Deliberative Democracy via Cyberspace:

A Study of Online Political Forums@Taiwan

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DECLARATION

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

The emergence of the Internet ignited new hope for those aspiring to reinvigorate democracy, especially online political forums whose discursive nature seemingly offers the possibility of deliberative democracy. This thesis aims to explore whether online political forums are capable of contributing to public deliberation in Taiwan's context.

Three forums have been chosen in this study, Yahoo Political Forum, Palm BBS and The Presidential Office Forum, respectively sponsored by a commercial website, an academic institution and the government. The complete research project has two branches of inquiry, one focuses on the analysis of the messages published in the forums, and the other aims to comprehend online discussants' motivations, expectations and standpoints concerning online deliberation. Drawing on systematic content analysis and discourse analysis, the results reveal that 1) the discursive qualities are different amongst the three forums; The Presidential Office's discussants tend to create their own topics, in contrast to the participants of Yahoo and Palm who rely very much on journalists' reports as sources of discussion topics; 2) Current political tensions are amplified, and engender verbal conflict in Yahoo and Palm which thwarts the rationality of discussions; 4) Driven by political efficacy, the participants in The Presidential Office prefer to communicate directly with bureaucrats. The analytic results from the in-depth interviews show that the discussants are encouraged and motivated to participate by the forums' anonymous character; nevertheless, the lack of positive responses and encouragements gained from the extended environment causes the discussants to reward themselves by pleasing their individual demands.

Public deliberation in online forums may be weakened by unequal access, irrational participants/actions and fragmentation of public discourse. In this study, online political forums do not yet constitute a virtual/alternative public sphere. Their deliberative function confronts identity politics and tensions between political groups, therefore, to talk politics online the boundaries and differences of the political diversity in Taiwan must be overcome.

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List of Abbreviations

CMC: Computer-Mediated-Communication

DPP: Democratic Progressive Party

GII: Global Information Infrastructure

ICT: Information Communication Technology

KMT: Kuomingtang (the nationalist party in Taiwan)

NII: National Information Infrastructure

NP: New Party

PFP: People First Party

PRC: People's Republic of China

ROC: Republic of China

TAnet: Taiwan Academic Network

TI: Taiwanese Independence

TSU: Taiwan Solidarity Union

WHO: World Health Organisation

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Introduction

1. Talking about Politics across Geographical Boundaries

When I reside in the UK, my daily activities usually start with turning on my computer, which is a high spec server PC. The machine wakes up quickly and connects to the Internet very efficiently via a 16mb broadband width with unlimited downloading. As a board moderator of *Exchange Diary* in the *Hellouk* website, the biggest online community for Taiwanese students, workers or immigrants with UK citizenship, my responsibility is to maintain order within my board. If any posts are not written in diary format, or are against the regulations set up by the site management teams, I will either move them to other boards, or delete/edit them subject to their contents.

To observe the interactions between the Taiwanese participants and the Mainland Chinese users in the political forum of *Hellouk* is also part of my daily routine. The repeated conflicts between these two groups doesn't shock or surprise a long-term user like me; however, the occasional good discussions are worth reading because usually they are constituted by researchers, scholars or PhD students who live in the UK.

One of my students from my previous University lecturing job in Taiwan passes some messages to me via MSN sometimes. In his previous job he worked as a project planner in a community movement organisation. He likes to share his political concerns with me during our online chats. Recently, he tried to help farmers to protest against a new regulation to merge farmers' villages. According to this regulation[1], if any farmer's house is not decorated well enough, the owner must pay a fee to move his/her house from his/her land. He invited me to take part in the online petition as well as forum discussions.

Despite the fact that I don't reside physically in Taiwan, through the connection of the Internet I am still capable of participating in some political activities remotely. This

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[1] The regulation title is *The Regulation of Revitalised Farmers' Villages.*

virtual participation is in contrast to the situation when I physically stay at home in Taiwan. My family members prohibit me from taking part in any political activities. As the only daughter in my family, my mum gets extremely worried if I am involved with any activities associated with politics. In her mind, keeping me away from politics is a way to ascertain my safety and avoid trouble.

I understand my mum's concern very much because I also experienced the period of *White Terror*[2]. There is also some footage imprinted in my mind vividly, though the colour of this footage has faded gradually over the past thirty years.

My eyes were the lens of the camcorder as I tried to observe something from the street. Though my mum tried to hide me in her arms, I could see the entire main road in darkness without a single street light on, only the red sparkling lights of the police cars lit the scene. As usual, all the houses had switched off their lights due to Martial Law. None of the residents in Taiwan could turn on their lights after 9 pm, except the organisations of the government. I could sense the unusually tense atmosphere abounding the whole city. The police broadcast a repeated warning that no residents could help any criminals who had escaped from the anti-government protest. My father asked me 'don't talk, just be quite', in a short period of time, a policeman and a soldier came into our house. They checked every corner and every room very carefully, finally they left. Years later at university, I realised this memory was rooted in the Formosa Incident[3].

My parents, my students and I represent three generations who have experienced different political regimes in Taiwan's history. My parents had a terrible experience under the sovereignty of the authoritarians. My own upbringing took place between the nationalist emerge regime (Kuomingtan, a detailed explanation will be presented in chapter I) and democratisation. My students who were born after the lift of Martial Law[4] don't have any bad memories about censorship of speech, being caught on the protest alley, or being forced to worship a political leader. For them, talking politics is

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[2] The period of White Terror refers to the evolution of the nationalist émigré regime from 1945 to 1988. According to Wei's (1997:2) investigation, at least 200,000 political victims suffered and were caught during this period. The details will be explained in Chapter I.
[3] Also known as the Kaohsiung Incident. The detailed will be explained in Chapter I.
[4] The details will be explained in Chapter I.

a kind of social activity; they don't need to worry about what will happen if they express themselves as supporters of the government or as protestors against their policies.

The daily me in the UK and the daily me in Taiwan act in the two different environments. Talking about politics is easier for me while I reside in the UK, because I won't be discouraged by my parents or other Taiwanese relatives. The Internet technology carries me across geographical boundaries and allows me to be remotely involved in some political activities.

The idea to investigate 'who talks about or discusses politics online in Taiwan's context, emerged in my mind when I read bulk messages left in different Taiwanese online politics forums. In her observation of online forum discussions set up by Yahoo and Yam sites[5] during the 2004 presidential election, Pai (2005) observed that the sudden explosion in the amount of posts caused the forums' operation systems to sometimes crash. Complicated ethnic identities (the formation of which will be explained in chapter I) were usually the main excuse for different groups to create flames (ibid).

The Taiwanese old saying, 'it is better for children not to have mouths', implies that the old generations expect the youth to be incapable of talking politics. During the past century, while Taiwan was governed by the Japanese colonial government and later the nationalist émigré party, talking politics had always been a taboo in Taiwanese life until the lifting of Martial Law in 1986. Even during the period of democratisation from 1988 to 2000, the generations who experienced the previous hegemonic regimes still educated their siblings to never express their political standpoints in front of people.

If talking about politics in public is not encouraged by older generations due to the distrust of the political regime, would this be a reason to motivate people to participate in anonymous online forum discussions instead? In addition, I would like to know: do these online discussants have a similar background to me, my students, or

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[5] Yahoo! and Yam are the biggest portal websites in Taiwan.

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my parents? In their mind, what is the vision of Taiwan's democracy? Can online discussions in the anonymous environment contribute to the development of Taiwan's democracy? My life experiences and the direct observation of online discussions triggered me to search for proper answers. *Why* and *how* do they talk politics online in Taiwan's context?

Essentially, the purpose of this thesis is to thoroughly find out how and why discussants talk about politics online in a Taiwanese context. As Walsh (2004:3) claims, 'how people look at the world is grounded in where they place themselves in relation to others.' To understand why people make decisions to be part of the online world will extend the understanding of informal political discussions.

2. A Significant Technological Feature: the Easy Internet Access Environment in Taiwan

In a survey of the Internet's accessibility in 2002, results showed that Taiwan ranks in the top three countries in the world (South-Korea - no.1, Hong Kong - no.2, source from Point-Topic, quoted from FIND Research). The data revealed that in 2009, 81% of households in Taiwan subscribe to broadband (the highest country is South-Korea's 95%, UK is 67%, and US reaches 60%, Strategy Analytics Report, 2009). For most of the Taiwanese users, the network has played an important role in their lives.

The convenient Internet access environment was mostly constructed by the National Information Infrastructure (NII) project. Encouraged by the USA's Global Information Infrastructure (GII), Taiwan initiated the NII project in 1994. The NII project was initially dominated and driven by the government, but was later transferred to the social organisation, *National Information Infrastructure Enterprise Promotion Association*. The rapid speed of establishing the network provided people with a very convenient environment to access the Internet. However, none of the projects in the NII plan are associated with the development of democracy[6].

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[6] According to the guidelines of NII developing plans, there are seven areas of Internet applications, including video conferencing, e-shopping, e-learning, e-medical care, e-libraries and video on demand. (source from http://www.cs.nccu.edu.tw/~lien/NIIslide/NiiBook/niil2.htm, accessed 10th of June 2009).

In Taiwan's context, academic institutions started their Internet network (named TAnet, Taiwan Academic Network) four years earlier than NII. At the initial stage, only a few national universities used TAnet to communicate with each other and to conduct relevant researches. Until 1994, TAnet was expanded to become a secondary education system in support of the NII plan. According to TAnet data in 2008, the penetration rate of regular academic Internet users is 83% of the whole TAnet population, which is 4.48 million[7].

The Lunch Box Event which occurred in 1993 was the first successful student movement in Taiwan's history to mobilise its members via forum discussions. In May 1993, a National Chiao-Tung University student published messages on the school's BBS to request other students to protest together with him about the terrible cuisine supplied by the university's restaurant, and this issue obtained hundreds of students' support very quickly. During their lunch time break, the protesting students occupied the entrance of university and ate their lunch boxes in front of the gate. Although this protest was disrupted by angry car and van drivers, and some students were hit by a school bus because the bus driver attempted to break through the crowd in order to drive into the campus, the protest action still obtained the promise from the official of Chiao-Tung University, who then improved the food quality of the restaurant's cuisine and changed the regulation to prohibit any car entering the campus (Ku and Chang, 2002:6).

The Lunch Box Event demonstrated the mobilising ability of the Internet amongst student clusters. This kind of collective mobilising ability, especially shown in TAnet, is dubbed by the participants as *countrymen culture*[8] (Tsai, 2008:1), which implies that the users are not in line with the mainstream culture. With countrymen culture, however, it is not always necessarily to make a physical gathering or collective action like the Lunch Box Event; in most of cases, the countrymen (i.e. online discussants)

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[7] The newest statistic data of Taiwan's population is 23,060,000(Ministry of the Interior, 2008). Source from TAnet, data retrieval from http://www.find.org.tw/eng/news.asp?pos=1&subjectid=8&msgid=381, accessed 09/07/2008).

[8] The term of countryman was created around 2004 from PTT, the biggest BBS in Taiwan University network. It originated from a Stephen Chou's Cantonese popular movie, *Hail the Judge*. In the context of the movie, countrymen represent the people who like to join the fun. In the BBS's environment, countrymen become a symbol of the person participating in online activities.

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intend to leave their posts on the forums to virtually boycott or support certain issues. There is a famous case of a discussant who made a fake story about his girlfriend being unfaithful to him. His girlfriend was scolded by most of discussants, and someone even uploaded her photos. Because the thread attracted too many posts, and crashed the system, journalists reported this story in the press, which attracted the whole society's concern, and in the end the original author was recognised and apologised for writing a fake story (Tsai, ibid).

From the above case it is clear that countrymen don't always make the right decision. In the explanation of special terms created by the online discussions, Tsai (ibid) accounts the original meaning of countrymen to be online discussants who are incapable of making the right judgement. However, this term has been accepted by all the online participants in TAnet, and its original meaning has been transformed into a symbol of online popular sub-culture. Journalists refer to countrymen's discussions from some famous boards, such as *Hate* and *Gossips,* quite often in order to make reports about youth culture. But the contents of discussions from politics forums are usually excluded from their reports (ibid).

3. The Internet: Embracing the Possibilities of Grassroots Politics

The easy access character of the Internet in Taiwan offers a great opportunity to encourage citizens to participate in politics via cyberspace, and may reduce the influence of the digital divide - an existing inequality in access to new communication technologies (Sunstein, 2001:20). By embracing the characteristics of a de-centralised, all-participating, and boundary-crossing domain, online political forums have been considered by many optimists to be a great step towards deliberative democracy. The discursive nature of online political forums might contribute to the possibilities of grassroots politics. Corrado and Firestone believe (1996:17) that via online discussions, a 'conversation democracy' can form in which 'citizens and political leaders interact in new and exciting ways'. Rheingold (1993:131) similarly claims that if online political forums aren't 'a democratizing technology, there is no such thing'.

