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## **Microbloggers' motivations in participatory journalism: A cross-cultural study of America and China**

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jue Rui entitled "Microbloggers' motivations in participatory journalism: A cross-cultural study of America and China." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communication and Information.

Norman R. Swan Jr., Major Professor

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**Microbloggers' motivations in participatory journalism: A cross-cultural study of  
America and China**

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jue Rui  
May 2014

## **Dedication**

*This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, a devoted educator and an exquisite woman;  
and my father, a role model and a fan of all my work.*

## **Acknowledgement**

If it hadn't been for Professor Norman (Sam) Swan, I probably would not be here writing this dissertation or even be in the United States. For this, I am truly grateful. Sam is a person that changes lives. He embraces diversity and recognizes talents in many forms. He is my mentor, my colleague and more importantly, a lifelong friend. He not only helped me through my academic career as a researcher, but also taught me many things about life.

I want to thank my husband Harrison Huaqing Pang. He has been my biggest fan and supporter for almost 10 years. Since we met in college, life has given us ups and downs. He pushed, pulled, and protected me through them all and we prevailed as a couple. He made me the woman I am today and I look forward to spending the rest of my life with him building our American dream together.

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Last but not least, I want to thank the University of Tennessee for providing me with an opportunity to pursue graduate degrees here and making Knoxville my home away from home.

## **Abstract**

This phenomenological study focuses on the motivations of participatory journalists contributing on microblogs such as Twitter and Weibo. Although online user behavior and motivations have been studied before, few studies have examined motivations of participatory journalists from their own perspective. Moreover, this study is one of the few to explore participatory journalists across different cultures (U.S. and China). The author conducted a total of 13 in-depth interviews with participatory journalists on microblogs from both countries and used a qualitative analysis method to identify the themes and patterns that emerged. Motivations such as earning respect, technology early adoption, self-expression, relationship building, self-enhancement, branding and image building, and financial gain were discussed. De-motivational factors such as time constraints and self-censorship were presented. Motivational differences between the two groups of participants, including what the microblog account represents and the role of participatory journalists, were explained by cultural differences collectivism versus individualism and power distance. Limitations and future research were also discussed.

**Keywords:** phenomenology, participatory journalism, microblog, motivation, cross culture, Twitter, Weibo

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## CHAPTER I Introduction

In recent years, social media applications such as Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn and Twitter have attracted many researchers' attention. Opportunities these platforms provide for user interactions and information dissemination were found to be useful in many professional fields such as marketing, advertising and journalism. Professional journalists started to use information on microblogs as sources in their stories or frequently visit the microblogging sites to obtain story leads (Broersma & Graham, 2013).

Participation in news production by ordinary citizens other than professional journalists is often referred to as *participatory journalism (PJ)*. Bowman and Willis (2003) defined PJ as the “act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information” (p.9). Although PJ existed long before the Internet was even invented; technologies such as microblogs provide opportunities for more people to join the force to participate in such activities. Moreover, because of the microblogs' technological advantages, PJ content there enjoys a high level of immediacy and interactivity, which has brought a huge impact on professional journalism. Some researchers even started to question whether or not professional journalists will soon be replaced (Compton & Benedetti, 2010).

When people use microblogs to report news, they blur the line between an ordinary citizen and a professional journalist. Although they are actively participating in news production, not all of them can be called participatory journalists. Some of them just happen to there to witness the event. For those people, participating in news production may only be a one-time act.

This phenomenological study's focus, *participatory journalists*, refers to people who are not associated with mainstream media but are intentionally reporting news on microblogs consistently over an extended period of time. Examining the participatory journalists' motivations for reporting news on microblogs, the current study can further our understanding of the PJ microblog phenomenon and its impact on professional journalism.

Moreover, microblogging applications such as Twitter have diffused with great speed throughout the world. Some popular applications in countries other than the U.S. include Jaiku in Finland and Weibo in China. PJ on microblogs has also proven to become a global phenomenon. In China, with respect to news coverage about the 2011 Wenzhou bullet train accident, reports on Weibo from witness accounts were sent two hours earlier than any mainstream media. The current study will also attempt to compare motivations of participatory journalists in America and China to illustrate how culture may affect their motivations and, in turn, their PJ activities.

The remainder of this chapter will give a detailed overview of microblogs and their information dissemination system and discuss the impact on professional journalism and the forms of participatory journalism on microblogs. The author will then describe the Chinese media system to provide some background information and clarify the purpose and significance of the study. This chapter will conclude by outlining the structure of the following chapters.

### **Microblogs Defined: Twitter and Weibo**

Microblogs refer to a group of online applications "which allow users to exchange small elements of content such as short sentences, individual images, or video links" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Microblogs belong to the big family of social media, which is a "group

of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). There are many microblog platforms; in this study the author will focus on Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China, the two most widely-used microblogs in their respective countries.

Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read messages up to 140 characters, known as tweets. Today, these messages can also include images and video clips. Launched in March 2006, the number of monthly active Twitter users had passed 200 million by the end of 2012 (Fiegerman, 2012).

The content of tweets covers a wide range of topics. A study conducted in August 2009 by Pear Analytics, a search engine marketing firm based in San Antonio, Texas, randomly sampled the public timeline on Twitter for two weeks, obtained 2,000 tweets and analyzed their content. Their report concluded that a large portion of tweets are “pointless babble” (40.55 percent), followed by “conversational” tweets (37.55 percent). News content comprised 3.6 percent of the 2,000 tweets they sampled (Kelly, 2009). *News* refers to the selected information on current events (Shirky, 2008). It’s an important form of real-time information. While the percentage of news among all tweets seems small, their impact on people’s information-seeking behavior is anything but insignificant. In fact, the impact is so evident that the Russian search engine Yandex signed a contract with Twitter in 2012 to show new tweets in its search results almost instantly, because Yandex believes “Twitter (has) become an increasingly important source of real-time information” (Prodhan, 2012).

Shortly after its launch, Twitter experienced “explosive growth” worldwide (Hartzer, 2010). ComScore, Inc., (NASDAQ: SCOR) released a report in 2010 about Twitter growth and found that in June 2010, about 93 million Internet users visited Twitter.com, an overall increase of 109 percent over 2009. The Netherlands was reported as having the highest number of users (age 15+), with 22.3 percent of Internet users in the Netherlands visiting Twitter.com in December 2010, followed by Brazil (21.8 percent) and Venezuela (21.1 percent) (comScoreDataMine, 2011).

However, in the Chinese market, Twitter was met with unprecedented difficulties stemming from the government’s tight control over the technology. Twitter was blocked on June 2, 2009, by the “Great Firewall of China” (GFW), two days before the 20-year anniversary of the “Tiananmen” incident (FoxNews, 2009). Although citizens in China regained access to Twitter on June 8, the block was reinstated two days after the riots in Xinjiang Province on July 5, 2009. At this time, Twitter is only accessible in China by the virtual private network (VPN) software, proxy servers, or API that only a small number of dedicated netizens use to “scale the wall” (Gao, 2009; Sullivan, 2012).

Aforementioned technologies require users to have at least basic programming knowledge, so the general public in China turned to Twitter’s alternative: 微博, or Weibo. Weibo is the literal translation of “microblog” in Mandarin. Introduced in 2009, Weibo attracted more than 200 million users in just two years (“How to ‘tweet’ in China: Twitter vs Sina Weibo in figures”). As of June 2011, reports were that more than 40 percent of Chinese netizens (485 million) were actively using Weibo (Sheng & Meng, 2011). The leading Weibo, Sina Weibo, had more than 100 million users as of June 2011 (“微博 (Microblog),”). In February 2013, Sina reported registered Sina Weibo users have reached 500 million, with more than 4.6 million daily active users (Zhou, 2013).

Weibo is famous for its ability to provide continuous coverage of a large amount of national news and to foster abundant discussions in the public domain about social issues. Liu and Ji (2012) commented that Weibo has become an important social medium where users can obtain news and at the same time publish and share their own stories. Many studies even described China as in the midst of a “microblogging revolution” (Canaves, 2011; Y. Hu, 2010; Y. Yang, 2011) and hope by empowering ordinary citizens, Weibo can bring about changes in government information distribution (Y. Yang, 2011).

### Information Dissemination on Microblogs

Understanding how information disseminates on microblogs such as Twitter and Weibo is a crucial step in comprehending their impact.

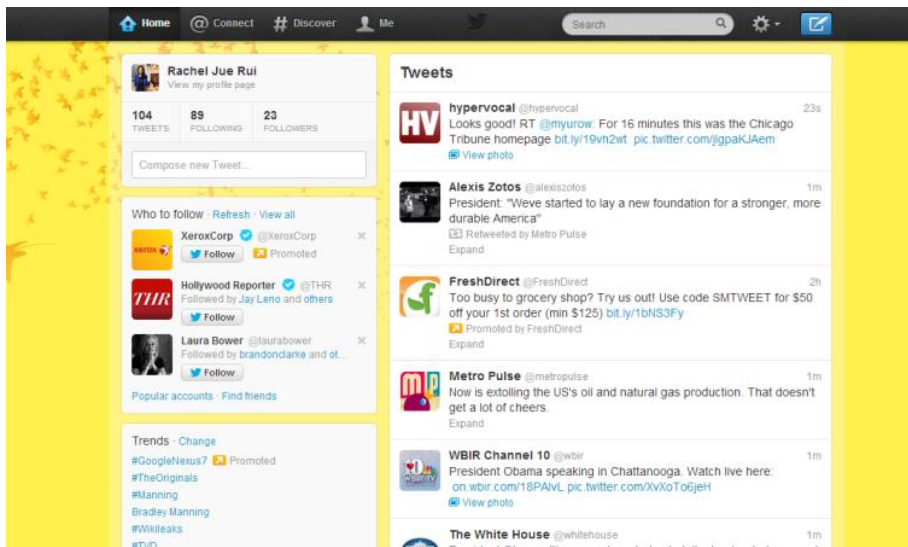


Figure 1 Home Page of a Twitter Account



Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) summarized Twitter's communication structure as Push—Push—Pull. In the default setting on a computer platform (versus a mobile platform), Twitter's home page shows a two-column design. One narrow column displays the user's profile information including a picture, number of tweets, number of followers and number of tweeters this user is following. This column also displays suggestions of who to follow based on whom this user has already followed and provides a list of trending topics at the bottom. The column to the right, taking up two-thirds of the screen space, is a list of the most recent tweets sent by tweeters this user is following; the list is known as a *timeline* or *live feed*. When Twitter users access Twitter on a mobile device, the default screen is the news timeline as shown in figure 1 above.

The *live feed* described above is Twitter's first push. All published tweets are automatically pushed to the tweeter's followers' front page. Tweets are accessible to the general public except for a minority of tweets that are sent by users who restricted public access (D. Murthy, 2011). Once a tweet is sent, it's also automatically posted to the "Twittersphere." Anyone with Internet access can view it and registered Twitter users can respond or retweet (RT) it. RT is the second step of information dissemination on Twitter. Zaman et al. (2013) noted that on social networks, users form connections with other users, in turn producing a *social graph*. In the case of Twitter, these connections are formed by *followers*, and the social graph produced is a *follower graph*. The original impact of a tweet is confined within the follower graph of the original tweeter. With RT, the tweet will reach other follower graphs and, with time, the impact has the potential to grow exponentially. Though seemingly random, information can be intentionally pushed to a certain individual by adding an at-sign (@) in front of a user name to tag the user along with the tweet. Users tagged will be notified by Twitter that he/she has been mentioned in a tweet.

The two *push* steps describe the communication features on Twitter that are similar to traditional media in a sense that it's one-to-many information dissemination, although the *one* is not necessarily a media entity; any individual could serve as the *one*. The next step, *pull*, refers to situations when people actively seek information on Twitter using the hashtag function. A hashtag is a method that could connect tweets to a larger theme or event. For example, Fox News' official Twitter account tweeted "Airline worker, friend charged with stealing luggage after #Asiana plane crash" on July 30, 2013, after the Asiana plane crashed on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013, at the San Francisco International Airport. By adding a hashtag in front of Asiana, Fox News enabled people who are searching for tweets containing the word Asiana to find this story.

With Twitter's 140-character restriction, one or two tweets may not give people an overview of the event. But by searching event-related keywords, people can gain access to thousands of tweets about it to get a bigger picture. This information *crowd sourcing* activity has been proven useful in many situations, especially during disasters and in controlled information environments (Dhiraj Murthy & Longwell, 2013; B. G. Smith, 2010).

Murthy (2011) credited Twitter's popularity to its ease of use. Anyone with the knowledge of how to send a text message can quickly learn how to use Twitter on their phone. In fact, Twitter's 140-character limit is based on text message constraints. Today, the mobile phone is the primary way for people to access Twitter. According to Twitter's official blog, 60 percent of 200 million active users on Twitter log in via a mobile device at least once a month (TwitterAds, 2013).

The same can be said with Weibo in China. According to a report published by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2012), as of June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012, the number

of people using a mobile phone to access the Internet in China had reached 388 million, comprising 72.2 percent of the Chinese netizen population, making mobile phones the most used terminal for Internet access. The top reason for Chinese mobile users to access the Internet is staying connected with friends (84.8 percent), followed by entertainment (62.1 percent) and obtaining news (58.2 percent).

In summary, microblogs' information dissemination system greatly reduced the time needed for news to reach general public. As long as witnesses of the event have a phone with Internet access, people can learn about the event almost simultaneously as it progresses.

### **Microblogs' Impact on Professional Journalism**

Early Twitter and Weibo users were mainly amateurs in terms of news reporting, but with its rapid growth, the technology has been embraced by mainstream media in both the U.S. and China. Lasorsa et al. (2012) observed from various sources that journalists increasingly are turning to Twitter as a form of engaging with audiences and sources, tracking the latest information on their beats, and promoting their work (Ahmad, 2010; Farhi, 2009; A. Hermida, 2010a). A collaborative study done by the Pew Research Center and George Washington University examined Twitter feeds over the course of two weeks from 13 major news organizations in the United States and found that 93 percent of those news organizations use Twitter to direct followers to their own news website and also “as an added means to disseminate their own material” (Holcomb, Gross, & Mitchell, 2011). Studies have shown that having a representation on microblogs can increase a newspaper's readership (Boyle, 2012) and for individual journalists, it can “portray a personal brand” (A. Hermida, 2013, p. 7).

Chinese scholars are encouraging journalists to identify sources and useful leads in Weibo entries and trending topics (Ying, 2010) and cited Xinhua journalist Jingyan Hua's successful attempt to piece together information gathered on Weibo to report the rescue of seven hikers who were detained in Indonesia.

Some research found contradicting evidence. Lariscy et al. (2009) conducted 200 telephone surveys with business/financial journalists and found little use of social media in their daily routine. They concluded that journalists "embrace the concept of social media more than they enact the practices" (p. 316). They are definitely not opposed to it, however. Jordaan (2013) studied the impact of Facebook and Twitter on newsroom routines and cultures at two South African weeklies and found the use of social media did not alter the journalists' news selection and production procedures. But since data were collected through self-reporting, Jordaan suspected that newsroom routines were indeed being directly and indirectly affected by social media but journalists have not realized that internally.

Besides using microblogs as an added outlet to disseminate news, professional media organizations are also found to be using information provided by microbloggers as sources for news (Broersma & Graham, 2013; Cision, 2011). But researchers also found conflicting evidence on this topic. Bachmann and Harlow (2012) studied how newspapers in Latin America are responding to this shift toward user-generated and multimedia content and found that traditional newspapers only allowed limited contribution from ordinary citizens.

Much research has been poured into investigating microblogs' impact on professional journalism. However, little attention was paid to the group of people who are not professional journalists but are participating in news production on microblogs. Moreover,

few researchers looked at motivations of this particular group of microbloggers. What motivated this group of people to participate in the first place? What factors persuaded them to continue contributing to news production on Twitter and Weibo? And unlike the professional journalists who extended their work to microblog platforms, what do these microbloggers gain from participatory journalism? These are all questions this study is trying to answer.

### **Participatory Journalism (PJ) on Microblogs**

At the inception of microblogs, sharing life moments was an important motive for microblog users. Initial posts were centered on the question “What are you doing?” As microblogs evolved, they became an information hub allowing users to post or search for information about “what’s happening.” The phenomenon of participatory journalism on microblogs gained popularity among the general public and was highlighted frequently in mainstream media.

In recent years, many news stories were first broken by microbloggers instead of professional journalists. A good example is the “Miracle on Hudson River,” which happened in 2009. A US Airways plane crash landed on the Hudson River and 155 passengers were evacuated with minimum injuries. One of the first tweets with a picture showing passenger evacuation was sent by a passenger on a nearby ferry, 15 minutes before any mainstream media reported the news (Hodge, 2010). Another example happened in China in 2011. Two high-speed bullet trains crashed into each other in a suburban area of Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province. Four cars were derailed, 40 people died and nearly 200 people were injured. The first Weibo post reporting the accident appeared on a passenger’s Weibo account minutes after the collision happened, more than two hours before the news broke on mainstream media in China. With help from witnesses of

those news events, microblogs such as Twitter and Weibo played an important role in disseminating news and reporting from the scene.

Millions of microbloggers are participating in collecting, reporting and disseminating news every day. Although these activities are defined as participatory journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003), not all of the people who are posting on microblogs can be called participatory journalists. As mentioned at the beginning, in this study *participatory journalists* refers to people who are not associated with mainstream media but are intentionally reporting news on microblogs consistently over an extended period of time.

There are three types of participatory journalism on microblogs. The first and the most highlighted by the news media is participation in breaking news coverage by serving as “witnesses” to actual events and providing firsthand information and pictures. “Miracle on Hudson River” and “Wenzhou Bullet Train Collision” mentioned above are good examples. This form of participation is most valuable for traditional media because without losing time to rush to the scene they can get firsthand materials at low or almost no cost from people who are tweeting and roll out the story immediately after it happened. It also extends the media lenses into zones where media access is tightly controlled and restricted by the government or severe conditions. But since this type of participation is based on the fortuitous combination of circumstances, it’s hardly repeatable for microbloggers across different events in different geographical locations. So this form of participation usually is a one-time act.

The second type of participatory journalism is the most commonly seen action of “retweeting” (RT) a piece of news. Some may argue that this is not in the realm of journalism. But journalism is the process of collecting and disseminating information. In

the case of RT, the focus is simply on dissemination, not so much on collecting information. It's the act of RT that magnifies the impact of a piece of news.

The final type of participatory journalism is through a process where users actively collect and disseminate the latest information about an event. The process is characterized by users tweeting related information they found on various platforms including but not limited to original information from the scene, word-of-mouth and other online sources. Much like traditional journalism, this type of participation requires users to spend time researching and gathering "evidence" of what is happening and making decisions of what to broadcast to followers. By selecting materials they feel will most interest their followers, the users go through a regular news production cycle to construct a structured overview of an event from their perspective. These microbloggers are also more consistent in terms of contributing news over an extended period of time. People who are practicing this type of participatory journalism are called participatory journalists.

Participatory journalists in this study should be differentiated from another similar concept known as "citizen journalists." Rosen (2008) defined citizen journalism as "when the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another, that's citizen journalism." This term has received numerous criticism and challenges. Safran (2005) criticized the term as "inaccurate," in part because journalism is not an individual act but requires an infrastructure and support system. On the other hand, the term "citizen" indicates that the participating people will have to be associated with a nation-state, which is not a mandatory requirement in the online world.

Many previous studies have looked at participatory journalism on microblogs and the microbloggers' roles in reporting certain events or political campaigns (e.g. Ifukor, 2010; Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & De Züniga, 2010; Moyo, 2009). Few researches have focused on participatory journalists' motivations for covering the news. Even fewer extended their studies to include participatory journalists from different cultural backgrounds.

### **China Perspective**

The most important reason this study brings China onto the horizon is not only because of its wide adoption of the Internet and social media, especially by mobile phone users (CNNIC, 2012), but also China's different media and journalism environment as observed by many previous studies.

Siebert et al.'s *Four Theories of the Press* (1963) presented four major theories that explain and illustrate the functioning of the world's presses: the Authoritarian theory, the Libertarian theory, the Social Responsibility theory and the Soviet Communist theory. These four theories have long dominated journalism education and research. Some scholars argued that it is hard to fit Asian media systems into the existing theories (Yin, 2008) because of the cultural differences between western and eastern countries. Chinese culture is deeply rooted in Confucian thoughts in which the strength of a country is considered more important than the profitability of any institutions within it and a family's well-being takes priority compared with an individual member's rights and freedom (Yin, 2008, p. 9). Hofstede (Hofstede, 1984) described this cultural dimension as "collectivism versus individualism." In his IBM survey, China scored much higher on the collectivism scale than the U.S. Thus Yin (2008) argued that such cultural tradition leads to the fact that professional media in Asian countries such as Japan and China maintain a close and "cozy" relationship with the government, which contradicts the western



concept of media as a watchdog and the “ultimate goal of libertarian philosophies – man as an end in himself” (p.9).

The 1978 economic reform in China also took a toll on China’s media system. With the commercialization of Chinese media, the majority is now financially independent or only acquire a small amount of support from the central government. However, this puts more pressure on those media to walk a thin line between being politically correct and financially viable. With so many strings attached to its professional media, China has witnessed a boom of unofficial press activities online, especially on social media such as Weibo. A recent *Guardian Weekly* article pointed out that in China, there are many “cyber-investigators” utilizing the freedom of speech on Weibo to uncover corruptions inside the government (Pedroletti, 2013). A tight self-censorship among traditional media in China compelled ordinary Chinese citizens to either disseminate or seek information on alternative platforms such as Weibo.

Different media environments led the author to contemplate how, compared with American microbloggers, motivations of Chinese microbloggers will differ in terms of participating in journalism activities online.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

For hundreds of years, journalism has been the primary means of informing society about itself and making events public that would otherwise remain private (Harcup, 2009). Since the first English daily, the *Daily Courant*, was published in 1702 (Maxted, 2004), major news organizations have taken the responsibility of informing the public. Not until the advent of the Internet and the wide adoption of social networks such as Facebook and

Twitter were the general public invited to or naturally inclined to participate in journalistic activities as illustrated above.

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study is to examine the phenomenon of *participatory journalism* by exploring *participatory journalists' motivations* of reporting news on *microblogs*. The current research will not only look at participatory journalists' motivations in the United States, but also compare motivations of both American and Chinese participants to provide insights on this global phenomenon from a cultural perspective.

As mentioned above, participants of this study have to meet the following requirements to be considered participatory journalists. First, they cannot be associated with or working for mainstream media. Second, they have to have been actively reporting news on microblogs for more than one year. Third, they have to post at least one piece of news on their microblog daily.

This research will contribute to the general knowledge of microblogs and provide insights into microbloggers' motivations. Furthermore, the current study will zoom in on a group of microbloggers who are participatory journalists. By examining their motivations, the current research can further our understanding of the participatory journalism phenomenon, which has an increasing importance brought on by technological advancements.

Social networks including microblogs have a great impact on people's news consumption. Through an online survey of 1,600 Canadians, Hermida et al. (2012) found social networks are becoming a significant source of news for Canadians. Heinrich (2012) argues that in a global communication space, traditional journalists gather news while

bloggers, Twitter-users and other social media participants contribute to that information flow. Information provided by traditional journalists combined with information from other sources forms a global news map.

On this global news map, participatory journalists are still struggling to find their own footing. Oftentimes, microblog posts about breaking news will immediately be picked up by mainstream media. Although the public may be amazed by how fast the information was disseminated by microbloggers, they will most likely take interest in the stories themselves, but not the original post or the person who posted it. So after 15 minutes of fame, people who broke the news on microblogs are usually left “unpaid and unknown” (D. Murthy, 2011). What motivates participatory journalists on microblogs to continue contributing news becomes a question.

The importance of looking into participatory journalists goes beyond simply describing the group and its members. They are at the front line of the convergence shift of the media system and are shaping the “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006). Participatory journalism’s political (empowering the public, (e.g., Berger, 2011; Stavrositu & Shyam Sundar, 2012) and economic (audience labor and exploitation (e.g., Fisher, 2012; Vujnovic et al., 2010) impacts have been discussed before. But the participatory journalists’ motivations are the key to understanding how this media shift happened or is happening and where society is heading.

