital democracy'. Digital democracy could be understood as 'a collection of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions, using ICT (Information and communications technology) instead, as an addition, not a replacement for traditional analogue political practices' [6]. Astra's view is consistent with that of Hacker and Dijk; he also states that digital democracy could be used as 'a title for programmes of democratic renewal based on new ICTs', and grounded in various dimensions of democracy—direct, interactive and indirect [7]. Accordingly, the following sections present the respective positions of cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists in relation to three key areas of the debate: how new media enable minor parties to have greater presence, yet are controlled by major parties; how the political participation of citizens is limited and their freedom of expression restricted whilst how new media could make possible to strengthen citizens' attempts in political participation; how citizens are using (micro) blogs to participate in political communication whilst politicians are using new media to manipulate the citizens rather than reinforce their communication. These debates and analyses aim to demonstrate how and to what extent the new media could be used for political communication from different points of views.

#### **'Minor Party Access' Vs 'Major Party Control'**

The first area of debate to be considered here is to what extent new media are able to put minor parties on a par with their larger counterparts, in terms of exposure. Minor parties are able to make use of new media technologies to disseminate information and promote

themselves; typically, these new technologies not only provide broader exposure for minor parties but also act as additional channels through which to challenge major opponents and break into the political debate. For example, according to data analysis undertaken by Gibson and Ward, some of the fringe parties, such as the Progressive Party or the Socialist Equality Party, ‘barely regist[e]r outside of cyberspace [yet] share equal billing with Labour and Conservative on major party link sites’ [8]. Overall, the widespread use of new media has opened up many more opportunities for minor parties; they have started to challenge major parties and have undergone rapid changes themselves. However, cyber-pessimists argue that a higher number of communication channels does not equate with more democracy. Both minor and major parties tend to approach the Internet in utilitarian terms, using it as a tool to provide information about policies rather than as a new platform for the promotion of interaction and interorganizational links. In this sense, they serve themselves rather than citizens, their approach bordering on manipulation. It has been suggested, for example, that simulation technologies could help both minor and major parties persuade citizens to engage with political issues. As early as 1997, ‘visualization techniques’ employed by the California Transportation Department convinced San Francisco residents of the need for expenditure on the new Bay Bridge; they subsequently accepted a rise in taxes [9]. Additionally, Ward and Gibson themselves acknowledge that there is a considerable gap between major and minor parties in terms of the quality of their web design, and claim that as long as visual attraction remains a core criterion for voters deciding whether or not to scrutinize a party’s web site, the World Wide Web will only serve to strengthen the dominance of parties with access to better resources [8].

#### **‘Cyber power’ vs ‘Access’**

Cyber-pessimists disagree with cyber-optimistic commentators, arguing that the potential of new media to facilitate democracy will inevitably be limited by the question of ‘accesses. Scholars such as Hague, Loader and David express concern over the fact that individuals are prevented from accessing the field of political communication via new

media technologies for at least three reasons: 'economic status; geographic location; educational attainment' [10]. Lelia [11] also demonstrated that Internet access is restricted to 'the richer, better educated, younger, males in the community' in most parts of the world. Cyber-pessimists have further criticized the use of new media for political participation due to the serious Internet censorship exerted by major parties in some countries, such as China. The Chinese Communist Party has implemented an intricate system of information restriction known as the Great Firewall of China to control the content of Internet communications. For instance, YouTube, Facebook, and Google are blocked by the Golden Shield's web filtering mechanism. As a result, even though a large number of Internet users have started to participate in blogging activities, they confine their output to casual lifestyle-related posts rather than writing political content. According to a study conducted in 2007, not one of the top 100 bloggers in China engaged in explicit debate centered on political change or the current political system in China [12]. Thus, censorship of political online discourse certainly exists and, so far, has its influence. Digital democracy is limited by strict censorship which severely restrains the creativity and freedom of speech of netizens. Scholars like Watts, Graham-Harrison and Le have indeed criticized the Firewall for its negative impact on citizen participation, both in China and further afield. Watts has argued that the censorship applied to these social networking tools is an act of conscious political manipulation [13], while Graham-Harrison and Le demonstrated that Weibo's political function has become increasingly weakened under the Chinese government's strict control, given that the government sometimes blocks social networking sites at crucial moments. To sum up, in the debate over whether or not new media are enhancing democracy by fostering the growth of democratic movements as well as limiting political citizen participation online, the cyber-pessimists maintain that rather than leading to a new democratic future, new media are only providing a platform for the few-for the majority, it is still 'politics as usual'. However, political cyber-optimists have criticized cyber-pessimists for being too extreme and maintain that new media might be the decisive element in pushing the democratic agenda of elections nowadays. For instance, based on data published by the

Pew Research Center, sixty-six percentage of social media users have participated in at least eight online political activities, such as encouraging people to vote or posting their comments on politics through social media [14]. Thus, Internet voters may shape election campaign agendas to some extent. Internet voters are also able to reach out to nominees at the individual level; according to Michael Chin, Marketing Director of social media platform KickApps, new media is 'a highly interactive and cost effective channel' which offers politicians a valuable opportunity to make direct contact with potential voters. The fact that Barack Obama obtained an electoral victory following a triumphant grassroots campaign and successful use of social media such as Facebook and My Space [15] is a case in point. Moreover, more than 69 percentages of Internets uses who are using social networking sites and Twitter come from Republicans, Independents, and Democrats [14]. In the election of 2012, thirty percentages of registered voters were encouraged to vote for candidates Mitt Romney or Barack Obama through Facebook and Twitter (ibid.). Overall, as the evidence above suggests, new media have dramatically influenced the political lives of both voters and candidates in terms of strengthening the interactivity of their communication. This communication, and most significantly the power of the public to scrutinize and criticize the election system, is considered crucial to the functioning of the democratic political order. Cyber-optimists such as Gibson and Ward respond to criticism from cyber-pessimists by arguing that citizens can promote or even organize democratic social movements via new media, thereby pushing the democratic agenda [8]. During the Jasmine Revolution, in 2010, Tunisians made use of social networking tools such as Twitter to spread and accelerate the democracy movement, even social media did not cause the revolution but did enable to counter official propaganda, which subsequently achieved the reshuffling of the government. It might be argued that the reshuffling of the government was evidence that the leadership was indeed interested in and tried to approach the netizens via new media. Furthermore, Sassi has shown that the self-reflexive, self-organizing, non-governmental activities of individuals via the Internet are a core element of civic society [16]. In China, social media pioneers started to challenge the Party-State through new media; the increasing onlineactivities of these

young people signal a 'revolutionary impulse' in the Chinese society, thereby strengthening, or perhaps achieving, democracy. Chinese Cyber-optimists [17-19] also responded to the cyber-pessimists' negative views of Chinese online censorship, claiming that regulating the Internet is difficult but necessary. In their view, providing access to all communication channels without filtering and censoring information threatens the stability of the State. One example given to sustain this argument is a group of online paid posters called the Internet Water Army, a Chinese organization paid by individual politicians or political organizations to spread negative or fake information online [20]; their aim is to manipulate the netizens' opinions towards certain social or political events. This group of people makes negative contributions to online opinion dissemination (ibid.). Moreover, the strategy of China's Communist Party with regards to online censorship is quite simple: they would like to strictly restrict the Internet's content and simultaneously expect to improve China's economy through market transactions by the Internet. Cyber-optimists maintain that new media could enhance the digital democracy even though there is a limitation of 'access' by according to the information from a researcher at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who suggested that China could benefit both economically and politically from the Internet even though control is exerted by the CCP upon the content of internet [17].

### **'Citizen (micro) Blogging' vs 'Unresponsive Government'**

The third area of the debate to be considered here is the phenomenon of citizen (micro) blogging. Citizens are using social media, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and Weibo, as a channel for participation in political discussions, aiming to directly or indirectly influence public concerns or even reshape the public agenda, promoting the democratic public sphere. Voltmer [3], in his empirical study of political communication, revealed the interdependencies between politicians, citizens and the media, and highlighted why some media are more successful channels for democratic public communication than others. Voltmer cites the example of a Chinese blogger named Lixiaode, who was the first successful case of using a blog as a 'watchdog' to expose numerous official

corruptions in China in 2004 and 2005 [21], thereby broadening the channel of political participation through blogs. This example illustrates the potential power of new media, which has already started to challenge the existing political system. The spread of citizen political participation via new media (typically social media) has led many scholars to claim that network communications have enhanced citizens' democratic participation and strengthened direct relations between citizens and politicians [22-24], thereby promoting digital democracy. They argue that new media provide a platform for citizens to get more politically involved and to engage in the journalistic process. Typically, citizen journalists and bloggers are both producers and consumers of political reportage [25]. The mutually beneficial cooperation between citizen journalists, bloggers and professional newsmen taking place has given these citizens the chance to take on the role of gatekeepers and become more engaged in political debates. It was a citizen journalist, for example, who was able to report Barack Obama's 'lament that small-town Americans clung to God and guns in times of hardship' [25]. The status of citizen journalists is best exemplified by the fact that some bloggers have become accredited members of the Washington press corps [25]. Citizen participation also extends to the reporting of natural disasters: in more than twenty percent of China's top one hundred emergency cases in 2012, information was initially spread by citizens through social media. News of the 2012 Sichuan Earthquake, for example, was relayed via Weibo six minutes earlier than in any other news platform's posts. From the evidence above, there is no doubt that democracy is being enhanced not only by the fact of equal participation in politics or freedom from political oppression but also by the fact that increasing numbers of bloggers or citizen journalists are posting diverse political articles, analyzing government reports, and participating on an equal par with professional journalists in the broadcasting of events. This supports the views of Schudson, who maintains that democracy could be measured by citizens who contribute to more widely disseminating information and completing information [26]. News and political information are spread faster and public topic agendas are even being shifted by citizens rather than by news organizations or the government. These examples would imply that citizens are playing a

significant role in an ongoing process of democratization. However, although new media provide a platform for some bloggers and citizen journalists, Siapera maintains that ‘the Internet is mainly used for efficiency rather than to add to accountability, transparency and participation’ [27], which mean the Internet is not used to broaden democracy. Cyber-pessimists point out that politicians, who have already ceded much of their leadership role, are not interested in providing new platforms for democratic participation. They argue that this interaction between politicians and citizens is really an illusion, and that it is more important to observe what does not happen. David, for example, asserts that both candidates and elected officials utilize the Internet for the dissemination of information rather than to gather feedback from citizens [5]. According to Hague and Loader, whilst digital democracy might appeal to politicians vying for leadership, new media is just a way of contacting individuals directly, and as such political figures mainly utilize it to manipulate voters; they require little feedback from participants [10]. Most significantly, political commentators also claim that governments are rarely interested in permitting citizens to engage in what they consider to be ‘their business’, as they have no wish to lose control of the political agenda [5]. The cyber-pessimists’ scepticism is corroborated by Schuler, who described how ‘at a Massachusetts Institute of Technology conference, devoted to Democracy and the Internet, Ira Magaziner, the White House’s head internet advisor, extolled the virtues of e-commerce; not a single word was wasted on democracy’ [28]. Whether or not governments are actively using new media as a channel through which to communicate with citizens during election campaigns is, open to dispute. According to Negrine and Stanyer, the utilization of new media by citizen journalists or bloggers has not led to significant changes in the exercise of power at a global level, and the Internet remains dominated by the traditional players [4]. Cyber-pessimists have cited Hague and Loader’s arguments to support the criticism that is commonly levelled at advanced liberal democracies: that politicians too often become isolated from or unresponsive to the individuals on whose behalf they ostensibly act. Looking at the three key areas of debate outlined above, it is apparent that there is nothing inherently democratic about the new media; the extent to which they are being

used to enhance democracy depends on who is using them and why. Schuler wrote, 'Only if large numbers of people are involved in the movement is there any realistic hope for increased democratization, and only if there is a heightened awareness and a sense of necessity and opportunity can any major change and reorientation occur' [28]. Whether or not new media technologies are enhancing democracy, they are the driving force behind some radical shifts which are taking place in politics, and these changes are inevitably bringing with them both benefits and limitations. The discussion between cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists on these three issues has informed the debate over whether democracy should be considered a double-sided concept, serving both to re-form national power and restructure civil society [29]. Whether the ultimate assessment of the impact of new media on politics is positive or negative, the discussion itself is beneficial in that it fosters a basic sense of belonging to, and sharing in, a democratic society.

### **Conclusion**

This paper started by identifying the factors which led to the development of the cyber-optimistic and cyber-pessimistic perspectives. Three specific issues related to democratic communication via new media were then discussed, with the arguments put forward by cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists being used to illustrate the perceived benefits and limitations of new media respectively. On the question of citizen blogging, cyber-optimists hold the view that it allows citizens to challenge the traditional journalistic process, shape the news directly and communicate with politicians interactively via new media, while cyber-pessimists respond that political actors are interested in the dissemination of information rather than democratic interaction. As far as democratic movements—or the expansion there of—are concerned, cyber-optimists assert that citizens can utilize new media to self-organize, whereas cyber-pessimists argue that the development of the democratic agenda is constrained by the issue of access. While cyber optimists claim that voters can control the election agenda using new media, cyber-pessimists maintain that candidates are still the dominant force in the election process. Finally, although cyber-optimists have demonstrated that new media open up

more space for minor parties to gain exposure and challenge major parties, the cyber-pessimists have shown that major parties still hold the advantage. To sum up, pushing the democratic agenda via new media technologies is an ambitious aim. Widespread consultation is needed; the more perspectives are gathered from all areas of society, the more advances there will be.