Deliberation is highly recommended by scholars in contributing an increased tolerance or understanding of others' stances (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004; Warren, 1996), a more selfless, public-minded and self-reflective form of democratic citizenship (Dewey, 1954), and increased communicative abilities (Gastil, 1993; Bohman, 1996). Citizens are capable of increasing political participation, autonomy and individual self-efficacy via deliberative procedures (Fishkin and Luskin, 1999).

In the virtual environment, to exchange opinions with political leaders is categorised as a successful factor in deliberation, and this has occurred in government-run forums (Jensen, 2003; Albrecht, 2006). Recently, the emergence of micro-blogging (i.e. Twitter and Plurk) offers a new arena for deliberation. The simplified function of micro-blogging has attracted politicians to take part in order to diffuse their political ideologies. Famous users include the White House in America, the Labour and Conservative Parties and the Royal Family in the UK, who all tweet on Twitter to share their messages with other tweeters (Cellan-Jones, 2009:1).

In Taiwan's context, Plurk is more popular than Twitter. In a survey of Dataopedia.com in 2009[9], the Taiwanese users of Plurk are the second biggest group among all other countries. The popularity of Plurk has drawn great attention from some Taiwanese politicians to engage in the discussions with other plurkers. Their efforts to interact with plurkers directly have attracted a massive number of followers successfully (Su, 2009:1). Lin Gia-long, the Taichung City Mayor candidate, admitted that direct interaction with discussants benefits his understanding of what citizens need[10] in the political domain. Lin collected the opinions of his followers concerning the issue of Taichung's Tube system, and wrote a letter to the editor published in *Liberal Press*, a mainstream paper in Taiwan. The Internet, in this case, has demonstrated its great ability to bridge the gap between political elites and ordinary citizens.

To apply Plurk to direct political communication is the newest trend to arise in 2009. In Plurk, topics are only initiated by the plurkers, unlike online forums where anyone can initiate or join different topics. Plurk also has a more simple user-friendly

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[9] Refer to the following link http://dataopedia.com/plurkmania-com
[10] Lin wrote this information in his Plurk on July 14th 2009 to express his appreciation.

structure than forums, yet contains more advanced features like automatic updating of content to other linked sites (e.g. Facebook or personal websites), and can be accessed via a mobile phone. Prior to the emergence of Plurk, online forums were joined by those who wanted to access deliberation. The difference between online political forums and Plurk is that the previous arena didn't attract politicians to interact with discussants constantly in Taiwan's context.

In contrast to politicians who occasionally engage in online forum discussions, the members of grassroots movements in Taiwan regard online forums as ideal spaces for discussing their collective vision continuously. In traditional communities' redevelopment plans, online forums are advocated as arenas for implementing the ideal of deliberative democracy. A famous case is the experiment in the Beitou community. Inspired by the spirit of Minnesota's E-Democracy plan[11] Beitou community initiated its online deliberation plan in 2004, which aimed to form public discourse about the issue of improving Beitou's community. The members of the Beitou community anticipated that collective vision of their community plan could be developed via their online discussions (Fong, 2009:77).

It is worth noting that nowadays, the participants of community movements strive for the implementation of deliberative democracy in Taiwan. Deliberative democracy (the detailed discussion of which will be explained in chapter V) is attributed as a necessary approach to conducting grassroots movements, especially for young generation (Liu, 2006). Nevertheless, deliberative democracy is still regarded as a 'spreading and developing concept' rather than a mature system, by most scholars in Taiwan's context (ibid). In this respect, can online virtual communities replace real communities in carrying out deliberative democracy?

4. Inevitable Filtering in Cyberspace

The lifting of Martial Law in 1987 ascertained Taiwanese freedom of speech. According to the Constitution of the Republic of China (ROC)[12], 'The people shall

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[11] Advocated by Steven Clift, Minnesota E-Democracy aims to expand the participation of citizens in democracy in Minnesota via the use of information networks. The website is http://www.e-democracy.org/
[12] Taiwan's diplomatic formal name.

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have freedom of speech, teaching, writing, and publication' (Article 11). In the recent twenty years of democratisation, Taiwan has gradually developed into a diverse society.

In clarifying freedom of speech in a diverse society, Sunstein (2001:8-9) attributes two conditions for establishing a well-functioning system of free expression. Firstly, people should be able to expose themselves to materials with unplanned and unanticipated choices. If they only choose a certain type of voice, i.e. like-minded groups, the predictable outcome would oppose an ideal democracy wherein 'people often come across views and topics that they have not specifically selected' (ibid:9), and would inevitably cause a fragmentation for the whole society. The second condition is that people should have common experiences (possibly provided by the media functioning as a social glue to accelerate mutual understanding), and should like to share their experiences. Social problems would be addressed through efficient communication via such shared experiences in a heterogeneous society (ibid).

In Sunstein's view, unplanned and unanticipated choices prior to the exposure of certain materials and shared experiences form a basis of a well-functioning system of free expression. But he worries that these two conditions confront difficulties in online forums due to the way people use the Internet. Internet users will unavoidably filter materials out which they feel are unnecessary, and not allow them to appear in the chosen contents. He asks'…why people are likely to engage in filtering. The simplest reason is that people often know, or think they know, what they like and dislike' (ibid:55). Sunstein uses 'daily me' as a metaphor in explaining this individualised communication experience in cyberspace.

> The daily me. It is some time in the future. Technology has greatly increased people's ability to 'filter' what they want to read, see, and hear.....When the power to filter is unlimited, people can decide, in advance and with perfect accuracy, what they will and will not encounter (ibid:3-5).

If people intend to interact with other like-minded groups, and avoid encountering different voices in cyberspace, the deliberative function of online forums would be somewhat wasted. A similar concern about this online balkanising phenomenon is also echoed by some other scholars (Bellamy and Raab, 1999; Meraz, 2007; Pew

Internet Report, 2004; Wright and Street, 2007). Bellamy and Raab (1999:169) argue that 'there is a real danger that ICT's (Information Communication Technology) will not only reflect but amplify the fragmentation of the public sphere, balkanising politics into multifarious and shifting constituencies.' The balkanising effect would lead online discussions away from creating inclusive deliberation, and instead make them 'as narrow or perhaps even narrower than those across the backyard fence' (Davis and Owen, 1998:124, quoted in Wright and Street, 2007:852). Therefore, the views of online discussants would be reinforced rather than exchanged.

The question of whether this online balkanising phenomenon exists and whether it clashes with online deliberation will be addressed in this study. This thesis aims to scrutinise, in Taiwan's context, whether online discussants adhere to their affiliations with political parties and their identity politics (the political background of Taiwan will be explained in Chapter I), or whether they cross these boundaries and form public discourses in cyberspace.

5. Situating Digital Design in Online Deliberation

In sharing his experience of conducting online discussions in the Beitou community, Lin (2008:86, quoted in Fong, 2009:78) recognises the most difficult part of this project is 'how to help the participants to conquer the fear of managing the technological design' (ibid). Those who implement deliberative democracy via cyberspace inevitably encounter the decision of technological design, including software's adoption, interface operation/interaction, and hardware speed. The relevant analysis from Beitou's project stresses that 'the discursive process was disturbed' (ibid) due to some participants being incapable of operating the designated system.

Lin's assessment notes the importance of technological design in conducting online deliberation. From a comparison of the results of several countries' experiments (Greece, Holland, and Germany), Tsagarousianou (1998:169) employs *who* designs the forum as a factor which influences the process of democratic discussions. She concludes that there are enormous differences between government-run sites and spontaneous civil society-led sites (ibid). The former cases are defined and shaped in

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top-down and bottom-up communication embraced by the authorities, and the latter forums contribute in information 'provision and exchange, deliberation and civic networking' (ibid).

Concerning the differences amongst the forums' design, instead of providing a simple conclusion that online political forums destroy deliberation, or celebrate that they reinvigorate democracy, this research includes the factor of design, and follows Wright and Street's (2007) suggestion that 'websites (online political forums) are the products of technical, political and other choices, and of the contingencies of context' (850). It is to say, the ways that websites/forums are constructed may be a factor that influences both the discursive qualities, and how discussants interact with each other. In this study, three forums designed respectively by the government, a commercial enterprise and an academic institution, are chosen for examining the following inquiry: Instead of classifying all the political forums as homogeneous by ignoring the dissimilarities amongst the differently designed forums, this research will investigate whether a distinction exists between different forums based on their design and purpose of construction.

6. Outlines of the Thesis

In this thesis, the structure can be separated into four main themes; a background knowledge of Taiwan, literature review, research methods, and main findings. The theme of the background knowledge of Taiwan chapter (I and II) aims to retrace Taiwan's political history and democratic movements, which are associated with the formation of Taiwan's current politics. The unique contribution of media technology to the democratic process is also discussed in order to provide more understanding of the importance of new media in Taiwan's context. The literature review contains two main chapters – chapter III and IV. In these chapters, the relevant literatures are reviewed, and theoretical discussions construct the foundations for further empirical analysis. The theme of the research methods chapter (V) attempts to sketch out the whole research framework and the relevant approaches which address the research questions in this study. The main findings analysed from these research approaches are presented in chapter VI, VII, VIII and IX. The results from this study not only provide an analysis of the phenomena of online political forums in Taiwan, but also

contribute to the exploration of deliberative democracy via cyberspace. Detailed explanations of each chapter are presented as follows.

Chapter I begins with an introduction to the political background of Taiwan. In this chapter, the complicated historical background which constituted the national identity issues and conflict within Taiwan's current society is described and analysed. In chapter II, firstly, the relationship between media technology prior to the Internet's appearance and democracy in Taiwan's context is reviewed and discussed. From a historical trajectory, the issue of whether the evolution of media technology has benefited democratic developments, or lead to another outcome, is discussed explicitly. Borrowing from the experiences of advanced countries, the attributes of the Internet are particularly analysed in this chapter.

Chapter III moves the focus from a historical view of media technology and democracy to theoretical discussions. Since the Internet was invented and applied to our lives, many proponents have attributed the Habermasian public sphere as providing a good account of how the Internet is being used to accelerate public purpose. In this chapter, the theory of Habermas's public sphere and its shortcomings are reviewed and discussed. In addition, the plausibility of transplanting Habermas's public sphere into a new space is theoretically discussed.

Following Chapter III, Chapter IV focuses on the discursive function provided by the Internet. Extending the line of thought from chapter III, this chapter discusses the theory of deliberative democracy and rationality. In addition to the theoretical discussions, the findings from empirical researches into whether online political forums are ideal places for deliberation are discussed. Based on the theoretical analyses and previous relevant researches, some more research questions are attempted to be answered.

Chapter V opens on the discussion of the research design and research framework. The main themes are: how this research has been conducted, the theoretical knowledge of methodologies, and the relevant approaches. Basically, this research has two focus points; the first analyses the texts left in the forums, the second investigates the online discussants in order to comprehend their motivations.

Chapter VI investigates who says what in the online political forums. After analysing the contents of the three chosen forums, the descriptive characteristics are found to be different, including the amounts of posts, authors, rates, and lengths of words. The way to initiate a discursive topic also shows a differentiation across the chosen forums.

Chapter VII looks at the online discussants' attitudes toward government and others. In Taiwan's political context, the different governments represent different ethnic groups and powers with complicated historical backgrounds. In this chapter, the attitudes toward former and current governments are analysed in order to look at how independent they are. Others in Taiwanese contexts are identified as Mainland Chinese residents. The attitudes towards Mainland Chinese people can be seen by how open online discussants are to accepting others.

Chapter VIII investigates whether the online discussants act rationally or irrationally. Flames are seen as a kind of online war; in this chapter, the results from content analysis show that the amounts of flames in this study are higher than in other researches. The three chosen forums also show a differentiation in the amount of flames occurring among them.

Chapter IX uncovers how and why the online discussants participate in the online discussions. Not fully agreeing with the prediction that online discussants take advantage of anonymity, in this study they regard their main virtual pseudonyms as the extensions of themselves, but considering creating other disposable IDs in order to win debates. Self-rewarding thoughts compensate for being ignored by the government or mainstream media.

The conclusion summarises the discussions and analyses from the previous chapters. The images of online forums and discussants are constructed via step by step analyses. At the end of this thesis, I also suggest some approaches for further researches.