As a global phenomenon, participatory journalism’s importance in countries other than United States has also attracted many researchers’ attention (e.g. Matheson & Allen, 2007; Men & Tsai, 2013; Pedroletti, 2013; Y. Yang, 2011). By including participants from different cultures and comparing their motivations, the current study will deepen our understanding of participatory journalism from a cultural perspective.

## **Structure of the Following Chapters**

In the following chapters, the author will first give an overview of previous research that has been done in related fields, identify gaps in the literature, then discuss the methods (phenomenology) used for conducting the research. Following a detailed description of research procedures and participants, the author will present research findings and discuss their implications. Finally limitations of this study and suggestions for future research will be provided.

## **Chapter II Literature Review**

The question this study seeks to answer comprises some important concepts including participatory journalism, human motivation, and cultural differences. The following chapter reviews related literature, including participatory journalism; the convergence culture in which it's situated; motivation research in the fields of both social psychology and journalism; user-generated content and motivations; motivations from journalism role perspective; Twitter and user motivations; Weibo research in China; and motivation and culture.

### **Participatory Journalism (PJ)**

When Bowman and Willis (2003) defined participatory journalism, they already had an idealized motivation for this group of people.

“Participatory journalism: The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.”

Fröhlich et al. (2012) questioned this claimed intent, arguing that little research has been done to prove the intent of participatory journalists and it's possible that this group of people are practicing journalism for self-interest, self-development and self-expression rather than providing independent information as indicated in the quote above. They combed through previous literature and found nine terms associated with participatory journalism, then grouped the terms into three categories according to their similarities. Participatory journalism is closely related to “citizen journalism” (Rosen, 2008) and

“grassroots journalism” (Gillmor, 2006) in that all three terms emphasize the important “democratic function” (Fröhlich et al., 2012, p. 1044) of this group of people. Grassroots journalism, the oldest of the bunch, emerged before the Internet was invented and focused on the importance of citizens entering social discourse. Gillmor (2006) predicted a change in journalism from “journalism as lecture” to “journalism as a conversation or seminar.” Citizen journalism tends to exclude professional journalism in the process of news production. Paulusssen et al. (2008) commented that citizen journalists completely took news-making out of the hands of professional journalists, becoming both “producers” and “users” of the news. Participatory journalism is different from the two concepts in that it emphasizes participation instead of takeover and does not indicate an inherent democratic motivation behind the participation. Participation can be demonstrated in various forms including being a source, contributing pictures and information, gathering related information, disseminating information, etc. The contributing content is not limited to political topics, but can range from entertainment to civic; from sports to science.

The closest effort to explore motivations behind participatory journalism is a study done by Vujnovic et al. (2010) from the professional journalists’ perspective. The authors interviewed 65 professional journalists working for 20 different newspapers, all with an online participation feature, in eight European countries, Canada and Israel to find out what they perceive as motivations for participatory journalism. The study’s focus was on economic motivations. Researchers stood on the side of professional journalists and examined the motivations for newspapers to incorporate participatory journalism into their news production. Branding, building traffic and keeping up with the competition were the three main themes that emerged during interviews. However, motivations from

the participatory journalists' perspective remain an unanswered question and merit further exploration.

### **Participatory Journalism and Convergence Culture**

To study participatory journalism as a newly emerged phenomenon, the first step lies in understanding the social environment in which it's situated. Participatory journalism has its roots in independent amateur production and user-generated content (UGC). Examples of UGC include tweets, blog entries, YouTube videos, Flickr photos, Instagram postings and podcasts. Studies of UGC are deeply grounded in convergence culture and the three concepts raised by Henry Jenkins (2006) – media convergence, participatory culture and collective intelligence.

Jenkins (2006) defined media convergence as “where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (p.15). Although participatory journalism existed during the era of traditional media, its development has been spurred by the ubiquity of new media. These new platforms for mass communication empowered media consumers to share their point of view and information like never before. Technologies, however, are just facilitators that allow for easier and cheaper access to the means of producing and distributing content (Markman, 2011). This convergence is not happening through devices such as mobile phones and tablets, but in the brains of individual consumers and through their interactions with each other and with media producers.

While media convergence emphasizes a shift in the media system, participatory culture is a departure from the older notion of passive media spectatorship. Jenkins (2006)

commented that media producers and consumers are no longer playing separate roles (one distributing content; the other consuming), but are now interacting with each other according to a set of rules that are yet to be discovered. Participatory journalism is one form of those interactions that can be captured and analyzed. The product of media convergence and participatory culture is collective intelligence. As demonstrated in the background section, collective intelligence can sometimes be used as an alternative media source. If one compares a news event to an elephant, each media source (including participatory journalism) can be considered as a blind man. Each media outlet will be able to describe a part of the elephant from their perspective. Although the descriptions may sometimes be in total conflict, given enough information, the audience is provided the opportunity to process the pieces of information and reconstruct the “elephant” or the news event closest to its original form. In this sense, collective intelligence grants the audience a chance to form their own reality.

Participatory journalism is the manifestation of the evolution of media convergence and participatory culture, providing a snapshot of the resulting collective intelligence. A key element in convergence culture is the interaction between media consumer and producer (Jenkins, 2006). Ordinary people’s participation in news production blurred the line between professional media practitioners and the general audience. Their roles intersect and so does their power. Motivations for participating might stem from such empowerment and continuous interactions between the two groups may become a sustainable force to support prolonged participation. One example is the effort made by professional media organizations to integrate online platforms and UGC into their day-to-day news production. Some have achieved demonstrated success. Besides CNN’s much-lauded iReport, local news organizations also saw merits in combining professional journalism with participatory journalism. Deuze (2007) examined the case of *Bluffon*



*Today (BT)* in South Carolina, a combination of a free daily newspaper and a community news website. According to Deuze, BT used UGC as its primary source of news and information and it increased the level of transparency in the media system, where content producers and users can “see” each other.

It’s important to note that the media consumer/producer line is not the only one blurred by the advent of convergence culture. This phenomenon has also obscured the boundaries between countries, cultures and ethnicities. Participatory journalism is not confined to one country or one culture, but has become an international phenomenon. News dissemination is accelerated globally, especially with the advantage of the Internet platform. To cite one example, Xiao and Li (2012) studied news reports about the American actress Sharon Stone’s comment on China’s earthquake during the 2008 Cannes Festival. Stone said she believed the earthquake happened because of “karma”(报应)<sup>1</sup>. The word, when translated into Mandarin, has a negative cultural connotation, meaning it’s the consequence of one’s wrongdoing. Xiao and Li found this news attracted full media coverage across different platforms including TV, newspaper and websites, both in America and China. The news went global almost immediately through participatory journalism on the Web platform. The researchers found that although participatory journalism helped audiences in different countries overcome language barriers, it also stirred up heated online discussions fueled by nationalism. Xiao and Li’s study brought to light the impact of participatory journalism on a global level. Citizens of one country do not have to rely on traditional news agencies such as the Associated Press and Reuters to learn about international news. They can quickly get access to world news through online platforms and participatory journalism. In some instances, the audience

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<sup>1</sup> Karma is a Buddhism concept that according to Merriam-Webster online dictionary refers to the force created by a person's actions that is believed in Hinduism and Buddhism to determine what that person's next life will be like.

comes across this information passively by logging into microblogging services such as Twitter and Microblog for other reasons and glimpsing through the tweets on their front page.

Whether these participatory journalists are motivated by the fact that information they provide can be shared and pushed onto an international platform (which this study sets out to discover), they took part in a process called “ambient journalism” (A. Hermida, 2010c). When information and news are prevalent on all platforms: TV, radio, paper, and Internet; they create an environment in which people are immersed in news pieces like background noise, so that even if they do not actively seek information, their brains will unintentionally absorb it to raise their awareness. Hermida (2010b) further defined the concept from the content producers’ point of view, as a news experience where ordinary audiences are “producing small pieces of content that can be collectively considered as journalism.” The value does not reside in each single piece but in the “combined effects of communication.” Ambient journalism illustrates an important aspect of participatory journalism: the emphasis on its contribution toward establishing an audience’s awareness system.

Convergence culture (media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence) and ambient journalism are intertwined concepts that describe the social and journalism environment in which participatory journalism has emerged and prospered. While this study’s focus is on uncovering motivations of participatory journalists on Twitter and Weibo, it’s difficult to ignore the fact that all participatory journalists and their motivation system are shaped and affected by this convergent social and journalism environment, and such effects are reciprocal. Whether they recognize this bigger picture may have an impact on their motivations to participate and persevere in their practices.

## **Motivation Research**

### **Field of Social Psychology**

The focal point of this study is human motivation and consequently the author felt obligated to introduce some fundamental concepts and important work done in this area. Motivation studies enjoy a long tradition in the field of social psychology. To be motivated is to be moved into action, or to decide on a change in action (Schopenhauer, 1841/1960). Motivation can originate from internal sources, described as biological and psychological needs, and from external sources such as goals and incentives (Deckers, 2010). Biological science-oriented views of motivation date back to Darwin (1872), Freud (1955), and McDougall (1908). They stress instincts as the motivational force behind people's behaviors (Sorrentino & Yamaguchi, 2008). Since online activity is not a behavior that can directly fulfill instinctive human needs such as hunger and thirst, this type of motivation has not been seen in studies explaining people's online behaviors. On the contrary, psychological needs such as the need to belong have been found to motivate people to use social networks (Dean, 2010). The intensity of people's psychological needs was also found to be positively correlated with people's online media usage as measured by the duration of exposure (Schaedel & Clement, 2010). In other words, some people may be more motivated than others to stay active online (Deckers, 2010).

Since 1930, social psychologists have developed more than a dozen theories of motivation that apply to different types of human behaviors (Graham & Weiner, 1996). Among these, humanistic theories have witnessed steady growth in recent decades. The core of humanistic motivation theories is their assumption that people have strong cognitive reasons to perform certain behaviors (Cherry). It's famously illustrated by Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as shown in the picture below, with more basic

needs at the bottom and higher level needs at the top. Maslow assumed that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs and lower levels of needs have to be satisfied before higher level needs can be addressed (Maslow).

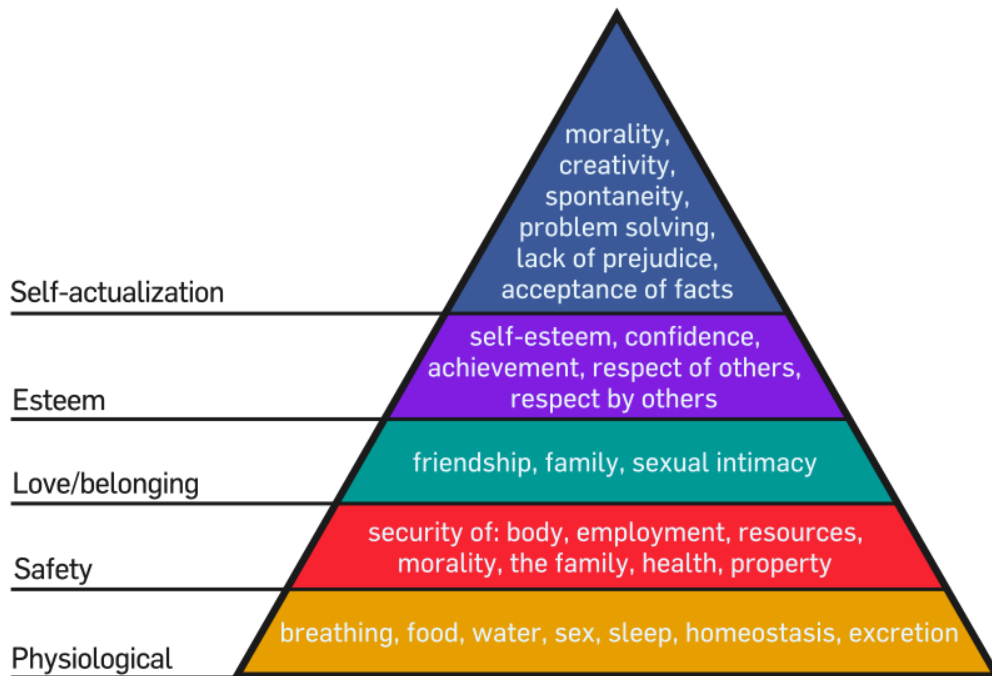


Figure 2 Maslow Hierarchy of Needs

In the graphic above, Maslow included both internal and external sources of motivations. External sources, as mentioned above, include goals and incentives (Deckers, 2010). For example, to obtain power is a goal, while a political office is an incentive. To earn a monetary reward is a goal, while a \$100 prize is an incentive. The individual differences in external motivations stem from the fact that people and the environment they live in

are interacting in a way so that they are constantly affecting and modifying each other (Deckers, 2010).

According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), behavioral, personal and environmental factors influence people's thoughts and behaviors simultaneously in a reciprocal fashion (Bandura, 1978). Behavior may be determined by an individual's own direct experience or by vicarious experience (observation). In addition, thought processes and behaviors are also driven by *expected outcomes* and *self-efficacious beliefs* (Sirianni & Vishwanath, 2012). Since the conceptualization of SCT, Bandura applied it to studies of organizational management (Wood & Bandura, 1989), health communication (1998), and mass communication (2008). He emphasized the assumption that SCT is founded in an agentic perspective, meaning people are not only a product of but are also producers of social systems. They are "proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating" and not just "reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental events or inner forces" (Bandura, 2008, p. 121).

Bandura (2008) argued that SCT not only affects people's acquisition of knowledge and cognitive skills, but it also has strong motivational effects. Under SCT, internal motivations can be considered rooted in self-efficacious beliefs, while external motivations are derived from expected outcomes. Consider the example of a news website consisting of UGC. Research has shown that people contributing to such a site have different expected outcomes that guided their motivations and in turn directed their different online posting behaviors (Schweiger & Quiring, 2006). When expected to be publicly recognized for their authority, participants tended to direct their content toward the general public; when seeking monetary or material rewards, they tend to contribute content addressed to the website/service provider.

Furthermore, expected outcomes not only derive from people's direct experiences, but also from observing others' behaviors and the consequential outcome they have achieved (Bandura, 2008). Thus overnight fame enjoyed by some microbloggers may trigger the interest of others and motivate them to participate. However, what motivates those people to continue beyond initial participation is a question this study tries to answer.

Another concept within SCT, *self-efficacy*, refers to the belief in one's ability to obtain certain goals. The types of outcomes people anticipate depend largely on their judgments of how well they will be able to perform in given situations (Bandura, 1986). In the context of microblogging, the 140-character limit of Twitter, for example, significantly lowered the bar for participating in news production. No one is expected to write a long investigative story; simple facts and plain language are good enough for a tweet. Thus the lower standard may serve as an important motivational factor for microbloggers. Studies have shown that in the world of blogging where such word limitation is none-existent, a lack of self-efficacy in writing blogs and expected negative social outcome from the blog posts are among the causes of posting anxiety for both American and Chinese bloggers (X. Liu, 2010).

### **Field of Media Research**

Motivation studies in the media field do not strictly follow the framework provided by social psychologists. Instead, media researchers often examine motivations using a *Uses and Gratifications* (U&G) approach. Studies guided by this approach usually stand at the media consumers' point of view and seek to interpret the audience's media choices in terms of their psychological and sociological needs (Conway & Rubin, 1991). Within this approach, the audience is conceived as active and assumed to be goal directed. They will select specific media formats and content to gratify their needs (Severin & Tankard Jr.,

2001). Audience motivations for using media and their specific gratifications are central in inquiries guided by the U&G approach.

Early U&G research usually attached certain gratifications to a specific medium. Some examples include the assertion that “newspapers were found to be the best for instrumental purposes such as seeking information and integrating into the socio-political order, while television was mainly for escapism and entertainment” (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973, cited in Yuan, 2011). With the emergence of the Internet, recreation, diversion and entertainment were found to be associated with using electronic bulletin boards (Rafaeli, 1986); while social escapism, security and privacy concerns, etc., are gratifications obtained through using the World Wide Web in general (Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999). Similarly, information-seeking, virtual community, relationship maintenance, etc., are associated with Internet use (Song, Larose, Eastin, & Lin, 2004), and social support is a type of gratification specifically linked to using online care Web pages (Anderson, 2011).

Thus far, U&G research is often presented from the perspective of media consumers (e.g. Bondad-Brown, Rice, & Pearce, 2012). In a convergence culture where the line between media consumers and producers is continuously blurred, the U&G approach also needs an update. Media convergence as advocated by Jenkins (2004) is not only a “top-down corporate-driven” process but also a “bottom-up consumer-driven” process (p.32). In the era of the Internet, UGC becomes a unique content type in that users are at both ends of the spectrum. On one end, there are solely consumers of UGC, while on the other, active users are both consuming and producing content. This aspect of UGC calls for motivation studies that are conducted from a different point of view – the content producers’ perspective. Such understanding is crucial because the sustainability of UGC platforms

such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Weibo are relying solely on the continuous content contributions from end users. Shaver & Shaver (2006) pointed out that in today's media industry, with the increased importance of UGC, the competition for "unpaid employees" is contemporaneously fierce.

Some researchers have tried to expand the U&G approach to understand what motivated people who were producing content. These studies mainly focused on narrowly-defined UGC. For example, under the U&G framework, researchers found that communicating Islam, self-expression and social recognition were the main motivational factors for people to create and post videos about Islam on YouTube (Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2013); and a study reviewing why people contributed to English and Hebrew Wikipedia found their top motivations to include pleasure, learning, intellectual challenge and contributing/sharing with other people (Rafaeli, Hayat, & Ariel, 2009). Schaedel and Clement (2010) compared the motivations of users at both ends. In a German AOL community where the majority of the content was UGC, the researchers redefined the sole content consumers as passive users and content producers as active users. Schaedel and Clement found active users were also the "heavy" users in terms of time and frequency of online exposure. Overall, heavy users had higher motivations than light users in all categories of motivation (intrinsic: achievement-orientation, stimulus avoidance; social motives: social relationships, social status and self-expression), except for altruism. The differences, however, are not significant. The researchers attributed the insignificant results observed for intrinsic motives to "the fact that users no longer perceive community activity as leisure time when the time invested increases" (p. 32).

None of the above studies looked at the motivations of people who are actively engaging in news production through UGC on microblogs. And no one has explored the motivation



differences among those users/content producers from countries that are culturally, politically and economically different. The author decided to fill in the gap by focusing on this group of media participants and their motivations. This study may not only develop a new category of gratifications but will also redefine the term “active audience” in the context of U&G research to include not only choosing a medium intentionally but also contributing content voluntarily.

### **User Generated Content (UGC) and Motivations**

As briefly mentioned above, participatory journalism can be considered a particular type of UGC. While few studies have looked at motivations of participatory journalists, motivations of UGC producers can serve as references in the current study.

Through a qualitative analysis of online news sites, Schweiger and Quiring (2006) differentiated three types of motivations based on the intended audience. When the intended audience is the general public, the objectives usually include distributing personal ideas, opinions and information to generate public reactions and the motivation behind those behaviors is “to reach the status of a well-known, prestigious and respected personality” (p. 87). When the intended audience is other user(s) of UGC sites, the primary motivation becomes establishing or maintaining social connections. If the UGC is addressed to a website/service provider, the motivation for contributing content is the desire to communicate with the provider or financial and/or material incentives.

This typology of motivation is quite interesting in that it’s not solely dependent on the content contributors but who they perceive to be their audience. A study on microbloggers has shown that they often have an “imagined audience” and their “ideal readers” are described to be similar to the microbloggers themselves and can appreciate

their perspective and opinions (Marwick & boyd, 2011). The same study also identified that microbloggers with a large number of followers had a deep understanding of their audience and were strategically managing their fan base. In other words, just like traditional media, influential microbloggers are also trying to target their messages and content at a certain group of people.

Studies inquiring into the motives of Internet users to produce various types of UGC almost all identified particular motivations (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008; Shao, 2009; Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmohl, & Sapp, 2006), among which self-expression, social recognition, entertainment and information dissemination are arguably the most prominent (Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2013). Fröhlich et al. (2012) took a step further to conceptualize the motivations found in previous studies and categorized them into extrinsic motivations (indirect benefits such as reputation building) and intrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivations are further broken down into enjoyment-based concepts such as fun and intellectual stimulation and obligation or community-based ideas such as help and altruism<sup>2</sup>. The Fröhlich et al. (2012) study surveyed participatory journalists on a German language website that serves as a portal for them to contribute content. The authors found that creativity, ideas and fun (intrinsic motivations) were the most important motivations for taking part in participatory journalism, followed by community and reputation motivations.

### **Motivations from Journalists' Roles Perspective**

Besides the most prevalent media motivation studies guided by U&G, motivations of participatory journalists may be viewed from another perspective. Like professional

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<sup>2</sup> For more details, Fröhlich et al.(2012, p. 1048) offers a great overview of list of motivations associated with production of user-generated content and the literature they appeared in.

journalists, participatory journalists are also playing different roles in the journalism profession, so their motivations can also be interpreted through journalists' self-conception of their roles. Research has shown that conception of their roles can influence journalists' behaviors and that journalists in the same culture tend to have similar role conceptions (van Dalen, 2012). Weaver, Wilhoit and their colleagues' extensive and longitudinal studies on American journalists rendered five different categories of professional roles including disseminator, interpreter, adversary, populist mobilizer (encouraging more public participation in social discourse), and civic (e.g. conducting public polls) (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, 1996).

In the most recent survey of American journalists, conducted in 2007, Weaver et al. included a new category—online professional journalists—and compared their role conceptions with traditional journalists. The online journalists were reported to feel less autonomy than journalists who worked for other media, and surprisingly, despite the inherent opportunities provided by online platforms to engage the public during news production, online professional journalists were less likely to cite “populist mobilizer” as their role (Weaver et al., 2007). They also show little motivation to incorporate participatory journalism pieces into their everyday work (Hoffman, 2009).

On the other hand, Thruman (2008) suggested that the development of participatory journalism is encouraging professional journalists to redefine their roles. Finnish newspaper journalists who participated in public journalism projects re-articulated their role “as a helper, accessible collaborator, discussion moderator or ‘connector’, and as a commercial representative of the paper” (Ahva, 2013). Vujnovic et al.'s (2010) interviews with more than 60 professional journalists from Europe, Israel, Canada and the

United States found that they all recognized the importance of UGC and participatory journalism and realized that their professional roles are transforming because of it. The Populist mobilizer role was being highlighted. The journalists felt one of their roles was to “develop participation channels” (p.291). They admitted the use of participatory journalism in their daily work for branding, increasing traffic (which may eventually lead to increased profit), and keeping up with their competition. However, they all lacked a clear “vision” as how to adopt this form of journalism. One reason, the author speculates, is the unpredictability of participatory journalism. As they are not employed by any news organization, participatory journalists act on their own will, and thus cannot be relied on to establish a steady stream of news production. From the point of view of professional journalists and news organizations, they may be considered too “unreliable” to be adopted either as news sources or to produce actual news stories. This further demonstrates the need to explore and bring to light the motivations, as well as role conceptions, behind participatory journalists if professional journalists and news organizations are to understand the phenomenon, and to better renegotiate their own professional roles and integrate the mass power into their newsrooms.

### **Twitter and User Motivations**

While participatory journalism can happen on any platform, even with traditional media, the rise of social networks definitely accentuated the phenomenon. As the fastest growing social network, Twitter has become the front line of participatory journalism. Since participatory journalists on Twitter are also Twitter users, the author decided to incorporate literature about Twitter users and their motivations to give a more rounded description of the existing research relevant to the phenomenon of interest.