## **Appendix 2 Coding Book**

### **Unit of Analysis**

The basic unit of analysis was determined by two criteria:

- 1) An advanced search of the top ten media sources by time using the search terms *Hong Kong* and *Election* from 20<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2012.
- 2) The retweets and comments posted in response to these top ten sources between 20/03/2012 and 31/03/2012 were categorized into following categories

### **Basic Elements**

Each item will be individually numbered to allow for cross tabulation.

#### **Time Period**

Label: Pre-election days: 20th to 24th March 2012; Election day: 25th March 2012;

Post-election days: 26th to 31st March 2012, classified as-

- 1 Pre-election days
- 2 Election day
- 3 Post-election days

#### **Types of Contribution**

Label: In a comment, a user might express their own view or enter a discussion with other followers who have also commented. The comment on comment type of contribution could be viewed by clicking on the *dialogue* button, which showed what the user had discussed, when and with whom; a repost (or a forwarding post) is when a user forwards and shares a post originally generated by another author, with or without adding their own content, classified as-

- 1 Comment
- 2 Comment on comment
- 3 Forward

### **Status of Weibo users**

Label: Vo:Weibo VIP (organization); Vp: Weibo VIP (person); WGT: Weibo Got Talent;

Casual: Weibo casual users, classified as-

1 VIP (person)

2 VIP (organization)

3 Weibo Got Talent

4 Weibo Casual users

### **Geographical Location of Users**

Label: Weibo users from mainland China or Hong Kong or overseas or others, classified

as-

1 Mainland China

2 HK

3 Overseas

4 Others

### **Inductive and Deductive Codes**

<b>Inductive codes</b>	<b>A1</b>	<b>The Election Committee</b>
	<b>A2</b>	<b>Universal suffrage</b>
	<b>B1</b>	<b>The Communist Party of China</b>
	<b>B2</b>	<b>Leung Chun-ying</b>
	<b>B3</b>	<b>He Junren, Tang Yingnian</b>
	<b>C1</b>	<b>Democratization in Hong Kong</b>
	<b>C2</b>	<b>'One country, two systems' policy</b>
	<b>C3</b>	<b>The 'fall' of HK</b>
	<b>C4</b>	<b>Mock election</b>
	<b>C5</b>	<b>Political movement</b>

<b>Deductive Codes</b>	<b>D1</b>	<b>Government censorship of Weibo</b>
	<b>D2</b>	<b>Weibo's role in the dissemination of information</b>
	<b>D3</b>	<b>Free political communication on Weibo</b>

Details explained as following:

### **Topic a1 Orientation (Inductive Analysis)**

Label: The Election Committee; 1200 people/ voters or the population of election committee; the category 'rhetorical use' included 'rhetorical and oppositional' or 'rhetorical and supportive' or 'rhetorical and neutral'. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

- 1 Explicit Opposition
- 0 Neutrality or unclear
- 1 Explicit Support
- 2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

#### **Topic a2 Orientation (Inductive Analysis)**

Label: Universal suffrage; the category 'rhetorical use' included 'rhetorical and oppositional' or 'rhetorical and supportive' or 'rhetorical and neutral'. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

- 1 Explicit Opposition
- 0 Neutrality or unclear
- 1 Explicit Support
- 2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

#### **Topic b1 Orientation (Inductive Analysis)**

Label: The Communist Party of China; the authority; the political system in mainland China; the category 'rhetorical use' included 'rhetorical and oppositional' or 'rhetorical and supportive' or 'rhetorical and neutral'. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

- 1 Explicit Opposition
- 0 Neutrality or unclear
- 1 Explicit Support

## 2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

### **Topic b2 Orientation (Inductive Analysis)**

Label: Leung Chun-ying (current Chief Executive); pro-Beijing candidate and CCP supporter Leung Chun-ying; the category 'rhetorical use' included 'rhetorical and oppositional' or 'rhetorical and supportive' or 'rhetorical and neutral'. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

-1 Explicit Opposition

0 Neutrality or unclear

1 Explicit Support

2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

### **Topic b3 Orientation (Inductive Analysis)**

Label: He Junren, Tang Yingnian (the candidates); the category 'rhetorical use' included 'rhetorical and oppositional' or 'rhetorical and supportive' or 'rhetorical and neutral'. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

-1 Explicit Opposition

0 Neutrality or unclear

1 Explicit Support

2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

### **Topic c1 Orientation (Inductive Analysis)**

Label: Democratization in Hong Kong; the category 'rhetorical use' included 'rhetorical and oppositional' or 'rhetorical and supportive' or 'rhetorical and neutral'. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning classified as-

- 1 Explicit Opposition
- 0 Neutrality or unclear
- 1 Explicit Support
- 2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

**Topic c2 Orientation (Inductive Analysis)**

Label: ‘One country, two systems’ policy; the category ‘rhetorical use’ included ‘rhetorical and oppositional’ or ‘rhetorical and supportive’ or ‘rhetorical and neutral’. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

- 1 Explicit Opposition
- 0 Neutrality or unclear
- 1 Explicit Support
- 2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

**Topic c3 Orientation (Inductive Analysis)**

Label: The ‘fall’ of HK; the category ‘rhetorical use’ included ‘rhetorical and oppositional’ or ‘rhetorical and supportive’ or ‘rhetorical and neutral’. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

- 1 Explicit Opposition
- 0 Neutrality or unclear
- 1 Explicit Support
- 2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

**Topic c4 Orientation (Inductive Analysis)**

Label: Mock election; the category ‘rhetorical use’ included ‘rhetorical and oppositional’ or ‘rhetorical and supportive’ or ‘rhetorical and neutral’. It considers how the rhetorical

expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

- 1 Explicit Opposition
- 0 Neutrality or unclear
- 1 Explicit Support
- 2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

**Topic c5 Orientation (Inductive Analysis)**

Label: Political movement (civic protest; political parade); the category ‘rhetorical use’ included ‘rhetorical and oppositional’ or ‘rhetorical and supportive’ or ‘rhetorical and neutral’. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

- 1 Explicit Opposition
- 0 Neutrality or unclear
- 1 Explicit Support
- 2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

**Topic d1 Orientation (Deductive Analysis)**

Label: Government censorship of Weibo and how this affected participation; the category ‘rhetorical use’ included ‘rhetorical and oppositional’ or ‘rhetorical and supportive’ or ‘rhetorical and neutral’. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

- 1 Explicit Opposition
- 0 Neutrality or unclear
- 1 Explicit Support
- 2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

### **Topic d2 Orientation (Deductive Analysis)**

Label: Weibo's role in the dissemination of information, testing how respondents perceived the ability of Weibo with regards to information dissemination; the category 'rhetorical use' included 'rhetorical and oppositional' or 'rhetorical and supportive' or 'rhetorical and neutral'. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

- 1 Explicit Opposition
- 0 Neutrality or unclear
- 1 Explicit Support
- 2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

### **Topic d3 Orientation (Deductive Analysis)**

Label: Free political communication on Weibo, the extent to which it encouraged or allowed free political communication; the category 'rhetorical use' included 'rhetorical and oppositional' or 'rhetorical and supportive' or 'rhetorical and neutral'. It considers how the rhetorical expressions like forms of irony constitute a, sarcastic or satire do as a hidden form of criticism or a converse meaning of the literal meaning, classified as-

- 1 Explicit Opposition
- 0 Neutrality or unclear
- 1 Explicit Support
- 2 Rhetorical Use (Optional)

## Appendix 3 Critical Discourse Analysis Sample Text

### Sample 1



阿锺Ben★: 字都签了, 生米煮成熟饭了。。。 (2012-3-28 17:39)

转发

Original Text: 字都签了, 生米煮成熟饭了。。。。。

Translation: Paper has been signed. Rice has been served.....

### Sample 2



深圳出行易★: 梁省长 (2012-3-28 16:44)

转发

Original Text: 梁省长

Translation: Governor Leung

### Sample 3



名字被占用也不行呀: 梁特首内牛满面的说: 党的恩情比天高, 感谢某委员南下sz拉票, 感谢党中央在选举过程中的全力支持, 梁一定竭尽全力把香港建设成有中国特色的法制社会, 民主社会。 (2012-3-27 00:38)

转发

Original Text: 梁特首内牛满面的说: 党的恩情比天高。感谢某委员南下深圳拉票, 感谢党中央在选举过程中的全力支持, 梁一定竭尽全力把香港建设成有中国特色的法治社会, 民主社会。

Translation: Chief Leung wept: The Party's grace can move mountains. I appreciate the committee, who I am in an embarrassing position to mention his name, for canvassing for me in Shenzhen. I appreciate the central committee for the full support during the election. I shall, with my last ounce of strength and loyalty, construct Hong Kong into a society ruled by law, and a community run by democracy.....with Chinese characteristics.

The others **Samples:**

Irony

字都签了, 生米煮成熟饭了。。。。。

Paper has been signed. Rice has been served.....

B2

香港总督, 港督!

Governor of Hong Kong, GHK!

C2

梁省长

Governor Leung

B2, c2

白色恐怖要来了

There will be the White Terror.

?

特首? 特务首脑?

Chief Executive.....of Espionage?

B2,c2

CY 得到中央[祝福]了。

CY is "blessed" by Beijing..

B2,c2

只能看不能说。。。。宝宝软了

Can watch but cannot say.....Bobo ducked.

\*Bobo is the nick name of China's former PM Wen Jiabao.

C1,d1

我就看看，不说话，当然不说话的原因是不敢说话

I'm simply watching and not going to say anything, not that I dare to.

C1,d1

梁去北京报到了?

Did Leung just report to Beijing?

B2:N

第一次见总理签名。

First time in my life seeing the signature of PM

D2:s

其实相对于其他省份，“阿爷”对香港人已经好关照，好忍耐.....

Compared with other provinces, granpi has actually been kind and patient with Hong Kong.....

这是任命！不是选举的！香港这片净土也悲剧了

This is an appointment! He is not elected! Hong Kong the Pure Land suffered!

\*Granpi is a nick name that Hong Kong people refer to PRC

B1,c1,c2,c3

最后一句太假了吧。君不见，梁特首上任之时，香港人民上街抗议吗？

The last sentence was just too hypocritical. Behold, the populace protested through the streets of Hong Kong the day Chief Executive Leung assumed office.

C5,b2:N

民意所向，大陆何时以这种方式产生领导人。

It's a result of public opinion. When will Mainland China have a leader in this way?

C1,b2:s b1:o

梁特首内牛满面的说：党的恩情比天高。感谢某委员南下深圳拉票，感谢党中央在选举过程中的全力支持，梁一定竭尽全力把香港建设成有中国特色的法治社会，民主社会。

Chief Leung wept: The Party's grace can move mountains. I appreciate the committee, who I am in an embarrassing position to mention his name, for canvassing for me in Shenzhen. I appreciate the central committee for the full support during the election. I shall, with my last ounce of strength and loyalty, construct Hong Kong into a society ruled by law, and a community run by democracy.....with Chinese characteristics.

吓？新特首唔咪市民选出里葛咩？点解要呼吁市民支持葛？

Wut? Ain't the new Chief elected by the public? Why still call for public support?

CY 今天在中联办待了超过一个小时而拜访立法会和终审法院首席法官则总共只在四十分分钟左右，被认为是去中联办谢票。

CY spent one good hour in LOCPG, and just 40 minutes in LegCo and CJ combined. Presumed thanking LOCPG for campaign support.

中国政府真能胡扯用你任命咩，人家是选举出来的。

Can the Government of China really afford the joke to appoint CY? He was elected!

别把无知当个性，孩子。

Don't take ignorance as an individuality, son.

一哥们在读完无数 A 片后，感叹道：国家强，则老二强！国家富，则老二长！。。。我靠。要不要这样！

So there's this buddy, after watching endless porns, signing: With a strong country comes a tough cock, with a rich country comes a long cock.....shit, man, seriously?!

梁振英翘着二郎腿，而曾却显得那么的拘谨,里面有文章.....

CY Leung sits cross-legged, while Donald Tsang sits with great caution. There must be something going on behind the scene.

荫权同志受党教育这么多年，知道要强调一国两制啥啥的。梁兄竞选前后似乎鲜提此。

Comrade Donald had been educated by the Party long enough to mention one country two systems and things like that. CY seemed economical on these terms.

香港特首第一任是富商，第二任是职业官僚，这第三任才是平民出身的。估计全是地下党？

The first Chief Executive of Hong Kong was a wealthy businessman, the second a career bureaucrats, and the finally the third with a civilian background. Are they all undercover CPC members?

老梁接旨！

Leung! Take orders!

你们要知道振英系中国特务来得。

You shall know that CY is a Chinese spy.

记得 BBC 采访温总理时问道中国在 20 年后会出现多名竞选人在全国拉票的情况吗？温总理的回答是：将来的事我无法预测！觉得是有点失败的回答。

There was this time when BBC interviewed PM Wen that whether China, in 20 years, will see multiple presidential candidates canvassing all over the country. PM Wen answered: I can't foresee the future! Seemed like a slightly failed response.