Chapter I   The Political Complexities in Taiwan - Historical Background and Current Predicaments

Everyone can bully Taiwan Ren; everyone can rape Taiwan Ren; no one loves Taiwan Ren.   *Adapted from the movie, 'A City of Sadness'[13].*

When the presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou, who represented the nationalist Kuomingtang party (KMT) won the presidential election in 2008, the Democratic Progress Party (DPP) once again became the opposing minority. After eight years of having no political authority, the KMT regained control over the Presidential Office, the Legislative Institution (seventy two percent of all legislators), and the majority of the cities and counties in Taiwan. Despite the results of the presidential polls, for some elderly native Taiwanese (*Taiwan Ren* or *Bensheng Ren*) the resurrection of the KMT's political regime meant 'the return of a nightmare'.

On the night that the presidential election poll results were revealed, I phoned my mother and criticised the political situation in Taiwan. My mother asked me to stop discussing this topic; she seemed scared and talked to me quietly, 'Hey girl, don't make trouble for yourself. You know Taiwan is now under the control of the KMT authoritarians again.'

My mother's reaction was typical of conservative women from native Taiwanese families who have been educated under and experienced the regime of the KMT Nationalist émigré (1945-1988). My mother also had a Japanese name *Ko-Ah* (meaning *pearl*) given by my grandfather, who refused to recognise that he was Chinese due to the suffering experienced during the 2-28 incident[14]. He sadly missed the era when Taiwan was ruled by the Japanese colonial regime (1895-1945), which he described as a golden age for the Taiwanese. My grandfather's attitude echoes that of most generations of Taiwanese who grew up and lived in Taiwan during the same era. In the documentary 'Viva Tonal'[15], the director interviewed several old singers and scholars. The singers personally experienced the 'Composed Popular Songs in

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[13] This movie, A City of Sadness, was awarded the Golden Lion Prize at the 1989 Venice Film Festival.
[14] The details of the 2-28 incident are be explained in part 1.3 of this chapter
[15] The documentary Viva Tonal was produced by Jen, Wei-shi and Guo, Jen-Di, and was released in 2003. Viva Tonal won the Best Documentary at the 40th Golden Horse Prizes in 2003.

Taiwanese Language', proposed by the Japanese colonial government. The scholars confirmed the contribution of the Japanese colonial government in assisting the Taiwanese people to develop their own popular Taiwanese culture. This was the first time in history that Taiwanese women were encouraged by the official government to have the freedom to choose their husbands instead of being assigned marriages by family members. For my grandfather, though he had to give up his Chinese name, and be loyal to the Japanese Emperor (more detailed accounts are provided in the following section), he still appreciated how the Japanese government provided equal opportunities for all Taiwanese to be educated, and encouraged the Taiwanese to develop their own culture. For him, the quality of life was far better than under the later KMT party's governance.

Actually, my grandfather's point of view was not reflected by the contents of text books designed by the KMT nationalists. It is, however, in line with the ethos of former president Lee Teng-huei, who was the first native Taiwanese president. In a recent public speech, Lee praised Gotō Shinpei, the civil administrator (Minsei Chōkan) of the Japanese colonial government, as his spiritual leader because he established the foundation of modernisation for Taiwan. Also, Lee recognised that the education he received from Japan assisted him in finding his path in life (BBC Chinese, 1ˢᵗ of June, 2007).

Lee's support for the Japanese colonial regime was a taboo during the years of KMT nationalist governance. Many native Taiwanese children were taught that the Japanese were guilty of crimes against the people. For example, their history textbooks urged them: 'don't forget how horrible the Japanese are, and remember the day that Japanese soldiers massacred the residents of Nanjin'[16]. It is true that the 'Mainlander' ethnic group (*Waisheng Ren*) who followed the KMT government's retreat from Mainland China to Taiwan in/after 1949, would have just over a decade before, witnessed the Japanese military's massacre of thousands of Chinese in World War II, so there is little doubt that they saw the Japanese as enemies. But for the native Taiwanese who experienced two cycles of regime evolutions, the KMT nationalists were far worse than the Japanese.

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[16] Nanjin is the capital city of Jiang-Su Province in China. The Nanjin massacre happened in 1937 when Japan occupied Nanjin.

The milestone for Taiwan's politics was the lifting of Martial Law in 1987, when the people's freedom of speech and publishing became protected by Constitutional Law. The democratisation process has led all residents to consider the following issue seriously: Should Taiwan become an independent (national) state, or should it unify with China in the future?

Since 1971, the leader of the KMT, Chiang Kai-shek, withdrew Taiwan's membership from the United Nations, and landed the country in a complicated situation. Taiwan is not a national title but the name is well-known by global societies. The official title 'Republic of China' is little known, used or recognised. In geographical reality, Taiwan is not a part of China, yet it is not recognised by the United Nations or most countries as a nation. Thus, 'to be independent' or 'to be unified with China' are the two major routes for Taiwan to climb out of its isolated situation.

The increased amount of identity politics seems to dominate the decision making of political choices. A conflict still exists between the two major ethnic groups, the majority, the native Taiwanese, and the minority, the Mainlanders. According to Wang's (1999:9) account, the most popular 'common sense' view is that the former group tends to support Taiwanese Independence (TI) and nationalism to build up Taiwan as a nation, but the latter group prefers Taiwan to eventually become unified with Mainland China, the PRC (The Peoples' Republic of China). For Wang, such an ethnically based explanation cannot account for the escalation of TI, rather than its decline, in the past decade since '…the 'ethnic Taiwanese' became the ruling majority after democratization' (ibid:11). There must be other reasons for the peoples' desire for independence, beyond their ethnic backgrounds and ethnic categorisations, to account for the current situation. For both native Taiwanese and Mainlanders, talking about politics is no simple matter, but is instead surrounded by historical complexities and ethno-cultural identity issues. By untangling the historical complexities, the reasons behind the current predicaments can be more deeply understood.

1.1 The Old Names of Taiwan: Formosa and Yi-Chou

When the first western ship passed Taiwan in 1590, a Dutch explorer named the island *Ilha Formosa*, meaning 'beautiful island' and this name was used for the next four centuries. Around the same period of time, due to the turbulence between the

Ming and Ching Dynasty in China, a great number of residents from the Fukein and Guangtung provinces (located in south-eastern part of China) chose to emigrate to Taiwan. During that time, Taiwan had been named by the Chinese as *Yi-Chou*, which means *Savage island*. For those pioneering immigrants whose only option to escape the wars was to run away and settle in Taiwan as farmers, it was not categorised as a part of China.

From 1624 to 1662, the Dutch occupied Taiwan and brought in Chinese labourers as migrant workers for planting sugarcane and rice. Those labourers usually came for a few years (without family) and then returned to the mainland. Eventually, more settled and married aborigine[17] wives. The Dutch established a fortress on the Southwestern coast of the island named *'Zeelandia'* after the Dutch province of Zeeland. In 1642, the Spanish power, who occupied the northern area of Formosa, was expelled, and the Dutch took over its fort, named *San Domingo*[18] (Chen, 2008:2).

Taiwan, as a borderline settlement for poor Chinese immigrants, had been ignored by Chinese emperors for centuries (Chu and Lin, 2001:104). But in 1662, Cheng Cheng-Kung (Koxinga), a loyalist of the old Ming dynasty, defeated the Dutch and then extended the remainder of the Ming dynasty to include Taiwan, giving the island more close political connections with Mainland China. However, the Ming dynasty only lasted for 20 years, and in 1683, the Ming defences disintegrated under the pressure of the Ching's military might as they took over Taiwan.

For most of the Ching period, Taiwan was governed by absentee Mandarins from Fukein, who spent very little time on the island, which was regarded as 'a chaotic and plague-ridden periphery' (ibid, 105).

The Chinese immigrants brought the traditional customs, life styles, and habits with them from their home towns, such as Fukein or Guangtung. The language Min-Nan comes from the ancient name of Fukein, meaning 'south of Min'. Those immigrants who came from Guangtung spoke Hakka language. According to an investigation of

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[17] Taiwanese Aborigines or Aboriginal peoples are the indigenous peoples in Taiwan. It is believed that their ancestors have been living on this island for approximately 8,000 years before major Han's Chinese immigration began in 1600. They are Austronesian peoples, and are tied to other Austronesian ethnic groups, such as peoples of the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Oceania (Blust, 1999).

[18] The current name of this castle is 'Red Hair Castle'. Red hair is a nickname for the Dutch.

the dispersion of ethnic groups, conducted in 2004, the Min-Nan group covers 73.3% of the whole population, while the Hakka group covers 13.5% (Council for Hakka Affairs, 2004:3-2). Most of time, the term Taiwanese (*Taiwan Ren* or *Bensheng Ren*) stands for the descendants of the immigrant Min-Nan group.

1.2 The Evolution of the Japanese Colonial Regime (1895- 1945)

The Ching dynasty declared Taiwan a province in 1885, and assigned Liu Mingchuan as the first provincial governor (*xunfu*). The mission of Liu was to modernise the island, and to build up Taiwan as a blockhouse against foreign invasions of China. Ten years later, Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Ching court after China was defeated in the Sino-Japanese war and signed the Treaty of Shimonseki in April 1895. When the news arrived in Taiwan, despite the withdrawal of the Ching officialdom, the remaining officials engaged their resistance by organizing the Republic of Taiwan (*Taiwan minzhu guo*) in May 1895, which was the first modern republic in Asia. The Republic of Taiwan lasted less than five months until it was defeated by the Japanese military. Japan replaced it with the Japanese-authorized 'Taiwan government' on June 17, 1895 (Yeh, 1997:17).

The Japanese captured Liu's modernisation, but made developments within a different political framework. Rather than adopting western colonial thoughts and practices, which treated colonised people as members of an inferior race and separated the colony from the homeland, the policies of Japanese rulers tended to chain Taiwan closely to the homeland. A report presented to the Bureau of Taiwan Affairs by under-secretary of the Foreign Ministry Hara Takashi in 1896, outlined two alternatives routes for colonial policy; they were assimilation or non-assimilation, and assimilation was asserted. Under the 'principle of homeland extensionism' (*naichi enchō shugi*), the Taiwanese were to be regarded as equal to the Japanese.

However, this policy was impractical due to the occupation of Taiwan being dominated by political and military considerations. For the colonial government, the Taiwanese were likely to be more of a challenge than their own citizens. Thereafter, the colonisers moved towards building an elite-steered colonial state. It is agreed that GotōShinpei, the civil administrator, was the major architect of this vision. As a doctor trained in Germany, Gotō believed that Taiwan must be ruled by "biological

principles", i.e. he sought to first understand the habits of the Taiwanese population, as well as the reasons for their existence, before creating corresponding policies. To address this purpose, he created and headed the Provisional Council for the Investigation of the Old Habits of Taiwan. Several surveys were conducted between 1898 and 1903 on geography, land, traditional customs and population. The results assisted the colonial government to receive the unclaimed properties, reassign the land ownership, monopolise the sugar and camphor industries, and to finally reach financial independence (Chu and Lin, 2001:106).

Basically, on one side, the colonial government kept the social structure of Taiwan intact, for example, by preserving the literati-gentry class and sponsored the gathering of Chinese poetic compositions. But on the other side, they built a dense police network with the traditional *baojia* system which infiltrated every corner of Taiwanese society. Following the agreement of the Treaty of Shimonoseki (Article 5), Taiwanese residents were allowed to choose their nationalities in the first period of occupation. Only a few thousands kept their Chinese nationality, the majority changed to Japanese. Despite their nationalities changing, the Taiwanese were far from having complete Japanese citizenship, especially as they were excluded from the government, representative bodies and military.

After the First World War, Japan was regarded as one of the superpowers in the world. When Europeans withdrew their Asian colonies, Japan inherited the financial and political benefits that their pre-occupiers left. In keeping with the demand of the rapid economical expansion in homeland Japan, Taiwan was the major supplier of rice and sugar. A commercialised landholding class started to incubate, and the landed class wanted more political autonomy. They were armed with modern ideologies, such as democracy and self-determination to launch political movements which weren't counteracted violently by the colonial government. Around the same time, Taiwan was more accommodating to the Japanese, compared to the previous two decades. For the educated class, Japanese was no longer seen as a foreign language. All the armed resistance was totally eliminated.