The first question many people asked was “Who are they?” Who are those people behind the screens sending millions of tweets every day and who are reading them? Twitter engineering reported in June 2011 that users on Twitter are sending 200 million tweets per day (TwitterEngineering, 2011). Although this may lead people to conclude that millions of users are active on Twitter every day, surprisingly, that’s not the case. A Harvard Business Review research article examined a random sample of 300,000 Twitter users and found that the top 10 percent of prolific users accounted for 90percent of the tweets (Heil & Piskorski, 2009). Schonfeld compared Twitter to other forms of participatory media and commented that Twitter is not much different. “A small fraction of users produce the overwhelming amount of content” (Schonfeldt, 2009). Based on a 2009 analysis of seven million Twitter accounts, only 22 percent of Twitter accounts have more than 10 tweets. In other words, there are many more people who are reading tweets every day than the ones sending them. Schonfeldt called those people “sheep,” as it’s easier to follow than to lead. Hargittai and Litt (2011) surveyed 505 diverse young American adults about their Internet use and found that an interest in celebrity and entertainment news is a significant predictor for Twitter adoption, which could explain the lack of active users on Twitter.

Research about Twitter users has reviewed various behaviors, including how frequently people use Twitter (Altunay, 2010), how they use Twitter in elections to comment on performances of traditional media and politicians (Burgess & Bruns, 2012; Larsson & Moe, 2011), and where users found sources for their tweets (Dhiraj Murthy & Longwell, 2013). Several studies looked at interaction patterns among Twitter users, mostly within the context of a political event. Larsson examined the Twitter interaction patterns between the audience and professional journalists and found that relationship similar to that in a traditional media setting, with journalists playing the dominant role and the

audience having limited participation (Larsson, 2013). In the same vein, Verweij focused on the connections between journalists and politicians on Twitter in the Netherlands and concluded that these two groups were interdependent and formed “a fully connected group of users controlling information” (Verweij, 2012). Bruns and Highfield (2013) examined interaction patterns between politicians and other users on Twitter during a 2012 election in the Australian state of Queensland. They analyzed the strategies of different campaign groups on Twitter and how the political debate evolved on Twitter and among its users.

This online political participation is encouraged by the anonymity provided by Twitter, which is much applauded for its contribution to freedom of expression through protection of users’ privacy (Macgillivray, 2012). Free flow of content and electronic access to information empowered everyday users to actively participate in events, especially political events such as general elections (Ifukor, 2010). Speculation can be drawn here that Twitter opened up a space for political participation once reserved only for professional journalists and political elites. Self-esteem and self-actualization motivations (Maslow, 1943) may play an important role in determining participatory journalism behaviors.

Similar motivations can be assumed to apply to influential Twitter users as well. Like opinion leaders in the public-sphere, influential users on Twitter are also identified by researchers. When political issues are in question, leading Twitter users are usually elite political professionals, however, “niche authorities” (sometimes participatory journalists) have also emerged due to the unique characteristics of Twitter that encourage public participation (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013). Even committed minorities (Twitter users with relatively few connections) can make a significant impact on trends related to

political topics (Bastos, Raimundo, & Travitzki, 2013). However, public participation is far from being the main force of political event reporting. Poell and Borra (2012) content-analyzed accounts on Twitter, YouTube and Flickr for the 12-day period of the 2010 G20 summit in Toronto, Canada, to examine the appropriation of social media as platforms of alternative journalism. They found social media did not facilitate alternative reporting. Event reporting was still dominated by a relatively small number of users. On the contrary, Dang-Xuan et al. (2013) looked at characteristics and communication behavior of influential accounts on Twitter during an election period and identified 47 percent of those accounts belonged to individual citizens, activists and civil society groups. They also found that expression of sentiments in the tweets help diffuse the information at a higher speed, inferring that the addition of subjective elements in the message actually accelerated the information diffusion on Twitter.

With all the descriptive studies done about Twitter users, few researchers have really looked into the motivations behind the users sending the tweets. More than 40 percent of tweets are “pointless babble” (Kelly, 2009), such as a description of the meal someone just had or places one just visited and even groceries they picked up. While celebrities may have a reason to post such mundane information to keep their fans engaged, why ordinary people tweet such things leaves a big question mark. Qiu et al. (2010) adopted a psychological point of view to look at the motivations behind these “meaningless” messages. Using a student sample and an experimental design, they excluded social connection and affiliation from the motivations but confirmed that highly extraverted participants posted tweets to relieve their existential anxiety. While this study did shed some light on the motivations behind microbloggers, experimental design is questionable when studying motivations since it’s almost impossible to isolate the participants’ pre-existing values and personal traits, which might skew the results. At the same time the

study did not focus on motivations behind sending “meaningful” tweets, which is another gap the current study is trying to fill.

Unlike “meaningless” tweets, conversational tweets and news content tweets (which, according to Kelly, 2009, comprise around 40 percent of all tweets) have a bigger impact on society and their audience. Through these messages, Twitter users have fulfilled different roles that normally would only be performed by professionals. By examining 1400 Tweets related to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake , Smith (2010) found patterns of public relations strategies represented by Twitter users. A study published in M/C Journal discussed the use of microblogging sites like Twitter by religious believers to spread faith and religious beliefs ("Faith Tweets: Ambient religious communication and microblogging rituals," 2010).

### **Weibo Studies in China**

Weibo studies in China are still at an early stage, with the majority of research seeking to define the phenomenon rather than focusing on key players such as Weibo content contributors. Hu (2011) reviewed articles about Weibo in 11 major communication journals in order to provide an overview of Weibo research in China. He found, overall, researchers recognized the unique information dissemination model Weibo provides and its advantages in encouraging participatory journalism/citizen journalism, especially during sudden events. However, they were also concerned about information overload, unreliable information and the ability of participatory journalists to conduct investigative journalism beyond simple facts-sharing. Some assumptions were made about Weibo users’ motivations. Yu (2010) suggested content producers on Weibo were mainly motivated by self-expression, while consumers were motivated by information-seeking interests. However, he did not take a further step to examine the assumptions.



Other researchers took a more “close-up” approach and examined cases of participatory journalism on Weibo. Shi (2011) cited unique cases of how Weibo served as a new platform for citizen journalism. In the first, a young boy named Kai sent a picture of the mud flood in his village and received 5300 “re-tweets” overnight. The attention caused the boy to feel a “sudden social responsibility,” and in the two weeks following the flood, he visited multiple disaster areas and sent more than 400 posts on Weibo about the disaster and rescue efforts. His posts were featured on TV, in newspapers and on news websites; Kai was even called “one-man news agency.” Another case featured several victims of local government’s forceful demolition against the homeowners’ will. The victims described the situation on Weibo, making the government’s practices public. Their Weibo posts received so much attention that the central government removed eight local officials two days after the incident. Shi commented that Weibo can help China transform into a “civil society” (p. 26).

Although Weibo has given an edge to participatory journalism in China and has proved useful in the fight against corruption, it’s not moving along unsupervised. Epstein commented that Weibo in China is like a “rambunctious sandbox” that comes with “walls and adult supervision” (Epstein, 2011). In comparison to the journalism environment in the United States, Sullivan (2012) found that the Chinese environment is strongly regulatory, resulting in a “highly unusual” microblogging environment. With traditional media adhering to the self-censorship imposed by the central government and Twitter being blocked in mainland China, Weibo becomes an alternative for citizens to participate in news production. Sullivan’s speculation suggests the need for self-expression, combined with the lack of satisfaction with the journalism status quo in China, motivated Chinese netizens to contribute on Weibo. However, Sullivan also cautioned that with Sina Weibo’s self-censorship, this mainstream platform has developed into a

venue for “tabloid press, raising scandals, mobilizing capricious online public opinion and in some cases effecting ‘virtual mob justice.’”

Influential Weibo users (usually celebrities) are also opinion leaders in the public sphere. Weibo has functioned as a magnifier for them to transmit their own opinions and views (Peng, 2013). They also sometimes give a “push” to news on Weibo that would otherwise be ignored by mainstream media (Shi, 2011) and thrust participatory journalism into the public eye. A famous Chinese actress, Chen Yao, is known as the “Queen of Weibo” with more than 53 million fans; almost twice the circulation number of the largest newspaper CanKaoXiaoXi (Reference News) in China. She and other celebrities in China re-posted news about Ling Zhu, a victim allegedly poisoned by her roommate 18 years ago. There was suspicion the case had been compromised, with crucial evidence disappearing days after the incident, but the story recently caught people’s attention after a similar incident happened at FuDan University in Shanghai. Participatory journalists on Weibo quickly started to compare the two cases and demanded justice for Ling Zhu. Weibo self-censorship staff (Epstein, 2011) first blocked any news with Ling Zhu’s name; however, with more and more influential Weibo users (especially celebrities) reposting it, traditional media started to investigate the story. The public also went to the White House website to petition for the deportation of the suspect Jasmine Sun (“Invest and deport Jasmine Sun who was the main suspect of a famous Thallium poison murder case (victim:Zhu Lin) in China,” 2013) and received almost 150,000 signatures in a week. The news spread across the globe and ended up with the official Xinhua News Agency requesting that the police department make the case and the investigation process public (S. Jiang, 2013).

Even with Weibo attracting global attention, Weibo research has thus far stayed indigenous. Researchers have borrowed what has been done in the Western world as a basis for their work, but no one took the first step to directly compare Weibo users with Tweeters to find out their different or similar motivations behind participating in news production.

### **Motivation and Culture**

The cultural perspective has been recognized as indispensable in motivation research (Sorrentino & Yamaguchi, 2008). While generality is a big issue in this field, many studies are conducted under highly localized conditions and tacitly assume generality without considering limited conditions that were left unexamined (Wosnitza, Karabenick, Efklides, & Neinniger, 2009). Early motivation studies assume that studies conducted in one culture can be applied to another, since all human beings are motivated by biological needs. However, researchers later realized that even personal needs and traits that were considered comparatively stable can be affected by the environment and can change over time.

Environmental variables are concerned with motivations from external sources, and are defined as “characteristics of incentives and goals that have the ability to attract or repel” people (Deckers, 2010, p. 9). While culture is not a motivation itself, it affects people’s perceptions and evaluation of incentives and goals. What is appealing to people in one culture might not be the same for people in another. Their goals might also be set and prioritized differently according to their respective cultural backgrounds; thus motivations behind their behaviors are also different.

While many theories and approaches tried to capture cultural differences to provide a framework for cross-cultural studies, none has done a better and more extensive job than Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Since the current study is focused on microbloggers in the U.S. and China, the author felt the need to briefly discuss the differences between these two cultures in order to provide some background to illustrate how people might differ in these two cultures when forming and prioritizing their goals and how they may appraise the same incentive differently.

### **Hofstede's 5-Dimensions Model**

Hofstede analyzed a large data set of IBM employees between 1967 and 1973. With multiple validating studies, his 2010 book "Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind" (2010), includes data from 76 countries. Although Hofstede's study was carried out based on data obtained in a work context, he argues that people do not carry different mental programs for work and non-work situations (Hofstede, 2001, p. 92). Guided by Hofstede's 5-D model, a study looking into articles on Wikipedia contributed by authors across different cultures and countries found that the cultural differences observed in the physical world also exist in the virtual world (Pfeil, Zaphiris, & Chee Siang, 2006). In other words, culture also plays a part in social networking activities.

Hofstede sees culture as a set of beliefs, values, attitudes and patterns of behavior shared by members of a social unit (Hofstede, 1984, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The five dimensions include power distance (PDI), individualism/collectivism (IDV), masculinity/femininity (MAS), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), and long-term orientation (LTO). The dimensions were first proposed to analyze work-related cultural values in different countries, but were quickly adopted and applied to all research areas including marketing (Wu, 2013), advertising (K. C. C. Yang, 2011), and general consumer research

(Overby, Gardial, & Woodruff, 2004). Hofstede emphasized that all the cultural dimension scores are not absolute. They only make sense when two or more cultures are compared with each other (2010). The following chart from Geert Hofstede’s website shows a comparison between the United States and China in regard to the five cultural dimensions (Hofstede).

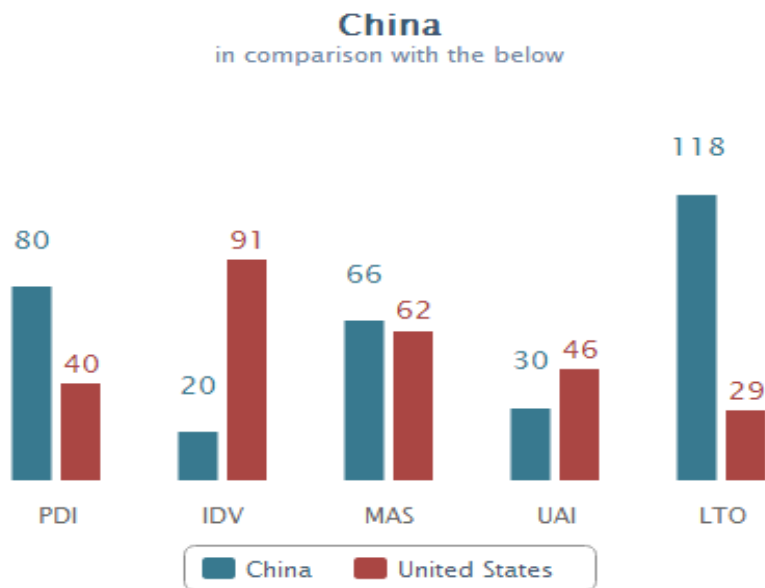


Figure 3 Cultural Index Comparisons between China and US

*Power distance* is defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 98). Members of high power distance (HPD) cultures

accept power as part of society, whereas the members of low power distance (LPD) cultures believe power should be distributed only when it is legitimate (Hofstede, 1984).

From ancient history, China is a country with high power distance. It is built upon Confucius' idea of a stable and harmonious society achieved by strict rules cast upon five basic relationships: ruler-subject, father-son, older brother-younger brother, husband-wife, and senior friend-junior friend. In these dyads, one side needs to respect and obey the other unconditionally. These rules served as the cornerstone of Chinese society for almost 2,000 years until the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Chairman Mao tried to wipe out Confucianism, but failed to realize that his ideologies, cultivated in Chinese society, inevitably contained many Confucianism elements.

During the past two decades, China has gone through a dramatic economic reform, starting in 1978 with Deng's *Reforming and Opening Up Policy* shifting the Chinese economy from a Soviet-style centrally controlled one to a market-oriented mixed economy. Whether social values as part of culture have changed with the economy is of concern in this study. Turkey (after 1983 Prime Minister Turgut Özal's reform policies), Belarus and Uzbekistan (after the collapse of the Soviet Union) have experienced similar, if not more drastic, economic reforms. Research has found that although these countries have made enormous efforts to adapt to the Western market economy, local cultural values still prevail (Daller & Yildiz, 2006). Thus it's safe to predict that Chinese society is still characterized by high power distance. Based on Hofstede's data (2010), China was among the medium high countries on the Power Distance Index (PDI).

Compared with China, the United States scored low on the PDI. This may be the result of historical facts (Hofstede et al., 2010). European settlers brought with them values and beliefs that were deeply rooted in the Germanic part of Europe. This territory was

populated by tribes with local lords who did not respond to any higher power, neither were they centrally controlled. It's not surprising that their descendants' culture may be very different from those in China who have been obedient to one loci of power for thousands of years.

In a high power distance society such as China, people are less likely to challenge authority. In the case of mass communication, traditional media project an image of authority in Chinese society. For a long time, they were considered the mouthpiece of the Chinese central government and the ruling party. The emergence of participatory journalism provided an alternative news source for the Chinese people. In an environment where it's almost impossible to challenge the traditional media, this added outlet becomes a point of interest for many researchers. Whether the highly-controlled news environment in China motivated participatory journalists to express their views and share information on web-based platforms is another question the current study seeks to answer.

In the motivation process, self-efficacy is an important element where individuals evaluate whether they have the ability to achieve a desired outcome. Thus efficacy evaluation is an important part in motivation research. Studies have suggested that people from a high power distance society have lower efficacy beliefs due to the fact that they are not to question efficacy appraisal given by the authorities (Oettingen, Sevincer, & Gollwitzer, 2008). On the other hand, members of cultures with low power distance only loosely base their efficacy appraisal on evaluation of authorities and tend to have high efficacy beliefs.

*Individualism*, in Chinese culture, is often linked with "selfishness" and being "self-centered" while in Hofstede's 5-D model, a high score in this dimension is defined as "a

preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families only” (Hofstede). In this dimension, the United States scored much higher than China. In other words, China is characterized more as a collectivism society in which individuals can expect their relatives or in-group members to look after them in exchange for their loyalty. Many families, even after they migrated to the United States, maintain this inherent cultural character. Chinese parents are known for their financial generosity to pay for their children’s education through college, wedding expenses, and even a young couple’s first house so they can begin their new life debt-free. . The parents’ devotion to and sacrifice for their children are expected to be repaid when they are older. An old Chinese saying has 养儿防老, meaning the benefit that comes with raising a child is for him/her to take care of you when you get old. In Chinese society, children are expected to take care of their parents, especially after the parents retire, lose financial income or become ill. Sending parents to a nursing home is deemed unacceptable and disrespectful (不孝). The one child policy enforced since 1980 in China has put a tremendous burden on people born under that policy. If two only-children get married, they face a situation where they have to support four elderly parents, not counting their own children who might also depend on them financially and emotionally. It is reported that China, by the end of 2011, had 185 million people above the age of 60 and half of those people’s children are not living with them (Bai, 2013). Despite the apparent factual constraints, the Chinese government entered “visiting elderly often” into *Rights Protection Law of the People's Republic of China Elderly People* effective July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013, to strengthen the family bond.

The fundamental issue addressed by this dimension is the “interdependence a society maintains among its members” (Hofstede). It has to do with whether people’s self-image is defined as “I” or “we.” In a group setting, the interest of the group is placed higher than



the interest of an individual. During the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, a total of 286 km lanes in the heart of the city were marked as Olympic lanes and the general public were forbidden to drive on them (S. Hu, 2012). This unquestionably added inconvenience for residents and cab drivers in an already over-crowded city. At the time, the author was hired by the Associated Press and interviewed cab drivers in Beijing. When asked if the blocked lanes caused them any trouble getting around town, the responses were surprisingly positive. Cab drivers all applauded the traffic control and said it was for the greater good and to project a better image of China and Chinese people for the world to see.

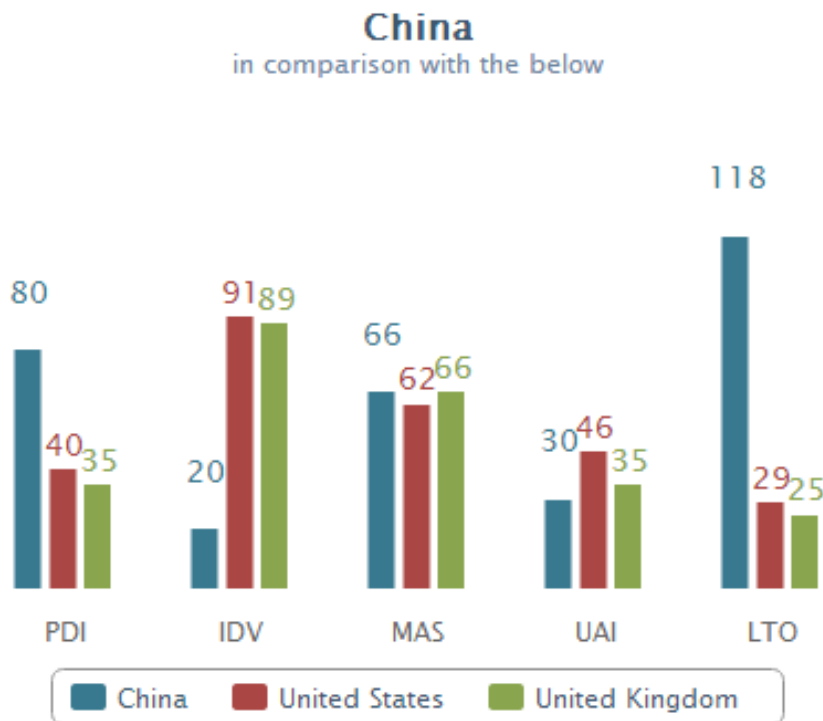


Figure 4 Cultural Index Comparisons Among China, US, and United Kingdom

On the other hand, during the Olympics in London in 2012, more than 200 taxi drivers almost brought central London to a halt in a protest against the 274 km long Olympic Games lanes. One protestor remarked that "Taxis are excluded, which is unacceptable and wrong. This is a working city and we need to get around and do our job" (Millward, 2012). Meanwhile, one netizen from Shandong Province, China, saw this news on Sina Corp.'s news portal and commented, "This is horrible! They're utterly unaware of the bigger picture!" While this may be construed as "horrible" according to a Chinese standard, it is not surprising. The chart above shows that, much like the United States, the United Kingdom scores 89 on the individualism indices (IDV), which means it's also a high individualism society.

IDV is frequently introduced into motivation studies. Consider self-verification motives, as an example. In a collectivism culture, people seek self-verification targeting context-specific self-views (such as how one is viewed in a certain group by other members), while people in individualism cultures target a global self-view (English, Chen, & Swann, 2008). Another example is the self-enhancement motive. People in individualism cultures, such as the U.S., have higher self-esteem and hence stronger motivation for personal self-enhancement than people from collectivism cultures such as Japan, where motivation to enhance the group is stronger and could result in self-sacrifice and self-denial (Higgins, Pierro, & Kruglanski, 2008). Other motivation studies took this dimension into consideration in the area of goal pursuit. Goals in collectivism culture tend to be interpersonally-achievement oriented, while in individualism culture, goals are personally oriented. Thus, which goal is more desirable may vary across cultures (Oettingen et al., 2008).

In Hofstede 's model, a high score in *Masculinity* means the society is driven by competition and achievement. Success in such a society is defined by the winner or best in the field. A low score in this dimension marks the society as more feminine, with dominant values that include caring for others and quality of life. China and the U.S. are both on the higher end in this dimension, meaning they are both masculine societies where people are success oriented (Hofstede).

“The extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these” (Hofstede) is reflected in the *Uncertainty Avoidance* score. There tend to be more written rules and regulations to guide people in different situations in high UAI cultures (Wu, 2008).

In a cross-culture study, detection of differences across cultures is definitely the trend (Brouwers, Van Hemert, Breugelmans, & van de Vijver, 2004); however, it is equally important to reveal similarities (Brown, 1991). In the UAI dimension, differences between Chinese and American cultures are less obvious. In fact, people in both cultures have relatively low UAI<sup>3</sup>, meaning they are tolerant of unorthodox behaviors and ideas. Depending on the situation, they can bend rules to suit people's needs. In terms of online behavior, individuals in cultures low in UAI tend to be more open-minded in searching for information and in the choice of new innovations (Vishwanath, 2003). Hofstede (2001) found UAI negatively correlated with the adoption of new media and use of the Internet.

In a 2008 study, Sorrentino et al. (2008) differentiated people's uncertainty orientation both across and within cultures (Japan and Canada). Uncertainty-oriented (UO) people are those who actively seek information, trying to clarify uncertainties but have little

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<sup>3</sup> Some studies have found both America and China have high UAI, (Wu, 2008). But Wu's study is only looking at university employees and on a much smaller scale compared with Hofstede's data collection.

desire to maintain clarity. They are constantly in search of information to resolve personal uncertainties, as well as those in the environment. Hofstede describes these people as low in UAI. On the other hand, certainty-oriented (CO) people have little desire to attain clarity but a strong desire to maintain it. They rely on others and sources of expertise to provide resolution. The researchers argue that while certainty orientation does not impact people's motives directly, when individual level and societal level of certainty orientation combine with achievement-related motives, they affect people's behavior<sup>4</sup>.