政治改革如果没有人民群众的广泛直接参与，最终发展为少数政客的权势斗争！斗争的过程就是改革先驱漫长的流血牺牲的过程。重庆改革就是鲜活的例子！薄、王轰轰烈烈的改革，取得了人民群众的广泛认可，但是在权势斗争中占据下风，最终倒台了！如果是人民群众公开选举国家领导，薄、王将得到广泛支持！

Without the extensive and direct participation of the populace, political reform will ultimately developed into a power struggle by a small number of politicians. The process of this struggle is the prolonged process during which the pioneers of reform sacrifice for their cause. The Chongqing reform was a vivid example! The vigorous reform by Bo and Wang won people's recognition but down-winded in the power struggle. And then they both fell! Were a national leader openly elected by the populace, Bo and Wang will earn more support!

得票高有毛用！别忘了，董政协是在涛哥在紧接 50 万香港人上街倒董后斥令查找不足，后来找到了，是自己的脚出了毛病，下台。

Ain't no fucking use with high votes! Right after 500,000 Hong Kong people protested Tung, President Hu ordered Tung to find out what went wrong. It turned out to be the wrong feet in office. Step down.

再详细一点。

Can you be more detailed?

有一段回复被河蟹了，这里不高兴。

Part of my comment has been censored, Big Brother wasn't happy.

是啊，微博就这样，还没听够呢。

Amen to that. This is how Twitter is. I still want more.

这个手势太像希特勒法西斯主义的了..

This gesture looks just like Hitler.

威海人顶一下吧

People of Weihai, you shall give more likes.

可以搞微博选举，这样及时方便，且高效。

Voting can be done via Twitter. Timely, convenient, and efficient.

永远不能忽视媒介的力量。

The power of social media shall never be overlooked.

草根特首，又一个励志榜样。

Grassroots Chief Executive, here comes another inspirational example.

假打！投票的那几个都不看电视和微博。

Fake! Those who voted live without TV or Twitter.

正在发生变革...

Transform is happening...

共产党动员投票部队大力支持的人上台，假民主，假的一国两制。

The one supported by communist motivated voters took office. False democracy, false "one country, two systems".

这张脸怎么看怎么像社会主义的脸。

The amount of socialism in this face is too damn high.

回归十五年，实现港人治港，共产党万岁。

15 years since the return and we can see Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong. Long live the Communist!

香港媒体披露，两位中央支持的候选人，唐的问题是感情缺失，梁的问题是黑金政治，ZY 钦定的 1200 位投票人最终的投票体现出，评定的原则是两害相权取其轻。港人治港，悲哀啊，黑金竟然为轻？！

Hong Kong media uncovered that between two candidates supported by Beijing, Tang's problem was lack of feeling while Leung's was money politics. The result of the vote showed that the principle was to choose the least worst one. Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong. How pathetic, money politics was that least worst?

逢中必反的小丑！成不了气候！

You are clowns that oppose everything related to China! And you will not change anything!

成熟的公民社会无论是在怎样的政策环境下也能够用民意去捍卫民主。可在参加民调投票的香港人只有一半的人还相信公民社会的力量，一半投白票的已经对此失去信心了，唉。

Democracy can be safeguarded under any policy environment through popular will by a mature civil society. Only half of Hong Kong people who took part in the polls vote still believe in the power of civil society. The other half casted blank votes have already lost faith. Sign.

唐先生，您的微博就关注了一个组织，是不是显得过于做作和不亲民？

Mr. Tang, your Weibo account only followed one organization, seems a little bit too affected and far away from people, eh?

他们不懂真正的民主含义。

They have no idea what democracy really are.

有什么资格任命！不是尊重香港制度么？怪不得香港爆发了去年的七一反赤化大游行呢。

Who are you to appoint? What about all the “respect Hong Kong system”? No wonder last year an anti-Communization protest broke out in Hong Kong.

基本法规定的。

It is predetermined by the Basic Law.

基本法规定由香港人自己选出特首，而不是大陆那套假选举，搞个香港的中共地下党上去当特首。

The Basic Law predetermined that the Chief Executive is elected by we Hong Kong people, instead of by you mainlander's false election and then have an undercover communist to be the Chief Executive.

下次就直选了，中央任命这一流程是基本法规定的，与民主与否没有联系。

Next time you'll see direction election. This process of being appointed by the Central party committee is predetermined by the Basic Law, which has nothing to do with democracy.

任命这个词很恶心。我自己选出来的还需要你任命，你支持即可。要不然就直接说钦点更直接，幸亏台湾人聪明。

This term “appointment” is just disgusting. Who needs your appointment when I have my own person elected? Showing support is all you need to do. Otherwise you can just say you handpicked our leader. Taiwanese are the wiser one on this matter.

这是主权问题不是民主问题，只有“任命”才显隶属中央，而不是“独立王国”~

This is an issue of sovereignty instead of democracy. Only “appointment” can show that Hong Kong is subordinate to PRC, instead of some “independent kingdom”~

就有那么多自诩的民主斗士充二，他主权概念都搞不清楚，跟他说个屁。

The amount of self-appointed democracy fighter willing to demonstrate their ignorance is too damn high. He doesn't even have a clear idea on sovereignty. Why waste time trying to enlighten his mind?

真正的民主最怕这类伪民主的愣头青。

The real democracy is ruined by this very type of pseudo-democracy retard.

这下可好，选委会选举和同期进行的全民选举结果一致，民众可以高呼“香港没死了”。

Now this is good. The Election Commission shares the same election result with the national elections that happened at the same time. People can roar “Hong Kong survived”.

没想到民望低的人竟然当选了？

The one with lower popularity rating won? Unthinkable.

一句话：北京支持的我们反对。

Long story short: we oppose everything supported by Beijing.

是香港的福还是大陆的祸？//梁振英胜出！

Not sure if Hong Kong's fortune or the Mainland's misfortune// CY Leung won!

那么请问香港核心价值是什么？梁生唯北京马首是瞻，以前建议催泪瓦斯对待游行队伍，压制言论自由。他更能代表香港的核心价值？

So what is the core value of Hong Kong? Mr. Leung follows Beijing like a dog. He used to suggest the parade shall be treated with tear gas and he suppressed freedom of speech and now he can represent Hong Kong's core value?

和台湾的选举比起来，香港的特首选举就是场闹剧。

Hong Kong's Chief Executive Election is a drama compared with Taiwan's election.

1996年香港特区第一任行政长官选举时，胜出者董建华的得票率高达八成，遥遥领先于两名对手。2002年，2005年，两次选举均只有一名候选人获得有效提名而自动当选。2007年，第一次出现电视直播辩论。2012年，候选人把战场扩到了内地微博。

In the first Chief Executive Election of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in 1990, the winner Tung Chee Hwa was by far ahead of the other two candidates with 80% of votes. And in the two elections in the year 2002 and 2005, the CE was automatically

elected since there was only one effective nomination. In 2007, the CE Election first saw live television debate. 2012, candidates expensed the campaign to mainland China's Twitter like social network software Weibo.

傀儡，你好！

Bon jour, puppet!

评论被删了。那还是爆发出来罢。

My comment has been censored. So shall it break out.

梁振英不过是中共地下党，他的当选践踏了一国两制。香港危矣，香港的大游行，抗议不断。而大陆媒体的报道，则是一篇欣欣向荣，悲矣。

CY Leung is nothing more than an undercover CPC, whose victory is a humiliation to the concept of one country, two systems. Hong Kong is in danger. Hong Kong constantly saw grand protests. According to mainland China's media report, however, everything is perfectly good. How pathetic.

这是新闻自由的胜利！

This is a victory of press freedom!

支持流选流选再流选，直至五年后的普选。

I support abortive election until the general election in 5 years.

一国两制到头来还是个笑话。

"One country, two systems", a joke to the end.

流吧！

Let there be no winner!

## Appendix 4 Semi-Structured Interview Questions Template

### Sample

#### Demographic features of interviewees

Table as below has presented the demographic features of interviewees in this research:

Interview Number	Weibo Status	Geographical Location	Gender	Age	Education Background	Job
MCU1	Casual	Mainland	F	20	Bachelor	Student
MCU2	Casual	Mainland	F	20	Bachelor	Student
MCU3	Casual	Mainland	M	30	Master	Banker
MCU4	Casual	Mainland	M	27	Bachelor	Teacher
HCU1	Casual	HK	F	19	Bachelor	Student
HCU2	Casual	HK	M	24	Bachelor	Student
HCU3	Casual	HK	F	26	Master	Business
HCU4	Casual	HK	M	25	Bachelor	Student
MVU1	VIP	Mainland	M	24	Bachelor	Business
MVU2	VIP	Mainland	M	32	High school	Officer
MVU3	VIP	Mainland	M	31	Bachelor	Journalist
MVU4	VIP	Mainland	F	26	PhD	Lecturer
HVU1	VIP	HK	M	30	Bachelor	Journalist
HVU2	VIP	HK	M	31	Master	CEO
HVU3	VIP	HK	F	26	Master	Host
HVU4	VIP	HK	F	33	Master	Editor
MWU1	WGT	Mainland	F	23	Bachelor	Student
MWU2	WGT	Mainland	F	26	Bachelor	Student
MWU3	WGT	Mainland	M	33	Bachelor	Data Analyst
MWU4	WGT	Mainland	M	21	Bachelor	Student
HWU1	WGT	HK	F	20	Bachelor	Student
HWU2	WGT	HK	F	20	Bachelor	Student
HWU3	WGT	HK	F	23	Bachelor	Student
HWU4	WGT	HK	M	20	Bachelor	Student

## **Interview Questions**

Some specific interview questions may be expressed slightly different in mandarin and Cantonese based on Chinese culture context from the research questions in English, thereby making the interviewees more comfortable and comprehensive. For instance, Q24 'Have you ever been censored on Weibo? If yes, how do you feel about that? If not, why do you think this is?' will be expressed in a way like 'have your posts on Weibo been deleted before? Or have your Weibo account been blocked before?', moreover, interviewees may not understand or even not realize what 'expectation' they have in practise in Q8 & Q9, so it is better to give them more time to recall and think about, and also ask the following questions like 'what specific political information you would like to read and follow in difference time periods?'

### **Section One**

Aim: These basic questions should help interviewees 'open up'. They explore in broad terms what and how the interviewees use social media for political communication, and explore their basic opinions upon the difference between Weibo use and other social media, and what specific political issues they are interested in when they using social media.

Schedule: This round of interview will last only 2 minutes as a basic exploration and make the interviewees feel more relax and comfortable.

Q1 Have you ever used other social media before using Weibo?

(If interviewee says yes, then ask Q2 AND Q3, if no, skip to Q5.)

请问您在使用微博之前有用过其他社交媒体平台吗?

Q2 Which ones? How do you think they differ from Weibo?

有哪些? 您觉得他们和围脖最大的区别在哪里呢?

Q3 Have you used them to post comments or forward information on political issues?

那您有用过这些平台参与和关注一些政治事件或者政治话题吗?

Q4 Do you know when Weibo set up? When you start to use Weibo?

您知道围脖什么时候建立的？您自己是什么时候开始使用围脖的呢？

Q5 When did you start using Weibo to explore politics?

您是什么时候开始用围脖去关注一些政治话题的呢？

Q6 Have you ever followed any election news or information on Weibo? For example, events during the Chief Executive Election of Hong Kong or the activities of the 18th CCP Central Committee?

您除了用围脖参与香港特首选举这个事件之外有参与过其他大的政治事件或者话题吗？如果有，是哪些呢？

## **Section Two**

Aim: This round of questions explores what period are most attracted by interviewees and why, as well as their political aims and expectations at different points during the election.

Schedule: This round of interview will take 2-3 minutes.

Q7 When did you start to follow the election on Weibo?

您是什么时候用围脖开始关注香港特首选举的呢？

Q8 When did you participate in political discussion on Weibo (pre-election, election day, post-election)?

您是在选举前，选举当天还是选举结果出来之后参与这个话题讨论的呢？

Q9 Why did you prefer to do so at these times?

您为什么选择这个时间段参与呢？

Q10 Did you have different expectations before the election, on election day and afterwards?

您在这三个时间段里面有没有什么不一样的期待？比如希望看到什么不一样的信息？

Q11 What expectations do you have when you explore political information on Weibo?

## **Section Three**

Aim: This round of questions begins to investigate the extent and different types of political participation among Weibo users, how the interviewees interpret their own understanding the differences between different types of contributions, what way is their choice and why.

Schedule: This round of interview will take 5 minutes.

Q12 Do you know the differences between the three types of contributions? How do you think they differ?

您知道在围脖上至少三种参与方式或者说功能吗？有哪些？您觉得他们的不同是什么？

Q13 Have you ever left comments on these political issues on Weibo? If yes, when?

您自己是哪一种参与方式呢？什么时候？

Q14 Do you discuss politics with other users on Weibo or not? Why?

您有和其他网友讨论过吗？

Q15 How do you like to contribute to the discussion and why do you suppose they prefer to do it this way? (Give the interviewee some examples of topics.)