Later, the anti-governmental elite of the Taiwanese found a greater leverage to influence the policy-making of the colonial government. With their fluent Japanese, they could search for supporters from the Japanese homeland who would help format

public opinion. But those leaders had to face a challenge at the same time concerning their dual identities. They could play down their Taiwanese identity and instead stress that they were Japanese in order to request the same civil rights as the Japanese citizens. However, if they emphasised the differences between themselves and the Japanese, they would possibly lose the sympathies of those who supported the assimilation policy. The two targets of anti-governmental movements, and self-determination with equal citizenship, couldn't be reached simultaneously.

Japan's colonial government also struggled with assimilation and non-assimilation policies. Strategic interactions between the anti-government elite and the colonial government created dynamic identity politics. Lin Hsien-tang, a leader of the Taiwanese movement, strategically embraced 'equalization through assimilation', and established the Taiwan Assimilation Society (Taiwan dōkakai). This organisation was discontinued by order of the government. When the Japanese colonial government finally shifted to homeland extensionism completely, the Taiwanese were not satisfied with assimilation. The anti-government movement shifted to stress Taiwan's peculiarity and petitioned for a permission to organise a Taiwan parliament, based on the assumption of ethnic differences between Taiwanese and Japanese.

The issue of national identity didn't surface, but instead dissolved because the anti-government movement suffered from internal division. For the radicals, they had to consider which vision of building a nation they preferred to accept from the Communist Parties in Japan or China. The land owning class was forced to receive the government's assimilation plan in order to guarantee their safety.

By the mid-1930s, Japan invaded China, and Taiwan's role shifted from the suppliers of capital contributions, to the factory production base of the military. With the increased importance of Taiwan's strategic value, the Japanese government started to revise its policies and adopt measures. But when Japan found that the battlefields of Mainland China were in difficult and precarious positions, Taiwan's role was moved up to become a naval military base. The colonial regime decided to leave the least space for identity, and instead adopted high-force policies. Kobayashi Seizō, the governor-general of the colonial government outlined three policies: to Japanize Taiwanese people, to build military industries, and to use Taiwan as a base 'Proceeding to the South' (Lee, 1997:47). During WWII, the biological principle was

abandoned, and the governor-generals instead implemented the assimilation policy named Kōminka. Under Kōminka, or the Japanization movement, all the colonial people were converted into imperial subjects. Firstly, all Taiwanese were forced to abandon their Chinese customs, regard Japanese as their national language, worship the God/Goddess of the Japanese Emperor's religion, and adopt Japanese names. Secondly, all private schools offering Chinese education were banned in 1940. Japanese school was the only option, and by the end of the war, the percentage of primary school students in education had reached 71.1% (Tsurumi, 1977:245).

By the end of World War II, Taiwan's society had been shaped by assimilation policies for more than two decades. The most obvious impact of national identity policy was on the younger generations - the Japanese Empire gave them not only hopes, but also educations and job opportunities. Many of them considered themselves Japanese citizens rather than Chinese, and most questioned their Han Chinese identity. The issue of national identity still remained under the later Nationalist government, and shaped another agitated cycle of nation establishment.

1.3 The Evolution of the Nationalist Émigré Regime (1945-1988)

In August 1945, after China's Resistance War which lasted for eight years, Japan announced its unconditional surrender to China. Following the outcome of the Potsdam Proclamation written by the allied leaders, Taiwan and its offshore islands were retroceded to the 'Republic of China' which was established by Kuomingtang (KMT) in 1912 after the downfall of the Ching dynasty.

When the news travelled back to Taiwan, Taiwanese Hsieh Hsueh-hung and others organised the 'Taiwan Democratic Self-Government' in opposition to the decision of the Potsdam Proclamation. But this activity was soon suppressed by the KMT regime's military; all the main members were arrested and sentenced to death for being traitors to China (Lee, 1997:101). The result of Taiwan's independence was very different from the mobilisation of indigenous themes to create independence and global de-colonisation, which happened in most Third World countries after WWII (Chen, 1994:557). Suffering under authoritarianism, there was no opportunity for Taiwan's 'self-rediscovery' to move towards any such indigenous theme.

Besides military suppression, the retrocession created predictable tragedies due to the Mainland Chinese and native Taiwanese's distinctly different experiences of modernisation, state-establishment, and nationalist struggles, during the preceding fifty years. Huge gaps existed in the social structures, political values, and cultural customs of the two ethnic groups. Taiwan, in particular, had experienced a period of stable social and economic development, and as a result, was more modern than most of the mainland. Colonial rules also shaped different cultural values and world views; for example, Taiwan had a semi-peripheral status which was higher than China, according to the Japanese Imperial definition. The second-generation islanders had received intrinsically Japanese thought through their education in history and cultural identity, which was different from the historical consciousness of the Chinese motherland.

The Nationalists didn't adopt any careful plan for the retrocession, but instead regarded Taiwan as a financial supplier for replenishing their losses from the war. Taiwanese residents quickly found out that the government from their motherland was no better than its colonial precedent. The new administrator, General and Garrison Commander Chen Yi, paid little attention to the issue of equality between native Taiwanese and Mainlanders. On Feb 28th, 1947, an island-wide uprising against the ruler spread out. The central government of Nationalists at Nanjing decided to dispatch troops to crack down on the uprising, which inevitably led to a massacre. Thousands of Taiwanese were persecuted and executed, many of whom were well-educated social elites. This incident, later named the '2/28 incident', planted a deep root of division between the two main ethnic groups and resulted in a widespread antipathy among Taiwanese towards the Mainlanders (Wang, 1999:69). After this incident, the Nationalist government tried to conciliate the islanders, by upgrading the status of Taiwan from a special military zone to a province, and replacing Chen Yi with Wei Tao-ming, who was a civilian. However, these approaches were too little and too late to retrieve the trust of the Taiwanese.

The 2-28 Incident had a long lasting influence on Taiwanese, and became 'a lightening-rod event that constantly reminded them of their 'common sorrow'' (Chu and Lin, 2001:112). This event also stimulated the emergence of Taiwanese

nationalism, which aimed to build a nation that would be independent from China in later years.

When the leader of the KMT Nationalist party, Chiang Kai-shek, with his mainlander followers and million troops retreated from the mainland to Taiwan at the end of 1949, they wouldn't have predicted they would stay on the island and never return to the mainland even until this day. During the Chinese Civil war, Chiang Kai-shek was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party, which established the regime of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the mainland, and it was anticipated that his days were numbered. However, his retreat extended the regime of the KMT nationalists on the island for another thirty-seven years.

The KMT regime faced a society which was profoundly hostile to its rule, and the residents spoke different languages, and had the potential to build up their own nation. The authoritarians pursued some nationalising projects in order to secure their regime. Basically, the targets of these tasks were to build a set of civic-territorial institutions to strengthen the legitimate ruling of Taiwan, and to construct ethno-cultural institutions to de-Japanize and to Chinize the population, making Chinese become the character of the island, by assimilating things and people to the customs and institution of the Chinese nation.

Lacking supporting legitimacy and a social basis, the KMT declared that Taiwan was a province of China, and that the ROC was the legitimate government of China. In their view, the central government had moved to Taiwan temporarily due to the Chinese Communist Party's insurgency, and undoubtedly the KMT would win the battle and recuperate its mainland for all Chinese. Taiwan played an important role in the 'anti-Communist bulwark' of the ROC.

Under the Martial Law, the garrison command of Taiwan had extreme power, and the civil rights protected by the 1947 ROC Constitution had been suspended. 'Temporary Articles' and a series of special legislation, 'During the Period of Mobilization and Combating Rebellion', replaced the function of the constitution during the so-called 'Emergency Period'. The one party authoritarianism was not to be disobeyed or challenged, or they would be ready and prepared to crash down upon any political stirring.

Theoretically, the ROC was the combination of thirty-five provinces, of which Taiwan is the smallest. But realistically, Taiwan was the only and the essential one that the KMT regime governed. However, to continue the ideology of the ROC as the only legitimate government of China, the three national representative institutions, the Legislative Yuan, the National Assembly and the Control Yuan, had to be constituted by all the people from all the provinces. Due to this reason, these three parliaments were not supposed to be re-elected unless the mainland had returned to the regime of the KMT again. Thereafter, the majority of members coming from mainland China in the 'perennial parliaments' held their positions for more than forty years. According to the results of an investigation in 1988, three to four years before they were forced to leave their institutions, these permanent representatives in the Legislative Yuan had an average age of eighty-two years old, and seventy-eight years old in National Assembly (Tien, 1989:140).

It was more difficult and complicated to build the ROC nation via ethno-cultural institutions. To transfer the 'quasi Japanese' or 'Japanized Taiwanese' into 'Chinese', institutions of languages, education and mass media were hegemonically employed in order to reach the final target of the nationalising project. Before 1945, the official language in Taiwan was Japanese, and Minnan the majority language, but in contrast, few residents spoke Mandarin, the national language of China. When the KMT took over control of the island, the institution named the *Taiwan Province National Language Implementation Committee* was immediately established in order to promote the use of Mandarin. This national language policy was coercive and hegemonic. Unlike the Japanese government who banned Chinese printed media after forty-two years of ruling, the KMT forbade the use of Japanese after only one year of rule over the island.

The unification policy of language lasted for decades, and gradually reduced the influence of the Taiwanese elites and intellectuals because they were incapable of communicating using Mandarin. The Japanese culture and language were made useless and worthless (Johnson 1990; Chen, 1989:246). The use of the Taiwanese dialect in broadcast programs was strictly forbidden, and school teachers were acquiesced by the government to humiliate children who spoke their mother tongues publicly (Huang, 1995:120). As a result, this forceful implementation of national

language policy has become the most successful project of the KMT's nationalisation. Studies in 1991 showed that ninety percent of the population use Mandarin (ibid).

But this policy also eradicated other native Taiwanese languages such as Minnan, Hakka and the languages of aborigines, and generated a deep hatred toward the KMT regime. By the late 80s, Taiwan had initiated the Taiwanese Language Movement which aimed to oppose the hegemonic use of Mandarin, and to establish the foundation of Taiwanese nationalism (Hsiau, 1998).

Mass education was another important tool for completing the nationalisation process. The standard curricula including Mandarin, History and Geography was promulgated just after the KMT took over the whole island. The ideologies of Chinese nationalism formed the basis of all textbooks. For example, the first lesson of Mandarin was 'I am Chinese; you are Chinese; we are all Chinese' (Wo-shih-jhong-guo-ren, ni-shi-jhong guo-ren, wo-men-da-jia-dou-shi-jhong-guo-ren) (Huang, 1995:108). Several studies have shown that more than fifty percent of the material in textbooks used by junior high schools covered Chinese history, while only two percent belonged to Taiwanese history; Taiwan was identified as merely one of thirty-five provinces of China. Similarly, only five percent of the material in geography textbooks explored Taiwan (Lin 1998:133-4). The image of Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the KMT, was constituted as 'the greatest ever man' of worship, even after he passed away in 1975, by the lyrics of the *Memorial Song of the Greatest Man Sir Chiang Kai-shek* '... you were the saviour of human beings, you were the greatest man in human history...'. All such songs were produced in order to spread the hegemonic China (KMT)-centric view in Taiwan's society.

Inevitably, the sovereign status of the ROC faced challenges and threats from the PRC. Both Beijing and Taipei exclusively searched for support from the international community to claim its representation as the capital of legitimate China. The American's recognition of ROC's precarious sovereign status assisted the ROC in obtaining membership to the United Nations and a seat on the Security Council before 1971. But the relationship between the USA and the ROC ended in 1969. The PRC-U.S. rapprochement rejected the KMT leadership, and resulted in the loss of the UN seat to the PRC in 1971, and de-recognition by major allies around the world

throughout the 1970s.

Despite the Constitution of the ROC being guided toward a democracy, the KMT has strictly constrained political freedom and civil rights in Taiwan's society. The operations of politics have been circumscribed by a series of emergency laws, administrative decrees and judicial interpretations. Especially under the Provisional Amendments for the Period of Mobilization of the Communist Rebellion and Martial Law, the power of the state was ultimately expanded and civil rights were restricted.

By the late 1970s, a new cohort of post-war generation political opposition emerged, and organised a loose group, *Tangwai* (meaning outside KMT), which emphasised democratic reform and Taiwanese identity. On December 10, 1979, some *Tangwai* leaders were arrested when they tried to initiate the first major Human Rights Day celebration on the island, which was later named the Kaohsiung (Formosa) Incident. Until that time the authorities had never allowed any public expression of discontent. As a result, the Tangwai movement was forced to be disrupted temporarily, and became an underground movement searching for support from overseas communities.