The last cultural dimension, *Long Term Orientation*, is closely related to the teaching of Confucius. It is defined as “the extent to which a society shows a pragmatic future-oriented perspective rather than a conventional historical short-term point of view” (Hofstede). Rooted in Confucius philosophy, Chinese culture is undoubtedly highly long-term oriented. Persistence and perseverance are normal. 先苦后甜 is a common virtue among Chinese, referring to deferred pleasure. 吃得苦中苦，方为人上人. People in China believe that one has to endure and suffer unthinkable hardship before becoming a better person who deserves a better life than others. Long term orientation is also apparent in Chinese families' financial planning. One example comes from a Chinese immigrant who wrote about Chinese money habits (Lu, 2008). Although she had apparently assimilated with American culture after 16 years spent in the United States, Lu wrote, “being frugal is a virtue, save as much as possible, pay for things in cash and always look for a bargain” are the four principles she maintained as part of her cultural heritage. Indeed, these principals are adopted by most Chinese people in their everyday life. Parents start saving money to invest in their children even before they are born. Many Chinese college students are completely unfamiliar with the concept of student

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<sup>4</sup> A model of such effects can be seen on p. 62 (Sorrentino et al., 2008).

loans; the Chinese government did not introduce the student loan program until 1999 (X. Jiang, 2001). With the one-child policy, most families in China have poured all financial resources into the only child of the family, and sometimes even extended family members will contribute to a child's education. So while many American students are amassing debts to finance college, Chinese students' education is usually paid for (McDonald, 2012). On the other hand, the United States scored 29 on LTO and is a short-term oriented society. As a result, Americans in general adopt a more pragmatic view in terms of their life goals and future plans. In a work setting, this means measuring profit and loss on a short-term base such as quarterly evaluation (Hofstede). Researchers have also investigated LTO in conjunction with advertising appeals (Yunjae, Kihan, & Lu, 2010), news frames (Xiang, 2008) and communication strategies (Zhu, Nel, & Bhat, 2006) and have confirmed that in each area LTO affects the variable of interest.

The current research's focus, motivation, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as "willingness to do something," is closely related to a person's goals and expected outcomes of a certain behavior. Individuals from long-term oriented and short-term oriented cultures evaluate goals and outcomes differently in that long-term oriented individuals are more likely to look for future gains rather than focusing on immediate returns. This will in turn impact their motivations, especially when perseverance is needed to continue contributing content on microblogs.

To put it succinctly, while culture's role is not to directly impact human motivations, it will affect and alter the process involved in translating motives into behaviors (Hofer & Bond, 2008). The cultural environment is not only the source of some implicit motives, it also constantly affects a person's explicit motivations in a given situation by "representing a major source of behavioral determinants that have their locus outside the

individual” (Pepitone, 1976 in Hofer & Bond, 2008). Researchers believe that culture exists in a society to prevent chaos and maintain order through setting social roles, normative behaviors, and prescribing what’s acceptable in a society. Emotion precedes motivation. When emotions are elicited, “culture calibrates the primed individual to the behavioral repertoires available” that are bounded by social norms and expectations in order to serve as a motivator for desired behaviors (Matsumoto & Wilson, 2008, p. 558).

## **Summary**

In this chapter, the author presented concepts and literature that are pertinent to the phenomenon of interest. The concepts of participatory journalism and convergence culture were introduced as backgrounds to describe how the phenomenon sprang into form. Participatory journalism was born before convergence culture but was cultivated and accelerated by it. Motivation research was reviewed in details from different perspectives. The original research started in the social psychology field with Maslow’s hierarchy of motivations being a popular representation. In the media field, motivation studies mainly adopted a uses and gratification approach. Numerous studies on different media found a handful of motivations for each medium. Motivations for using the internet included self-expression, entertainment, escapism, education and more. However, the majority of the studies were done from the perspective of media consumers, not media content generator.

With the advent of the social networks, studies about user generated content and their producers’ motivations started to emerge. Motivations of bloggers, especially political bloggers and their online and off line political participation attracted most researchers’ attention. After a careful review, very few studies that focused on microblogs and their content contributors’ motivations were found. Moreover, since the professional

journalists' motivations were studied from the journalistic roles perspective before, the author introduced related literature and hoping this could help understand the participatory journalists' motivations too.

Although Twitter, as a technology, is almost ten years old, studies about Twitter users were mainly descriptive in nature and there was not a comprehensive framework to differentiate user behaviors on Twitter. One relevant study proposed to differentiate meaningless tweets and meaningful ones. The study also pointed the motivation behind meaningless tweets to stress relief.

Weibo studies in China are currently in a similar situation with case studies took the main stage. Motivations of Weibo content contributors were frequently mentioned in the studies, but stayed merely speculations of the researchers, not the focus of any studies. Previous research did find a unique microblogging environment in China with government supervision.

The current study is one of the few studies that look into participatory journalists' motivations in different cultures from their own perspectives. Culture was gradually recognized as an important aspect that affects the human motivation. Hofstede's 5-dimensions culture model demonstrated the cultural differences between China and the U.S., especially in the collectivism and individualism dimension, power distance dimension and long term orientation dimension.

In the next few chapters, the study methods will be introduced followed by findings, discussions and the study will include limitations and future research at the very end.

### Chapter III Methods

Questions this study is trying to answer include

- What are the motivations of participatory journalists on Twitter (U.S.) and Weibo (China)?
- What are the differences of the motivations between these two groups of participatory journalists?

Since limited research has been done in participatory journalists' motivations, the exploratory nature of this study calls for a phenomenological approach. The purpose of a phenomenological research is to explore the *lived experience* of the participant(s) in order to illuminate and deepen the understanding of a phenomenon (Waters) and to reduce individual experiences to the general essence (Creswell, 2009). It is often used when the study is exploratory in nature (Creswell, 2009) and is especially powerful in gaining insights into people's motivations and actions (Lester, 1999). More specifically, this research will use interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Drawing on the theoretical approach of phenomenology, IPA acknowledges that the understanding of an event or an object (in this case, the microblogger) is mediated by its social-historical and cultural context (Shinebourne, 2011), so a person's *lived experience* takes center stage in an IPA study. In addition to providing descriptive interpretation of such experiences from the participants' point of view, IPA allows the researcher to also be critical and questioning "in ways which participants might be unwilling or unable to do themselves" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 189).

Freud's (1955) study about unconscious motivation suggested that people are not always aware of the events that motivate them. While explicit motives (self-attributed



motivational orientations such as power and wealth) can be easily studied by survey questions, implicit (social) motives are formed in correspondence to the environment and shaped in early stages of cognitive development. They are likely to operate outside of a person's conscious awareness (Hofer & Bond, 2008) and thus cannot be asked directly. The IPA approach offers an advantage in examining human experiences and exploring motivations buried deep down. By engaging the participants through semi-structured in-depth interviews, the researcher can then gain insights into some of the motivations even the participants themselves are not aware of.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted during the summer of 2013 between the researcher and microbloggers. The interview was chosen not only because it's the most relied on method in IPA studies (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003), but also because it's suitable for the researcher to "bracket" (Husserl, 1989) her own values and view the phenomenon from the microbloggers' perspective. As suggested by Groenewald (2004), understanding the phenomenon from the participant's point of view is only one form of bracketing. Interview is a shared experience by both the interviewer and the interviewee. It promotes "an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest." (Kvale, 1996, p. 1) It allows the participants to describe their experience in their own language "as free from the constructs of the intellect and society as possible" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 12). This consists the other form of "bracketing" at the interviewee's end.

Moreover, research has shown that implicit motives are associated with people's accessibility of emotional experiences (Woike, McLeod, & Goggin, 2003). Interviews are suitable for not only examining a person's explicit motivational system (e.g., asking direct questions such as why the person does something) but also for deciphering an

implicit motivational system (e.g., asking indirect questions such as describing the process of a certain behavior). As suggested by Hofer (2008), implicit measurements can obviate methodological problems of self-reports in multicultural research.

### **Establishing Equivalences**

This study intends to not only explore the motivations of participatory journalists on Twitter in the U.S., but also to compare the motivations between them and their counterparts in China. Comparative studies across different cultures can only be legitimate if equivalent bases of comparison are first established (Lonner, 1979). As Gudykunst (2002) suggests, functional, conceptual, linguistic, metric, and sample equivalence must be addressed in a cross-cultural communication. Other researchers also agree that meaningful comparison can only be made if sources of bias are addressed and successfully ruled out (Hofer & Bond, 2008).

*Conceptual* (Gudykunst, 2002) or *construct equivalence* is the most basic and fundamental level of equivalence (Fischer & Lun, 2008). Whether the same construct exists and can account for behavioral differences in cultures that are being studied is the main question. Construct bias is present when “the definition of a construct under investigation only partially overlaps across cultures” (Fischer & Lun, 2008, p. 106). The main construct of interest in this research is motivation. As illustrated in the literature review, both American and Chinese researchers understood motivation as what compels people to exhibit certain behaviors. When studying motivation, they seem to be asking the same question—why people are doing certain things (e.g. Li & Lin, 2012; Rafaeli et al., 2009).

*Functional equivalence* refers to the equivalence of inferences made from specific observations in different cultures (Gudykunst, 2002). If such inferences are not shared by cultures in one study, their differences must be taken into account when comparing the phenomenon. Participatory journalism is viewed as projecting great impacts in both America and China. While in China, researchers believe it can promote civil society (Shi, 2011), in America, researchers are excited to see it become an alternative source for information and play a part in building the general audience's awareness system (A. Hermida, 2010b, 2013). Both inferences were positive with the view in China being more democracy focused.

Since long interviews were used, metric equivalence did not apply to this study.

*Linguistic equivalence* was addressed in this research by the bilingual skills of the author. The author is a native speaker of Mandarin and has lived in the United States for more than six years. She received an advanced degree in Communication from a U.S. Research I institute and is now a Ph. D candidate. The interviews were conducted in the participants' first language following an interview guide (Appendix 1) that was back-translated. The variations in wording were discussed between the author and the other translator, and reconciled to ensure linguistic equivalence (Gudykunst, 2002). Although the actual interviews all deviated from the guide from time to time, the author used her best judgment to ensure the same questions were asked. Especially with this phenomenological study, the author let the interviewees take center stage during the interview. The interview guide only served as a direction and the author concentrated on allowing interviewees to describe and share their own experiences. On the interview guide, the author did not ask directly what their motivations are, instead, the author asked questions that allow participants to recall their experiences and describe them in a way that the researcher can relive the experiences along with the participant. This interview

method is frequently used in a phenomenological study and is proven to be effective to not only discover the explicit motivations but also implicit motivations that even participants themselves may not be aware of. The analysis later conducted is based on these shared experiences. Themes and patterns of motivations emerged naturally through these shared experiences rather than being self-reported by the participants.

Although the purpose of this study is not to generalize the findings to a general population, the author still considered *sample equivalence* as an important factor during cross-cultural comparisons (Gudykunst, 2002). Besides collecting the basic demographic information (age, sex, occupation) on the participants, the author also added questions such as duration of participatory journalism activities online, association with media outlets, and whether the person has received journalism training, not only to establish sample equivalence in both countries, but also as screening questions to make sure the participants fulfill the requirements.

## **Participants**

Small samples, even single-case, are often used in phenomenological studies (Lester, 1999). A single-case study offers the researcher an opportunity to view the phenomenon from different aspects while a multiple-case study can produce detailed reflections on shared experiences (Shinebourne, 2011). The purpose of this study is to describe and deepen the understanding of a phenomenon and is not to generalize the findings for the general population. Researchers suggested that a sample of five or six is suitable for a student project using IPA (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 54).

The author interviewed a total of 13 participatory journalists, with seven from China and six from the U.S. They were identified through purposive sampling (Shinebourne, 2011)

based on the purpose of the research and the author's judgment (Welman & Kruger, 1999). Samples in IPA studies tend to be small because this type of study benefits more from an intensive focus on a small number of participants. Shinebourne (2011) noticed in Brocki and Wearden's review of relevant literature that the sample sizes range from one to 30. The number of participants in the current study was determined when the author decided that the data collection had reached its theoretical saturation when participants started to repeat what others had said and patterns in participants' answers clearly emerged.

Participants in this research are microbloggers on Twitter (U.S.) and Weibo (China) who are not professional journalists or associated with any professional media outlet and are using microblogs as a tool to participate in news production on a regular basis. Some other criteria include: the user has to be active on the microblog for more than a year, participatory journalism has to be a continuous behavior rather than a one-time act, and the user has to contribute original news rather than simply retweeting or reposting. These criteria were arbitrarily made by the researcher to ensure sample equivalence. Based on previous literature, the author also recognized that motivation to start something may be different from the reasons that motivate people to continue doing something. So experience over a period of time is needed to detect if the difference really exists.

The author conducted interviews with Chinese participants during May 2013. Participants were identified by searching the keyword #公民新闻 (citizen journalism), #公民记者 (citizen journalist), #草根新闻 (grassroots journalism), #草根记者 (grassroots journalist), and #突发新闻 (breaking news) on Weibo. After searching those keywords, the author

discovered some verified<sup>5</sup> Weibo IDs such as 江苏身边事 (Everyday Happenings in Jiangsu) and 南京正在发生 (what's happening in Nanjing) that publish a collection of news from both mainstream media outlets and participatory journalists. The author went through the posts and contacted 30 Weibo users who had contributed news-related content and who, judging from the posts, are not associated with mainstream media. Initially only three people responded and accepted an interview, so the snowballing technique (Babbie, 2002) was used. This is a non-probability sampling technique that is commonly used in qualitative field research and primarily for exploratory purposes. It is appropriate when “the members of a special population are difficult to locate” (p. 174).

Following the procedure suggested by Babbie (2002), each microblogger was asked if they knew someone else who is also doing the similar things. Through recommendations, the researcher was able to look at profiles of interview candidates to make sure they fit the selection criteria and then contacted them to find out if they were able to participate. When the number of people interviewed reached nine, the researcher noticed that in their responses to questions and descriptions about their experiences, similar patterns were repeated and little new information was added. Theoretical saturation was reached, so the author decided to conclude the Chinese data collection.

The interview averaged thirty minutes per interviewee. Two out of the seven interviews were conducted face-to-face while the other five were conducted over the phone or Skype due to the distance between the researcher and the interviewee. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in two quiet cafés of the participants' choice in Nanjing,

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<sup>5</sup> This is a function of Sina Weibo. If a user or an organization fulfills the following requirements: has more than 30 fans, is a fan of more than 30 other users, has a valid picture, and the ID is linked to a cellphone, they can submit required copies of their IDs and employment documents, and be verified by Sina Weibo. After verification, a “V” symbol will show beside their user name. Research has demonstrated that audiences perceive news as more credible from an identified source (Radovic & Rui, 2013). Perceived news credibility is not a focus of this research, but can be part of future research.

Jiangsu Province, China. The two cafés had similar surroundings. None of the interviewees were offered any incentives.

The American data was collected in June and July 2013. The researcher first tried to recruit American participants through Demotix, an iPhone application that hosts a citizen journalism network with more than 30,000 members globally. In order to increase the possibility of conducting face-to-face interviews, the author searched Demotix for stories happening closer to her location and identified several citizen journalists. The author then examined their Demotix profiles and found the potential participants' Twitter accounts. However, when the researcher was trying to read through the potential participants' tweets to qualify them for interviews, a problem occurred. Demotix is a platform for citizen journalists to provide their work in exchange of financial gains, so although the pictures and articles are visible for the public to see on Demotix, other media outlets cannot use the data unless they purchase it through Demotix. That directly results in the fact that those citizen journalists did not publish the same information on Twitter or had that information protected. Due to the difficulty in recruiting this group of participatory journalists and the fact that there is not a comparable platform in China, the author decided to use the same procedure that was adopted to recruit Chinese participants.

The researcher entered keywords such as #citizen journalist, #participatory journalist, #citizen journalism, #participatory journalism, and #grassroots journalism on Twitter and found dozens of active accounts contributing participatory journalism content.



Figure 5 A tweet sent by Hypervocal account

Accounts tweeting a collection of participatory journalism pieces are also found. An example is an account called Hypervocal, which describes itself as “Internet Sherpas. Purveyors of the vital and the viral. Next-generation news site. Blog network. Occasional rouser of rabble.” It not only collects and re-tweets participatory journalism stories every hour but also recommend accounts to follow for specific areas of interest. One example can be seen in the figure above. After reviewing the accounts found through keyword searches on Twitter and re-tweets on Hypervocal, the author contacted 30 participatory journalists. Initially, only three responded, so the snow balling technique was used again to identify more participants. The author used the same criteria as adopted when selecting the Chinese microbloggers to pre-screen the American participants. Three more interviews were scheduled. Only one of the six interviews was conducted face-to-face in a coffee shop. One was conducted via Skype video call. The participant was at home at the time of calling. The other four interviews were all conducted through telephone calls due to the long travel distance or the participants’ preference. As with the Chinese participants, no incentive was given to any American participants.



## **Semi-Structured Interview**

IPA requires flexible data collection methods and the semi-structured interview is the most frequently-used method in this type of research. Unlike a structured interview, which is equivalent to an oral questionnaire, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher and the participant to enter into a conversation (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003). The interview schedule only serves as a guide and does not have to be strictly followed. Rather, the researcher will reconstruct follow-up questions based on the responses from the participants. Participants are allowed to take the lead and direct the conversations. The advantage of a semi-structured interview lies in the unpredictability of the answers. New topics or areas of interests may be elicited and unexpected patterns may emerge.

As suggested by Smith and Osborn (2003), the interview schedule was constructed by the author with open-ended, non-value-laden questions that were put into a sequence (Appendix 2). The participants were asked to recall their microblog posting behaviors chronologically and describe their experiences, feedback, and feelings in each stage of their microblogging lives. To avoid asking leading questions or questions that are too specific, the author utilized the *funnelling* technique (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 60) so that both the participants' general view and specific concern could be recorded. For example, participants were asked how and if he/she feels microblogging has changed his/her life. Depending on the response, the researcher continued to ask how the participant feels microblogging has impacted his/her personal life, interpersonal relationships, and other people around them. Then the researcher asked if they felt they benefitted or were frustrated by the impacts they observed and how.

Since the semi-structured interviews generally last for a considerably long time, the researcher made sure to suggest a time and location where the interview would not be

interrupted. In this study, the interviews lasted from a half hour to an hour and a half, with the participants making the final decisions of when and where the interviews were conducted.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed afterward in their original language. Because this study is seeking to find the deep-down motivations of the participants, which may not be evident to the researcher during the interview process, recording of the interviews became necessary to help the researcher preserve the original data so that she was able to review it and dig deeper into the meanings of the conversations.

### **Data Analysis**

All data collected was transcribed and analyzed in its original language and cultural setting to make sure no meaning was lost during translation. The data analysis followed the steps proposed by Smith & Osborn (2003) and Shineborne (2011). The author transcribed all the interviews herself, so she could familiarize herself with the data. After this was completed, she read through all the transcripts and got a general idea of what had been said. Since a phenomenological study is a holistic one (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003), the researcher has to know the whole perspective before she can continue with phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1989). Because the total number of interviewees was not large, no computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was used to help with the following coding steps.

Coding is a process of continual reflecting upon the data and asking analytical questions so that themes can emerge and data can be separated into different segments (Creswell, 2009). The goal is to make what's implicit explicit and generalize to an extent that the analysis is not too situation-specific (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The author printed all the

transcripts with wide margins so she could write down themes and descriptions beside each segment.

The author started the coding process focusing on one participant. Recommended by Smith and Osborn (2003), this approach is often used when analyzing large amounts of data with complexity. The process consisted of reading through the transcript, highlighting parts that the researcher considered significant, and writing down statements about those segments. Then, by re-reading the whole transcript, the author put emphasis on discovering emerging themes while continuing to add to the parts she felt were significant. This step was repeated several times to make sure that all themes were captured. The author then read through the data again and edited the descriptions until they well represented the data in each segment. In order to connect all the emerging themes, the author recorded them chronologically on a sheet. By analyzing the connections among the themes, the author noticed that some started to cluster together as patterns and some emerged as superordinate concepts. Rearrangements were made to the original list of themes so that the structure was more coherent. The clusters were then renamed and key words, phrases, and descriptions were written down beside them, along with the transcript page and line numbers to facilitate finding the original sources subsequently.

After the analysis of the first case was done, the author moved on to the next participant and used the final theme list from the first case to inform analysis of other transcripts. By studying each case independently, the author avoided the biased coding and the possibility of forcing the data into existing themes. At the same time, using the theme list from the first case helped the author identify differences between transcripts and keep refining the list so it was more comprehensive.

After each transcription was analyzed, the author summarized each interview which served as a “validity check” to see if the essence of each interview has been correctly captured (Hycner, 1985).

Comparison and contrasts in this study were done in two phases. First is inner-culture comparison; then the cross-culture comparison. After all cases were analyzed in both countries in their original languages, the author took all the theme structure sheets from one country and conducted a comparing and contrasting process among them to construct a final table of superordinate themes for each country, respectively.

Before the comparisons between two countries were made, the Chinese final theme list was translated into English and back-translated to ensure linguistic equivalence. The reason that the translation took place in this late stage of analysis was to preserve the cultural and social context of the experiences shared by the participants.

The next chapter will present findings followed by the author’s interpretations of those findings in Chapter V along with limitations and future research.

## Chapter IV Findings

The phenomenological approach focuses on exploring the phenomenon through the objects' or participants' lived experiences. The tool used in such studies should assist the author in viewing the experiences from the participants' perspective, looking through their own eyes and re-living the actions with them that reflect and define the phenomenon in question.

The in-depth interview is an ideal tool that allows the researcher to interact with the participants. It promotes a free environment where the participants can elaborate on their experiences with stories in their own words. Findings of a phenomenological study are embedded in the participants' descriptions and the interactions between the participants and the researcher. A summary of what each participant articulated lays the groundwork for further analysis and discussions.

Initially, the author conducted a total of 14 in-depth interviews with six participants from the United States (AP) and eight from China (CP). One of the Chinese participants, after the completion of the interview, decided to withdraw from the study. So the author ended up with a total of 13 interviewees. The interview duration ranged from 20 minutes to an hour, with the average being 45 minutes. In this chapter, the author will provide a comprehensive overview of the findings from each participant without drawing inferences from these findings. Since the author used semi-structured interview method and constructed a general interview guide to lead the interviews, this chapter will be arranged according to the interview questions that were asked.

The intention of this chapter is to present findings. In the next chapter, the author will discuss how these findings resemble or differ and provide interpretations of the meanings for these comparisons and contrasts.

### **Demographic Information**

The following form provides an overview of the interviewees' demographic information including age group, gender, occupation, years active on the microblog, and participatory journalism content area. Years active refers to the year the participatory journalists started to contribute content online either on their own blogs or on Twitter and Weibo. A lot of American participants started Twitter account to promote their blogs where they posted the PJ content. So in order to find out about their motivations, it's important to note the time they spent on their blog too.

Table 1 Participants Demographic Information

Participant	Age Group	Gender	Occupation	Years Active	Content
CP1	20s	Male	College student	2010	Campus News
CP2	30s	Male	Marketing	2011	Local News
CP3	30s	Male	Police Officer	2011	Criminal News & Community News
CP4	30s	Male	Government employee	2010	Community News & Sports News & Government News
CP5	30s	Male	Sales	2010	Local News, Hot Topic
CP6	30s	Female	Financial industry employee	2010	Hot Topic
CP7	30s	Male	IT company partner	2011	Technology News
AP1	60s	Male	Retired salesman	2009	Sports news
AP2	60s	Male	Semi-Retired, software businessman	2008	Political news
AP3	40s	Female	Real Estate Agent	2008	Real Estate News
AP4	30s	Male	Small Business Owner	2007	Local News
AP5	30s	Male	Cooperate employee	2007	Local News
AP6	20s	Male	Self-employed	2008	International News

All participants started to use microblogs not long after they were launched in the respective countries. Twitter was launched in the U.S. in 2006 and Sina Weibo was launched in China in 2009. All but one Chinese participant were at their 30s, while American participants' age group spread out. There was only one female participant from each country. The author did not select the participants based on their gender and did not intentionally exclude female participants.

### **Time Spent on Microblogs**

The following form shows how much time each participant spent on microblog and their other PJ platforms such as blogs. The quotes column included related comments the participants made about their time spent.