您自己为什么选择这种参与方式呢？当时是什么原因促使您参与的呢？

Q16 What motivates you to forward posts, either with or without adding your own comments? Is it because: 1) you want to be an agenda setter and prompt public discussion of the topic, you just want to publicize this topic and highlight certain posts more visible to other users; 2) you just want to link to your own page; 3) attract the users who have the similar feeling or judgment with you 4) others

我这里有几个可能会促使您转发的原因，您可以多选，您的选择是？为什么？

#### **Section Four**

Aim: This round of questions aims to examine the interviewee's personal opinion about the relationship between user status and opinion dissemination.

Schedule: This round of interview will take 2 minutes.

Q17 What is your user status on Weibo? Do you feel comfortable commenting on politics? Do you want to be in the VIP or Weibo Got Talent groups? If so, why?

您自己现在在围脖上是什么身份呢?

### **Section Five**

Aim: These online political discourses come from previous research through content analysis and critical discourse analysis, this round of interview aims to examine the interviewees' own judgments upon online political discourse and its orientations, implications, intended evaluations. Exploring the way of interviewees expression online and why, as well as how they think of the relationship between users' status and political discourse.

Schedule: This round of interview will take 10 minutes.

Q18 Can I show you some comments from others? Could you identify these comments orientation by yourselves?

我现在给您看一下别的网友留言，我们进一步探讨一下网络政治传播用语的特点

*样本Sample (this content of samples have been rephrased based on original ones on Weibo in order to avoid that the users' identities could be traced, thereby protecting the privacy of the Weibo users)*

1'老梁接旨吧'

2'亲爱的傀儡，您好'

3'这张脸怎么那么像社会主义的脸'

4 'CY得到中央的wish了'

5 '梁省长'

6'我就看看，不出声，当然不出声的原因是不敢说话'

7 'CY内牛满面的说：党的恩情比天高，感谢党中央在选举过程中的全力支持，我

一定竭尽全力把香港建设成中国特色的法制社会，民主社会’

Q19 Do you prefer to express yourself explicitly on Weibo?

您自己会用哪一种表达方式呢？直接表达赞成或反对还是中立，还是婉转甚至讽刺？

Q20 What do you think of other users' explicit remarks?

您怎么看待这些网友的表达方式和态度？

Q21 Do you use irony when participating in political debate?

您自己会用讽刺这个方式表达意见吗？

Q22 What do you think of these ironic comments?

您怎么看待这些网友的讽刺表达？您能判断出他们讽刺的目的和讽刺寓意是什么吗？

Q23 Do you think there is any difference to post these orientation comments when you are a VIP or casual? (Do you think it is easier (or more difficult) for VIP users to post comments than casual users? Or...Do you think VIP users' comments are received differently from casual users' comments?)

您觉得如果您变成其他围脖身份，还是会坚持您现在的表达方式还是选择其他表达方式？为什么？

Q24 Have you ever been censored on Weibo? If yes, how do you feel about that? If not, why do you think this is?

您在围脖上有被删过帖子这种经历吗？如果有，当时是什么感受？

Q25 Have you ever post some comments to test the censorship for purpose? Why?

您有想过专门特意去发一些信息内容测试一下帖子会不会删除或者帐号被封锁呢，（如果没有）有想过去测试一下吗？为什么？

Q26 Do you feel that you are influenced by the threat of online censorship?

（根据受访者回答，选择问题）您觉得网友选择这种讽刺，婉转的表达，或者您想测试网络监管这些想法是不是因为受到中国严格的网络监管影响？我能不能把这个影响称为威胁或者恐吓？

Q27 Did you know that censorship is practised not just by the government but also by commercial companies? All do you think they are the same?

您知道网络监管既有政府行为也有新浪公司自己的监管行为，还是您认为两者其实是一样的？

Q28 Do you agree with this censorship? What is your opinion of the way in which Internet content is controlled in China?

您支持中国这种网络监管吗？为什么？

Q29 there are 9 topic discussions come from my previous research, could you choose which topics you have participated and why? Are you really familiar with the background information of these topics you have participated?

您能告诉我您参与了香港特首选举话题讨论中哪些热点话题吗？

a1- The Election Committee (EC); 1200 people; (选举委员会)

a2- universal suffrage (香港普选)

b1-The Communist Party of China (CCP); (中国共产党)

b2- Leung Chun-ying; (梁振英)

b3- the other candidates: He Junren or Tang Yinlian (其他候选人)

C1-Democratization of Hong Kong; (香港民主化)

C2- 'one country, two systems' policy; (一国两制政策)

C3-the fall of Hong Kong; (香港沦陷)

C4-mock Election; (港大发起的模拟普选)

C5-civic protest or political parade (公民游行示威)

d1- Government censorship of Weibo (围脖的网络监管)

d2- Information dissemination through Weibo (围脖的信息扩散)

d3- Free political communication on Weibo (围脖的自由政治讨论)

Q30 which types of contributions you choose to participated in these topics? Why?

您是用哪种方式参与的？为什么？您用什么表达态度参与的？

Q31 how do you think people who are not familiar with these topics but active

participated?

您怎么看待大陆网友在不了解香港政治体制情况下这么积极参与围脖上的特首选  
举话题讨论？

Q32 Have you ever think about you could use Weibo to communicate the politics? How  
do you feel about?

您觉得现在围脖能公开公众的讨论大的政治事件对您来说是惊喜还是预料中的？  
还是觉得是一种进步？

Q33 could you use your own words to interpret your understanding of Digital democracy?  
Like key words?

您觉得根据您的经验和理解，什么叫做网络民主？能用关键词形容您的理解吗？

Q34 do you think communicate on politics online is a way to enhance the digital  
democracy?

您觉得现在用围脖讨论政治事件是提高了您理解的网络民主了吗？

Q35 do you have any expectation that your comments will be reviewed by the politicians  
in China or not?

Q36 will the possibilities of their review could influence your understanding the digital  
democracy?

那您觉得这些网友的意见和建议能否被领导们看到或者影响决策，会影响您对网  
络民主的定义或者判断吗？

## Interview Answers (Sampled response)

Q18 Can I show you some comments from others? Could you identify these comments orientation by yourselves?

*样本 Sample (this content of samples have been rephrased based on original ones on Weibo in order to avoid that the users' identities could be traced, thereby protecting the privacy of the Weibo users)*

1‘老梁接旨吧’，

2‘亲爱的傀儡，您好’，

3‘这张脸怎么那么像社会主义的脸’

4‘CY 得到中央的 wish 了’

5‘梁省长’

6‘我就看看，不出声，当然不出声的原因是不敢说话’

7‘CY 内牛满面的说：党的恩情比天高，感谢党中央在选举过程中的全力支持，我一定竭尽全力把香港建设成中国特色的法制社会，民主社会’

Q19 Do you prefer to express yourself explicitly on Weibo?

Q20 What do you think of other users' explicit remarks?

Q21 Do you use irony when participating in political debate?

Q22 What do you think of these ironic comments?

Q23 Do you think there is any difference to post these orientation comments when you are a VIP or casual? (Do you think it is easier (or more difficult) for VIP users to post comments than casual users? Or...Do you think VIP users' comments are received differently from casual users' comments?)

VIP	M	<p>在我看来是比较偏激的。是站在 ccp 对立的层面上。我又关注到当天选举结果出来的时候，梁正英有公开表示说他任命为行政长官没有收到任何政党党纪的约束。就是在没有受到任何约束的情况下，产生的一个民意的效果行为。但是我们知道，香港的特首选举一定是受到 ccp 政党指示的影响。也就是内部会指定有这样一个。但他自己却签署了一个法定声明认为自己并没有任何政党背景。所以在他们这些网友与其看来说‘老梁接旨’认为他是收到 ccp 的一个授意和指示。对网友来说他们站在 ccp 对立的立场看这个问题。//我觉得是一种攻击。//因为我现在我的工作代表 ccp 正当来说话，说以我的想法是这个香港新任特首梁正英是在 ccp 指定情况下出任的行政长官。他是从属于 ccp 政党所在的国家来管理。如第五条所说的“梁省长”一样他其实是我们这个 party 管理的一个区域。所以他们的选举和管理是收到 ccp 的一种控制。这种控制是必须的。我是赞成‘梁省长’这样的表达//如果是普通用户，我觉得我会表</p>
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		<p>达不同的声音。我不会用很讽刺方式。但我会把我的立场给说出来。我并不会同意说这样的选举有没有收到 ccp 的授意但是我会把握自己的想法和怀疑发表出来。但我不会用意识形态的攻击的方式。比如说根据梁正英自己签署的法定声明，他在透过电视包括香港有一个绅士，陈家驹的见证下。他说我像香港做出严重声明，本人不是被任何行政长官选举条例或是任何政党成员。。。就是表示这是确认无误的。表示他作为行政长官，在任期内不会成为任何正当的成员，也不会接受任何政党成员的一个党籍约束的效果，不会做任何的行为。但是我们认为你本身选举被选举成为这里的特首本身就是受到 ccp 这样的一个受益。这种事情对我来说本身就有个怀疑。因为你是在这个体制制度下的一个人，但你说你的行为可以不受到这个制度的管制。这个会让我产生一个怀疑。我会把实事罗列出来去说我的一些观点。但我不会用一些攻击的字眼。会用比较理性的观点表达。</p>
VIP	M1	<p>1‘老梁接旨’，可能就是带着点风趣的和那种古代相结合的画外音的样子。</p> <p>2‘傀儡，您好’，可能是带着讽刺的方式表达。</p> <p>3‘这张脸怎么看像社会主义的脸’可能是蕴含了一种比拟的方式描述。</p> <p>4‘CY 得到中央的 [祝福] 了’可能是旁人冷眼看待一件事的意思。</p> <p>5‘梁省长’从简短的称呼上来表现梁省长背后还有一些不为人知的事情。</p> <p>6‘我就看看，不说话，当然不说话的原因是不敢说话’可能他是一种想把自己的话说出来，但是又绕了个弯来表达出来。</p> <p>7‘梁特首内牛满面的说：党的恩情比天高，感谢党中央在选举过程中的全力支持，梁一定竭尽全力把香港建设成中国特色的法制社会，民主社会’可能是一个比较正面又带有风趣的表达，表达了梁特首一种负责任的态度。</p> <p>Q4 所以你认为他们都是直接表达反对或支持，还是你认为他们都是在嘲讽或绕弯。</p> <p>A4 有一点是绕弯吧，现在这个社会你也不好直接表达出自己的观点，可能会惹来麻烦，只要你仔细看就能看出来。</p> <p>Q4 所以你能看出来？你自己会选择怎样的表达方式？</p> <p>A4 自己会选择不是很绕弯。</p> <p>Q4 所以你会明确的支持反对？</p> <p>A4 因为也是普通网名嘛，虽然是 VIP，但是跟重要人物相比的话。</p> <p>Q5 你又没有没想过你是 VIP，可你是明显的表达支持反对，会不会身份不方便？</p>

		<p>A5 这要看是针对哪个问题的方面了,如果是跟我的身份有一点相似或冲突,我在发言中会收敛点。如果是跟我的专业啊没有涉及到,我会讲的比较直接。</p> <p>Q5 所以你目前参与香港特首选举讨论,你没有觉得你是VIP 而感觉说话不方便?</p> <p>A5 嗯,对,所以特别是关于香港这一块,跟我们内地是有一些区别,所以表达的会比较直观。</p> <p>Q6 你所谓的区别是什么?</p> <p>A6 区别就是香港与内地不同,香港的政治自助经营,可能我们说的话不会对他们产生效果。但是做归我是有身份的人,做还是会去做,但是真正能不能影响到还是另外看的,所以我会直接的表达。</p> <p>Q7 您自己会用讽刺这个方式表达意见吗?您怎么看待这些网友的讽刺表达?</p> <p>A7 我可能不会这样表达,但我觉得这种表达可能是一种委婉的方式来指出一些比较有争议的政治问题。这样可能让大众接受,也能让政治领袖懂得大众的意思。</p>
VIP	M1	<p>第一眼看上去他们几乎都是用的反讽手法,没有直接说很支持这个选举的结果,或是对这个结果很认可,大家一般都是用反讽的手法来表达自己的对选举结果的观点,或是对这个当选人的看法。//我有时候也会用反讽,这是微博上一种网络习惯,一方面大家觉得微博是一个轻松的平台,反讽的话会更有意思一些,另一方面写得太直白会被限制、删除和警告,甚至封账户,所以反讽的话会更安全一些,而且反讽的方法更适合大部分网友接受的一个能力,他们会觉得自己说的比较搞笑,就会吸引更多的粉丝。我自己也会选择反讽的说法,比如第三个和第六个,让大家想象的空间更多一些。这几个方法网络上的人用的还挺多的,你只要有一两个关键词,大家都能看出来是什么意思。//您认为有没有因为您是会员身份的原因促使您不能明显表达?</p> <p>答:应该有,比如作为会员我的粉丝数量就比较多,所以我就对自己的言行比较谨慎,而且现在微博有个新的政策,发出来一条新闻如果转发超过 500,就会受到法律制裁、审判之类的,所以我觉得还是要小心一些,像刚才说到的反讽的手法就会越来越被经常用到。</p> <p>20.如果在这种环境下您是否更倾向于普通用户,可以想表达什么就表达什么?</p> <p>答:还是不要吧,因为就像刚才说的反讽的手法,虽然我没有很明确的每个字写出来,但是我用一句反讽的手法,我的粉丝和关注我的人都会知道,所以还是会员好一些,影响力更大一些。</p>
VIP	M2	<p>像老梁接旨,可以更加直接反应微博中跟朋友互动的一个</p>