Starting from the early 1980s, the atmosphere across the Taiwan Strait turned into détente, which weakened the rationale of the necessity for Martial Law. The KMT therefore responded by enhancing its own democratic legitimacy at home. The one party authoritarianism had already been challenged for its internal weakness. The successor, Chiang Ching-kuo, the eldest son of Chiang Kai-shek, gained a relatively supportive power at the first period of succession due to his father's influence. He initiated a policy of KMT *localisation* (bentuhua), also called *Taiwanization* (taiwanhua). Under this policy, he integrated the government with the society by recruiting more native Taiwanese as party members and appointed leaders of major cities. The ratio of native Taiwanese in the KMT's Central Standing Committee jumped from eighteen percent to forty-five percent within the decade between 1976 and 1986 (Wakabayashi, 1994:185).

Chiang Ching-kuo nominated Lee Teng-huei, a native Taiwanese, as the vice president and his official successor after 1984. During the last few years of Chiang's

permanence, he also initiated a series of political reorganisations to prevent a future crisis. For example, he tolerated the establishment of the DPP establishment in 1986, and only a week after the DPP's birth, announced the lifting of Martial Law. Essentially, the authoritarianism was broken down by him, and changed into a democratic process.

1.4 The Transformation from Authoritarianism to Democracy (1988- 2000)

Lee Teng-huei came to power in 1988 when Chiang Ching-kuo passed away. The mechanism of built-in succession successfully guaranteed Lee's dominance of political reform. Lee was the first native Taiwanese to become the president of the ROC, and the chairman of the KMT. Under his rule from 1988 to 2000, the KMT pursued a more 'Taiwanized' agenda, and as a result many Mainlanders split from the KMT and organised the New Party (NP). Lee Teng-huei represented the 'mainstream', while the NP considered themselves the 'orthodox KMT' and the true guardians of the ROC (Wang, 1996:313).

Lee's efforts accelerated the process of democratisation by changing the institutional structures of the ROC, demarcating the nation, and raising the civic consciousness (Wang, 1999:83-85). Prior to the late 80's, the KMT state was still an authoritarian regime, however, the credo of its official ideology based on Sun Yat-sen's *Three Principles of the People* kept the ideal vision of constitutional democracy as the eternal goal. Due to the state's ideology being one of liberal democracy, the KMT was later capable of smoothly repackaging itself as an initiator and promoter of democracy during the process of democratisation (Lin, 1998:27).

The National Assembly was completely re-elected in 1991, and re-named the Second National Assembly. It followed the 1992 Legislative Yuan that stands for the termination of fictitious representations. This was also the first time that the KMT surrendered its controlling position to the democratic contestants. The Second National Assembly passed an amendment to the constitution in 1994, which changed the presidential election from a representative system to a direct election by the residents of Taiwan (ibid:627). Lee's presidential election victory in 1996 symbolised that Taiwan had become an independent nation.

Another remarkable change of governmental organisation occurred with the reduction of Taiwan's Provincial Government into a symbolic office and minor institution. Afterwards, it became clear that the ROC government is essentially the same as the government of Taiwan.

Lee had achieved two seemingly impossible tasks. Firstly, his efforts broke down Taiwan's one-party authoritarianism and made steps towards a Third Wave democracy (Chu and Lin, 2001:122). Secondly, he helped to build up a new foundation of legitimacy for the ROC, peacefully, without internal polarisation or external military intervention.

In the 2000 presidential election, Chen Shui-bian, the candidate of the DPP, beat Lien Chan, the candidate of the KMT, to become the president of Taiwan. Lee was forced to resign as chairman, and renounce his membership of the KMT to Ma Ying-jeou, who represented the hope of the Mainlanders, and who was a pure descendant of the original KMT. Lien Chan was elected as the chairman of the KMT. The followers of Lee reorganised a new party, Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), respecting Lee as their leader.

According to the current political map, the supporters of the DPP, and the supporters of the TSU, are categorised as 'Pan- Green'; those who support the KMT, NP, or People First Party (PFP) that spilt from the KMT in 2000, are called 'Pan- Blue'. The tension between Pan-Blue and Pan-Green camps has risen sharply since 2000, and has been named *Blue-Green Civil War*.

Chapter II Media Technology and Democracy: Taiwan's Experience prior to Digital Media and the Debates of Cyber-Politics

Introduction

This chapter initially tackles the debate of technology's neutrality, and then divides into two major sections following the trajectory of the media's developments by discussing the relations between media technology and democracy. The first section focuses on Taiwan primarily to describe how the media (prior to digital media) was applied as a tool to format the Taiwanese people's democratic consciousness between 1960-1988. The second section turns to western countries' experiences and relevant discussions exploring the issues of digital media and democracy, since Taiwan lacked the opportunity to experience a similar development process.

Alternative media played a crucial role in influencing Taiwan's democratisation. In the previous chapter, I have discussed Taiwan's political background, and have mentioned a series of democratic movements by Tangwai, which established a fundamental basis for Taiwan's democratisation. Prior to 1988, Taiwan's mainstream media was censored and controlled through the surveillance of the KMT nationalist government (Chen, 1998; Lee, 1993:524-526). Tangwai, the opposite political power, used 'underground' media, which was illegally set up without certification from the government, to battle with KMT government and to diffuse ideas about democracy and human rights (Chen, 1998:27; Fong, 1993:386-387).

However, despite the development of digital media by the 1980s, Taiwan lacked experience in pursuing relevant democratic plans[19] like other advanced and developed countries, having been a follower rather than an initiator in adopting new technology throughout the history of media's development. The loosening up of the political atmosphere might be a reason for suspending the search for new media technology to

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[19] The goals of developing the Internet in Taiwan's context, the government's plan (NII, meaning National Infrastructural Information) included establishing the hardware, E-learning, E-medical service, VOD-video on demand, and Database. None of them were related to democratic plans.

apply to the democratic purpose[20]. Therefore, in the discussion of digital media and democracy, the advanced and developed countries' experiences and theoretical debates will be employed.

2.1 A Debate of Technologies' Neutrality

Everyday, we experience the conveniences and benefits of technological applications in our daily lives. Technologies, the inventions of systems and machinery developed for assisting us to get things done (Green, 1994:27-35), have made great impacts on human culture and society.

Whether technologies play a neutral role is still arguable. For those who support (Chandler, 2000; Shallis, 1984) technologies being neutral or value-free (neither good nor bad in themselves), emphasis is placed on the importance of the way in which we choose to use them. They argue that 'poor workers blame their tools' (Chandler, 2000:1), and that 'accepting the proposition that... technology... [is] neutral... means accepting the technological imperative' (Shallis, 1984:5). Some theorists (Green, 1994; Ellul, 1990; Smith, 1994; MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999) challenge such a stance in support of technologies' neutrality. They criticise the neutralist idea which ignores the influence of social structures, industrial promotions, economic forces and bureaucratic power (Green, 1994:3). Mander (1978:43) dismisses the idea of neutral technology and calls it as an 'absolutely erroneous assumption', which ignores '...benign instruments that may be used well or badly depending upon who controls them...' (ibid: 350). Green (1994:3) adopts a debate of ownership of guns as an example which highlights the shortcoming of the neutral position. In the case of the 'mindless massacre' that occurred in Tasmania, Australia, she argues that anyone who supports the stance that guns do not kill people because they are neutral, '...ignores the development of the whole military-industrial complex, and the incentive to create weapons that can kill at a distance.'

Green's stance urges us not to ignore the power of complex industrial development, and actually emphasises how a responsible society can determine the developments of

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[20] It is worth noting that after the DPP returned to being the minority party in 2008, the DPP started to employ Internet technology again to diffuse their political ideals in 2009. The application of the above mentioned microblog Plurk is a new trend, the influential extent of which still needs time to observe.

technology through *social determinism*. In contrast with the previous view of technology, *technological determinism*, which looks at how the transformation of society relies on technological features, social determinism advocates the responsibilities of elites in determining the priorities of technological development (ibid:20). As Murphie and Potts argue, instead of accounting for the relations between technology and society as a 'simplistic cause-and-effect formula', social determinism functions as an 'intertwining' process, whereby technology doesn't determine, but is '...operated upon in a complex social field' (2003:21).

Understanding technology from this perspective, it cannot be neutral because it adheres to culture, society and even government policy, all of which help to identify the role of media technology in terms of democracy, especially in Taiwan's context in the following discussions.

2.2 Media Technologies and Taiwan's Democratisation

2.2.1 Printed Media: Tangwai Magazines and Reforming Political Movements

Historically, writing was the first media technology to be invented around 3100 BC in Egypt and Samaria, and separately in China at approximately the same time, and has never subsequently been extinguished. In the sense of writing's democratic role, no matter what changes in civilisation have ensued, writing has continued to be used 'to distribute ideas between people' (Hartley, 2002:164). In succession to writing's diffusive function, printing followed as the next influential invention. In the book *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (2006:40-46) discusses the development of mechanically-reproduced printed language in the fifteenth century in western countries, and how it had a seminal influence on the democratic process. By 1500AD, at least 20,000,000 books had been printed, and this number signalled the initiation of the age of mechanical reproduction (ibid:37). Supported by technological reproducibility and dissemination, print knowledge broke through the limitation of manuscript knowledge, which was scarce and recherché. Later, the trend of convergence between capitalism and printing technology brought about 'the

possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation' (ibid:49).

However, Anderson's thesis of the causality between printed capitalism and the birth of modern nations didn't occur in Chinese history. In China, though the earliest periodical newssheets appeared in the eighth century (Lin, 1968:12) and printed technology was invented in fourteenth century, for hundreds of years the press and books were regarded as tools only for the purpose of enhancing the power and legitimacy of the ruling bureaucracies (Keane, 1991:8).

Since the first Chinese residents immigrated to Taiwan, the ruling state (Ching dynasty, Japanese colonial government and nationalist émigré) always controlled the press industry and censored the content of publishing prior to 1988[21]. In the previous chapter, I have discussed how the Japanese colonial government and nationalists forced the Taiwanese people to change their original languages to designated official languages, and how the education system and national curriculum were designed to diffuse government ideologies. In the following section, I will explore the KMT's strategies for the press industry from 1949 to 1988, which was dominated and controlled by party-state papers only, and how the opposition camp chose magazines as a means to broadcast democratic ideals during this period of time.

The government regulation to ban the press limited the development of the newspaper industry before 1988. Three famous controls under Martial Law were: control over entry, control over price structure, and control over the number of pages. The total number of permitted newspapers was frozen at 31, and more than half of them belonged to the KMT. The KMT's newspapers were supported financially by government advertising and grants, whilst privately run presses had to compete with the KMT's newspapers in the marketplace, yet still show their loyal to the KMT government (Chen, 1998:17). Only the publishers of privately run presses supporting the KMT politically were allowed to transact their ownership (ibid).

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[21] The press ban was lifted in 1988.

KMT also offered benefits to their own press, i.e. tax, transportation and telecommunication rate concessions, and reduced taxation on advertising revenues, reduced duties on imported newsprint and ink, and offered exemptions from sales taxes to alleviate the operating costs of the press (ibid). The heads of neighbourhood and community associations had to subscribe to the KMT-owned government funded newspapers (Brain, 1989:17, quoted in Chen, ibid).

The political opposition faced very heavy censorship and control in the press media, therefore the only means available to diffuse anti-government ideas was through alternative magazines. Dissidents who could not gain access to newspapers turned to published magazines in order to promote their political thoughts. Magazines were exempt from the press bans imposed by the KMT, although they were closely monitored (Rampal, 1994:83). *Free China*, advocated democracy and a two-party system for eleven years before it was forced to stop in 1960. Launched in 1975, the *Taiwan Political Review* was the first political journal which provided a forum for discussing Taiwanese opposition toward the KMT government (Chen, 1998:23). This journal was later suspended due to the contents being beyond the KMT's acceptance (Jacob, 1976:787). In 1979, the magazine *Formosa* played a major role for the opposition, however, the editors and publisher were arrested after a few months of publishing. The circulation of *Formosa* was seen as the main factor which initiated the Kaohsuing (or Formosa) incident (refer to Chapter I).

Until the early 1980s, three magazines, *Asia, Warm Current* and *Progress Weekly* promoted the spirit of *Free China*, and advocated the need to build a mass movement to force a reform of the KMT and establish a Taiwanese consciousness (Lu, 1985:159-61). The popularity of the opposition magazines peaked between 1980 and 1985. According to statistical data, a total of 400,000 copies of oppositional magazines were on the market in 1984 (*Independence Evening Post*, July 25th, 1984:2).