**Table 2 Table of Participants Time Spent**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Time spent per day</b>	<b>Quotes and Notes</b>
CP1	More than 6 hours	<p>“I am on there whenever I have time. This is how passionate I am toward new media.”</p> <p>“I regularly stay up to 3, 4 in the morning.”</p>
CP2	4 hours	<p>“Part of my job is closely related to Weibo marketing, so this (activity) can be considered part of my job. It’s a process of research and analysis.”</p>
CP3	One and half hours	
CP4	3 to 4 hours	
CP5	4 hours	
CP6	2 hours	<p>“When I am on subway, or before I go to sleep, or when I am bored. I would browse and post on Weibo...Except for when I am working, I would spend most of my time on Weibo. I would use the time I used to spend on reading newspapers.”</p>
CP7	Not sure	<p>“It’s not like you can calculate it. Time accumulates quickly. You cannot get to where I am overnight.”</p>
AP1	10 hours	<p>“Most successful people work more hours each day.”</p>
AP2	2 or 3 hours	<p>“It takes a lot of time reading stuff. Reading other blogs, reading newspaper web sites, reading news sites, news feeds, all that sort of thing. And a lot of time is spent sort of monitoring when there are controversial things going on.”</p>
AP3	3 hours a week for blog, not sure for Twitter	<p>“I am religiously on target about posting the post I’m supposed to post.”</p>

**Table 2. Continued.**

Participant	Time spent per day	Quotes and Notes
AP4	Used to be 10%, not much any mores	<p>“If you are really working it, you don’t have children, it’s kind of just like your hobby, probably 10% of your time. That’s when I was still in school...We really don’t have time to blog now. Not that we don’t want to, it’s really just stuff, so Twittering, ...it’s nice and easy way to put it (news) out.”</p>
AP5	Used to be 20 to 30 hours a week, now only 20 minutes per week on Twitter	<p>“When we first started, the blog took me specifically, I have always been the main one that worked on it. It took me specifically probably 20 to 30 hours a week. A lot of that was focused on the brand, the design, the marketing. There was also the editorial piece, keeping an editorial calendar and following people to get articles and generating new topics, you know, really being an editor. “</p> <p>“Our day-to-day work really takes over our time and really becomes a labor of love we just cannot maintain”</p>
AP6	13 to 14 hours	<p>“All the time. Literally like I said it’s almost addicting. By the time I want to sleep, it’s 13-to-14 hours. But for Twitter I use it also to get news. I don’t watch TV anymore. This is how I get my news. I follow journalists out there and read their stories. That’s how I get my news now.”</p>

## **Motivations to Get Started**

One commonality among all participants is they all started to use microblog when it first came out.

### **Curiosity**

Curiosity towards new things and new technology was mentioned as a motivation by multiple interviewees.

CP1: I was still in high school, right before the college entrance exam, cellphone was strictly forbidden in the classroom. My adviser had to break several of my cellphones (to stop me from using Weibo) ... but Weibo was so new, it barely got started.

CP4: I was always drawn to new things. Weibo was not as popular as Facebook or Twitter. It was completely new in China. ... I found how much information it could disseminate in a blink of the eye. You don't even have to go to any other sources online to learn about news. I can get everything on Weibo. This was what got me started.

CP5: You know I have always been fascinated by the digital and online world. I would try everything, anything new. I didn't take Weibo seriously at first, but later I found it interesting as more and more people were engaged in the conversation.

AP2: The main thing I remember, a long, long time ago I started reading an article in the *Newsweek* about Graham Reynolds and (his) blog. I have never heard about such a thing. You know Graham Reynolds is a professor at UT. I looked at his

blog and said, “Wow, this looks fun.” And you can vent your frustrations and self-expression there. That sort of thing.

AP3: ... what’s so interesting is I think when I started that, I hit a kind of perfect time in a way because Twitter was relatively new in 2008. I actually found out about it through Jack Leos at the *Knoxville News Sentinel* (who) had written about it. He’s like, “I am trying this Twitter thing, you follow me, I follow you back,” so I followed Jack and I followed his followers.

AP6: I would say that I joined it before it went very mainstream ... I joined to kind of see what it was, was it the next Facebook or Myspace, that sort of thing. I joined to see what it was. Obviously it turned into what it is now; it’s amazing.

### **Sense of belonging**

Early adopters tend to be small, exclusive groups. Many participants in this study also shared a positive experience of belonging to a small yet highly selective group. The groups were usually characterized by celebrity’s and media professionals’ participation.

CP1: I started to use Weibo really early on. At the time a lot of verified accounts or celebrities were among my followers. When I was turning 18 years old, I asked them to re-post my “adult resolutions.” My resolutions were re-posted more than a thousand times so I was invited to be on TV.

AP2: ...we started a thing called Rocky Top Brigade. We were trying to identify every blog in Tennessee; this was when it was new and there were only a handful. We had this little fun online association of all the bloggers. By doing that, that

helps everybody's traffic, because everybody's linking to each other, having each other on the blogging world. So that sort of helped promoted it.

AP3: At that time, people had 50 followers, you know. And a lot of them were *Knoxville News Sentinel* people or news people and they were all on trying to figure out "How can we use this for news?", so I met a lot of people in the media inadvertently. That wasn't my goal, but it turned out to be a really good thing because I know a lot of people in the media. But there are three closest of us. We still kind of joke "those were some good old Twitter days" because we made some really solid connections on Twitter when things were smaller. And you know now I have like 1,700 followers, I try to follow them back, but I cannot keep up with it in the same way like I used to. Like there used to be a lot more one-on-one communication.

AP4: We were in Twitter before a lot of people were, so there was a small community, you know, the actual Twitter thing was awesome when it first started. It was really tight, people are friends and I am sure it's still that way today, but they have that and Facebook before the masses have really joined and propelled this into ...

### **Observation and Prior Research**

Most participants in this study have intentionally or unintentionally looked at other examples online before they started their own PJ blog and microblog. Some of them found successful examples and wanted to model after them.

CP1: You know there is a Weibo account called "learning fans." It attracted so much media attention nowadays, even the Chinese Central TV Station. It would

post close-up pictures of Jinping Xi (current Chairman of China). The pictures were taken so close, even other official media could not get those. Anyway, (because of the pictures), the Weibo account was so popular at that time, it's still very popular now. I even edited some "Baidu-pedia" for it (counterpart of Wikipedia in China).

CP2: ... one day, I was bored, so I saw Wenzhou Grassroots News on Weibo. I was thinking, "I could do that too." I used to be a journalism major; I was even a real journalist. I wanted to do it to build up connections and get to know the city.

CP2. After the speed train accident, I found out that the Wenzhou Grassroots News is spreading firsthand information including (the) latest photographs from the accident site, something unobtainable for conventional journalists. He posted original stories, as well as re-posting other people's stories. He was very popular. I thought this way you be able to receive information directly from your fellow netizens; at the same time it functioned as an information hub. You don't have to be at the scene to gain firsthand information.

AP3: In late 2007, the market was bad, it was really bad, my business was really bad, and it was winter time, which is a bad time for (real estate) agents. I was sitting around and thinking, "OK, I am either have to get out of the business, or I have to do something else." So I was online exploring what's going on in other markets, kind of looking for what other people did I haven't and I was kind of finding all these blogs other people had. I was like, "Wait, why isn't there anybody writing this about Knoxville?" It seems such a no-brainer to me so I started researching and there was one person (who) was kind of writing, but was really selling oriented. You know, it was kind of like "Buy, buy, buy;" it was very

agent-focused. Then I was like, “Wait, nobody was doing this for Knoxville” and it was literally like at midnight and I went online and got a blogger account and I was like, “OK, I am going to set aside the stuff and get it going before anybody else get the chance to do it.” And that’s how I got started.

AP6: I started out by following a few people. All that just evolved into me following more and more people kind of generally; evolved (to) me following a lot of news people, journalists, personalities and producers. So that’s really kind of how I gained a lot of followers so on and so forth. And they really kind of made the Twitter for me. Following these brilliant journalists, they have great stories they tweet out and if I like them, I will tweet it out myself or if I see something I will tweet it out and they will retweet it. That’s just really a means of Twitter, just how everything builds off everything.

Some other participants were intentionally looking for certain type of blog or microblog and could not find any, so they started their own. CP3 and AP1 were such cases.

CP3: I found there are not a lot of “公务微博<sup>6</sup>” or “official Weibo” online. There was a time when rumors about certain things were all over the place...rumors spread especially fast on Weibo, much faster than any traditional media. But there was not an official source on Weibo that can refute the rumor, especially rumors about the police department. Whenever there are something happening, people tend to exaggerate it on Weibo. Exaggerations would quickly become rumors. But

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<sup>6</sup> CP3 defined “公务微博” or “official Weibo” as those operated by government staff or that concentrated on sharing information coming from government entities such as police departments, fire departments, administration of taxation, etc.

there was not an official platform to refute those rumors. I see it as an opportunity to establish an “official Weibo” myself.

AP1: It was in November 2009. I guess a bit of background is I am now 65 years old. At the time, I just quit the job and had nothing to do. I went online and read some blog(s), various chat rooms and so forth. And (I) just thought it would be fun to do myself. Since I had issues with some of the boards and some of the chat rooms that people were inhospitable, I thought it would be a good idea to form a blog where people are nice to people.

### **Technology**

AP1 and AP2 are the two oldest participants in this study. Technology did not become a hurdle for them to contribute PJ content. On the contrary, they were both confident in their abilities to keep up with the technology changes and are constantly seeking new platforms for their PJ contribution.

AP1: I use Google Plus. It’s becoming more and more important. I think Google Plus over time is going to replace Twitter; that’s my opinion. I am a Google user. I use (an) Android phone; all of my stuff (is) Google. And I use Gmail. The thing I am most excited about is Google hangouts online. They just started to use it. This fall we are planning to produce shows on Google hangouts online. Pre-games, interviews: you talk about making the beat writers mad, when we go to interviews, we will be going with phones that will be broadcasting interviews alive. When everybody else is taking notes using shorthands, we will be showing them then; we will be video-taping it. It will take them two hours to get it online; people will have already seen it on Bulldog Illustrated. That’s going to be great.



Of course, the more savvy writers will start doing it soon. We will still be first. You are talking about citizen journalists. The point I am trying to make here is that we are going to be citizen media. What we are doing essentially is no difference from a TV station, except we don't have a million-dollar truck to broadcast it. We only need a cellphone and Internet to broadcast it.

### **Association with Organizations**

Chinese participants exhibited different mentality from American participants when registering for their Weibo accounts. They frequently used the word “we” instead of “I” when talking about how they registered for the accounts and began the postings. Although none of them received direct order from their superior at work or any organizations they belong to, CP1, 3, 4, 7 all expressed that their accounts also represented the organization they work for.

CP1: I started my Weibo not to gossip. I started it because I saw Tencent<sup>7</sup> Education was recruiting volunteers to report campus news. All I needed to do was to walk around campus with my cellphone...snap pictures, and post it onto Weibo. Weibo can represent our university... it is very important to use Weibo to build an image for our school.... I spend every minute online collecting news about my university. I have accounts at Renren, comic club, online forum, Sina and Tencent Weibo that I would go on and browse every day. I read a lot and take in tons of information, including what I hear from other people. Then I edit this information together and present it on my Weibo to showcase the University.

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<sup>7</sup> Tencent Holdings Limited is a Chinese investment holdings company that started out as an Internet company. Today it has a great presence and major market share in the fields of entertainment, Internet, mass media, and mobile phone value-added services in China (Alon & Zhang, 2009).

CP3: The bureau opened an account first, and then the station followed. Public Weibo was pretty boring initially. Because Weibo has maximum character restriction, one cannot post too much under each post. Things like “6 tips on how to prevent burglary:” each tip would end up filling the entire post. This is self-defeating because no one cares enough to actually read them. Later I tried to come up with alternative ways to attract more attention, and this is my brainchild.

### **Motivations to Continue**

All participants were asked how they persevered and continued to spend time on posting PJ content on Weibo and Twitter. Large number of followers, treating it as an interest, earning other’s respects, self-expression, self-enhancement and branding were all mentioned by multiple participants.

### **Number of Followers**

Many participants measure the success of their microblog with number of followers and number of re-tweets. Most participants consider both the quantity and quality of the followers play an important part in supporting their online activities.

AP6: Things that kind of motivated me I think definitely the follower number. I think it kind of helped. I think people can be selfish about it, but it definitely helps when your tweets get rewarded by these followers. And I would also say by the quality of the followers, if I get a follower who’s a journalist or who I respect, I mean that’s a huge thrill, it’s almost a high, it’s like, “Wow, this guy follows me?” ... You would get appraised, people would say, “Hey, good job” whatever the story you were working on. I think that’s very rewarding.

CP1: I don't like "zombie fans." They don't have a profile picture, only send low quality postings, and only re-post; nothing original. Zombie fans also follow a large number of Weibo accounts, but they hardly have any followers of their own. They never interact with you. I opened my Weibo account to let more people know about the things I care (about). If we don't interact, I might just as well put those in my diary. Why bother (to post on Weibo)? I want people to follow me, to pay attention to me, and to recognize my effort. Even if I got thousands of fans, if we don't interact, it's nothing.

CP6: Because at that time I knew the topic was very sensitive, and a lot of materials online are transient, and I just happened to post it. Later that post went viral, and it was reposted more than 10,000 times. I was monitoring the changes that night, and I found out that it was re-posted 10,000 times. Normally, anything that has been re-posted that many times will be put under the hot Weibo section. Eventually it was.

CP7: I consider my Weibo very successful. The China Cloud Storage Forum Weibo was managed by us. Since last October when we registered, we now have more than 10,000 fans. Every posting could be re-posted five or six hundred times; or at least dozens of times.

## Interest

Many participants described their activities on microblogs as their hobby, not part of the job and something fun that they enjoy doing every day.

CP6: My profession is in finance. News doesn't relate to my work that much. All I needed was some economic news, etc. I guess it's just one of my hobbies (posting PJ content on Weibo). I am a girl with many hobbies, but I do not dig too deep in just one.

AP2: I guess it's because it's not a job, I don't HAVE TO do it; nobody is making me doing it. I am not dependent on it for a living, I would be starving if I was.  
(laught)

AP5: I guess we keep going now me and Brandon still behind it is (because) we don't want to see the brand go away. I mean, people were so drawn to it, such big fans of it, I don't want to let them down, but I still want to keep it going. So we are really doing it because we still love to do it.

AP6: It's a lot of work but I do it because I enjoy it. It's just something I do; it's work outside of work, it's just something I do and I love.

CP5 described his online activities as a "habit" rather than a hobby.

CP5: Weibo is very convenient. You can find many applications to access it ... Now everyone's used to follow(ing) celebrities on Weibo, it's an easy way to obtain information ... I don't think I will get tired of Weibo in the foreseeable future. It has become a part of my life. It's like I used to get up and buy a morning

paper; now I get up and browse my Weibo feeds and post something. This is a habit now.

For AP6, it was more extreme and close to an “addiction”.

AP6: It (Twitter) was actually recommended to me by (a) former colleague who works in TV news. I was at the time as well between jobs and she said, “Hey, give this a go: we think this is kind of a cool. It’s new kind of social networking site; we think it could be kind of big.” So I kind of took her advice wisely and that’s how it started and it’s something I use every single day. I don’t think I can’t live without it ... Aside from tweeting for my job, (pause), maybe 3 or 4 hours. Pretty much whenever I get home, I hop on my laptop, have it open, while I am watching a movie or some TV shows. I open it on my phone if I stop at red lights, it’s kind of addicting, for me at least.

### **Earning Respect**

Earning others’ respects and recognition is the most prominent motivational factor among all participants. Both American and Chinese participants were asked to describe their moments of satisfaction and what are some of the proudest moments for them, the majority of the answers involve recognitions from peers, superiors, main stream media or authorities.

AP2: I used to call myself S\*\*\*, I was pretty famous in the blogging world. I was supposed to be anonymous, but we went out for parties, gatherings and a lot of things, a lot of people knew who I was. And even city official(s) will treat me like a legitimate media source and send me press release(s); that sort of thing. ... I got involved in the East Tennessee Society of Professional Journalists in the past. I

am not really much anymore, but I used to go to their functions. I have gotten (an) award from them. I used to help them a little bit. I guess I can still be a journalist, but you know, I am a software developer. That's my profession, the rest are just my hobby. Like photography, kayaking and stuff .... I got invited to go to the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver when they nominated Obama. The Democratic National Committee was looking at what they call 50 states blogging poll,.They had the bloggers from each state; we were able to be the official DNC bloggers from Tennessee. So that was pretty awesome. That was gratifying. That was a great trip; some amazing stuff.

AP3: Carly Harrington, who's a business writer, did a front page business article about several different small business owners (who) used Twitter and there was a picture of me and my cat...What's so interesting is several years ago, I don't even know if they still have it up. But K\*\*\*.com was like an entertainment website. It belongs to (the) *News Sentinel*. ... But they put up a neighborhood section. It's very broad: north, south, east, west, downtown — and right before they put it up, I ran into the people, I didn't know they were going to do that. I ran into them at a cocktail party and they were really picking my brain. “How do you do this? What do you ... ?” Kind of the things we are doing right now and literally two weeks later they put up what they called a neighborhood guide and I was like ... “I would have written it and put my name on it for free.” I understand they got a job to do and they did what they had to, but at the same time, it's interesting, it was like “Are they copying me?” It's just such an inherent, basic idea that anybody would do it.

AP4: I think there's some roles we probably play in the community. You know there are so many people involved in it at the beginning. The brand was so well put. We were interviewed by WBIR. I started noticing that people would copy us, you know; I wouldn't say copy us, getting inspiration — that kind of stuff. People actually try to make money in the news field, the journalism field. We were just having fun; we were just joking around. These people actually were like, "How do you do this? How did you think of this?" and we were like, we didn't really (thought it through), we were just having a good time with it, you know. ... I thought it was cool just the fact that somebody reaches out and says, "Hey, I have been in school for a long period of time and I don't have a job and I really want to do this thing on K\*\*\*; I like it." And just people asking what's going on with it. Just the fact people know it's there I think is kind of gratifying... We kind of serve as a K\*\*\* Chamber of Commerce, K\*\*\* Visitors Center or as an extension of those.

AP5: When NPR news contacted us, they did a national story on hyper-local news: that was definitely a milestone in K\*\*\* history. They interviewed Brandon and me. You can actually find the audio on their website. That was probably the biggest moment for us. That's when we kind of realized that we were being taken seriously and that we were being viewed as the subject matter expert on something like hyper-local media.

CP1: I became the president of our News Club on campus ... our club publication "Morning Breeze" was awarded three star campus publication designated by the Communication Association of China ... Recently, I received an award for best campus Weibo practice on behalf of my university at a conference in Changzhou.

CP1 then mentioned many other opportunities and awards his PJ content on Weibo has brought him, including recognition from the university's higher administration, attending a Weibo conference and giving a talk to college professors and club presidents. Chinese participants in this study were particularly proud of any recognition they received from the authority.

CP2: My Weibo is different from the others. Because of my Weibo, I was recognized by the City of Jinan Communication Department and Shandong Province Qingdao Daily as one of the Top Ten responsible citizens. I was also selected as a member of the citizen supervising council ... On top of that, local media treat me as a news source all the time. TV stations, newspaper and even news websites would solicit information from me.

### **Self-Expression**

Microblog being a social networking platform provides a venue for self-expression. This function was valued by almost all participants to express their views, relieve their frustrations in life, and help them adapt to new environment.

AP2: ... the other thing was a lot of the media around here are more conservative views towards things, and I thought this should be an outlet for a liberal progressive kind of voice. ... A long, long time ago I started reading an article in *Newsweek* about Graham Reynolds and his blog...I looked at his blog and said, "Wow, this looks fun." And you can vent your frustrations and self-expression there.

AP3: It's to my advantage. Because I can do one (tweet) really fast. If I am in a showing, at a closing, like when ... I think it's absolutely to my advantage. And



you know about half of my tweets are about real estate and the other half is about stupid stuff about my cats or whatever. It's also, I think, a great way for people to get to know me without meeting me. If they don't like my personality, they are not gonna like to ride in a car with me for three days looking for houses.

Chinese participants also used Weibo to express themselves, but they are more concerned about freely expressing their views on political issues.

CP1: I love Weibo. I want to try my best to express myself; express the things others need to know through Weibo. I would post some opinions about political issues and even about media personnel. I want to express myself through this channel, even if my audience does not react, I will still do it.

CP3: I would post things on Weibo that are not considered confidential (by the Police Department). On one hand, I want all citizens to know what our policemen are doing. On the other hand, in the event of breaking news or rumor, I would use my Weibo to clarify and allow people to see from my angle to know what's really happening.

CP5: Weibo is part of my life now. It's a way for me to obtain and share information and news. I found it a good way to express myself to others online. It's hard to do it in real life; to sit down with friends and really discuss what you are thinking about deep down. When friends are hanging out, we talk about party, food, drink and we gossip. There was rarely any moment to share more profound thoughts. So I opened Weibo as another channel for people to really know me. ... I always show my true self online ... On the discussion forums such as Tianya, I only browse and observe. But I would get things (off) of my chest on Weibo. I

found myself more and more self-constrained in real life, even when I ran into things that upset me. But I would use my words to let it all out on Weibo.

### **Self-Enhancement and Career Advancement**

Through microblog, many participants found ways for self-enhancement, resume building and self-education. While they were writing for their blog and microblogs, they were also absorbing information and advance their own knowledge.

AP3: Foreclosure Watch, which is one of my other weekly posts in the neighborhood of the week, gives me, you know, we can get so bogged down showing houses whatever, we are not stepping back to look at the market as a whole. So people ask me what are the odds (of) finding a foreclosure in (a) certain area, I am going to tell them, not very good because there are only 145 foreclosures in (the) Knoxville county are., I know that because I combed through all the numbers. So I can stay on top of that for me and for my clients. All, kind of, works together to be very beneficial for me; very beneficial for my clients. And I can tell the clients, most of these foreclosures have been listed very close to market price, they are selling between 5 or 6 percent of market price, so ...

Participants CP1, 5, 7 and AP1, 5, 6 are also particularly interested in advancing their career through Weibo and Twitter, especially CP1 and AP6 who are still in school or fresh out of school.

CP1: This is where my interest lies. I want to pursue a career in the field of network media. Even though many people complain such profession is hard and tedious with regular late nights of story writing, I still hold strong interest in it, partly because I don't like what I am learning now at school... I wish to find a job

in an Internet company, such as an editor. Or I can join a traditional media outlet, such as a newspaper, and help them explore the new territory. I can also learn to develop new products, and how to run new media as a business.

AP6: One of the reasons I am working on Hyper Vocal is just to get more exposure for my work. Working in the news business, you don't always get the opportunity to put your name on your work, especially if you are a reporter or something. So with Twitter, I definitely have gotten some good exposure from different people. I have gotten some tweets from people who worked in New York Times, and other organizations, Huffington Post, National news organizations. That's been very cool. That's been really helpful in getting my name out I think it has helped me, I think it will give me some good (exposure). It's definitely a brand, I think it's still in development. But people started to see something that are from me and kind of my style.

### **Interaction with Audience**

Participants in this study were asked about their interactions with their fans, followers or audience and how that has affected their decision on their online activities. Most participants had an idea of who their followers are and are tailoring their content and posting time according to their perceived audience needs and browsing routine.

CP1: I know my fans; they do not only follow me. They follow many people simultaneously. If I do not send out my post at the right time, the right moment, my Weibo posts will be submerged by other celebrities' Weibo entries. People tend to view Weibo at a certain time of the day. If you missed it, that's it. So I did a little research and always tried to seize the moment ... I try not to send too

many Weibo posts, or bombard my followers with it, otherwise people would stop following. I only send three-to-five posts per day, all at different times: one in the morning, one at noon and one at night. I found out most people respond to my posts at night, so I decided to concentrate on the evening posts. But it always depends. I try to analyze (follower pattern). The goal is to maximize my Weibo impact and to let more people know.

CP3: Since I started to post on Weibo, I found out most of our citizens are really nice people. I can tell from my interactions with them. As long as I take responsibilities of what I do at work (police department) within my jurisdiction, they all applaud my efforts. The society is not as deformed as some might say and the media is not always misleading people. Although I got questioned from time to time on my Weibo, I generally received more positive feedback.