	<p>关系，可能他很直观的很亲切，更加同等的身份，甚至行政人员是人民公仆来表达他对特首选举事件的态度。A16: 那你觉得接旨这 2 个词语，他表达恰当么？A16: 我觉得在（纸媒体时代？），我觉得不太尊重人，但更直观反映人们对平等权的追求，也不是不很恰当的一种表达。Q16: 你说大家追求平等权利是表达自由平等么？A16: 对，就像对一个老朋友的称谓，我觉得挺好的。Q16: 那接下来的几个呢？你觉得语气怎么样的，他们是明显的表达支持、反对，还是比较隐晦，双关语的讽刺表达？A16: 首先刚才第一种，我是支持它的，以命令的口吻去支持它的。第二种的话，他是有点讽刺，以一种傀儡的身份去称谓他，然后我觉得有点没表达他的立场，至少讽刺了他的身份。第三种的话，更加明显的讽刺，因为结合他特首的身份背景，他很早期的时候已经和中国有很亲密的交往了，更多人认为他代表的立场不是香港的立场，可能是香港一个特区的立场，更多的是整个中国的立场，所以他用一个更加直观讽刺的说法来表达他对特首选举的意见。</p> <p>第四个的话，我觉得跟前面 2 个没有太大区别，都围绕着他跟国内政治方面交往比较密切，而导致大家对他，不知道可不可以用偏见这个词语吧。第五个，更加搞笑，大家会觉得他应该代表香港特区的身份，是一个特首的身份，而不应该把香港特区的这种做法跟大陆省份，省长做法一样。希望通过梁省长这种称谓来，也不是讽刺，希望他不要来做，把香港看成一个省，督促他去做好本职工作，所以用梁省长这种语气去看。而第六个，可能是因为，第六个网友的立场，是一个更加直观的围观者。为什么他不敢说话，可能他碍于一些比较敏感的政治话题，所以他不敢对特首选举事件做一个自己的定论，所以以一个围观者去看待这个事件。第七个，可能比较详细，他引用了梁特首的一句话，他可能更多的是想用这句话来引发更多网友对他的共鸣，他用了泪流满面形容词去形容，他希望自己的网友圈里面找到一些共鸣，来引发一些讨论。</p> <p>Q2: 那你觉得这些表达，是一种隐晦的表达吗？ A2: 我觉得非常隐晦。</p> <p>Q3: 你会用什么方式表达呢，你是明确公开支持哪一个候选人，某一个话题呢，还是像他们一样，用一种隐晦的表达？ A3: 我来表达，我更侧重于，他以多少票来赢得这次选举，本年度他承诺的一些话题，我可能会说出来，因为毕竟他是因为人民选举出来的特首，他肯定有支持它的原因，也有反对他的声音，我觉得更加客观一点的话，应该把他得到的支持的声音，承诺说出来，为什么他获选的原因，还有大家对他反对的原因说出来，可能这</p>
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		<p>样大家更加直观判断他的这个事件，可能也会更加引发大家对这个事件的关注。</p> <p>Q4: 我可不可以认为你比较中立，比较倾向于把正反两面评价都罗列出来，让大家参与讨论，而你不会明确的支持或者反对的立场？</p> <p>A4: 对。</p> <p>Q5: 为什么呢？是因为你的 VIP 身份？</p> <p>A5: 是我的 VIP 身份，但更多立场表达的话，可能涉及到更多的利益关系。</p> <p>Q6: 什么样的利益关系？</p> <p>A6: 比如他的选举，他的政策动态，可能会影响到我自己本人接下来在香港的生意，或者说在香港的一些学习啊等等方面。觉得不太利于自己的，可能我会比较反对他。可能更多的人会因为这个原因，到目前来说的话，我可能是更多是因为我对于香港的热爱，是我们国内的一部分。但是因为我觉得还没有涉入到一些更深入的一些关系，所以我不太直观去表达我的立场。</p> <p>Q7: 假如，梁特首的一些执行政策，会对你在香港发展不利。但是因为你是 VIP，你仍然会明显的表达你的意见吗？</p> <p>A7: 如果他对我不利，但是对公众来说，是真的很好的，我是不会反对。但如果他的政策带来了一大波人的一些负面影响的话，我想我会站出来发出我的反对声音。</p> <p>Q8: 你有没有想过，像刚才这样的表达，你如果回归普通微博用户，你表达会更方便，你有没有想过，回归普通用户或者微博达人？</p> <p>A8: 我觉得也没有必要。Q8: 为什么？ A8: 因为我觉得即使我是普通用户，我也有我自己的立场，加 V 只是为了让大家对我有一定了解。但我觉得它可能会给我更多社会责任感或者其他的。但即使我是一个普通市民，我也具备社会责任感，我也不能在这么一个知媒体发达的时代，制造更多浮躁的声音，而不是更加客观的声音。</p>
VIP	M3	<p>我觉得第一条老梁接旨是一种很讽刺的说法，接旨是一种回到封建社会的讽刺；傀儡你好，也是一种更直白的讽刺，意思是香港特区政府只是中央人民政府的傀儡；这张脸怎么看都是社会主义的脸，这个讽刺稍微少了点，意思是看到梁特首感觉怎么看到像社会主义了，讽刺社会主义了；第四个等到中央的祝福，可能更多的是贬义的意思；第五个梁省长可能更多是体现出港人对身份的定位问题，可能跟台湾问题一样，港人觉得自己首先在地理位置上具备优势，其次香港在多年的发展历程中，跟英国包括跟多个国家有过合作，香港可以独立；称为省长，我应该能体会到港人的一种不服，更多受了台湾问题的影响。第六个的意</p>

		<p>思很明显，可能怕被很多方式方法查出来，所以啥子都不敢说；第七个后面这句话，就是体现出香港网友的不满，情绪的一种发泄//对于香港特首选举的这个话题，我觉得从1997年香港回归，当时中央制定的是港人治港的方式，港人治港这么多年做的也很好，他们的特首，相当于省长这种级别的人，香港由港人推选，同时由中央任命，应该是兑现了港人治港的一种承诺，按理说，港人应该是很高兴很开心，如果我参与这种话题，我会觉得香港是往民主自由方向迈进了一步。我会明确的表示赞成的意愿。//我觉得他们这种表达方式看似婉转、委婉、弯酸，其实我觉得是一种幼稚的行为//我觉得是确实是加了 V 以后，就是去掉这个译名化，一定的会限制我在网上的一些行为、言论，可能我就不会以我个人身份的形式再转发这种形式进行意见的表达，可能更多的在评论里面；如果我是普通用户的话，可能我会转发，参与到评论当中去。</p>
VIP	M4	<p>我觉得第一条老梁接旨是给人一种很诙谐的感觉，第二个它的意思就是代表老梁受国内领导和党中央任命的；第二个表示很怀疑这个选举的真实性；第三个还是和第一意思差不多；整个 7 条的意思就是表示他们很不信任选举是民主选举，应该是党内指派任命的。我都能读出它字里行间背后的意思：就是表达他们不相信这是民主选举，属于党内指派，其实我并不同意他们的说法和想法，因为虽然是在中央领导之下产生特首，但是他应该也同时代表了绝大多数香港人的民意和认可。//直接表达我的支持想法//他们通过诙谐、有内涵的表达，同时他们钻网络监管的空子，有些话不能明说。如果是我的话，只要个人观点是支持的话，我会直接表达//如果我有不同的和反对的意见，我也会用诙谐婉转的表达，用一两句有内涵的话表达出来。因为这是带有政府性质的选举，加上严格的网络监管，因为我是 vip，所以会很小心心的参与这种敏感话题，特别是表达反对意见的时候，一般都不会直接表达反对意见，而是一语双关，婉转或者诙谐的方式，去规避这个网络监管。但同时我认为这种网民习惯表达是不正常的，是在抹杀自由表达权利的感觉//他们排除了民主选举</p>
VIP	HK1	<p>我觉得是很直白的嘲讽在里面的，这种表达方式不是我习惯的，看这表达方式蛮好玩的。</p> <p>Q10: 你为什么不会这么表达，你又觉得为什么他们要这么表达？</p> <p>A10: 我觉得这种话能给他们带来一种快感吧，说这种话，同时能找到很多志同道合的人一呼百应，大家都用这种方式说话，其实我认为这些评论不带什么观点的，只是一种小市民的调侃吧。</p> <p>Q11: 但是你自己表达的时候，你会鲜明旗帜的支持就是</p>

		<p>支持，反对就是反对，还是中立？</p> <p>A11: 我觉得可能会有有一些 Point 在里面吧。</p> <p>Q12: 你的 Point 是怎样的方式去表达呢？你是用一种婉转的方式还是明显的支持的方式。</p> <p>A12:我认为是描述性的，柔和的，能让大家看得懂的说什么。</p> <p>Q13: 我可以认为倾向一种理性的表达？</p> <p>A13:理性的，直接的表达吧。</p> <p>Q14: 是因为你是 VIP 吗？如果你假如今天是一个普通用户，你会像他们一样去调侃一下，讽刺一下吗？</p> <p>A14: 我觉得如果是转发要考虑这一点的，评论还好。</p> <p>Q15: 为什么呢？</p> <p>A15: 转发代表我一个比较正式的，强硬的立场吧。</p>
VIP	HK2	<p>、个人觉得梁振英是比较尴尬的，很多事情不是不敢做，而是不能做，他自己的压力本身就是很大的。</p> <p>Q13: 这几个例子你都能读出他们讽刺的意味对吗？</p> <p>A13: 我对第 3 个不是很懂，其他都懂了。</p> <p>Q14: 你当时是怎么表达出你自己的意见？</p> <p>A14: 也是讽刺，除了转发别人的，自己有时候还是会发表一些自己的观点。</p> <p>Q15:你选择讽刺的表达方式是为什么呢？没有直接表达自己的态度，是因为你觉得别人都是这样的，还是因为你是VIP，你不方便太明显表达自己的立场，希望能读懂你的人能读懂。</p> <p>A15: 是的，只是希望能看懂的能看懂就可以了。</p> <p>Q16: 如果你做回普通用户，你还是会选择这样的表达方式吗？</p> <p>A16: 应该还是会用的，比较坚持。</p>
VIP	HK	
VIP	HK	
WGT	M1	<p>是有一点比较隐晦的讽刺的表达，也有一些调侃的意味。</p> <p>//分不同的情况，对这个话题还是会比较直接的公开支持梁振英。//如果加 V 了话，会有更多人去关注你，你的言语也会有更多人去挑剔你，如果你用一些比较调侃式的语言，会有一些人会挑你的毛病，会故意抹黑你，去评论你的人格之类。没有加 V 的话，可以评论的更随便一点儿，因为关注我的人毕竟少，而且我也不代表什么权威的话语权。加了 V 的话，会有一些权威性，关注度也会提高，所以言语上也要注意一点儿。不能太过讽刺的调侃，要说符合大多数人的观点，但还是会直接表达自己的观点。</p>
WGT	M2	<p>我看到的更多的是起哄的心态，用一种不会伤害到自己的方式来表达一种不满，反应了一种民意。然而民意并不可靠，更多的是一种羊群效应，民意需要训导//</p>

		我个人通常采取一种相对明显的方式来表达观点，对不非常了解的事情就采取一种非常婉转的方式。//我认为他们的表达方式和态度更多的是一种自我保护情况下的情绪宣泄//会，在我表达一种非常无力的诉求的时候//用一种不会伤害到自己的方式来表达一种不满，也反应了一种民意//如果在成为 vip 后，如果采取一种非常明显的态度，由于有非常大的影响力，向下传导过程中，会被扭曲、利用，因此我更会采取一种更加中立温和的态度。//
WGT	M3	不会，对偏激的言论也不会转发，采取不予理睬的方式。//我会适当加入一下反讽的言语来表达自己的观点，并善意的提醒对方。
WGT	M4	1‘老梁接旨’，感觉是接受了中央的旨意，领了接力棒，然后管理香港。是讽刺的感觉//5‘梁省长’ 这些都是有一种感觉骂人不带脏字的感觉。都是在讽刺他。 6‘我就看看，不说话，当然不说话的原因是不敢说话’ 前几个是在讽刺梁。这个感觉是在讽刺自己和整个社会。 7‘梁特首内牛满面的说：党的恩情比天高，感谢党中央在选举过程中的全力支持，梁一定竭尽全力把香港建设成中国特色的法制社会，民主社会’ 这个肯定是网友改变的，感觉是网友借着梁的名义来讽刺这种现象。//我自己是不会用讽刺的表达。会直接表达我的个人感受，不会带着偏激的态度//我觉得他们的话明显有潜台词//我不会用这样的方式表达，会用中立的状态//我可以接受，每个人都有表达自己观点的方式的自由。我觉得这也反映了网友对整个社会现象的无奈和感受。这些话都是有点反对梁特首的评论。//我认为我倾向成为 vip。因为说了这些话，你有你的观点，你一定是想让更多的人听到你的话，让别人支持你看到你。Vip 就是关注的人更多，影响力更大。我会选择用 vip 发表这样的观点。
WGT	HK1	Q18: 讽刺的表达方式。 Q19: 我比较偏向我为什么不同意这个观点或者我觉得我怎么看这件事情，应该不会就说一两句的讽刺的话。因为你没有在告诉别人你为什么这么说，你的立场是什么。 Q22: 我认为他们是心理面有很多的不满，不满意的时候人就会想要骂人想要讽刺。不满意就要发泄讲出来的人比较多。 Q23: 我觉得是不是 vip 不会影响到我的表达。我觉得还是要坚持自己的表达方式和意见。
WGT	HK2	我会说，可能比较积极，我会说可能 PO 一句 CY 做了，不会这么讽刺言语。会比较中立客观来表达，不会有自己观点//也差不多了。其实就是他们表达自己的立场，就是表达自己不同观点，不是他说 A 我就要说 B，听到 A 而已。我觉得他们很婉转，他们就是讽刺，4 就是祝福不是