However, despite the magazines' successful distribution, the KMT, whilst restricting the political opposition's access to the mainstream media, also made great efforts to maintain control over the magazines they published in. Licensing schemes were the principal strategy of the KMT to limit the opposition's access to the media.

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Publication Laws were written which empowered governmental officials to suspend or take administrative measures against publications. After the KMT government owned the absolute power of censorship, almost every opposition magazine was quickly banned for offences such as 'confusing public opinion', 'adversely affecting public morals' or 'destroying relations between the government and the people' (Chen, 1998:24).

The opposition magazines had to fight with the authorities' censorship (i.e. changing their magazine names whenever the old ones were banned), as well as struggle with the declining market for opposition magazines after 1985, when readers moved their focus over to the newer entertaining magazines which were published in colourful print and filled with celebrity gossip. Lacking sufficient financial revenues, some magazines were closed, and some opposition editors tried to increase their readership by revising their content to include some dubious stories. Due to the neglect of comprehensive political discussion and analysis, the opposition magazines undermined their own credibility. In comparison to the opposition magazines of the 1970s, the magazines of the mid-1980s 'presented a significant loss of momentum for the cultural or political crusade' (Chen, ibid:25).

2.2.2 Broadcasting Media: Underground Radio and Low-Power Television

Since electronic media, film, radio and television entered into our daily lives, human history has entered the 'first media epoch' (Poster, 1995:1-20) The most obvious feature of this first media era was a broadcast model dominated by one kind of monologue channel of communication.

In Taiwan's context, the KMT government decided who were allowed to enter the broadcast industries before 1993. Basically, the government blocked applications for new licences, and undertook very strict surveillance of the existing television and radio stations. The contents of programs and schedules were controlled and guided by the KMT.

By 1983, the film makers who sympathised with the opposition started filming documentaries in terms of social movements (*Capital Morning Post*, August 23th and 24th, 1989:7). These films were not published legally because they could not be registered with the authorities, and since it was impossible to broadcast them on TV stations, their producers strategically chose to use the video distribution network to reach their audiences.

The opposition groups, who had been struck by the collapse of their magazines in the declining market, turned to choose radio or low-power television as a new platform to diffuse their political ideas. From 1989 to 1994, the opposition groups ignored government restrictions and set up radio and television station without requesting any licences. The DPP party, for example, established its own DPP television station on Nov. 30th 1989 for the purpose of promoting DPP's political agenda. In order to prevent its signal from being detected by the government, DPP television adapted a US portable television transmitter which had a 20-km broadcast radius and mounted it on a moving lorry (*Capital Morning Post*, 19th of Nov, 1989; 1st of Dec, 1989:1, 2). On March 1st 1990, the DPP established 'The Voice of Democracy', an island-wide network of radio and television stations for the purpose of loosening the KMT's dominance over the electronic media. This network provided a platform to launch a grassroots movement (Chen, 1998:27), and the programmes provided a place for people's discussions about issues such as anti-pollution and anti-nuclear protests.

By 1990, illegal radio stations in Taiwan were very much a terrain sought out by the political opposition to further their own political and cultural identities. By 1994, the popularity of illegal radio stations had surpassed that of traditional stations. Many of these illegal radio stations supported the stance of the DPP, and broadcast their programmes in Taiwanese dialect. Because they confined themselves more or less to a Taiwanese conception of the nation, much attention was given to the DPP's political actions (ibid), the folk culture of Taiwan, social affairs, and environment topics which were relevant to ordinary people (ibid). The most popular programmes used a phone-in system to provide a platform for audience members to talk about their political opinions. The consciousness of Taiwanese politics was formed in these public discussions. Furthermore, rallies launches by the radio station or its supporters,

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anonymous telephone interviews with politicians, and even a police break-in on an illegal station, were all transmitted live.

2.2.3 Conclusion and Discussion

Taiwan's people had struggled under an authoritarian state which restricted the freedom of speech and the freedom of publishing. The oppositional political group, Tangwai, who became the DPP in 1986, had diffused their political thoughts via the media. Chen (ibid) comments that the media used by the political opposition as a vehicle for grassroots reactions to the KMT's media monopoly, 'played a part in the development of a public sphere where a Taiwanese nation was competing for attention.'

However, great changes occurred in the media environment when a 38-year-old ban on newspapers was lifted in 1988, and a cable law was enacted in 1993, which opened up a wide variety of choices for consumers accessing the media and caught audiences' attentions (Rampal, 1994:89-90). The ownerships of the media were not restricted by the KMT, but by capital. Newspapers, magazines, and cable TV all experienced a tremendous growth after the lifting of Martial Law. The market-driven orientation arising in recent years has been doubted and questioned by scholars because it has made responsibility for social ethics a secondary concern. The conflict between two parties (KMT and DPP) has become the main topic of political issues in media reports, rather than the exploration of Taiwan's democracy.

2.3 Digital Media

The desire to search for an effective two-way communicative channel has emerged in the late 20th century, and digitalization has become a key characteristic of new media technology allowing two-way/interactive communication.

Cable television, which inspired early hopes of realising the interactive potential of media technology, provided various types of audience participation, discussion, and deliberative polls. The results were considerably more fruitful in providing samples for scholars describing how the new media will reshape civic life (Barber, 1998). Arterton (1987:184) studied 13 'teledemocracy' projects starting from early 1980s, he concludes that these experiments could 'improve the quantity and quality of citizen participation in politics', and 'mitigate the inequalities now found in the rates of participation of different social groups.' However, these initiatives could not lead to a transition toward direct democracy.

Interactive technologies seem to enhance mass media use in the political arena, but the ideal purpose and optimism of direct democracy have been confronted with commercial competition. Furthermore, much of the mass media still remain essentially just channels of one-way communication. Consequently, the opinion management decisions are still made by political elites (Thelen, 1996:170). This perception of constraint, confinement and closed communication has left many people's doubting whether the broadcast media could ever produce anything more than entertainment (Coleman, 2001:116).

In the early 1990s, with another technological evolution, computer technology (in particular the Internet) has extended to a broader public, and this latest technological development seems to proffer another further step for democratic empowerment. The character of the Internet provides equal opportunities for all the citizens' participation. Poster (ibid:18) names this age as 'the second media age', which means it has the potential to open a two-way interactivity and has the scope for decentralised communication, beyond the first media age.

The Internet as a new media environment is a hybrid mixture between interpersonal and mass communication depending on what purpose the computer networks are used for. The interpersonal role has been discussed in Barnes' (2001:33-56) work; she explains that interactions within the Internet are lacking in physical presence, and the mixed use of language transforms the traditional symbolic form of written language into a visually oriented text. Thus, this unique communicative process helps the users to communicate interpersonally. In addition to assisting interpersonal communication, the Internet also has functions as a broadcast medium.

Mark Poster (2001:613) in his work 'Postmodern Virtualities' claims that the Internet possesses another of media's characteristics: telephone, which has an essentially decentralised quality. In a discussion in terms of telephone's democratic value, Poster accounts that telephone has universal exchangeability of the position of sender and receiver. Anyone can produce and send a message to 'anyone else in the system and, in the advanced industrial societies, almost everyone is in the system' (2001:613). Inheriting the democratic structure of telephone, universal exchangeability and inclusiveness, the Internet has the potential of a decentralised communication system in which every individual can communicate with every other individual, and this is a characteristic so great that it is certainly worthy of recognition.

Therefore for Poster, the Internet has the right inherent characteristics to decentralise communication, promote a semblance of interpersonal communication, and show itself as a medium with multiple functions. The decentralising quality of the Internet seems to disable the controlling power of the authorities, whilst text-based discussions also open another window for mutual understandings.

The previous discussions show that the Internet appears to so perfectly fit into the categories which have been discussed by scholars for the improvement of the democratic process; however, some scholars challenge the Internet's role in accelerating and reinvigorating a vision of democracy. For them, the feasibilities are still confronted by some difficulties, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.3.1 Will the Internet Reinvigorate the Visions of Democracy? A Debate between Technological Utopian and Dystopian

Since the 1970s, several experiments have been conducted in different countries for the purpose of studying the Internet as a democratic platform. Early interactive communication systems such as the Berkeley Community Memory Project established in 1978, the Public Electronic Network (PEN) established in Santa Monica CA in 1989, the Blacksburg Electronic Village Inc (BEV) put in place in Blacksburg VA in 1993, the La Plaza Telecommunity established in Taos, New Mexico in 1995, and the White Paper Modernising Government in the UK (Cabinet Office, 1999), all demonstrated how internet-related technologies could be used to fulfil political needs (Rogers and Malhotra, 2000:10-29). Hacker and van Dijk (2000:1-7) dub these arising explorations (theoretical and practical issues included) of the use of information and communication technology (ICT), and computer-mediated communication (CMC), as *digital democracy*. For them, digital democracy offers a chance to characterise the related democratic issues, particularly focusing on the new digital media of non-linier transmissions.

The growth rate of participants using the Internet within the last ten years has been tremendous. Not only scientists and businesses, but also political organisations, parties, discussion circles and lobbyists have joined the Internet. In the United States, grass-roots political movements have been working within the net for nearly twenty years. By 1993, professional political agencies, governments and big businesses had also begun to use the Internet for political purposes (Buchstein, 1997:248-263).

High expectations for the Internet's democratic uses have been reflected in the growing literature published in the popular media and the official U.S. government pronouncements (e.g., Friedland, 1996; Browning, 1996; cf., Wright 1995). There is no doubt that among those discussions, there are no more pertinent than the 1994 speech of Al Gore, the former vice American president, as a metaphor for the Internet's practical potential in participatory democracy. In the meeting of the International Telecommunications Union in Argentina, Gore provided a utopian vision for the Internet use and lauded the benefits of a 'Global Information

Infrastructure' (GII) by making the even bolder declaration that computer networking could actually usher in 'a new Athenian Age of democracy' (Gore, 1994, quoted in Saco, 2002:xiii):

> The distributed intelligence of the GII will spread participatory democracy...The GII will be an assemblage of local, national and regional networks that are only like parallel computers but in their most advanced state will in fact be a distributed, parallel computer. In a sense, the GII will be a metaphor for democracy itself. ...People must have available the information they need. And be allowed to express their conclusions in free speech...The GII will not only be a metaphor for a functioning democracy, it will in fact promote the functioning of democracy by greatly enhancing the participation of citizens in decision making. And it will greatly promote the ability of nations to cooperate with each other. I see a new Athenian Age of democracy forged in the fora the GII will create (Gore 1994, quoted in Saco 2002:xiii-xv).

In Gore's speech, he emphasised that the characteristics of the Internet (GII) are its ability to cross geographical boundaries and its participatory impartiality. Other commentators (Rheingold, 1993; Tapscott, 1995) presented the same connection between an ancient political ethos and an apparently futuristic channel of communication as well.

Nevertheless, on the other side, concerning the implication of the Internet for democracy, some critics hold more diverse stances with less sanguine voices. The former camp has been labelled as 'technological utopian' or 'utopianists', and the latter one as 'technological dystopian' (Saco, 2002:xv, O'Loughlin, 2001:598).

In a discussion of the origins of technological utopianism, Segal (2005:2) traces back to some European works such as Johann Andreae's *Christianopolis*, or Tommaso Campanella's *The City of The Sun* in 17th century, and he concludes none of them made technological advance their panacea. In the 19th century, Edward Bellamy's socialist utopia in *Looking Backward*, which inspired hundreds of socialist clubs in the United States and a national political party, was as highly technological as Bellamy's imagination. Technological utopianism stands for any ideology based on the belief that advances in science and technology will eventually bring about a utopia, or at least help to fulfil one or more utopian ideals. In the late of 20th century, the invention of the Internet brings a new hope for pursuing a utopian ideal once again.

In this respect, for the utopianists, the Internet has the abilities to make citizens informed about government and more politically active, so the democratic qualities are improved, and will also be extended. Another utopianist hope is that the Internet will be ideally based on its intrinsic decentralised, interactive (two-way communication) and educational qualities, thus enabling the Internet to represent a possibility of revitalising the public sphere. For Tapscott (1995:305), it will happen because the transition to a 'knowledge' economy will accelerate the change of the distribution of power, and empower knowledge workers. As a result, the whole society will become a 'more pervasive and substantive democracy' (ibid:309).