Like CP3 said, the audience feedback is an important factor that encouraged the participatory journalists to continue with their work. Some participants even developed off line relationships with their audience which in turn benefited their career or business.

CP2: It is all about building social connections. I made a lot of friends through Weibo. As we understand more about Weibo, it is in fact a medium based on social connection, and people use that connection to promote their story. I follow many Weibo users who have larger influence over the local community, the so-called opinion leaders, including some public official accounts, such as the bureau of public security. I will @ them so that occasionally they will re-post my stories. ... All I wanted was to get familiarized with Jinan. I was looking for a way to come back. Because I was in Beijing and I couldn't come back immediately. Therefore I tried to come up with some idea, and I thought this

might be a good one, and it turned out to be true. Weibo helped me build connections, which I benefited from tremendously. I used to have very few friends in Jinan, but now through Weibo, I have friends in every branch of the local government, as well as businesses. After I came back, life couldn't be easier because of these connections.

AP3: I hit a kind of perfect time in a way because Twitter was relatively new in 2008. I actually found out about it through Jack Leos at the *Knoxville News Sentinel* (who) had written about it. He's like, "I am trying this Twitter thing, you follow me, I follow you back," so I followed Jack and I followed his followers. At that time, people had 50 followers, you know. And a lot of them were *Knoxville News Sentinel* people or news people and they were all trying to figure out how can we use this for news, so I met a lot of people in the media inadvertently. That wasn't my goal, but it turned out to be a really good thing because I know a lot of people in the media. But there are three closest of us we still kind of joke "Those were some good old Twitter days" because we made some really solid connections on Twitter when things were smaller.

AP6: I think I have always been attracted to news. I have always had a part of me attracted to it so I am always watching TV and all that stuff. Really with Twitter, I started out by following a few people; all that just started (and) evolved into me following more and more people (which) kind of generally evolved (into) me following a lot of news people, journalists, personalities and producers. So that's really kind of how I gained a lot of followers so on and so forth. And they really kind of made the Twitter for me. Following these brilliant journalists, they have great stories they tweet out and if I like them, I will tweet it out myself or if I see

something I will tweet it out and they will retweet it. That's just really a means of Twitter, just how everything builds off everything. ... If I get a follower who's a journalist or who I respect, I mean that's a huge thrill, it's almost a high, it's like, "Wow, this guy follows me?"

## **Branding**

Image building and branding using Weibo and Twitter were especially important for participants who are relying on microblog for business or career development. CP1, 2, 3, 7 and AP1, 3, 4, 5, 6 all shared their experiences how Weibo or Twitter helped them with branding and image building for either themselves or the organization they represent.

Like mentioned earlier in this chapter, CP1 started Weibo to showcase the university he attends. CP2 wanted his Weibo to represent the city he lives in and he made sure that the image he projected was a positive one.

CP2: If the nature of the news I am going to post could affect the city in any ways, I will call the police department. For example, I would ask them if I can publish this post even if the news reflected poorly on the city.

American participants tend to put their self-branding at a higher priority. AP4 and 5 mentioned that although they did not have much time to continuously contribute content to their PJ blog, they still kept the server space and the existing information on there just to "keep the brand" because it's hard to build and they would "hate to see it go away". They kept their Twitter accounts alive for the same reason. AP6's quotes in the earlier section of Self-enhancement clearly showed his eagerness to get his name out there, obtain more "exposure". Although his brand is "still in development", he would love for people to notice his "style". AP3's quote below shows how she benefited from her brand.

AP3: I just listed a house for someone who's following me on Twitter since 2008. We never met each other before, but we talked back and forth. She knows all the business I do. So when they finally decided to list their house, they called me. It was weird, because when they called me, I didn't know her name; I didn't recognize her name because I only know her Twitter name, so I was like "Tinkle?" I don't know any "Tinkle." And then I was like, "Oh, OK, alright." Then I believe somebody listed and sold another house for my friend on Twitter and so I have gotten a lot of business from Twitter and from the blog. Right now I am working with someone who's moving here from Minnesota who found me online. Really what the blog does for people is people will Google real estate agents and they can go on Zillow and pull reviews and I have good reviews on Zillow. Then they will Google my name and find my blog, they will find Twitter feeds, blog, whatever, and that might also solidify to them "she must be an expert."

### **Social Impact**

Participants in this study not only disclosed how PJ activities on Twitter and Weibo influenced their life but also shared their perceptions on how their activities have impacted the society as a whole. All participants felt they were disseminating information which could have a broader impact.

AP3 and CP7 carried out the role to educate the general public about their specific areas: real estate and cloud storage.

AP3: Back in 08, nobody around here has ever done a short sale before or never heard of a short sale. It just didn't happen. And once the market started to go downhill, we really all educated ourselves on what is a short sale, what does this

mean because this market just has never seen those, really. sometimes I use the weekly poll ... I had a situation last year where a first time home buyer came, put an offer on one of my listings, we signed off on the agreement, she put a certain amount of money down, mom came the second day to look at the house and mom said, "No, we are not buying it." So legally, the earnest money goes back to the seller. But the buyers' agent was like "Look, it was her mom, be nice ...". So I was angry for my seller, my seller was angry; she was hurt, she was sad. So I wrote a big long thing about it and my poll question was, "Who should get the earnest money?" you know and everybody said the seller should get the earnest money. They wind up splitting it. But there have been times I will take situations like that and just kind of present them with no names.

API believed he could facilitate the free flow of information which was not encouraged by traditional media system.

API: This fall we are planning to produce shows on Google hangouts online. Pre-games, interviews: you talk about making the beat writers mad, when we go to interviews, we will be going with phones that will be broadcasting interviews alive. When everybody else is taking notes using shorthands, we will be showing them then; we will be video-taping it. It will take them two hours to get it online; people will have already seen it on B\* I\*. That's going to be great. Of course, the more savvy writers will start doing it soon. We will still be first. You are talking about citizen journalists. The point I am trying to make here is that we are going to be citizen media. What we are doing essentially is no difference from a TV station, except we don't have a million-dollar truck to broadcast it. We only need a cellphone and Internet to broadcast it.



Chinese participants especially CP5 and 6 believed that Weibo provided an opportunity for government information transparency and they are fully utilizing this platform to promote democracy.

CP6: I paid close attention to the poison case ... I started off by looking at forum posts online. I read tens of posts everyday to follow the case ... Then I found Weibo helped reopen this poison case. I felt Weibo over time matured enough to impact how (the) Chinese government operates. You have to admit it. I know some government offices are keeping a close eye on Weibo. But when I found the case regained popularity on Weibo, I spent night after night on Weibo in search for truth. I really hope by posting related facts for the case, I can find out the truth and share the truth.

### **Frustrating moments**

The participants were asked to recall any frustrating moments they experienced during their PJ activities online. Most interviewees commented that they are still enjoying the process and could not recall any particular moments that's upsetting. However, some general concerns were raised.

### **Censorship**

Chinese participants CP1, 2, 5 and 6 all experienced different levels of censorship coming from the government.

CP1: Story related to May 35<sup>th</sup> cannot be posted.

R: May does not have 35<sup>th</sup>.

CP1: 5 days after May 30<sup>th</sup>.

R: You mean June 4<sup>th</sup><sup>8</sup>?

CP1: Yes, this is a sensitive topic that is banned by the government. I re-posted a story on the same topic, and it has already been deleted due to rules and regulations. Kai-Fu Li himself has been banned multiple times before, let alone grass root like me.

R: Have you ever been scared when re-posting such story?

CP1: I once dealt with the great firewall when I was a freshman, and I am completely baffled by its censorship ability. It is capable of capturing sensitive information immediately after posting. At the time I don't fully understand how news works, and I re-posted a scandalous story about Zhou Yongkang, then minister of public security, on Sina. Later that night I got a phone call in the middle of my sleep. A man asked me if I surfed the Web that day in a particular neighborhood. He might have checked my IP address or something. I said no, I was at school. He continued by asking about my school, and whether or not I re-posted that story. I denied and he wanted me to double check; I said fine. He then warned me not to re-post a story like that in the future. He also asked me if I know who was the original poster, I said I don't know, I was simply re-posting it. This incident did not go too far, but it scared me quite a bit.

R: He looked up your cellphone number?

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<sup>8</sup> Tian'anmen Square incident happened on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1989.

CP1: I don't understand; how did he get my number? He might have contacted Weibo. I registered Weibo with my cellphone number, and I used my real name, which is required. It could be that ...

CP6: At that time I knew the topic (poison case) was very sensitive, and a lot of materials online are transient, and I just happened to post it. Later that post went viral, and it was re-posted more than 10,000 times. I was monitoring the changes that night, and I found out that it was re-posted 10,000 times...and then within a very short period of time, this post was deleted. ... I was very angry. I am a law-abiding citizen, and regarding the Zhu Ling case, I neither said anything extreme in nature, nor was I condemning others, though I had a verdict in the back of my mind, but I did not mention the suspect's name. I did not reveal his identity to the public so that people can cyber-manhunt him; I did not do that. I was targeting the public security system. You have to make such a statement, because you want people to reply to your post. I aimed at them; I don't think I did anything wrong, I did not scold. I did not spread rumors, so why would they blacklist me? All I did was piecing together the puzzle so that the truth would come out, and I also have screenshots.

The censorship CP2 experienced was not directly from the government, but was imposed by the cooperation involved in the news he reported. CP2 had to seek advice from the police department to settle the issue.

CP2: I have to tell you something. Some of the big cooperates are not so happy that my stories somewhat projected negative images for them among their consumers. They would find me and try to convince me to take the story down. They exhausted all kinds of methods finding my contact information; some would

even come to my office...It does not happen a lot, but I would take these cases to the Jinan Police Department and discuss with them. If they felt I could still post the stories, I will keep it up. If they were not comfortable with the stories, I would take it down.

### **Time Constraints**

Time consumption is more of a concern for American participants 2, 3, 4 and 5. As their career developed and business grew, they found less and less time they could devote to keeping up with their blog and microblog postings.

AP2: People think it is easy, but you know, going to all these meetings, sitting through all this stuff, writing it up, it's a lot of time. I did all that for a while, but I fall back, because it just takes so much of your time... I just would like to be informed, it takes a lot of time reading stuff. Reading other blogs, reading newspaper websites, reading news sites, news feeds; all that sort of thing. And a lot of time is spent sort of monitoring when there are controversial things going on, a lot of comments going on the blogs. It takes a lot of time to monitor and moderate.

AP4: Well, I mean we both have businesses and family lives, we kind of just looked at it as, "Hey, can you find time to do it?" Right now, we just kind of let it do its thing, and set bunch of Google juice behind it and people know that if they want to look for something, they can go to there and find it.

AP5: Our day-to-day work really takes over our time and (it) really becomes a labor of love we just cannot maintain. We did have an editor for a while to help us out for free. But he kind of went off to do his own thing, which I totally

understood. You know, we just really don't have time; I guess that's what (it) boils down to.

### **Unique Experience**

Besides the common frustrating moments, API shared a unique experience when he encountered pressure, hostility, and lack of respect from professional journalists he knew.

API: I must say that some of the most frustrating things are the so-called journalists in the U\*\* beat- writing community. Because as the blogs started to get big, I started to get a lot of push-backs from the traditional media: the newspaper guys. Just to give you an example, I used to run into an old man named M\*\*, one of the beat writers that represent two papers in (a) medium-size city of Georgia. They are from the same cooperation. He publishes the same articles in the two newspapers every day about U\*\*. Well, the thing is they were doing interviews and posted them on YouTube. I am sure that you are aware that anything posted on YouTube is freely available for anyone else in the world to use. Well, I got an angry email from those people saying I cannot use their YouTube videos. That I am “stealing” from them. So I argued with the guy and basically tell them that if you don't want me to use them, what you need to do is stop using the free YouTube service and go out to purchase a proprietary video platform. But they just never get it and these people don't speak to me...I can do what they can do, but cheaper...I think most of the journalists don't really like Twitter, (it's) just something they are forced into.

## **Chapter summary**

This chapter was dedicated to laying out findings derived from in-depth interviews with each participant. Important motivational factors were highlighted in each section.

Throughout this chapter, some commonalities and differences have obviously emerged within and between the two groups of participants. The next chapter will start by summarizing these main themes and then discuss each theme in details.

## Chapter V Discussions, Limitations and Future Research

The purpose of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the motivations of participatory journalists on Twitter (U.S.) and Weibo (China)?
2. What are the differences of the motivations between these two groups of participatory journalists?

The readers must be aware that the research questions are different from the interview questions (Kvale, 1996). During interviews, the author directed her questions to the participants' feelings, lived experiences and beliefs (Welman & Kruger, 1999) about practicing participatory journalism on microblogs to explore not only explicit motivations the participants themselves are aware of but also implicit motivations of which the participants are unconscious.

Although various motivations and a wide spectrum of perspectives were observed during the interviews, certain themes, categories and subcategories emerged during the analysis process. Two themes of motivations stood out as much of the previous literature suggested: internal and external motivations. One aspect, de-motivating factors, was unique to this study and was added in the discussion section. This was never mentioned in any previous research but clearly emerged as a theme that should not be ignored.

Under external motivation, two themes emerged: 1) early adopters of a new technology and 2) economic motivations. Economic motivations are further broken down to direct (financial compensation) and indirect (branding and image building) economic motivations.

Under internal motivations, eight themes were identified: 1) observation of success; 2) hobby becomes habit; 3) professional recognition; 4) reinforcement of self-identity; 5) self-expression; 6) self-enhancement and education and 7) social network: building relationships.

Two de-motivation themes emerged, including time constraints and self-censorship. The latter is more obvious among Chinese participants.

Besides the general themes among all participatory journalists, motivational differences between Chinese and American microbloggers became explicit during analysis. Main motivational distinctions include: 1) who the account represents: individual or organization; 2) journalistic role: difference of power distance.

Related evidence and quotes from participants supporting these discussions can be found in the findings chapter. Although common themes are important in a phenomenology study, individual variations are also of importance with regard to the phenomenon in this study (Hycner, 1985). Therefore this chapter also presents and explains the unique perspectives raised by the participants related to each theme, if applicable.

### **External Motivations**

External sources of motivation are constantly being influenced by the environment (Deckers, 2010). With the development of the microblog as a technology and the increased use of microblogs as a news source, motivations for participatory journalists on Twitter and Weibo are also evolving. Many opportunities, including profit from PJ activities that was not present before, were made possible when microblogs went mainstream. The very best example was Demotix, as mentioned in the Methods chapter. Demotix is a platform where participatory journalists post their pictures and stories for



mainstream media to acquire. In return, they are compensated financially. Unlike regular journalists who are employed by broadcast or print media, each participatory journalist is his or her own entity. They are news freelancers not on anyone's payroll. But people on Demotix are not a focus of this study because it's obvious that their main motivation is financial gain.

While economic motivation is an important theme that was observed among this study's participants, another motivational factor, technology, was no less important. The study found all participants to be early adopters of microblog technology and the technology itself provided many reasons to motivate the participants to contribute PJ content.

### **Early Adopters of a New Technology**

All of the participants, despite their age differences, identified themselves as early adopters of the microblog technology. They were all attracted to newly-emerged technology and the opportunities it brought. Microblogging has grown exponentially since its inception. The rapid growth of such technology accelerated the gain for these early adopters, regardless of the type of benefits they are seeking. Similar to the practice of purchasing Initial Public Offering (IPO) stocks, participants in this study seized the opportunity early enough to almost guarantee a certain level of return.

By entering the microblogging sphere before the "early majority" (Rogers, 1995), these participants managed to establish solid roots on their choice of platform. They obtained seniority from long-term usage, earned respect from the public by posting quality content, and persisted even after the downtime and the frustration that came with it. Therefore once the technology took off, when millions of users went online and registered their own microblogging accounts, all they had to do was to keep up with the content and wait for

their readership to skyrocket. Because new users are constantly looking for quality content, these well-established, well-trusted, senior users became their top choices of content provider.

All participants are tech savvy. They all possess better-than-average computer aptitude regardless of age, profession and social economic status. They all exhibit a genuine interest toward social media, and are eager to try new things. In other words, instead of being intimidated by the ever-changing tech world, these participants embrace new products and new concepts with open arms. This, coupled with the fact that they are all early adopters of microblogging, contributes greatly toward their online success.

Although in their 60s, AP1 and AP2 both had backgrounds in computer programming and were naturally drawn to new technology as a career habit. All Chinese participants were Generation Y<sup>9</sup> and late Generation X<sup>10</sup> who grew up with digital technology. Junco and Mastrodicasa (2006) studied Generation Y using both U.S. and Chinese college students as samples. Their results showed 97 percent of the students owned a computer and 34 percent of them are using the Internet as their primary news source. AP4, 5 and 6 were all in the same age group as the Chinese participants and they were also introduced to microblogging during their years in college. Early adopters are not afraid of trying new things. In fact, they are intrigued and excited by the advent of a new technology. This curiosity is shared by all participants.

Another aspect of early adopters' motivations relates to the exclusiveness they felt being a small and enclosed group. The personal relationships such groups can offer also provided the early adopters a sense of belonging. Many participants mentioned a different

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<sup>9</sup> People born from the early the 1980s to the early 2000s.

<sup>10</sup> People born from the early the 1960s to the early 1980s.

experience before microblogs or blogs were adopted by the early majority. However, this was more evident among American participants.

As mentioned in the introduction, before Twitter was blocked, it was briefly accessible to Chinese citizens. So when Weibo was introduced to the Chinese market, it was no longer an unfamiliar concept. At the same time, the large population and the condensation of netizens in economically developed areas in China meant even early adopters conglomerated in large groups. So compared with the U.S. participants, Chinese participants were less likely to experience a sense of exclusivity.

### **Economic motivations**

All participants denied that they desired financial gains at the inception of their participatory journalism microblogs. But from the conversations, the author found almost all of them received direct or indirect financial compensations through their PJ activities. Although not enough to make a living, it's adequate to demonstrate their capabilities and keep them going. Two sub-categories under economic motivations emerged. *Branding and image building* is linked to indirect economic gain, while *financial compensation* addressed direct economic gain.

*Branding and image building* motivation should be treated as an indirect economic motivation. It does not bring income directly, but it does establish the company or the individual's reputation among their audience. Potential clients could be drawn from this crowd and existing clients can be maintained. Chinese participants and American participants differ significantly in this theme. So this will be discussed later in this chapter under "Differences."

### *Financial Compensation*

Although none of this study's participants started out seeking to be financially compensated, when presented with incentives such as monthly compensation based on Weibo account performance (CP1), merging with a print publication (AP1), or business brought by their exposure on microblogs (AP3, CP7), all of them embraced the financial benefits that came with their PJ activities and carried on doing it at least partially because of that. Even those who did not directly financially benefit from PJ postings gained financial rewards in many indirect ways.

AP4, 5 and 6 all viewed PJ postings on microblogs and blogs as a way for self-enhancement, resume building, and image building that helped or could potentially help their career or business development and therefore would provide financial stability. CP2 mentioned how his Weibo account helped him build up relationships in the city where he wanted to eventually move and conduct business. Through those relationships he built and maintained, CP2's life was "made easier."

AP1 sold his blog and Twitter account to be officially associated with a print publication. He commented how "tough" it was to live on "Social Security." While he did not disclose the final price of the sale, he admitted that he approached a print media outlet himself so that he could take his business "to the next level of growth" with "direct access to the programs and the university." Once committed to be officially affiliated with this print media, AP1's online PJ content on Twitter and his blog would also be transformed into an official account. This would mark the turning point of AP1's individual social networking account successfully becoming a business that could actually earn him income through generating and maintaining traffic. This would also mean that now AP1 would have no choice but to keep up with his PJ postings. Or, one could also argue that

after the merge is finalized, AP1 would become a professional online journalist. His social networking sites would no longer be independent. Both AP1 and AP3 mentioned that they considered the main difference between a professional journalist and a participatory journalist was whether or not they get paid for writing articles online. In that sense, AP1 would indeed become a professional.

AP3's motivation from financial compensation was quite obvious during her interview. She started the Twitter and blog when she faced a moment of truth to "either get out of the business or do something else." AP3 simply started it so that she would not "lose her mind." This will be mentioned again in the *Observation of Success* theme below: AP3 saw how agents in other markets took advantage of microblogs and through posting PJ stories, piqued the audience's interest. She decided to try it to "fill up the time", but more importantly with the hope that this could be the cure for her shrinking client pool and would be the miracle that could put food on the table.

AP3's Twitter and blog did not disappoint her. She gained the immediate attention of the local media and other audiences followed. Her business then boomed, especially from a lot of people trying to relocate to the town. From her posts online, they completely trusted her judgment on which neighborhood they should buy into. After a while, even AP3's broker noticed how much sales she generated through online PJ posts and asked her to give training sessions to her fellow agents.

Other American participants were also motivated by possible financial compensation to keep their posts up and current. AP4 and 5 are actively looking for suitable buyers who can pay the "right price" to take over their blog and Twitter accounts and to carry the torch. AP6 used his tweets to build up networks and enrich his portfolio. He hopes to land a job in Atlanta through these online activities.

Quite a few Chinese participants referred to the behavior of posting on Weibo as *running* or *operating* it (e.g., CP1, 2, 7). The choice of words itself meant they considered Weibo a business that could potentially bring income. CP1 received quite a few financial rewards from Tencent, which first recruited him to run his own Weibo and post campus-wide news stories.

CP1 reiterated throughout his interview that his financial gain was unintentional and emphasized the fact that he's doing it because this could benefit his future. He's not really looking for an immediate return on time investment but rather put the time spent toward building a better career and hopes to bank it in the future. CP7 openly admitted his financial gain motivation at the beginning of his interview. But for him, the gain is not only for himself, but also for his company. CP7's intention was to attract investors and clients' attention in order to generate revenue for his company.

Although both groups of participants illustrated their motivations of financial compensation, Chinese participants were more reluctant to publically display their financial motivation. Instead, they packaged their online behaviors as manifestations of social responsibilities conducted out of altruism to educate the audience. CP7's interview exemplifies this point. He frequently used the phrases "educate the crowd" and "build up the awareness" referring to the technology and service "cloud storage", which is his company's main product and solution. CP7 is clearly using Apple's marketing strategy to create needs in a market that's currently unaware or has little awareness of the advanced technology and thus has tremendous potential for future growth.

## **Internal Motivations**

### **Observation of Success**

Although all the participants were early adopters, they were hardly the first ones that started participatory journalism on Twitter or on Weibo. Most participants in this study were more or less inspired by others and learned through observations of success stories as well as failures online. AP6, CP1, CP2, CP5 and CP6 all mentioned Twitter or Weibo being their main news consumption platform. They obtained news by following other PJ accounts or using keywords to search for breaking news to gain more timely information.

These observations comprised important environmental factors for the participants to predict the expected outcomes of their behavior. In other words, they were motivated by the perception of other people's PJ posting experiences.

AP1 was a blog participant before he started his own PJ blog. The existing platforms could not quite meet his needs and standards. So he started his own. AP1 then applied what he learned through his own experience with blogs and applied it to Twitter. He started to monitor the follower number after each post, identified a pattern of fast growth and quickly built readership based on his own analysis. AP2 went through the same process.

AP3 was the most market-driven among all American participants. She intentionally sought out what agents in other markets were doing and stumbled upon the idea of posting housing market-related PJ content online; on one hand, to educate buyers, on the other hand, to attract a bigger audience and build a respected image. So her initiation to start PJ can also be attributed to observation.

AP6's background in journalism helped him identify renowned journalists on Twitter and he started by following them and observing things they tweeted. Then admiration turned into aspiration. AP6 began to tweet his own PJ content and edit pieces on Twitter. With Twitter being such an open platform, he was able to elevate himself to the same level as these professional journalists for who he had so much respect.