		祝福，CY 是根中央，帮他们工作。//没想过做VIP。又不是只有微博这个平台//我会还是保持中立，因为我举得你放一些主管的意见上去就会肯定会有一些人不同意，会debate。//W 我不是去judge他的人，是他做的事情去判断他的方法
WGT	HK3	<p>我会直接说出来，如果是我的，我会把自己的观点说出来，会比较积极地看法。//好像说第二个中国政府用他来管制，不是他来管制，就是中国派来的。我觉得是讽刺意义的，都是讽刺的。</p> <p>可以认为知道表达方式的立场，但知道他用了这个讽刺表达的方式//微博我只是看看，不需要达到VIP这种身份//我不会说谁对，谁不对，比较积极地表达</p>
WGT	HK4	<p>Q18: 有讽刺的味道。她们想说一下不好听的话但选择了一种比较隐晦的方式，是一些不是很理性的留言。</p> <p>Q19: 我会用更加理性的方式。更多的用中立的方式表达两方面的好与坏，期许它有一个美好的结果。</p> <p>Q20: 没有意思，纯粹讽刺香港和中国的关系，不是有意义的表达。</p> <p>Q21: 网络影响力更大了，自己说的话更加需要负责任。</p>
casual	M1	<p>这些感觉都挺讽刺的。比如第三个，但说这话的人并不一定了解社会主义体制和资本主义体制有什么区别。再不了解的情况下，有偏见。大陆的人对中国的社会体制也是不满的。把对大陆的体制的不满宣泄在香港投票上。//我认为这些观点中都有一些玩笑的意味在里面。本身鉴于国内的网民不会出于非常积极或消极的态度去评论有关政治的事情。从这7个观点中我认为比较像是香港人的观点。觉人认为虽然香港是处在一国两制的中但其实还是中央对香港还是有控制性的，不是完全的资本主义。//我自己会比较中立。因为我本身对中国的社会主义不太看好。我认为在中国如果没有在很高的地位对政治的影响是没有什么结果的。民众是无法影响政治的结果。</p> <p>我觉得我自己没有把握，也没有很特别的去了解。没有把我做出一个很正面或者负面的评价//我认为网友也是知道如果他们的意见是不会造成什么影响，有一点无奈的感觉。//我希望自己在微博上有一定影响力，这样自己说的话别人也会更加重视。</p>
casual	M2	<p>都是属于比较婉转间接，比较负面的表达他们的观点。大家在微博上很多话可能不能说吧，所以就选择这样的方式。//在自己比较情绪化的时候，可能就会用反讽，讽刺，演绎的方式来表达自己对一些事件的结果。//VIP,微博达人的话会更有影响力，像有很多勋章的人，他有很多粉丝，就说明他很有影响力。我觉得在未来某一阶段身份可能有必要，但现在是要能参与讨论就足够了。我有机会会愿意成为微</p>

		博红人，可能会有更多人关注我和我讨论。个人觉得自己可不可以个性化的表达和自己是不是微博红人没有直接的关系，对我影响并不大。
casual	M3	第一个有点反讽，有点隐晦到人家说什么你就要做什么。第二个就更讽刺了。第三个其实还好，只是他自己发表自己的感受，当然还是指对大陆那边有意见。第四个是他得到中央祝福就可以自然而然的当选。第五个，虽然香港是特别行政区，但是这样说感觉是他们的上位是我们大陆安排的，还是很讽刺。第六个是随自己的一种自嘲，好像我们在控制舆论，让他们不敢说，最后一个是很像纯属调侃这件事。//毕竟我是在内地长大的，我在北京长大的，所以我对大陆的感情还是挺深的，那么对于这些针对我们这边的话的话我会比较反感，当然要我对选举表态的话，我是比较中立，但是对于这种态度我会比较反感，那我可能会选择对他们反讽回去。//如果我是 VIP,我认为 VIP 只是拥有更多的功能，我不认为 VIP 的话语权就更重，或有更多人去关注你，也不会觉得自己是 VIP 就说话不方便了，但有些特殊的言论就不能随便说了。
casual	M4	1‘老梁接旨’，一感觉有一些讽刺。像古代皇帝下旨。有讽刺的意味。因为这个结果不是网友想要的结果。 2‘傀儡，您好’，（比较明显的在讽刺）5‘梁省长’（没有在讽刺这个人，而是在讽刺中国的现状。比如香港是特别行政区，应该是独立的，但实际上并没有做到原本应该有的。只是和中国其他省一样，并没有什么特权） 6‘我就看看，不说话，当然不说话的原因是不敢说话’（感觉是老百姓说出来的话，中国现在有很多事老百姓不满意，但没有权利讲话。网友会在网上讲，但又不能太明显，怕给自己招来麻烦，只能出一口气）//我比较赞同 1, 2//比较有趣。而且一般的市民并没有什么权利干预这样的政治事件，所以只能在网上发表意见。又怕惹祸上身，只能在网上隐晦的发表意见。//如果我是 vip，或者比较有影响力。我会说的比较直白一些。或者更直接，我会发起一个话题讨论，当一个主持人，让大家一起来讨论这个话题。
casual	HK1	1、2 是一般香港市民的想法。3，好像听说的比较少，至少在我和我家人朋友之间没有听到过这样的说法，4 和 1、2 意思差不多吧，他的上任是得到了中央党的支持，5 不太懂它的意思，6，不是描述香港的情况，可以发表言论的地方还蛮多的，会在 Facebook, twitter 还有其他更多地方，外国传媒也会留意香港动向，所以我们说话的地方还是蛮多，不会到这种不敢说话的程度。//是香港人评论政治的一种方法，会比较公开的评论现在香港的动向和政客的事件及自己对这件事情的感想，每年七月一号会举行游行，会努力争取我们缺少的东西。//香港人会比较直白的表达。//

		会根据不同事件会不一样。但还是会直白的表达。//如果我是 VIP 的话，应该不会直白的表达，但我自己的想法不会改变，在微博平台上跟我一样想法的人已经存在了，我也没有必要在改变一个其他的想法，特别是在这样一个官方平台，微博上没有必要大胆的发表自己的想法。//
casual	HK2	: 都是带有讽刺意味的。 Q19: 如果是 VIP 会有相对的知名度。偶尔自己也会用这样的表达方式。在内地会更加需要言语注意，在香港会公开支持或者反对意见。
casual	HK3	就是说那个中国地委派梁正英来做我们香港的特首然后把他说，就是把中国说的皇帝一样，我们特首被他委派。我觉得他们是比较嘲讽的意思吧。//就是批判的态度。//我觉得也蛮有趣的，这些留言看到的也慢好笑的。//我不会这么写，但是就是看上去蛮好笑的。// JR: 这是明星才做吧，要给钱的 Y: 不用。JR: 不会。
casual	HK4	理解那个， 那些人就是不满意梁正英当选，然后觉得 CY 有特殊的关系才能管制香港，然后香港就会被中国控制，这些留言就是在攻击 CY 比较多，然后说中国不好什么的。//我也不会，其实我只是我支持我自己喜欢的那个，只是看反对的留言比较有趣，跟他一样。//如果真的要反对的话。我只会说一些实话，不会写这些攻击的。// JR: 这是明星才做吧，要给钱的 Y: 不用。JR: 不会。

#### Online Political Discourse (translation and presenting)

One of the important aims of the interviews was to explore how interviewees preferred to express themselves on Weibo and how they interpreted other Weibo users' posts during the election. The majority of interviewees evaluated the samples they were shown as 'ironic', 'critical', 'jokey', 'circumlocutory', 'indirect', 'negative', 'self-mocking' and 'explicitly ironic'. When asked whether they themselves used irony, only two Hong Kong users (one casual and one VIP) said they had, but not often. However, almost all the users from the mainland preferred irony when 'I am emotional' and 'I feel helpless'.

Irony was employed for two main reasons: fear of online censorship and the users found it more entertaining. One casual user asserted that irony was more fun. Also, because they were just normal citizens, they had limited rights to affect political events.

They could only express their opinions online, but using irony helped them minimize the risk. One VIP user mentioned that his post might be warned, deleted or blocked if he used certain sensitive words online, so irony made it safer. The interviewee went on to explain that he had to be careful because he was a VIP. When he expressed opposition, the best way was to use ironic meanings or a humorous tone to avoid online censorship. One Weibo Got Talent activist explained that when he argued with someone else, irony was a mild and indirect way to express his ideas, while a VIP user observed that he found irony made Weibo more interesting and that it made online debate more acceptable.

However, some VIP users found irony limiting: 'because we could not say what we wanted to say explicitly'. The majority of Hong Kong users preferred explicit expressions of support or opposition on the grounds that they wanted to highlight why they agreed or disagreed, what their position was and why. Others rejected irony because they saw it as a less rational mode of expression. One interviewee said: 'I prefer to be neutral and objective', to 'tell the truth rather than going on the attack or being extreme'. One VIP user from Hong Kong highlighted that he did not support the one country, two systems model and he was quite concerned about democracy in Hong Kong; he was too disappointed to use irony to make fun of the situation. Some mainland users, on the other hand, did not use irony because: 'I am so in love with my country, I do not want to make fun of it' (from a casual user); 'Their ironic expressions seem indirect and circumlocutory, but actually it is childish behaviour' (from a VIP); and 'I prefer to be neutral and list both sides of the argument in order to encourage the public to discuss things rationally' (from a VIP).

The majority of participants felt that online political discourse is affected by users' status and even geographical location. One casual user from Hong Kong said that: 'Sometimes I will express myself ironically if I am using a mainland platform, where I need to be careful, but I can express myself explicitly now because I am in Hong Kong'. As far as user status was concerned, casual users from the mainland felt they would have more influence as VIPs: 'Others would not ignore my words' and 'I could use my power to attract more netizens to establish a discussion'. However, a Weibo Got Talent activist

from Hong Kong pointed out that VIP status brings greater responsibility. One VIP user from Hong Kong asserted that he would consider the language and identification only if he was forwarding, because forwarding represented a more formal and strong attitude than commenting (this is interesting, this contradicts the findings mentioned earlier), while another VIP user, also from Hong Kong, pointed out that as a journalist, his responsibility was to change society through ‘productive discourse’; ‘If I were just a normal casual user, I would spend my time reading gossip and joining in with irrational debates. So I have to admit that my identification does have a major effect on my Weibo use’.

One Weibo Got Talent activist described how VIPs are more likely to be criticized by the public; the more followers they have, the more criticism they receive. The interviewee suggested that he himself would be more relaxed if he were only a casual user. Another Weibo Got Talent activist agreed, observing that if he expressed explicit attitudes as a VIP, his words might be misunderstood or even quoted, so he preferred to remain safely neutral or ambiguous. Expressing similar concerns, one VIP admitted that he only forwarded posts without adding his own views. Another VIP was even more wary; he cited the new policy announced recently by China’s Supreme Court: ‘Any unauthorized posts “clicked and viewed more than 5000 times, or reposted more than 500 times” on Weibo will be regarded as serious defamation, which will generally be punished with at least three years in prison’. As a VIP, this respondent was particularly aware of the need for self-control online.

Q24 Have you ever been censored on Weibo? If yes, how do you feel about that? If not, why do you think this is?

Q25 Have you ever post some comments to test the censorship for purpose? Why?

Q26 Do you feel that you are influenced by the threat of online censorship?

Q27 Did you know that censorship is practised not just by the government but also by commercial companies? All do you think they are the same?

Q28 Do you agree with this censorship? What is your opinion of the way in which

Internet content is controlled in China?

