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About Us

This is the team blog for the Internet & Democracy Project, a research initiative at the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University.

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- A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Tweets
- Twitter sees strong growth in Russia
- US Set to Relax Internet Restrictions Towards Iran, Syria and Cuba
- 50 Million Tweets a Day
- Mobile Subscriber Growth in Africa

I&D Publications

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- Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007-2008 Post-Election Crisis
- Role of the Internet in Burma's Saffron Revolution
- The Citizen Journalism Web Site "OhmyNews" and the 2002 Korean Presidential Election
- The Role of Digital Networked Technologies During the Ukrainian Orange Revolution

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Micro-Blogging in China

July 9th, 2009 — Scott Hartley

During recent turmoil in Xinjiang, China again revealed the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) ability to stonewall Internet access regionally, and block sites such as Twitter nationally. However, with the growth of domestic copy-cat micro-blogging services such as Fanfou, TaoTao, Jiwai, Komoo, Zuosa, and Digu, China's government may be losing their cat and mouse game with connected denizens. Broad proliferation of comparable micro-blogging services are making central control harder to manage. For example, despite recent turmoil in Western China, according to the Berkman Center's Herdict Project, all of the above sites are still accessible except for Fanfou.com which recently went down for "server maintenance." Although Fanfou was supposed to come back online on June 6, it is still suspiciously inaccessible. Protracted unavailability of Fanfou points to possible CCP involvement to stifle destabilizing conversation. However, most other domestic micro-blogging services –even Jiwai.de, Komoo.cn, Digu.com and Zuosa.com which bear striking resemblance to Twitter– are still accessible in China. Perhaps user bases differ, and the CCP has shrewdly allowed for this less-threatening Internet persistence. More likely, however, is the fact that a plurality of diversely-hosted, yet similar, services is

becoming tougher to patrol.

Another emerging form of domestic communication is Tencent's Instant Messaging (IM) on QQ.com. No site in China enables greater horizontal web communication than QQ.com, now the 9th largest web property in the world. Founded by Pony Ma in 1998, Tencent –a Chinese-listed company earning $1.2 billion annually in revenue, 88 percent via the sale of "virtual goods" rather than online advertising– has over 570 million registered users of its IM service. In January Tencent launched an English version of the IM platform at IMQQ.com, and a 3G version that offers QQ chat, real-time news, and search engine accessible over mobile phone.

Many users in Western China, and across rural China, do not have email accounts. And many rural Chinese view and understand the Internet as Tencent, the platform on which they've grown up. In fact, as of March 2009 China had as many active Tencent QQ users as it officially had people online. Despite focus on access to Google and Twitter –observations of Tweet trends, and Google search engine query data patterns– undoubtedly most relevant in China is continued access to those domestic services of communication most widely used by Chinese citizens.

As advised last week by a Chinese colleague –"mail me at my university account. The government might shut down Google, but they never mess with my college email"– the CCP is selectively choosing what to patrol, because it can't do it all. While the Western media predominately pay attention to the CCP denying access to Western sites and services, domestic entrepreneurship and a swelling offering of overlapping tools of communication are mitigating the effectiveness of the Internet muzzle. In line with Ethan Zuckerman's Cute Cate Theory, Web 2.0 may have been created to share photos of adorable creatures, but new platforms for user-generated content are empowering digital activism in profound ways. For the CCP, perhaps it's the "cute cat," that is now out of the bag.

Posted in China. 1 Comment »

One Response to "Micro-Blogging in China"

1. *Common in Cambridge » Half-Way to McDonalds* Says:
   July 10th, 2009 at 1:51 pm

   [...] English version of their MSN-esq web-portal website, IMQQ.com. As I highlighted in my "Micro-Blogging in China" post yesterday on Harvard's Internet & Democracy blog, Western media focus on [...]

« Iranian Protesters Return to Streets, Everyone Else to Twitter

Russian Bloggers Prefer Beer Over Obama, But Respect His Mr. Miyagi Like Reflexes »
Theme: Garland by Steven Wittens and Stefan Nagtegaal.

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