Chinese participants exhibited similar motivational factor. Through observation, CP1 identified many Weibo accounts that received substantial media attention and official recognition. He was determined to do the same to benefit his career after graduation. Similarly, through online browsing, CP2 found a Weibo account "Wenzhou grassroots news" which was at the front line reporting the bullet train accident. CP2 then modeled his Weibo after Wenzhou grassroots news. He even adopted the name and just changed the location from Wenzhou to the city he lives in.

Much like AP6, CP4 followed celebrities such as the Queen of Weibo first and witnessed how much attention one can attract even with miscellaneous things they posted online. Although knowing he would not have the same magnitude of attention, he decided to try.

For all participants, observation of other people's existing accounts added up to vicarious experiences of what could happen to them if they were to take on and carry out similar tasks. Media attention, financial gain, respect, self-promotion could all have been their outcome. It also allowed them to identify the niche market, gaps and opportunity to correctly position their own contributions to maximize the benefits or to ensure the expected outcome.

However, some people's paths cannot be easily replicated. No one can expect themselves to follow the footprint of Bill Gates and become a billionaire the way he did it, nor can



one easily dream to have the brilliant marketing and branding genius like Steven Jobs that led Apple to become the most sought-after brand in the personal computer world, a leading company in creative design, and a pioneer in advancing technology.

Both Gates and Jobs achieved something admired by millions of people. Even though these outcomes are certainly desired, expected outcome alone cannot become a motivation strong enough to trigger behavior. People have to believe that they have the same skills and capability to achieve their goal. The author already explained in the Introduction chapter that microblogs provided a perfect opportunity that lowered bars for many people to participate. The 140 character limit eased the burden for people to conceive something elaborate; instead, they can post things that are “short and sweet.” AP5 said, “Twitter is easy, Twitter is not really time-consuming. For example, when we see something, it’s really easy to use Twitter versus sit down, try to write an article about it, download an image for it, try to do all the formatting for a post.”

Bandura (1986) in his early studies referred to these self-efficacy beliefs as internal motivation. The judgment of how well one will be able to perform in a given situation also drives people’s expected outcomes. Murthy (2011) commented that brevity on Twitter (one tweet is restricted to 140 characters) allowed tweets to effectively communicate timely information during disasters and breaking news events. This gives an advantage to ordinary people who have not received journalism training to react fast by posting a few words about the event. Most of the participants in this study believe that they are more than capable to deliver content on microblogs and can be as successful as others with or without a journalism background.

CP2’s quote mentioned in Chapter IV said when he saw Wenzhou Grassroots News’ Weibo account, he thought “I could do that too. I used to be a journalism major, I was

even a real journalist.” Seeing someone without a journalism background carrying out PJ reporting on Weibo and making an impact during breaking news reinforced CP2’s belief that PJ on Weibo was within his capability. Similarly, AP3 did not hesitate to start a blog account immediately after she observed similar practices in other markets. She thought this was a “no-brainer” and did not even question her own ability to accomplish what has been done in other markets.

Confidence in technology use is an especially important motivational factor for the older generation. While the younger generation might have taken it for granted growing up in the digital world, the older generation had to learn and adapt. AP1 and AP2 both had computer programming backgrounds, which helped them keep up with new technology and allowed them to be comfortable with microblogs. Beyond Twitter, AP1 was also experimenting with Google Plus and was planning to extend his PJ coverage to live streaming interviews in the near future.

### **Hobby Becomes Habit**

The previous two themes discussed how participants started their microblog PJ experience and their motivations behind it. But these could not quite explain why they persevered and continued to contribute. One reason repeatedly mentioned throughout interviews was “hobby” and a pure interest in doing it. Even for those who eventually grew their microblogs and blogs into a successful business, such as AP1, it started as a hobby. Other participants admitted that because PJ activities are not a job that their livelihood is dependent upon, they did not feel pressured to do it. And that became the reason they persevered.

For some participants, posting and tweeting PJ content gradually grew into a habit; something they repeat every day. Previous research suggested that habit, being a routine that individuals perform with little conscious knowledge and intention, could explain the sustained participation in online UGC (Wohn, Velasquez, Bjornrud, & Lampe, 2012). However, the absence of mind-processing determined that habit is more associated with less cognitive-driven behaviors such as digital news consumption rather than news production. CP5 provided the best example when he commented how he would browse Weibo instead of buying a morning newspaper.

Most PJ content contributors are also active digital news consumers. The habit of browsing Weibo and Twitter feeds in the morning, before sleep or anytime when someone “got a minute” during the day could be considered an unconscious behavior cultivated by frequent behavior in the past of the same kind. However, it could also be explained by a constant need for information and a sense of security that one could gain from immersing oneself in ambient journalism (A. Hermida, 2010b). Knowing what’s happening is essential for people to build their awareness and to connect with others.

The principle of least effort indicates people will naturally choose the path of least resistance to achieve a goal. While it’s often used to explain people’s information-seeking behavior, it also shows that, no matter how little effort was invested in something, there was always an objective; a goal to achieve in the end. In other words, a habit could hardly be continued if the person is not motivated or could not benefit from it at all. And the habit could easily be broken when de-motivating factors surface. The two common de-motivating factors will be discussed later in this chapter.

## **Professional Recognition**

Professional recognition and gaining respect for one's expertise in a certain field is the most prominent motivational theme among all 13 participants regardless of age, gender or nationality. Respect and recognition could come from different sources such as government, mainstream media, peers, professional journalists, clients and even oneself. When the source of respect is oneself, the motivational factor evolved into self-enhancement and self-improvement, which will be discussed later.

Schweiger and Quiring (2006) commented that when the intended audience is the general public, the objectives of the UGC content provider usually include distributing personal ideas, opinions and information to generate public reactions and the motivation behind those behaviors is "to reach the status of a well-known, prestigious and respected personality" (p. 87). All of the participants manifested a certain level of fulfillment when being recognized by others.

The number of followers, for this study's participants, is usually an indication of recognition among audience. The increasing number of followers is constantly motivating them to continue their participation. For participatory journalists who are not affiliated with any mainstream media, building a readership of more than 1,000 can be considered a substantial accomplishment, which most of this study's participants have achieved.

But the participants were also aware that number only tells one side of the story. The quality of the followers, meaning whether these followers are active on their own microblogs and if they interact with the participatory journalists, matters even more. The recognition received from an active audience and even a renowned audience brings even

more gratification for the participants. Interactions with the audience, especially positive feedback, provide support and motivations for participatory journalists to keep posting.

Among all participants, there was one exception. It's the lack of respect from professional journalists that bestirred AP1 to make a mark for himself and to prove himself worthy of others' recognition. AP1 described an encounter with professional journalists. They refused to admit him to the exclusive journalists' club. Feeling left out, AP1 did not give up on PJ. On the contrary, the argument gave AP1 reasons to believe that his work had a strong impact on professional journalists and even threatened their existence. If anything, this experience internally strengthened AP1's confidence in his own work; externally, it proved his vision of change in the journalism field led by participatory journalists.

### **Reinforcement of Identity**

No motivational factors are stand-alone. They are usually intertwined and together they form a strong force which propelled the participatory journalists to carry on contributing on Twitter and Weibo. Respect and recognition the participatory journalists received also served as reinforcement of their self-identities in many cases mentioned above.

AP2 mentioned one of the key reasons to start his blog and Twitter and to post PJ content was to balance his "reversed cultural shock" when he moved from Florida back to a more conservative and less diverse town. Westjohn and his colleague Arnold (2009) used the term "cosmopolitanism" to refer to the openness of an individual to other cultures. They developed this term based on Rogers' (1995) study where he found the more cosmopolite individuals are, the more likely they are to be early adopters of technology. This was one of the most relevant studies done to identify early adopters' motivations in general from a

technology perspective. AP2 can be described as a cosmopolitan individual. Westjohn and Arnold further stated that for these individuals, the use of technology is for self-identity reinforcement. When AP2 moved to Florida, his self-identity evolved as his environment changed. So at the time he moved back to a less diversified town, his self-identity was challenged and AP2 needed to find a way to strengthen and reinforce it. Hence he started to share his views and to post PJ content through online platforms such as his blog and Twitter.

AP6 was in between media jobs and was afraid that any blank time on his resume would reflect poorly on him as a media professional. So he was motivated to use PJ as an opportunity to fill in the blank in his life at the moment and preserve the identity he had previously achieved.

AP4 and AP5 both tried to fight and correct the identities local media imposed on them. By providing more positive hyper-local news items on their blog and Twitter, they tried to rebuild an identity that would be perceived more favorably by their friends and family. One could even argue that they were motivated by their cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and their behavior proved the selective exposure process (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). But without finding the news consistent with their values, they decided to interject themselves into the news production circle and generate more value-compliant news for themselves.

While reinforcing identity was also a deep motivation for Chinese participants, their identity was demonstrated more by their group affiliations. This was a major motivational difference between American and Chinese participants affected by the distinctive characteristics of collectivism and individualism cultures. It will be elaborated on later in this chapter when the two groups are compared for their differences.

## **Self-Expression**

Self-expression is no stranger to motivation studies in the online world, especially when the subject of interest is UGC (e.g. Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2013; Schaedel & Clement, 2010). It is the most prominent intrinsic motivation in online media usage motivation studies. The anonymity provided by online platforms such as Twitter and Weibo offered the best disguise for people whose voices were eager to be heard but who still wanted to protect their privacy.

Previous motivation studies mainly looked at self-expression motivation and how it's linked to political participation. In this study, only one participant's PJ content (AP2) is heavily politically-oriented. The current study expanded to include participatory journalists covering sports events, economic news, civic news and technology. Self-expression remained an important motivation for all participants regardless of the areas they cover.

All participants are ambitious, exploratory, like to set goals in life and will work hard to achieve them. These participants all fall into the so-called Type A personality (Friedman, 1996). They like to multitask and often push themselves to the limit. They constantly seek venues for their self-expression needs. Most participants try to maintain an active social life both on and offline; at the same time, time management and efficiency are crucial for Type A people. So a technology such as a microblog that drastically reduces the amount of effort people put in to get their message across to others is the perfect venue for them. A couple of keystrokes and a press of the left mouse button, and their thoughts are out there for the world to see. This excites the participants greatly as it is now easier than ever to express themselves to a large audience.

A review of the participants' tweets and blog posts indicated that the PJ content they published seemed to be more fact-focused with few personal opinions injected. Some may argue that if they were motivated by self-expression, more personality like AP3 mentioned would have been seen in the posts. However, the fact that some content was chosen over others is a process of self-selection. Just like selective exposure, Noelle-Neumann (1974, p. 49) noted that many people "may manage to support their opinions by selecting out persons and media which confirm their views." The participatory journalists in this study went through the same process to select content that was consistent with their views and that would reinforce their individual and organizational identities. The process of content selection is an experience of self-expression. By pushing a certain type of content to their followers, the participatory journalists were expressing their views of the world and society.

AP4 and AP5 mentioned multiple times during the interviews that they were "unsatisfied by the media coverage" of too many disasters and negative stories that "catch people's eyes" but did not make a positive impact on society. So they took upon themselves to share more "positive community news" that could get people excited about the town they live in, and view the town through their eyes.

AP6 is more relaxed about his content selection. He is concerned more about the quality and validity of the news he shares and less about the topic or where it happened. This is not to say that AP6 was not motivated by self-expression; on the contrary, his large reservoir of topics represents who he is as a person.

Chinese participants' need for self-expression is only more intense because of the tight media control in the Chinese society. Examples and quotes were illustrated in Chapter IV. One thing worth noticing is that the Chinese participants' self-expression is not only for



themselves as individuals, but also for the organizations they belong to. For examples, CP3 linked his “self” to his work place – the city Police Department. His self-identity was defined by the group he belonged to and when he tried to express his “self,” CP3 stood on the perspective of the group. Similar findings were prevalent throughout all Chinese interviews. The author believes this organizational self-expression theme is deeply rooted in China’s collectivism culture. It will be further discussed when comparisons are drawn between American and Chinese participants.

### **Self-Enhancement and Education**

Contributing original PJ content on microblogs is not as easy as one might think. AP2 shared his experience attending meetings and writing reports and explained how time consuming it was. But some participants felt they could benefit from such experience.

As mentioned in the *Findings* chapter, AP6 was in between jobs and was desperately in need of a resume-building experience. At the same time, he treated PJ postings as an opportunity to learn and advance himself. AP4 and 5 used this opportunity to learn online press releases, which eventually benefited their own business or jobs. AP3 enjoyed “learning while writing” stories such as neighborhood guides. Putting things down would force her to collect more data to back up her theories about the housing market and when she was asked a certain question by her clients; she could answer immediately and further establish her authority in the field.

CP1 has not started his career yet. He felt his college education was gradually killing his dream of being a media professional, so he took it upon himself to get back on track and apparently the idea of posting PJ stories on Weibo came around at the right time.

CP5 used Weibo to post heated scandals and political discussions. He used the process of collecting evidence and sources for a post as a “process of learning.” This fulfilled his need for social learning. CP5 commented that when he was with friends, they normally only gossip or talk about entertainment. CP5 was afraid that bringing up political discussions would only ruin the atmosphere so he never got the chance to do it offline. Now he can participate online and educate himself even more about current issues.

CP7’s education motivation was not for himself, but directed toward other people. CP7 mainly covers technology news, especially about cloud storage. Cloud storage is still a novelty in the Chinese market and many people are not aware that it can be scaled to fit companies of various sizes. CP7 felt the need to educate the audience to eventually create the market need, much like Apple did. One of CP7’s goals was to educate more people in China about the new technologies and the possibilities they might bring. While the ultimate goal was to attract more business, CP7’s commitment to spread the knowledge was also worth noticing.

### **Social Networking: Building Strong Bonds on Microblogs**

As with many other social networking sites, relationship building is an important user motivation. However, in contrast to sites such as Facebook and MySpace, where users are more focused on bringing the relationships in their real life online and maintaining the bonds there, microbloggers such as the participants in this study initiated relationships online and some have further grown into strong bonds in real life.

CP2’s relationship building goal is probably the strongest amongst all. He intended his microblog and his coverage of local news to be a bridge that could link him with local government officials, staff members in various government offices and people from all

walks of life. So that when it comes time he needed help, he would know who to turn to. And the fact is these relationships indeed provided him “convenience”.

For both CP1 and CP2, building relationships is a necessary step to achieve their career goals. CP1 expressed how thrilled he was when the university higher administration “knows him on the first-name basis” and described how he, through Weibo, got the chance to speak with a *shengzhang* (equal to the governor of a state) more than once. Although none of them promised CP1 anything after graduation, CP1 was a firm believer that in China, how far his career could advance was totally dependent upon how well he’s connected.

CP3 used his Weibo to get to know foreigners living within his jurisdiction. By sharing community news in English, he provided convenience for these English-speaking residents and strengthened his relationship with them. With this being said, the relationship building motivation goes both ways. Some participatory journalists reach out to cultivate relationships with selected audiences or groups (e.g., CP2), while some others would prefer to harvest the surprises and allow the active followers to take the initiative and make initial contacts (e.g. AP2).

For both types of relationship building, earning respect and recognition motivation is always part of the process. The impact of participatory journalists on microblogs is not only evaluated by the number of followers, but also the number of *active* followers who actually form a “bond” with them by participating in their reporting or discussions. To invite anyone into the conversation, the participatory journalist has to first establish authority by providing original and consistently accurate information. After respect is earned, some audiences would proactively seek to build a relationship with the microblogger. Or the microblogger can then reach out to the audience he/she intended the

content for. In any case, these two motivations go side-by-side. Earning recognition means more relationships can be built upon trust and respect while increased number and intensity of relationships can contribute to gaining a more solid stance in a field.

AP6 reached out to establish bonds with professional journalists whom he respects and deems important to advance his career. AP3 accidentally got to know the staff at the top local TV channel through her PJ tweets and because of that relationship she is featured regularly on TV, which definitely adds to her agent profile and contributes to her increased sales.

As relationships develop, they also benefit the participatory journalists in their offline life. CP1 described himself as “not good with people.” Being socially awkward, he has “never had a romantic relationship,” even in his college years. So he devoted all his time to covering campus news on Weibo. To him, Weibo became a tool that could transfer online popularity to real-life relationships. He was finally able to “socialize in real life” and was even elected the president of his campus news club. Although he has yet to meet his “romantic encounter,” he’s more confident than before that he will meet someone. In a sense, CP1’s virtual world and reality were intertwined. His eagerness to establish connections online demonstrated his need to socialize offline.

Not all participants needed help socializing with people in their everyday lives. As a matter of fact, only CP1 had difficulty interacting with people in real life; all other participants are quite extraverted, like to talk and enjoy various sports. For them, the relationship building motivation applies not only to their PJ content posting behaviors but also to other online activities. They treated Weibo as an extension of life and work and a place where familiar and strange meet, and pre-existing bonds were strengthened by revealing part of themselves unknown to their friends before. At the same time, new

bonds were made. CP5 mentioned how he hesitated to bring up serious political topics during a friends' outing, afraid that he might "ruin the upbeat atmosphere." So sharing on Weibo information he gathered and his interpretation is a safe harbor. He could let the real self out without concern for the consequences being seen by his friends. In fact, CP5 believed he and his friends' understanding of each other could be deepened through online interactions.

Besides earning respect, building relationships is also closely linked to the financial gain. Previously, the author mentioned AP3 used the connections she made online to sell houses. The number of her connections is growing so fast that now she is trying to "keep up" with it. CP7's relationship building was premeditated in order to maintain a steady relationship with his company's clients and even recruit new staff. He commented how the "technicians can find our company's information on my Weibo" and can reach out to him if they are interested in joining the company. Clients or investors who are interested in their service can "get to know the company on Weibo".

In summary, the primary relationships discussed in this section referred to those between a microblogger and his/her audience. The building process could be started by either party. The benefits are usually reciprocal and can largely affect the people who are interacting in their real lives.

## **De-motivating Factors**

### **Time Constraints**

Time constraints in this study appeared to be the most common de-motivating factor. AP4 and 5 specifically mentioned it being the main reason for their decreased online PJ activities. They even closed their blog and are now just maintaining the Twitter account.

They are still motivated to maintain the “brand.” But no more efforts were put into developing the blog or Twitter any further. Time spent appeared to be one element the participatory journalists are negotiating with themselves constantly. Negotiation was carried out by evaluating the value of possible gain and comparing it with the loss of time. If the participant decided the reward would trump time spent, they would be more motivated to continue this task they assigned to themselves. The accessibility and characteristics such as word limitation of microblogs in this sense helped lower the loss of time to a minimal level. And this explained why AP4 and AP5 decided to “freeze” the blog but continued to update Twitter.

However, time spent on posting content is not the only hurdle. In the entire news production circle, writing and editing account for only half or even less than half of the time invested. The other half was spent browsing, collecting, seeking and interpreting information that would go into a story. AP2 found this particularly challenging but he continued to invest his time because he was “self-employed” and almost “semi-retired,” so he had “a lot of flexibility.”

Other participants did not find time an issue or they found other motivations that justified the time spent. AP1 spends on average of 10 hours a day on his blog and Twitter. He

justified it by turning this into his full-time job and believed that to be successful meant investing extra time.

AP3 and CP7 both used microblogs as tools to establish authority in their respective fields in order to attract more business. Their time spent on Twitter and Weibo were rewarded with increased numbers of clients and almost guaranteed financial income. AP3 was especially grateful that she found this “niche market” in an economic downturn. It helped her overcome the hard times and boosted her business in a way that she could not have hoped for through any other channels. Time spent was only a small trade-off for it. AP3 mentioned at the beginning of her interview that she started contributing PJ content to “kill time” and keep her from “losing her mind while she wasn’t earning any money.” Time being a commodity in her life was something she would happily give up in exchange for family income. As her business grew, she had to re-evaluate her time spent and the benefits it brought. In this ongoing negotiation process, Twitter again won with its technological advantage of being easily accessible and especially handy for an real estate agent who has lots of fractions of time to spend rather than the luxury of setting aside a bulk of time to do things. Still, AP3’s responses showed a decline of her motivation as her time became more valuable and her initial objectives were met.

CP1 on average spent more than six hours every day on Weibo but he chose to be smart about how the time was spent to maximize the impact of his posts and to achieve his goal. There is also the case like CP2, whose job requires two hours of traveling time every day. He called those hours “time spent anyway.” Weibo was how he chose to fill up his travel time. CP2 gained a sense of satisfaction from actually making full use of this time rather than sitting on a bus doing nothing. But he was also very conservative about any extra

time he spent on contributing PJ content and commented that “now I think about it, it’s actually a bit scary that I spend four hours almost every day posting things on Weibo.”

CP2 is not the only one utilizing scattered time slots throughout the day. CP4 also mentioned that he would “check in” on Weibo whenever he has time. CP6 would post when she’s on the subway, before sleep or when she’s “bored during the night.”

Overall, the interviews have shown that time constraints would not become a de-motivating factor until the participants experienced a change of life priorities or fulfillment of goals and objectives. But as it’s an ongoing, fluctuating negotiation process, time does affect the level of motivation the participants experienced.

### **Self-Censorship**

Self-censorship as a de-motivating factor mainly affected the Chinese participants. It can be explained by Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs. As discussed above, participatory journalists were motivated by higher levels of needs such as respect from others (esteem), creativity and spontaneity (self-actualization). But once the lower levels of needs were threatened, the higher structure would tumble and fall.

Some participatory journalists, especially the ones in China, had their content censored, pulled off by the government, or were threatened and even fearful for their own security, which in Maslow’s hierarchy is a basic need for safety. When this need is not secured, higher-level needs usually would not be considered and thus could not become motivational factors. In the case of CP1, he shared a political sensitive story on his Weibo and was surprised to receive a call from an unknown man to warn him not to post any related content again.



Mentioned in discussion chapter, CP2 felt the same pressure, not from the government but from the involved parties of his PJ stories. The involved parties approached CP2 and tried to bribe him to take down stories. In these situations, CP2 turned to local authorities to act as a gatekeeper for him and borrow their standard to censor the content himself.

Self-censorship grew into a habit for most Chinese participants. Even without direct or indirect contact from government officers, Chinese participants chose to censor their own topics or content before even posting them. This de-motivating factor is also closely related to the collective culture in China where people tend to “put on a better face” for the groups they belong to and the places for whom they work. They follow the rules set by those groups and often think breaking the rules would damage the group image.

CP3 is a police officer and his standard for choosing PJ content to post exactly shows the argument above. He never posts content that he considered as “things that are not suited for public knowledge for reasons such as hype or panic” and “politically sensitive issues, such as the Senku Islands and Falun Gong.” All in all, CP3 commented that “only normal police work will be posted.”

CP4 also mentioned his own standard of providing “positive” and not “one-sided” information for his audience. However, he would also try “not to be radical and not to touch sensitive topics.” CP5 echoed his standard.

CP5: The bottom line of self-media is not to touch the bottom line of the government. One should not try to challenge government. The standard should be everything we post should support the regime of the Chinese Communist Party and the Party itself.

Although CP5 was not strictly commenting on his own posts, he's talking about his understanding of the general mentality among participatory journalists on Weibo.

### **Differences Observed**

The current study found that American participants were more likely to be motivated by extrinsic motivations such as reputation building, while Chinese participants tend to be motivated by intrinsic motivations. Fröhlich et al.(2012) broke down intrinsic motivations to enjoyment-based such as fun and intellectual stimulation, and community-based including help and altruism. Chinese participants all felt like they represented not only themselves but also the organization, community or group they belong to. So helping others in the same group or altruism motivations are more prominent among Chinese participants. This finding was a reflection of the collectivism and individualism cultural difference between American and Chinese people. Another important motivational difference is the participatory journalistic role perception between the two groups of participants. It is a reflection of varied power distance in two countries.

### **Who the Account Represents: Individual or Organization**

An interesting ideological difference exists between the Chinese participants and the American participants. The Chinese participants share a strong trait of collectivism, while the Americans exhibit individualism. As indicated by Hofstede (1984) original study and the ongoing data collection, this is a major cultural difference between the United States and China.