VIP	M1	<p>没有，我只删别人的帖子没人能删我的帖子。</p> <p>我们的监控会依照我们的一套准则。比如我们有一条是当别人在微博上把台湾西藏跟中国并列成一个国家的内容，我们会删掉。</p> <p>//如果网友没有直接表达，跳过敏感词汇，你们如何监管？因为目前这种删贴还是基于网络技术，因为每天这样的帖子非常多。如果避开关键词我们的技术人员可能无法找到这样的帖子。但是现在会有人用图片的形式上传避免文字上的审核。但我们如果看到不符合要求的一律删。//对网友用讽刺的语言表达自己观点而不能直白表达有什么观点？这个就和中国古典故事大禹治水一样，就是我们治水不能拥堵的方式，应该用疏导。应该引领网友有一种正确的方式去思考。也应该给他们一个公开的平台让他们表达心声。而不是一味的封锁。</p> <p>还是很鼓励网友自我监管。//我没有尝试过。身边的朋友有。比如搜索一些 party 关键的任务的名字。会出现搜索结果只显示部分的情况//对，我认为是这样。最近有条规定，就是你的转发评论超过多少条就会判罪触犯法律。有些人因为法律和制度的压迫下不得已就会采用比较委婉和隐晦的方式表达自己的诉求。</p> <p>这个情况是一种不同政党在治理不同国家上的一种需要。因为中国的情况比较复杂。必须用打压的方式来控制网友的想法，以保证确定独一无二的执政地位。但是如果在一个比较公平的地方就可以出现不同的声音。长期这样下去很不利于民众表达自己的呼声。但目前政党的情况是需要这样的手段。//新浪等网络公司是归中国国家信息工业部管。而这个部门的任何条例都要通过国务院新闻办公室的审核。所以总的来说，他们这个整体受益是 ccp 党内的一种收益。所以新浪本身并没有权利监管，其实新浪希望公开。但迫于 ccp 的压力，他们必须过滤删贴。</p> <p>我认为本质上不一样，一个实体之外的企业，一个是体制内的政党。我认为是一种政治对商业的压迫。好像 facebook 永远不能进入中国。包括赶走 google</p>
VIP	M2	<p>好像没有。我朋友应该有过吧，可能在转发的时候，他们言语比较激烈，说的话就被微博后台删了。//目前还没有这个想法。//我觉得可能不能算是恐吓或者威胁。因为这可能是微博后台和政治领袖考虑的范围比我们作为社会一员考虑的更大一些。如果我们直接说的话，可能会因为几句话，几个字引起不必要的麻烦，我们需要在一个和平的范围里，进行一些理性感性讨论，所以我认为控制还是有必要的。// A11 对，只要不把正常的说的给删了就可以了。//我认为他们 2 个不是完全一样，但是也有互相协作。他们有一些管理人员有相互沟通，不可能完全没沟通，他们之间应该有协商或者签过协议之类的。</p>

VIP	M3	<p>应该有，一开始刚使用的时候不太熟悉，可能就会发几个他们所谓的敏感词，就会被删除掉或那个词不会显示出来。//一开始是不小心，觉得应该说那样的话，不是特别的敏感，就是一般的大家会讨论的一个话题，但是他就会被删除掉，或是就会提示你那是个敏感词没有通过审核，后来就是有一点想尝试的心理，特别是有敏感事件出现的时候，就会特意打两个敏感词试一试它到底会不会显示出来。//是有影响的，因为如果他不管的话，大部分的人倾向于直接表达，就是直接把自己的想法写出来，但是因为这个网络监管的存在，我们就会谨慎一些，它还是偏向娱乐的一方面，只是表达自己的观点，大家都不想惹太多的麻烦，所以还是注重一些。//我觉得他们应该是不一样的，通过公司的监管然后再带到政府的监管，因为有很多虽然你发到微博上第一次发成功了，但过两三天那个事件变成了敏感事件，他就会又把你删除掉，就是一层层的审核。//不是完全的支持，也不是完全的反对。因为中国互联网的用户人群挺杂乱的，而且有的人有不理智的行为，就会随便发一些不负责任的语言，监管一下这些人的言论还是很有必要的，但是有的时候公司那些运营商或政府就有点太敏感、太压抑的话还是觉得不好。//26.您认为在这种我们看得见的网络监管体制下，大家选择这种反讽、隐晦的表达或不说这些敏感词，是否是一种自我监管的过程？它是好事吗？答：应该是，总体上我认为不太好，因为平时说话就直接说出来，但在网络上就很小心，还要想一个比较有意思的反讽的方式来表达自己的观点，这样就会影响我的言论的表达，而且反讽的方法每个人的理解不一样。//之前没有想过，因为一直没有接触过这个东西，之前也没有这样的平台让大家一起讨论一个政治的问题。我是以一种欢喜的态度来看待这样进步的，毕竟国外的人一直认为国内的这种政策或是网络监管或是社会监管还是很严格的，它开放的话大家都可以参与讨论进去，也相当于我们网络的一个进步。</p>
VIP	M	<p>有的，当时我记得肯定在删帖，基本在国内就是涉及到政治敏感问题。当时我的感受就是：好吧，我被和谐了。更多的是无奈。//我想我不会做这种无用功。毕竟他都把你放在敏感的话题了。在这样一个环境来进行这样一个讨论，你就遵守他的规则吧。//恐吓没那么严重，最主要的目的是为了维护整个社会的安稳，和谐。我觉得我这条帖子被删了，那我可以通過其他，像朋友聚会，更直观的聊这个话题。这样说吧，死了一个我的评论，还有千千万万的我的评论。//说不上支持，也说不上反对。存在即是合理。//其实是一样的，可以归根为政府的干预吧</p>
VIP	M4	<p>到目前为止，暂时没有。周围朋友有过这种情况。我的感受是他们当中的一些内容一定是涉及到一些敏感话题、敏感词汇，才会遭到删帖，封进的情况，我自己不会以测试的心态去做//这个倒没有也没有想过这么做//我觉得在很多年前看到这些（网友选择这种讽刺，婉转的表达）的话，我们会动脑壳想哈，这个到底真实含义是什么的情况下，我觉得它应该叫隐蔽；但是中国互联网发展</p>

		<p>这么年了，我觉得不应该算作隐晦了，应该是很直白了，现在的网友也不一定很多是逃避监管，不得不承认监管导致舆论、讽刺增加的一个重要因素，但是更多的是人们觉得骂出来不如弯酸说出来，更让网友解恨，所以更多是下意识的规避监管，已经习以为常了，规避网络监管已经成为一种下意识了，可能很多年前比较重要，但是现在他们已经习惯了，已经顺理成章了，已经习以为常了</p> <p>问：网友下意识的婉转表达自己的言论你认为是好是坏</p> <p>答：我觉得这个问题应该分两方面来看，首先我们先从积极方面看，能让大家特别是网友发出这种言论（婉转的言论），已经是非常大的一种进步了，我们在五年前，十年前是不可以想象的，现在有了互联网，有了围脖，有了社交平台等等，我们才可以（发表言论），当然，网友婉转表达自己的方式我们不得不否认的一个问题就是他表达出来了他的意见这个非常（啥子）的；其次网友觉得网络监管导致了他们的压抑和精神压力，所以他们用并不直接的表达，我觉得他的目的就是表达，而不在于压抑人性啊这种说法并不成立，。再比如说，在不久前网络造谣政策法规出台之前，也有很多网友非常直白的表达。。。如果说网络监管是一种人性的泯灭的话，我觉得应该是中国网络建设发展中的客观应该面对的问题//我觉得是一回事。目的和出发点都是统一和一致的。都是为了营造良好的上网环境//我觉得网络监管应该说非常有必要，我见过太多的有问题的东西以后，其实是网友无聊制造出来的，正因为很多网友认为他说出来的东西并没有上纲上线，不象现实生活中会产生对身边人的影响和引起争吵，所以他认为在网络上说话不需要负责， 如果没有网络监管，就目前中国人的素质和文化程度来讲肯定是不合时宜的。//</p>
VIP	M6	<p>没有被删掉，但是有被屏蔽，因为一般不会发表过于敏感的话题。自己感觉言论不自由的。想说话但是不让表达出来，很压抑//这个我没有试过//并不是威胁或恐吓，只是一种监管的形式， //主要应该是政府的行为，政府是主导，政府给网络（公司）的压力//网络也不是法外之地，监管还是必要的，但不能完全的监管，至少它应该有一种制度//</p>
VIP	HK1	<p>你现在在微博的过程中，比如关于 64 那天的事情，你的微博账户被封掉，那当时你是专门做这个事情，是去测试是否会被封掉嘛？</p> <p>A17: 是故意的，听朋友说过，然后自己就想试试。</p> <p>Q18: 您觉得网友选择这种讽刺，婉转的表达，或者您想测试网络监管这些想法是不是因为受到中国严格的网络监管影响？我能不能把这个影响称为威胁或者恐吓？或者说我说的太严重了？</p> <p>A18: 其实我觉得是有恐吓这种的。</p> <p>Q19: 现在大家都有一种故意逃避被监管的事情，大家养成的这种行为，你认为是好事吗？</p> <p>A19: 我觉得不好。完全不赞成网络监管。</p> <p>Q20: 您知道网络监管既有政府行为也有新浪公司自己的监管行</p>

		为，还是您认为两者其实是一样的？ A20：我不知道新浪自己也有网络警察，我只是知道政府有。
VIP	HK2	我自己还没有，我朋友有。//没有办法呀，因为他是微博呀。我觉得是无奈的，这就是微博的局限性。// Q19：所以你觉得无奈，但其实是很正常的，是这个意思么？ A19：嗯，非常正常。//没有这个兴趣，也没有这个想法。我如果被删了，一定是不小心，在我不知道的情况下被删的。肯定删了才知道。我如果被删了我会很意外。 Q22：刚才你不是说很正常么？ A22：我觉得我自己不会说太容易被删的东西。 Q23：在你的理解范围内，什么样的东西会被删？ A23：一些比较强硬，带有明显虚假信息的，可能会把一些人煽动起来的。当然政治方面是最容易的。 //我不能说支持。只是目前没有更好的办法。尤其是中国现在整个社会以及网民这种独立思考还不够的情况下，是有必要的。//我觉得有一定可能，有一定影响。因为我有在 Facebook 上看过一些更为直接的表达。//我觉得你说的严重了些。你可以想成本来跳舞应该穿请便的衣服。但是他们是在穿着大衣跳舞。//我觉得是都有吧。我不了解具体的。但是新浪他作为一个门户，或者是一个公司，他要考虑自身的利益。他不能代表政府，他是一个公开公平的信息平台，他是在政府这个大环境的监管下的，他不能完全跳出政府。如果他跳出了政府，就直接乱了。
VIP	HK3	1989
VIP	HK4	
WGT	M1	我没有，但看到别人微博被删过//有，当时是王立军事件的时候。会感觉网络审查和监管真的很严啊。//我觉得是潜移默化的被影响。//其实我觉得不太好，因为像一些敏感的话题大家会更好奇，会很想知道它的真相。如果网络监管禁止我们去讨论，去更深入的去了解它的话，反而大家会疑心更大对这件事情。所以不太赞成这样的网络监管。
WGT	M2	我在转发朋友的一个帖子中有被监管的经历。//我个人认为是有必要的，任何地方都需要监管。网络监督虽然在言论上有所限制，但网络次序需要有人来维护，就如同社会需要警察、法官、管理者，不然社会就失去和谐与稳定，网络就会失去本来的价值。//没有过，我觉得政治话题只是朋友间业余生活中谈论的话题，没有想过将它放在网络上公开讨论。
WGT	M3	有，一些过于激烈的词语和涵盖敏感词的帖子会被删掉。被删掉说明切中要害了，说明在某种程度上说中了事实//我不会测试会不会删，会去找一些现在存在的敏感词，因为被禁了的敏感词通常都是非常好的话题和非常热点的，真想也常常隐藏在这些敏感词中//影响肯定是有，但没到威胁这个地步，更多的讽刺，激烈表达的人是受到了自己生活状况影响的//政府和新浪的关系更多是层级关系，新浪公司很有可能把政府的要求放大//我支持适度的网络

		<p>监管，因为民意是需要被训话的// Q28.5 假如没有监管，大家的讨论自由，会不会更能接近事实真相？</p> <p>答：假如没有监管，大家完全自由，那么也许你的意愿就会被大众绑架，比如你反对某个事情，但你身边和你能联系的所有人都支持，那么你也就被迫支持，这就是民意的绑架</p>
WGT	M4	<p>我有看到过别人被网络监管，被删除。我自己并没有经历过//起初是好奇，想说什么样的内容被删除了。有些就是别人转发的，有评论原微博。但原微博被删除，多少可以通过转发的评论了解到原微博的信息。大多是反党反政府的信息。//这个情况对我有影响。我会遇到类似微博不会留言也不会转发。//我知道这种行为，但我认为政府和公司是隶属的关系。政府管制公司去具体操作。我认为是一样的。//我认为网络监管是一种“中国特色”。国外可能更崇尚言论自由。但是我有人为在中国，有这样的管制是特色也是必须的。因为毕竟中国就管制了这么多年，也不可能说突然不管。我认为在中国这是必要的。</p>
WGT	HK1	<p>没有//没有这样想过，但有听说过。//个人很不认同这种做法。因为我觉得一个社会应该有言论自由，因为每个人都会有她可以表达意见的权利，可是你在表达自己意见的时候你没有伤害到别人，这样是 ok 的。无论你的意见是什么，在表达的同时社会也在进步。政府应该也要听取意见，听到更多不同于政府的意见，而不是直接删除。//不是很清楚，我之前觉得是不一样，应该是两个不同的。//不支持网络监管。</p>
WGT	HK2	<p>没有//可以试一下//没有恐吓，我觉得是个潜规则，如果你 post 一些跟中央有关的帖子，或许会被删掉，但没到恐吓的地步。//我会觉得有关系，但不一样，中央政府会给一些压力//不同意 因为言论自由是每一个人权利。对就是现在的社会，人们有自由发言的权利，不可以恶意的严格限制</p>
WGT	HK4	<p>没有//可以试一下，但怕麻烦//对，我觉得是种威胁，也不算是种恐吓。//不是一样，但上面给一些指示//不同意 因为你看 Facebook 上的评论，你也不会删除，这样是比较好，有许多不同的意见，不是只是一面的一件，有更多地方面</p>
WGT	HK3	<p>Q24: 没有被删除过。身边朋友有过。我觉得很搞笑。她们都是香港人，微薄是很多中国人用的，删帖的速度很快就被和谐了。</p> <p>Q25: 我没有但我朋友有过。比如六四事件，五分钟后就被和谐了。</p> <p>Q26: 有些人很喜欢被其他人关注到。她们可能会@一些名人来吸引更多的注意力。是被网络监管影响。</p> <p>Q27: 有自己的公司，和政府也有联络但不是全部都依赖，因为她们有很多自己的信息来源。</p> <p>Q28: 支持但不能盲目。可以警示其他人但不要全部都和谐了。</p>
casual	M1	<p>有被删过。当时发帖子的时候就做好准备，感觉会被查出来，会被删除。已经有被删除的心理准备。</p> <p>当他给我删了，我会一笑而过。这就是中国社会体制下的，不可</p>

		能真正言论自由。//没有，如果情绪到达这样的一种情况，也许会这样去做//我本身不管是，用国内还是国外的平台，我个人不喜欢表达很强烈的想法和意见。我觉得并不是监管体制严不严格对我的影响。我并没有觉得网络监管对我有很大的影响尽管我有被监管的经历。//本身各大网站是有自己的网管的。我认为是不一样的，他们是分开的。真正感受不到很大区别。但是我尽量不在网上说很偏激的语言。
casual	M2	我没有，我比较谨慎吧，因为在微博上看到别人微博被删过。我会选择比较安全的方式去评论。//最开始我听说网络监管部门会删关键字，比如有些名字，领导人的名字一些公司的名字不能提，自己有试探过。在一些敏感阶段它的监管还是挺严的。//我觉得从我内心来说这种网络监管是很明显的，因为我的目的是想表达我的观点，但既然他会被删掉，还是选择比较保守和安全的方式吧。但是大部分人并不是很热烈地去讨论政治话题的讨论，因为很多这种话题会在发表之后很短的时间内被删除，让大家不自觉的形成了不去评论政治话题的气氛。//我感觉新浪微博有它自己的监管，有抵制造谣传谣，提醒我们谨慎发言的功能。不知道网监部门是用什么方式来监管，但他们可以与新浪微博相联系去参与监管。//我觉得其实是很不好的，它破坏了这种自由交流的平台，但我不是说完全自由，但起码是一个在不违反国家法律的前提下，它抑制了大家的讨论，我们就像是易拉罐里的水一样永远也离不开这个盖子。
casual	M3	自己没有，我看到过别人被删，有一些是涉及到敏感词语，有一些是造谣，如果真的是造谣他对社会危害很大，我是赞同删帖的，但关键是这个结果都是我通过网上看到的，所以只有他们内部操纵的人知道事实真相。//一方面是，因为微博现在和个人身份联系到一起，你要是随便说的话这样对自己可能有些不利影响。还有一方面是，我希望用同种的方式给他反击回去。我不会主动反讽攻击别人，但别人攻击我，我还是会用反讽的方式回击的。//我个人认为它是一种从属关系。像新浪公司它是从属于整个网络监管，但是有时候网络监管会主动地参与到非正常事态。举个例子吧，如果一个事态出现了，说一个新闻是假新闻，它没到一个程度的话，我认为微博它自己的网管首先会屏蔽掉或者怎么处理，如果这个事态严重了，到时候真正的网络监管它会出来干涉这种事情，所以我觉得他是一个从属关系，而且这个是非常有效率的，因为网上这么多条微博，数据量这么大，人手有限嘛说实在的，要通过先一层过滤网再过另外一层，可能这样比较有效率，第二层过滤网就是指政府的监管。所以它们是从属关系，不是一样的。//我是支持的，因为中国这么大，有那么多的微博用户，不能就是说每个人都这么随便的在网上发信息，一定自由度是允许的，但首先你是不能造谣，第二不能煽动是非，因为这样的话会引起很多不必要的动乱。我个人认为现在这种监管还是很有必要的，因为很多用户还是初中生或是小孩儿，或是社会闲杂人员，他们可能

		对后果想的不是特别清楚，所以我认为监管还是很有必要的。//
casual	M4	没有，我都不怎么发表。看到别人有。不一定是政治方面，各种内容都有。对社会有反面影响的微博就会被言禁。//我朋友没有，但我知道这样的事情。微博或者贴吧又网友发过激的内容，去测试。看会不会被禁止。//有的。比如有很多谐音字，同音字。都是因为这个监管而出现的//我认为大部分是由政府监管。虽然具体操作是由新浪公司执行，但也是受政府监管的//一半一半。对于无聊的人来说，发一些无聊的东西，能禁止发这类信息是好的。但对于有一些比如讨论政治实事比较敏感的事件，只是语言比较过激就被禁掉。会影响大家的积极性。
casual	HK1	没有，我一直没有发过这样的政治话题的微博。看到过粉丝较多的人发的微博被删过，可能大众的想法对党是没有好处的。//没有，自己没有发过政治类话题。可能会用一个新的注册号去测试，现在自己用的号，如果去测试可能未来会有一些不好的事吧。//这是肯定的，我不否认你这样形容我的担心，这样说是对的。//我觉得是一样的，政府是肯定是有很大的权力在新浪微博上，要是新浪微博真的发表了政府不喜欢的东西，政府会创建一个新的平台。//当然不赞成，每个人都有自己的想法，现在在微博上发表的都是中央比较想听到的话，它不想听到的话，都没有在中国这样最大的平台上发表过，这是一个比较洗脑的方式，他们看到的都是相同的東西，他们的想法会受到改变。
casual	HK2	Q24: 自己没有遇到过删帖，朋友有遇到删帖问题。觉得这种很不民主。每个人都有发言权。 Q25: 有朋友试过故意发帖看会不会删。比如胡锦涛和温家宝的儿子贪污多少钱的问题，和外国勾结等。习近平的老婆彭丽媛的知名度超过了习近平，因此不能再往上搜索更多彭丽媛。 Q26: 不涉及恐吓，威胁。人民的公仆应该有接受这样监管的能力。 Q28: 支持网络监管。因为有讨论有评论有反应才会有进步。
casual	HK3	没有//我好想听说过，如果被提到 news 的话题就会被和谐的//没有想过这么做。//我觉得不是恐吓//不支持。//这会控制言论，我们要支持民主。能说自己想说的话，因为在 Facebook，不会被删掉，这些评论会比较激烈，有些人会说粗俗的话出现在 Facebook。
casual	HK4	没有//我没有见到过，但我有听说过。//没有诶。没有想过这么做。//我觉得是一种政治压逼吧。//不支持。

#### Online Censorship in China (translation and presenting)

This was one of the core interview topics. Surprisingly, only one participant (a VIP user from Hong Kong), had had posts deleted. His account was blocked for more than a month when he discussed the Jasmine Revolution online. He described his attitude as ‘contradictory’; he was outraged at being blocked, but knew that: ‘Jasmine had been

mentioned so many times, so it would inevitably be blocked'. The other interviewees who had had similar experiences all came from the mainland. They described feeling as if they had been dismissed: 'Fine...I have touched the political mine and been "harmonious", I feel so disappointed!'; 'When my words were blocked, I felt depressed that I could not speak out what I wanted to say!'; 'Some extreme and sensitive words were deleted, which only showed that they were the truth'. Others had avoided being censored, having learned from their friends' experiences, though it left them feeling helpless.

While VIPs from Hong Kong saw censorship as normal on the mainland, one mainland VIP countered that: 'No one can delete mine, because I am the person who can delete others' posts. Our censorship system obeys rules; for example, we will delete messages which combine references to Taiwan or Tibet with reference to China'. When asked how the censor deals with posts that employ irony to avoid using sensitive words, the interviewee admitted that current technology means the censor is unable to detect posts that avoid using key words or that rely on pictures, '...so when we do find these, we have to delete them all'. The same interviewee explained that the CCP has also learnt to manipulate online discussion to achieve its political aims:

'The CCP is now focusing on micro-blog platform penetration of soft environments. On the one hand, they use strong-arm tactics such as deleting posts and restricting sensitive words, but they can also distort the picture in other ways.'

To illustrate his point, the interviewee told the story of a recent visit made by the Chinese President to the Qingfeng Baozi cafe. Pictures of the visit were quickly posted on a micro-blog. Weibo users, thinking the pictures had been posted by a bystander, forwarded them, but it subsequently emerged that the first blogger to forward the images was in fact within the CCP. At this signal, commentators at CCTV news and the *People's Daily*, who already had the story ready to go, went live. Xinhua News Agency reposted within seconds, while the *People's Daily* was able to post eight pictures of the President within half an hour under the title: 'Netizens encounter China's top man in Qingfeng Baozi cafe'. The Sina website and Phoenix website then reposted the news, sending it via

apps to millions of subscribers' mobile phones. A few non-party online media organizations expressed doubt that this was a genuine news story rather than a publicity stunt, but their opinions were quickly blocked and deleted. The general public, meanwhile, was left thinking that the story had emerged as a result of a spontaneous, friendly encounter between a netizen and the President.

Some participants explained that they had even tried to challenge online censorship by deliberately inserting sensitive words, because they were curious to see what would happen. Thus, a VIP from Hong Kong was blocked when she tried to post comments on the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest. Another casual user from Hong Kong tried to comment on the corruption of the sons of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, as well as the relationship between President Xi Jinping and his wife. However, one Weibo Got Talent activist from the mainland highlighted that there was quite harsh censorship in the Wang Lijun discussion at that time.

When interviewees were asked whether they felt online political discussion is threatened by this kind of online censorship, the majority felt it is not threatened, but it is definitely affected. One casual user from the mainland explained: 'I suppose the effect of online censorship is there in my mind. As there is a risk that the messages may be deleted, I play safe, because I want people to hear my voice and ideas. We are naturally inclined to play safe'. One Hong Kong VIP saw Chinese online censorship as more like 'a chronic strangle' that is leading users to censor themselves. He argued that this self-censorship is itself highly dangerous; if netizens feel unable to mention topics such as the Jasmine Revolution or democracy, eventually, they will stop thinking about them. He continued:

'I know some may support online censorship and self-censorship; they may argue that China would be a mess if everybody could say anything they wanted, but how can it be messed up by some words online! If online censorship is going to be conducted...then online censorship should be applied...not only to the political system, but also other fields. But now, it's all on politics, especially when someone says something against the authorities or the CCP. So it is clearly not about protecting the online environment, it is just for politics.'

VIPs from the mainland were more inclined to support online censorship and self-censorship. Some maintained that censorship is necessary because, as the classic Chinese story *da yu zhi shui* tells us, rivers have to be guided to avoid floods; in other words, online censorship could lead users to a right way of thinking. Another VIP argued that China is a complex country which needs online censorship; strict censorship maintains the stability of the authorities, even though it is bad for public expression. One interviewee argued that it is the responsibility of our leaders to help us consider more carefully. He wanted to discuss issues in a peaceful and rational environment, without upsetting people, and the main aim of online censorship is to protect and maintain the whole of society. If a contributor's messages are deleted, he or she can simply find another way to express their views. Another interviewee argued:

'I think we could analyse this issue from the positive side; it is an explicit improvement that we can voice our opinions on different social platforms, because we could not imagine this five or ten years ago. Some netizens argue that online censorship puts pressure on them and forces them to express themselves indirectly, but this is not a problem to me actually. The point is that you can express yourself at all, not how you do it'.

The interviewees were evenly divided between those who supported online censorship and those who did not, with most mainland interviewees supporting it and most Hong Kong interviewees opposing it. Those supporting China's online censorship saw it as an effective deterrent to netizens wanting to do something destructive or refusing to take responsibility for their online opinions, and a good way to lead and supervise public opinion. They argued that, given the large number of Chinese netizens, it would be dangerous to let everyone express themselves freely online; as one respondent put it: 'There are still lots of children and junior students among the netizens; they should be considered'. Thirdly, they argued that the Chinese government needed to manipulate the virtual discussion through online censorship in order to hold onto its unique position and stability: 'The situation of China is complex; online censorship is

needed for the Chinese government to rule'; 'This is a Chinese characteristic! We need it!' Finally, they argued that the virtual society, like actual society, needs management: 'Everywhere needs to be censored and managed'.

Those opposing online censorship saw the limitation of free speech as against the spirit of democratization. Some criticized online censorship because of what they had seen on Facebook: 'The comments on Facebook are even more extreme and harsh, but they are never blocked' (WGT, HK). Others argued that: 'It really destroys a platform which should allow free communication' (WGT, HK); and 'Everyone has the right to express themselves' (VIP, HK). Others objected: 'If the truth has been deleted, then no one can know the reality'; 'It doesn't matter what you say; the diversity of opinions reflects social development' (WGT, HK); and 'When comments are deleted, this makes people more curious, and it might push them to try and find the truth and the messages that have been deleted' (WGT, M).

A few interviewees were neutral on online censorship; one VIP from Hong Kong and one from the mainland suggested that there is currently no other strategy for managing online rumours and valueless information.