In China, a man is taught to put his own honor behind the honor of his clan. Everything a man does should honor his group, which can be a family, place of employment, or an organization with whom he is affiliated. More than 2,000 years of Confucius' teaching is

one of the reasons, and the emergence of Communism further strengthened this concept. To put your group in front you and win for the team is a constant motif in today's Chinese society. This motif is a strong part of motivation for the Chinese participants. They are proud to be the official spokesmen of their respective organizations even if they are not commissioned or asked to do so. They jumped at the opportunity to speak on behalf of their group if no one opposed the idea. Their personal gain is trivial compared to the glory of their group. For example, when CP3 saw that his workplace Weibo account struggled to attract attention, he stepped in and started his own trying to help.

As mentioned in identity reinforcement motivation, American participants' identities were mostly individual identities, while the Chinese participants always affiliate their own identity with the group they belong to.

Simply put, American participants' Twitter accounts usually represent themselves while Chinese participants viewed their accounts as representing their workplace (CP3, 4), their social circle (CP1), the city they live in (CP2), or the business they are running (CP7).

Another feature of microblogs that is worth mentioning is the verification system where users can provide their personal information to get authenticated. On Weibo, after authentication, a huge "V" logo will show up under the user's profile picture to symbolize verification.

The celebrities and high-profile Weibo users first started to use this feature to make sure their online profiles are protected against fraud. As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, anyone can register for any name at their free will without providing authentication materials. President Obama has a Weibo account in China that is managed by his fan club. The tweets are mainly quotes from his speeches. The drawback in this no-verification

system is that anyone can pretend to be someone on a microblog and what they post may damage the reputation of the person they claim to be and even cause great financial losses.

Twitter and Weibo's verification systems were established to give people a choice to protect their online profiles and prevent them from being used by people with malicious motives. At the same time, the system protects the microblog content's authenticity and adds credibility to the content published by verified people because what they post could be held against them. CP4 commented that now he wanted to remove the verification because he felt a "strong responsibility online" when he's verified and "when you really wanted to curse, you'd better find another angle to express your feelings."

None of the American participants in this study were verified users on Twitter, whereas among Chinese participants, only CP5 and CP6 are not verified. Being able to become a verified Weibo user meant a significant accomplishment for the Chinese participants. As mentioned above, initially only celebrities, politicians and the "most important" people felt the need to become verified users. Being verified, then, almost shortened the distance between an ordinary citizen and those people. Chinese Weibo users consider it a big opportunity to become "official," though at the expense of risking their own privacy. CP4 even tried two affiliations during the verification process. When he failed to be verified as a bicycling judge, he submitted all the documents again using his current job as a government employee.

On the other hand, American participants have very little, if any, interest in being the voice of a group or organization. They are on Twitter or the blog to speak for themselves, harvesting attention for their personal interests. Like collectivism tends to exist in socialist countries, individualism is more commonly found in capitalist societies.

As the world's strongest economy and a nation of immigration, America is the promised land for individual success. People flock to the land of opportunity to uncover their true potential. Success is often measured by financial competency. In America, the sky is the limit when it comes to what you do and how you do it, as long as the law permits it. The common saying "this is a free country" is a great reflection of this idea. Therefore when Twitter arrived, most American participants asked themselves, "How can I make this work for me? If I invest time and energy in it, will it pay off someday?" Even if most of them didn't fully understand the scope of Twitter at the time, or lacked of clear picture of the future, they still jumped on the fast train of technological advancement that ultimately took them to financial success. Having some recognition from the mainstream media? Sure, as long as it helps promote their business. But speaking on behalf of a group? Not unless somebody is getting paid. The fact that no American participants mentioned the Twitter verification system is a strong indication that verification is of little-to-no value for what they were pursuing. In fact, it is safe to assume that most American participants value their privacy more than official recognition.

It will not be entirely accurate to assert that the distinction of collectivism and individualism is an absolute fact in this study. As a society evolves, so do its ideological values. That's one of the reasons that Hofstede is continuously collecting data and updating his cultural dimension study. Although collectivism still plays a strong role in modern-day China, the exposure to Western culture and the practice of a market economy all contribute to the shift in values among Chinese people. It won't be surprising to find out that many younger generation Chinese put his/her own interest in front of everything else, though it may be viewed as selfishness and despised by others.

### *Self-Branding Versus Organizational Image Building*

A microblog is probably the cheapest one-to-many mass communication medium. Registering an account is free; all one needs to do is to invest time to compose content and post it. When properly administered, a microblog can function as a press release medium. Instead of sending information and product/service news to professional journalists, a business owner or anyone could push the press releases directly to their intended audience, eliminating the middleman.

Because of the low cost and high efficiency, almost all major manufacturers of consumer products, service providers, small business owners, luxury products, etc., have established their own Twitter or Weibo accounts to push new products and services to their fans and potential customers. In a recent article on MarketingProfs.com, Nanji (2014) did a comparison study about how big and small brands in the United States are using Twitter. He found big brands are utilizing Twitter more often than small trade companies. The Forbes 100 best small companies all tweet on a daily basis. Twitter has become the most powerful tool for advertising, branding and image building. If implemented correctly, a microblog could be even more efficient than TV ads or radio spots, yet more economical too.

Vujnovic et al.'s (2010) study has linked branding with professional journalists and found it to be one of the three main motivations for them to incorporate participatory journalists' pieces into their own work. However, branding and image building have not been linked with participatory journalists' motivation before. But from the 13 interviews the author conducted with both Chinese and American participants, it's no doubt one of the most important motivations.

However, while both groups were motivated by branding, the subjects of branding were quite different. While American participants focus on self-branding, Chinese participants are more concerned about building a positive image for the group or organization they represent. As mentioned in the section on identity reinforcement motivation, this variation stems from the differences between collectivism and individualism cultures. Definitions and characteristics of these two cultural dimensions can be found in the literature review. Here the author will focus on the evidence that was discovered during interviews.

AP3 serves as the best example. AP3 started posting stories on Twitter when the market was bad for real estate agents. She single-handedly turned the tables for herself with Twitter. Her Twitter stories about the housing market were backed up with real data she found using her own background knowledge. By sharing this information, she established her expertise in the field and her name has become more than the name of a real estate agent that you meet during a Sunday open house, but a trustworthy brand and a person you can turn to whenever you have any questions about house-hunting in the local community. Through Twitter, AP3 reached many potential clients and indirectly generated business.

After AP3 realized how many people are actively reading her tweets and browsing her blog, she became extra-cautious and made sure no “bad words” were in her tweets because her tweets might very likely “wind up in the *News Sentinel*.” Because she already established her own brand, AP3 treated Twitter and the blog as part of her job and took extra caution when writing her tweets and blog posts.

AP4 and 5 both took pride in the brand they built together and even when their life priorities changed, leaving them with little time to care for either their blog or their

Twitter accounts, they were still paying money to rent the server space to keep their blog up. But they are not opposed to selling the brand to someone worthy who “can bring it back to do it justice” for “the right price.” While they both invested a tremendous amount of time in branding their blog through their PJ content, they now are motivated by preserving the blog in the hopes of receiving financial compensation in the long run. For them, their Twitter and blog brand has almost become a side business.

For AP6, his PJ contributions are all about branding himself as a credible, keen and ambitious journalist. While AP6 is motivated by self-branding, the ultimate goal is to land his dream job. Online branding through Twitter is a means to an end. Many employers check candidates’ Facebook pages for red flags before a hiring decision is made. AP6 believed his online activities could add a special touch to his resume. This, coupled with the relationships he built with renowned journalists through Twitter following and related interactions, would definitely play a favorable role for AP6 when he is back on the market looking for a media job.

Chinese participatory journalists are also motivated by self-branding. For example, CP1 mentioned he promoted his own brand and received recognition from the university higher administration.

But at the same time, all of the PJ content CP1 posted is news stories that happened on his campus. Despite self-promotion, CP1 was actually recruited by Tencent Weibo to post campus news for his own university. One of his main purposes was to “showcase the university”.



CP2 was concerned about the impact his tweets could have towards the whole city. Very often when he uncovered some negative news stories, he would write to the local police department and only post it when he got a “go” signal from the police.

With tight online censorship, Chinese participants have learned to ask for “permissions” before publishing anything. The fact that they tend to rely on administrative offices such as the police department to solve the conflicts and let the police station decide the content and direction of the posts showed their deeply-rooted collectivism culture. Putting on a good face for the organization is to promote oneself.

### **Journalists’ Roles: Power Distance**

The second difference theme that emerged between American and Chinese participants has to do with their own perspective of the journalistic roles they played.

In the process of self-expression, a free flow of information selected by each participatory journalist can be detected. American participants considered information dissemination as the most important role of a journalist and the most basic function of journalism. As mentioned in the literature review, Weaver, Wilhoit and their colleagues’ longitudinal studies on American journalists rendered five different categories of professional roles including disseminator, interpreter, adversary, populist mobilizer and civic (Weaver et al., 2007; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, 1996).

The author found few of the participants in this study were eager to act as populist mobilizers because they still consider themselves members of the populace and did not differentiate themselves purposively. While a civic role was expected of online journalists from the audience point of view (Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, 2005), just like adversary and watchdog roles of traditional journalists, it did not seem to have

interested participants in this study much. AP3 is the only participant who played a civic role by posting different polls on her blog and promoting them with Twitter to collect public opinions about housing market-related questions.

In the “short sale” case mentioned in the findings section, at first glance, AP3 provided an open forum for other citizens to express their opinions about certain topics. But looking into the example AP3 shared further, one would find that she had a judgment of her own already. Although the poll was intended to collect other peoples’ opinions, AP3 gained validation through the poll results and handled the delicate situation with the support from the general public. All was done to strengthen her own value and further establish her reputation in the local real estate market. Whenever a poll is posted, people tend to entrust the poll founder with a certain level of authority. AP3 gained satisfaction knowing that she was “right” and the civic voice was validating her authority in the field.

Among the five journalistic roles, the most prominent role that seems to motivate the American participants in this study is the information disseminator, while Chinese participants showed signs of adopting an adversary role, and being motivated by supervising the government and providing different voices.

The discovered differences in journalistic roles between the two participating groups can be attributed to the cultural differences in power distance. Power distance refers to how willingly people in certain cultures accept the fact that power is distributed unequally (1984). The more willingly they accept; the higher the power distance. As illustrated in the literature review chapter, China has a much higher power distance than the United States. Government has absolute power over the people. In everyday life, authority figures such as father, teacher and company superior place themselves above son, students and company subordinates.

However, in the past 20 years, technology advancement has enabled increased ideological exchanges between China and the rest of the world. In turn, the impact from Western culture, especially from the United States, is gradually changing the media environment in China. People are demanding more transparency and more freedom in the media system. The advent of technology such as microblogs provided an opportunity. Participatory journalists in China took on the role as pioneers to challenge the authority and hope to lessen the power distance between authority and ordinary citizens. So their journalistic adversary role was prominent.

Unlike Chinese participants, Americans have always had their media play the role of the government's watchdog. Investigative journalism pieces are produced one after another looking into political issues, which is a luxury to talk about freely in China. Since there was less need, American participatory journalists in this study appeared less motivated by the journalists' adversary role but more motivated by the information dissemination role.

AP1 wanted to provide free flow of information and news about sports events through new technology so people would not rely on traditional media. On one hand, it's about free information dissemination; on the other, it's to restore AP1's bruised ego. He was earlier rejected and excluded by professional journalists, so competing with them and winning meant more than the excitement of discovering a new technology for broadcasting. For AP1, it meant the victory of participatory journalists.

AP3 took pride in her information dissemination role and found it gratifying to hear positive feedback from her audience. With her guidance, people can narrow down the areas they wanted to move in without even visiting the town. This was a win-win situation for her, because on one hand, CP3 helped the homebuyers narrow down the

search and on the other hand, she saved herself some time as a real estate agent to understand her clients' needs.

AP4 and AP5 tried to share as much positive information and news as they could find in the local community. They considered themselves “K\*\* Chamber of Commerce, K\*\* Visitors Center, or as an extension of those.” AP6 collected information and news from other Twitter accounts and online sources worldwide that he validated and considered credible. By tweeting restructured news, AP6 is like a one-man news agency that spits out information every hour, if not every minute.

The emergence of microblogs and proliferation of participatory journalists carry a profound meaning in China. They fundamentally changed the media landscape and put the power back into ordinary people's hands, a power much needed especially in a controlled media environment. Weibo in China became a social valve, a place to vent, complain, and to discover the “truth.”

CP6 was especially radical when it came to disclosing information the government was “trying to hide.” CP6 was angry when the adversary role she assigned to herself was not fulfilled. But this motivated her to continue with her endeavors.

CP6 believed she discovered the truth about the Zhu Ling case and was eager to share it with everyone. But because of the government's strict online censorship, she had to take snapshots of her “evidence” and share the pictures so she could post undetected by the “online police” through keyword searches.

Some believe that Weibo is the answer to China's tight control of information and a ‘microblogging revolution’ is taking place (Canaves, 2011; Y. Hu, 2010; Y. Yang, 2011) that will change the way the government distributes information (Yang, 2011). Based on

evidence discovered in this study, Weibo and participatory journalists in China still have a long way to go to see the changes.

China implemented a strong online censorship system that designated manpower to search for politically controversial issues and block the public from seeing radical comments or information in general related to the topic. It's usually carried out by keyword search. CP1's experience, as shared in the section on de-motivating factors, was indeed frightening for a freshman in college. Getting a call from a stranger because of something one posted anonymously online has unimaginably threatening effects. It stopped CP1 from posting any politically sensitive news. CP2 invited the local police to filter his own content and CP3, being a police officer, knew where to draw the line and did not dare to cross it because he himself is "in the system." Citing CP5's words again, "the bottom line of self-media is not to touch the bottom line of the government." What participatory journalists are doing on Weibo is to push the bottom line further down one inch at a time. Every inch they fight to gain will be one step closer to lessen the power distance.

The author presented some evidence of the adversary role the Chinese participatory journalists are playing through Weibo. However, this is not to say that's the only role they perceive themselves as playing. As with AP4 and AP5; CP1, CP2, CP5 and CP6 all wanted their audience, through their microblogs, to "hear news and gain information that would normally be ignored by mainstream media, and thus would go by unknown." Other Chinese participants focused on specific areas of information. CP3 concentrates on criminal and civic news in his jurisdiction, CP4 publicizes work-related information and cycling events where he normally serves as judge, and CP7 shares technology information, more specifically about cloud storage. All of these participants have easy

access to the information and out of job responsibility, social responsibility or the drive for financial gain. They all happily accepted the role of information disseminator.

To sum up, in this section the author presented the participatory journalists' self-perception of their journalistic roles. Chinese participants differ from American participants in the importance they put on the adversary role due to the different power distance in the two countries. The author does want to point out that although journalistic role serves as an important motivation, it should not be considered the single motivation that carries participants through their tasks, nor a primary one, but a step closer to seeing their more profound motivations such as self-expression, financial gain, image building and earning respect. The author believes that different role perceptions could reflect the deeper motivations that participants found to help them persevere in their PJ contributions.

### **Discussion Summary**

The discussion section presented some themes and subcategories of the 13 participatory journalists' motivations to answer the two research questions raised at the beginning of this study.

1. What are the motivations of participatory journalists on Twitter (U.S.) and Weibo (China)?

The current study found external motivations such as early adopter of new technology and economic motivations to be shared with almost all participants. Internal motivations such as observation of success, habit strength, gaining respect, reinforcement of identity, self-expression, self-enhancement, and relationship building are shared by multiple participants.

When trying to answer this question, the researcher also found two demotivating factors that largely influenced the perseverance of the participatory journalists. Time constraints have cost some participants to scale back and even stop postings. Self-censorship greatly influenced especially the Chinese participants' content selection process.

## 2. What are the differences of the motivations between these two groups of participatory journalists?

Two main differences were observed between the two participant groups. Collectivism versus individualism difference manifested through how the participants describe their accounts, whether it's an individual account or the account also represented the organization they belong to. Most Chinese participants chose later while the American participants leaned towards the former option. This difference was also made obvious by the participants' branding motivation. American participants tend to use Twitter postings for self-promotion and self-image building, while Chinese participants were more concerned about building a positive image for the institution they belong to or work for.

Although each motivational factor was discussed separately, it is important to recognize that all elements impact each other and they together form an intricate web of motivation that ultimately can predict a person's behavior.

Some common motivations are shared by most participants, such as earning respect and self-expression, but this does not mean they weighed most heavily on a person's decision to open or maintain a PJ microblog. These are all pieces of a puzzle. Some pieces may be one person's last piece to trigger him/her to act, while some may not even fit in a person's profile, especially in a cross-culture situation. The adversary role is important to Chinese participants due to their social environment and the fusion and crash they are

experiencing between their unique cultural perspective and the new ideas infused into the country in this globalized world. A new finding in this study is the de-motivating factors that were not discussed in previous studies. In this area, time constraints and self-censorship are most prominent among all participants.

In the next section, the author will briefly discuss the limitations of this study and future research areas.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

No study is perfect. Limitations exist in all research projects. By acknowledging these limitations, the author provided circumstances for the readers to better understand the findings and discussions that were presented. In a sense, limitations are like the fine print or warnings on a product that were given to users so they could use the product more cautiously and within certain boundaries. Sometimes, limitations also suggest future research areas the readers could ponder upon and other researchers can explore. In this short section, limitations of the current study are presented, and future studies are suggested.

#### **Limitations**

One limitation is shared by almost all qualitative studies – the generalizability of the study. The current study uncovered many interesting themes and categories of motivation, especially when comparisons were made between American and Chinese participants. However, these themes and categories would need empirical data to test their generalizability. And data about more countries should be collected to ensure the cross-culture study's reliability.



The second limitation is the technology itself. Any technology-centered study would face the same problem of the rapidly-changing landscape of the technology world. Although this could pose a potential risk of rendering the study outdated rather quickly, it may also bring new phenomena for researchers to explore and thereby extend the current study.

In the world of Web technology, the driving force is always the “next big thing.” Those who can come up with a better concept, deliver a better product, and attract a large user base will almost always replace the preceding technology. For example, MySpace has suffered a continuous loss of user base since 2008. Its heavy focus on entertainment and music became obsolete when users quickly outgrew the limited features MySpace could offer. Most members moved over to Facebook. Although Facebook is only one year younger than MySpace, it consistently offers more features to its users, resulting in a steady growth of its fan base.

A few years later, Twitter was born, and the whole new concept of live blog feeds fascinated millions of Web surfers. In just a few short years, Twitter became insanely popular, attracting users from Facebook and other social media sites that came before. Twitter’s success led to the era of microblogging. All around the world, people began switching to microblogging websites, such as Tencent or Sina Weibo in China. Most users are still maintaining their Facebook or other social media accounts, but the focus and energy were shifted to this new platform.

However, as with all social media, microblogging is not without its drawbacks. To begin with, privacy is a huge concern for many people using the microblog. The idea of broadcasting one’s thoughts to the public was indeed innovative, but after the excitement settled down, this feature that microblogging was known for also created its biggest problem. Without proper filtration both in terms of content and audience, a great deal of

personal information could be comprised. People might post something out of impulse, and regret it a second later, but it is too late because the world has seen it and it has been re-posted many times. Strangers can follow someone anonymously and learn quite a bit about that individual's personal life. In the online world where privacy is always at stake, such exposure of personal information can lead to harmful results. Moreover, security is a big concern. Sensitive materials can be leaked and disseminated easily on a microblog, such as corporate trade secrets and classified government information. Many people may see this as a way of promoting the free flow of information, but they rarely realize the high price paid behind the scenes.

With these known issues unsolved, and the advent of next-generation mobile technology, it is only a matter of time before microblogs become obsolete. In fact, Tencent Holding Limited, the company that first brought QQ, then Weibo, to the Chinese market, has already made the next move: WeChat. WeChat is a mobile app that was first introduced as an instant voice messenger, saving people the time of having to type out every word. This was instantly the favorite application of everyone owning a touch screen cellphone in China. WeChat later introduced many welcoming features, such as friend radar based on Geofencing, private moment sharing with friends that could potentially replace the functionality of the Facebook profile page, instant money transactions, and the list goes on. It is fun, convenient, private and secure. As most tech-savvy users have made the transition to smartphone devices, WeChat, with all these positive attributes, is bound to be successful. In fact, information overloading on Weibo has already driven some users away to join WeChat instead because it's a more controlled platform with fewer meaningless messages free floating. Without doubt, Weibo is facing serious competition in the Chinese market.

Twitter will perhaps suffer the same fate. Most American participants pointed out that Twitter today is not the same as Twitter before, when things were simple, friends were closer, and stories were still true. Only time will tell when and what will replace Twitter and become the next big thing in the American market, if it is not already happening, and at which time this study can be extended to include the new technology users.

### **Future Research**

As mentioned in the limitations above, generalizability could only be achieved through a quantitative study with empirical data and statistical analysis. To go beyond the current 13 participants and look at the motivational factors for more participants in different countries will be the next step. The current study provided a great platform to construct a quantitative study in the future. It will also be interesting to introduce more participants from different cultures into the study to add to the reliability of the emerged motivational differences among participatory journalists from different cultures.

From the technology perspective, people are always trying to find the perfect venue for self-expression. Participatory journalism was not born with Twitter or Weibo; on the contrary, it existed long before the Internet. When newspapers were dominant, people would write to the editors and contact journalists to have their stories told. When it comes to TV, people also found their voices in vox populi. Then the Internet came, and with it online forums and blogs spread like a spider's web. Comments were enabled on many news websites. But it was not until the invention of microblogs that people found a place where originality is cherished and hailed and quality news stories were told, not only by traditional journalists, but also by normal citizens; by "one of us." People quickly discovered that millions of other meaningless pieces of information also found their way onto microblogs. Finding a piece of truthful and useful information has become more and

more difficult. It's not hard to imagine people jumping onto the "next big thing" the inventors are currently working on and finding an even better platform to carry out their tasks as participatory journalists. Future studies should also look at other venues that have provided the opportunity for participatory journalists to contribute content, such as Wechat in China.

### **From Motivation to the Future of Professional Journalism**

Multiple participants mentioned Twitter or Weibo as their main news consumption source. This revealed the fact that digital news, especially participatory journalism, is becoming a strong contender of traditional news media.

Arguments about whether participatory journalism and citizen journalism will replace professional journalism have spurred abundant discussions among scholars, yet no one has been able to provide a conclusive answer to this question. Participatory journalism is a complicated phenomenon with numerous facets. Its timeliness, omnipresence and personal approach are what have shaken the ground under professional journalism. However, its information overloading, lack of credibility and reliability of continuing coverage give credence to the auspicious future of professional journalism.

Exploring motivations and de-motivational factors of microbloggers who conduct participatory journalism online is crucial to understand the process of participatory journalism, and will in turn shed light on the perplexing nature of credibility and reliability of microblog journalism postings. Only when the shortcomings of participatory journalism are addressed can we truly and safely predict the future of participatory journalism and its relationship with professional journalism. The author will continue this line of research.

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## Appendices

## Interview Guide

- Introduce myself
- Demographic questions: age, occupation, education, previous working experiences
- Microblog Content:
  - Most recent microblog entry: comment, then ask how he/she got the information and why he/she decided to post it. Emphasize on the process
  - First microblog entry: experience
  - First original news stories shared on microblog: process
  - Longevity: how long been using microblog, and how long been sharing original news
  - Frequency: how often share original news
  - News content: what are they
  - Source: how and where to get original information
  - Moments: most gratifying moments and frustrating moments
  - Microblog audience: who and interactions with them
- The platform
  - When started using microblog: feeling and first-time experience
  - What other platforms you are sharing original news stories
  - Why microblog
- Thank you and sharing contact info



## **Vita**

Rachel Jue Rui was born in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China. Before she came to the U.S., Rachel worked for the Associated Press TV News in Beijing as a news editor. She obtained her Master's Degree in Communication and Information in 2009 from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK). In 2010, Rachel joined UT Department of Chemistry as a full-time staff member and is in charge of all departmental communication efforts. At the same time she continued to pursue her Ph.D. degree in Communication. Rachel's research interests include social media, participatory journalism, and communication across cultures.