Rheingold (1993:14) provides a more concrete interpretation for the technological utopian camp. His 'electronic agora', in parallel with Gore's announcement, is constituted by 'the vision of a citizen-designed, citizen-controlled worldwide communication network.' The term of agora comes from the classical Greek. The Athenian agora was not simply an open space but more fundamentally a public space where the ecclesia, the popular assembly of Athenian citizens, could gather, engage each other in debate, and deliberate issues affecting the polis. In this sense, the term links a particular kind of space to certain democratic practices, especially open discussion and deliberation (Held, 1987:1-35). Considering the meaning of the Athenian agora, 'the electronic agora', presented by Rheingold, is the ideal evoked by the notion that the Internet is forging 'a new Athenian Age of democracy.'

In sum, the view from the technological utopian camp claims that technological advances like the Internet democratise information by simplifying the creation, duplication, storage and distribution of data. In addition, networking via computers also facilitates communication among a larger number and broader spectrum of individuals, enabling people from different remote locations to associate with each other, to engage in economic transaction and political debates, and more generally, to give their opinions weight by having their voices heard. For the technological utopians, it is very enticing to predict that the following will soon become a reality, i.e. town meetings and direct popular participation, a virtual parliament, and self-judgement individuals interactive with the citizenry and organisations, including government (Morris, 1999:27; Campbell et al., 1999:41; Riley, 2000:67).

It is arguable here whether the optimistic predictions above are only sloganized bubbles ready to burst, or whether they might actually be realised finally in this society. Those taking up a 'technological dystopian' position, stand as detractors who claim that the Internet, like other modern technologies, is changing society in decidedly negative ways. Pessimists worry that low quality information flowing from the Internet to its users without construction, and in burgeoning flows, serves to primarily numb people with a glut of unnecessary and often inaccurate information (Saco, 2002:xv).

The Internet has a function to be a radical tool, yet it has been doubted by scholars due to the users' attitudes, without a new awareness toward to the new media. Based on the observations of the US elections, researchers (Norris, 1999:89; Davis, 2000:189-204) noticed that the web seems to have been used more often as a means to access traditional news rather than as a radical new source of unmediated information and communication between citizens and their elected leaders. Candidates and their elected officials haven't lost their control of the agenda-setting. On-line users regard the website as an information-gathering source, so they were not aware that the messages they received were in fact of the same tone as the candidates political agenda.

The previous empirical result shows that the Internet users still mould the internet to fit traditional politics. Another fear involves the issue of instant electronic referenda; under a system of head-counting democracy, a plebiscitary online without enough informed knowledge will cause an uninformed citizens' vote (Hill and Hughes, 1998; O'Loughlin, 2001:598). The Internet's security, reliability and privacy are doubted by scholars because they worry that few websites have been able to provide total protection from hackers. For O'Loughlin (ibid), no matter whether it is a plebiscitary or just insecurity, either will probably create a private sphere with corporate actors dominating over the public sphere and elected government. If the open access of the Internet is disrupted, or is limited by some groups, it will further dissolve the ideal of democracy. In addition, unequal competence to access the Internet is another threat to democracy. Access is useless if you don't know how to use the Internet. The method of diffusing the Internet has thus been criticised, '...the rich use their access and competence to get richer and maintain the system, the poor and illiterate receive only

mass media which only perpetuates the narrow capitalist illusion' (ibid). The access provided by the private sector is designed to create quantities of consumers, but 'not politically-informed citizens' (ibid). The cyber-pessimists argue that the Internet creates a digital divide which results in 'new inequalities of power and wealth, reinforcing deeper divisions between the information rich and poor, the tuned-in and the tuned-out, the activists and the disengaged' (Norris, 2001:13). Consequently, Internet politics will only benefit the elite.

We can now compare both of the two camps' opinions. The utopians propose that as more and more people connect to the Internet and engage in political conversation, governments will become more accountable to the people (thus, the Internet actualises the vision of an Athenian agora in this age). Also for the utopians, the Internet directs citizens to give their input into the political process, which becomes ubiquitous and viable, thus forming on-line political communities. Conversely, the dystopians fear that such direct democracy will amount to nothing more than mob rule and rash decision making. They also consider that despite the flood of useful information that the Internet provides, it will also wash up a large share of outright misinformation which aids nothing. Besides, if accessibility and openness are prohibited by social, economic or intellectual inequality, the result is still far from the ideal of impartiality.

In fact, the utopianists have been criticised for their misunderstanding of the true sense of politics and citizenship, making way for technocratic and deterministic claims for civic transformation which fail to reach the core meaning of social change (Coleman, 2001:117). On the other hand, the dystopianists have insufficiently explored the unique functions of the new media. Thus, their criticism of the Internet for failing to improve upon, or replace, the traditional media and models of representation, is weak because it is precisely those functions that are not performed by old media and existing democratic models that point towards the promise and innovative scope of the new media (ibid:118).

Accordingly, both sides share the same idea, that regardless of what is better or worse, the Internet influences the political landscape fundamentally. Without regarding the Internet as a monstrosity or a saviour of democracy, some authors (Nederman et al. 1998; Budge, 1996; and Coleman, 2001) agree that the Internet does offer greater

opportunities for public discourse. Unmediated public deliberation via this developing space in which citizens can interact with one another, with other communities, and with elites, shows that the gloomy views of the pessimists might well be exaggerated, and that there is less vulnerability when participating in the direct political engagement. In short, the proper use of the Internet's nature is a critical point concerning the issue of social transmission in the CMC (computer-mediated-communication) age, yet the dialectic function provided by the Internet already seems very helpful for raising the awareness of citizens.

2.3.2 Conclusion and Further Discussion

In the previous section, I discussed that the Tangwai strategically adopted the printed media and electronic media for their means of diffusing their ideology, resulting in a successful breakthrough over the KMT's ban. But this success was disrupted by the sudden explosion of a competitive media industry after the lift of the press ban and media ban, and inevitably was replaced by the market-driven intentions of media management.

Statistical data shows that Taiwan's Internet's accessibility in 2002 reached the top three amongst all countries. Despite the rapid development of the Internet, the Taiwanese government did not encourage its implementation for democratic purposes. From the discussion in section 2.3.1, we can see that the theoretical debates of scholars actually point out the Internet's discursive nature for public discussion. So, for Taiwanese people, is the convenient accessibility of the Internet also applicable to the search for democracy? Since Taiwanese people have enjoyed the fruit of democratisation from 1988 (i.e. freedom of free speech), do they still regard the Internet as a means to continue democratic discussions and diffuse public opinion? As Chen comments (1998:27) the use of the media in developing Taiwan's democracy has played a part in developing Taiwan's public sphere, but is the use of the Internet still focussed in this direction?

Holub (1991:2-6) suggests that amongst all theorists' work discussing online forums and democracy, Habermas' public sphere (1962, 1989) most clearly demonstrates how and why public opinion is formed via a process of rational debate.

> An arena, independent of government...and also enjoying autonomy from partisan economic forces, which is open to rational debate...and which is both accessible to entry and open to inspection by the citizenry. It is here...that public opinion is formed (Holub 1991:2-6).

The Taiwanese media research scholar, Chang, Jin-Hwa (1997), who engaged in forming media policy after the lift of Martial Law, recognises the importance of the Habermasian public sphere in discussing the issues of Taiwan's democracy. '...It (Habermas's public sphere) provides a way to consider the possibility of public deliberation in Taiwan's context, especially after I observed the transformation of the underground media' (Chang, ibid:viii). In her view, Habermas's public sphere offers a theoretical framework which can for the foundation of Taiwanese participatory democracy.

Some questions arise here associated with the Internet and public sphere. Firstly, is this discursive spirit, formed from an ideal of an Athenian agora and grounded in physical space and bodies, able to move to an electronic agora, which is also grounded but within a cyber space and within digital bodies? Secondly, does cyberspace present a separate alternative during discussion processing to extend, minimise, or ignore the public sphere? In the next chapter, I will continue to review the main concept of the public sphere, and present a scholarly discussion of the relations between the Internet and the public sphere. Later, I will discuss the related theories about deliberative democracy to establish whether the Internet is an ideal speech environment for publicity.

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Chapter III   From Real to Virtual: the Public Sphere and the Internet

When considering the true meaning of *the public*, it is likely that we will visualise vividly people exchanging political thoughts and ideas either in ancient Greek agora, or colonial-era town halls. Indeed, the concept of 'the public' functions as a kind of representation for carrying out the democratic ideals which encourage all citizens' participation in public affairs. According to Dewey (1927, quoted in Papacharissi 2002:10), the term 'the public' connotes ideas of citizenship, commonality, and things not private, yet accessible and observable by all.

As we have discussed in the chapter 2, the utopianists have promised an all participating future for the use of the Internet. Cyberspace will be constructed as a 'new public space', constituted by people and serving to 'conjoin traditional mythic narratives of progress with strong modern impulses toward self-fulfilment and personal development' (Jones, 1997:22). Particularly, the discursive nature of online forums seems to provide hope for enhancing political discussions.

However, whether this new public space can be synonymous with a *new public sphere* is arguable. Papacharissi (2002:11) proposes an approach to clarify this by examining whether the discussions of online forums can enrich democracy; in her view '...a virtual space enhances discussions; a virtual sphere enhances democracy' (ibid). This is to say, if the Internet could satisfy some conditions of a public sphere for democratic purposes, it would be considered to be a new public sphere.

So, what is the definition of a public sphere, and in which conditions can it be named a public sphere? What is its contribution to democracy? The following section will start by discussing the public sphere explicitly to establish a theoretical basis for the later discussions of whether the Internet can be a new public sphere.

3.1 The Public Sphere: Concept, Emergence and Demise

The concept of the public sphere has a long and complicated genealogy. Sensing the passing of the great public, Jürgen Habermas in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (originally published in 1962, translated 1989) traces back much of that genealogy, and culminates in a theorisation reached through thorough explorations. In this book, Habermas attempts to identify 'when', and 'under what conditions', the arguments formed by mixed companies could become authoritative bases which lead to political action. The concept of the public sphere in Habermas's terms is 'first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens' (Habermas, 1989:102). That is to say, the theatre of the public sphere is a space where citizens can deliberate about common affairs, and therefore an institutionalised arena for the purpose of discursive interaction is built up.

For Habermas, this ideal had actually been carried out in human history, during the time when the social condition allowed people to take part in rational-critical debates related to public issues. In support of his historical findings, Habermas elucidates how the classical bourgeois public sphere of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was built upon rational critical arguments; these being the critical factors that lead to democracy (Calhoun, 1992:2).

In Habermas's historical view, before the high middle ages there were no signs that European society possessed a public sphere as a unique realm distinct from any private sphere. At that moment, a public representation of power existed: the status of the feudal lord was represented publicly; 'he showed himself, presented himself as the embodiment of an ever-present 'higher' power' (Habermas 2001:103). This era was the heyday of 'representative publicity', and lordship was represented, 'not for, but 'before' the people' (Habermas, 1989:8). Until the society has been developed into the new type of sociability in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century, the bourgeois society produced a certain form of public sphere salons (as well as coffee houses and other places), participating together in rational-critical discourses. This process resulted in the idea of society being separated from the sovereign (or the state) and of a private realm being separated from the public (Calhoun, 1999:7).

The notion of civil society is emphasised and established as a basis for Habermas' account of the public sphere. Civil society, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, evolved as 'the genuine domain of private autonomy stood opposed to the state' (Habermas, 1989:12). The capitalist market economy established the whole foundation of this civil society, but it included as well institutions of sociability and discourse which were connected loosely with the economy. Transformations of the economy inevitably generated complete transformations in the whole civil society.

In the related discussions, Habermas presents a very intimate involvement of the print media in explaining the early expansion of market economies beyond local towns. New commercial relationships were established between the *traffic in commodities* and *news* (ibid:15). Merchants connected with long distance trade needed to supply more accurate information about their commodities. So the arrival time of the traffic in news coincided with the traffic in commodities. Later, the newsletters filled with the merchants' information also carried other sorts of messages. This development benefited the spread of a wider literacy and the identification with printed words as a source of current significant 'public' information (Calhoun, 1999:8). However, during period the time when the town markets were expanding to national territories, 'continuous state activity corresponded to the continuity of contact among those trafficking in commodities and news (stock market, press)' (Habermas, 1989:18). Public authorities were consolidated into a palpable object differentiated from the representative publicity of the ruler and the older estates. 'Public' in this narrow sense was 'synonymous with state-related' (ibid). Only when the state was built up as an impersonal locus of authority, then the public sphere, including all members who might join discussions, could be implemented. Therefore, for Habermas, the modern notion of public actually relied on the possibility of counterposing state and society.

Referring to Arendt's notion of how a private sphere in society could take on a public relevance, Habermas argues that it became possible to bring society and organisations into private sphere by public discussions and (or) the action of the state. A certain educated elite came to consider itself as constituting the public, and the opponent of political authority, under the approach of '...the critical judgement of a public making use of its reason' (Habermas, ibid:24).

For Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere institutionalised not just a set of interests and an opposition between state and society, but a practice of rational-critical discourse. Thereafter, for example, early print media, which began to be produced after the era of salon discussions, constituted a comparatively informal yet stable base on which critical reasoning could flourish, similar to that which helped generate and sustain the bourgeois public sphere (Saco, 2002:65). The idea of public was built upon the notion of a general interest that discourse was concerned with, and wasn't twisted by particular interests.

> The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people coming together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason. (Habermas, 1989:27).

No matter if it was Great Britain's coffee shops (houses), France's salons, or Germany's table societies, these institutions all contributed to bridge the gap between the literary public sphere and the bourgeois public sphere. They 'preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from pre-supposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether' (ibid:36). All sorts of topics, including the monopoly interpretations by churches and state authorities, were opened to discussion. The emerging public was constructed as inclusive in principle.

Following this point, Habermas (ibid:38) analyses the development of the liberal model of the public sphere. In England the parliament limited royal power, therefore the development of the liberal model took a different course compared with the situation on the Continent where monarchies meditated estates. The Third Estate broke this form of power arrangement. Hitherto bourgeois individuals were private individuals (Habermas, 2001:104). Consequently, this process led to an idea of a society separate from the ruler (or the state) and of a private realm separate from the public. As such, power being claimed vis-à-vis public authority was not directed against the masses, but was being shared with them.

In addition, the daily political newspapers played an important role during the whole process. In according with Karl Bücher's standpoint, newpapers changed from mere institutions for the publication of news into bearers and leaders of public opinion in the second half of the eighteen century, Habermas (ibid:105) describes the characteristics of this great development as follows:

> ...The press remained an institution of the public itself, effective in the manner of a mediator and intensifier of public discussion, no longer a mere organ for the spreading of news, not yet the medium of a consumer culture (ibid).

It is to say, for Habermas, the public sphere was most constructive when it was uninfluenced by commercial interests or state control. However, since the 1830s commercial profits overtook the intellectual press in England, France, and the United States, so the public sphere was transformed by an influx of private interests. Therefore, Habermas argues that the increasing complexity and rationalisation of societies over the course of the 20th century, together with the growth of the mass media, has transformed the public sphere (Downey and Fenton, 2003:186).

3.1.1 Summary

Habermas's analysis of the public sphere provides a conceptual viewpoint of how the public sphere functions as a medium, and from which we can find the possibilities of realizing democracy. Principally, the public sphere constructed by Habermas is to be promoted as a site in which public discourse is produced and circulated, and in which one can be critical of the state (Fraser 1999:110-111). Habermas and fellow proponents value well-behaved and rational discussion highly as a condition of the public sphere. In their view, logic and reason not only promote discourse, but also guide a democratic society (Papacharissi, 2004:265-266).

It is to be believed that his stance is influenced by his experience of fascism and his apprenticeship with the Frankfurt School as Adorno's research assistant. He therefore held little hope of being able to identify a political philosophy that could resolve the consequence of capitalism or state control (Calhoun, 1992:4).

Habermas' work diagnoses the contemporary mass-media sphere as a space wherein social administration has replaced democratic politics and where passive production has replaced the media's role as a channel for the expression of public opinion. Later, he turns his attention toward outlining a 'communicative action' (1984, 1987): a new construction in terms of peoples' communications in the life world and system world, shifting his focus, as Calhoun notes, 'from the institutional construction of a public sphere as the basis for democratic will formation to the validity claims universally implicit in all speech' (1992:31). On the other hand, his earlier work seeks to ground the possibility for democratic communication in an empirical, historical and institutional account of an actually existing public sphere.

3.1.2 Main Critiques

The main weakness lies in Habermas failure to account symmetrically between the 'classical' bourgeois public sphere and the postransformation public sphere of organised or late capitalism (Calhoun, ibid:33). Calhoun (ibid) criticises part of Habermas's work concerning a typical suburban television viewer only, as narrow and

intellectually weak due to the asymmetrical comparison of twentieth and eighteenth century approaches. He comments '...Habermas's account of the twentieth century does not include the sort of intellectual history, [or] ...attempt to take leading thinkers seriously and recover the truth from their ideologically distorted writing' (ibid).

With regard to Habermas's concept of public sphere is applicable to this era, Fraser (1999:109-142) argues that Habermas's approach, identifying with a bourgeois conception, doesn't treat the societies as stratified and multicultural egalitarian, so it reflects very little of our political environment. In her article 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', she contends firstly, in this respect, that the societies are made up of combinations of unequal social groups in structural relations of dominance and subordination. Thus, the full parity of participation in public debate and deliberation is not easily realised. The subordinate groups have less chances of possessing their own areas to communicate their needs, objectives and so on, or, they are be under the supervision of dominant groups. Thereafter, their voices and thoughts would vanish, and they would not to be considered able to defend their own interests in the public. Continuing to extend this argument, Fraser proposes that subaltern counterpublics, an idea originally adopted from the historiography of subordinated groups such as women, workers, people of colour, gays and lesbians, has the parallel discursive function of allowing members of these groups to clarify their own interests, identities and needs which constitute the counterdiscourses. For Fraser, in contemporary America, co-existing public spheres of counterpublics form in response to their exclusion from the dominant sphere of debate. Therefore, multiple public spheres exist, which are not equally powerful, articulate, or privileged, and which give voice to collective identities and interests. A public realm or government, however, which pays attention to all these diverse voices, has never existed.

Habermas tries to present the public sphere as a system based primarily on the process of debate and knowledge exchange. For him, the participants' status should not to be a factor in the success or character of the public sphere. In response, Fraser (1992) asserts that Habermas's work is not wholly satisfactory. She contends that, 'his analysis of the public sphere needs to undergo some critical interrogation and reconstruction if it is to yield a category capable of theorizing the limits of actually

existing democracy' (1992:111). In her argument, Habermas' conceptualisation of the public sphere functions merely as a realm for privileged men to practice their skills of governance, whilst excluding women and non-propertied classes. In practice, it is impossible to ignore the questions of status.

Furthermore, feminist perspectives on Habermas' work have highlighted the exclusionary, elitist nature of the public sphere's original conception. Hartley (2002:193) and Fraser (1992:129) comment that it is unrealistic to assume we can overlook the historical exclusion of women, the racial criteria, and property criteria needed to participate in the public sphere.

Although Habermas describes the public sphere as a short-lived historical reality in eighteenth-century bourgeois society, the concept still persists in a wide range of discourses about modern society. Warner (1999:377-400) points out that the problem of applying such a single and homogenous public space to contemporary society is that the varied and heterogeneous can be neglected. As we know relying very much on rhetorical descriptions from printed media was a way to understand public in the early days, nowadays, the medium of print is one channel for all sources through which we can comprehend publicity. It is to say, the form of texts isn't an oligopolistic communication approach anymore. Therefore, for example, body images didn't figure importantly in the bourgeois public sphere, but now they are displayed in all virtually media contexts, including printed media itself for a broad purpose of admiration, identification, appropriation or scandal. Publicity, in Warner's view '...in the West means to have an iconicity, and this is true equally of Qaddafi and of Karen Carpenter' (ibid:385). So the highlight of a rhetoric form of abstraction for public sphere inevitably confronts the result of the transformation of media productions in this modern society which employ visualisation as a major expressive approach.

Lyotard (1984) challenges whether Habermas's rational public sphere is the only approach contributing to democracy. He raises the issue that anarchy, individuality and disagreement, rather than rational accord, lead to true democratic emancipation. He questions the emancipatory potential of the public sphere's model of consensus through debates. Especially, he rejects thoroughly Habermas' concept of rationality 'as the unacceptable remnant of a 'totalizing' philosophical tradition and as the

valorisation of conformism' (Jameson, 1984:viii). For him, emancipation is raised by the issues relating to the procedures of anarchy, individuality, and disagreement, rather than rational accord leading to true democratic emancipation (Lyotard, 1984:60).

Though Habermas's exploration of the public sphere has aroused considerable criticism, his stance still influences many theorists when they explain the process of democracy (for example, Garnham 1992, Price 1995). As Calhoun (1992:39) comments, for many the issue is '...how to identify the extent to which Habermas discusses theoretical ideals versus practical actualities of the bourgeois public sphere.' The criticism Habermas's work has generated has created academic expectations for the public sphere, and has also established some criteria to measure up these expectations. The contribution of Habermas's *Structural Transformation* is 'not to stand as an authoritative statement but to be an immensely fruitful generator of new research, analysis and theory' (Calhoun, ibid:41).

Now, we may ask; for the Internet as a new form of media, is there any possibility of realising the public sphere through public discourse, just as Habermas idealised, or are too many different groups' voices represented? Will the Internet present the elements of anarchy or support democracy? Will the Internet's unique potential be influenced by commercial culture? In the next section, these questions will be addressed in discussing the theoretical relationship between the Internet and the public sphere.

3.2 The Internet as a Public Sphere: The Theoretical Arguments

The original historical image of late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century coffeehouses has been adopted and reshaped in this era by Connery (1996:161), who sets up an interesting scenario by presenting the case of a local squatter, named CyberMonk, who visits the Horse Shoe Coffeehouse frequently in San Francisco. All he has to do is spend fifty cents, and then he can easily access the SFNet (designed by Horse Shoe proprietor Wayne Gregori) for twenty minutes. For this young man, staying in the coexisted 'real' and "virtual" coffeehouse allows him to use their facilities, such as a living room, a phone and a mailbox.

CyberMonk's activities mirror those of young men living in London in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, who used coffeehouses as places to obtain their mail, as social places that gave them the image of 'good figures' compared with their actual shabby lodgings, as discursive spaces where they discussed the 'news', and as bases to launch themselves as commercial, political or literary communities. From Connery's observation, when CyberMonk enters cyberspace, he recreates intuitively the social phenomena which has been rooted in western culture for centuries. In this Horse Shoe Coffeehouse, where a virtual coffee house operates within an actual coffeehouse, CyberMonk meets other online users and obtains an opportunity of identifying himself equally with other participants while discussing issues.

Connery's case study of CyberMonk's actions in the Horse Shoe Coffeehouse provides a perspective for considering whether these virtual coffeehouses, which construct the virtual Internet world, are the replications of coffeehouses from ancient times. In the above mentioned case, the Horse Shoe Coffeehouse, is identified as an analogy of an eighteenth century house. It reflects a new modern coffeehouse vision: to extend the spirit of historical coffeehouses in London from the eighteenth century. The case from the Horse Shoe Coffeehouse actually echoes a prediction from one Internet proponent, Dyson (1997:36), who claims 'the Net will foster activity instead of passivity'. For Dyson, the Internet seems to pave the road for a revived public sphere.

Some scholars (Holmes, 2002; Hauben and Hauben, 1997; Rheingold, 1993) support Dyson's positive vision of the Internet. They consider that the Internet contains potentially successful elements for constituting a new public sphere due to its ability to establish an imaginary unity which allows all participants to have equal opportunities to communicate. As a consequence, the unique nature of the Internet is its ability to transform the political environment into a reflection of the Greek political agora, whilst remaining radically different.

Bohman (2004:131-155) considers the niche of Internet to be asynchronous communication. Without any necessity for face-to-face communication when participants' transfer ideas, the Internet helps to conquer the restrictions of time and space. Bohman dubs this characteristic 'the indefinite future', through which others obtain chances to respond or speak out. Ultimately, a public sphere will depend upon the opening up of a social space for a particular kind of repeated and open-ended interaction.

So far, the discussion related to the Internet's potential role as a public sphere focuses on its intrinsic features: speed and accessibility. But whether the features of the public sphere can be applied to the internet plausibly is still questioned by some scholars, including Habermas.

Concerning the issue of whether the Internet can constitute a moral-practical discourse oriented towards resolving political problems, arguably, Habermas shows an ambivalence towards new information and communication technologies as a potential source of equal inclusive communication:

> ...Whereas the growth of systems and networks multiplies possible contacts
> and exchanges of information, it does not lead per se to the expansion of an
> intersubjectively shared world and to the discursive interweaving of
> conceptions of relevance, themes, and contradictions from which political
> public spheres arise. The consciousness of planning, communicating and acting
> subjects seems to have simultaneously expanded and fragmented. The publics
> produced by the Internet remain closed off from one another like global villages.
> For the present it remains unclear whether an expanding public consciousness,
> though centered in the lifeworld, nevertheless has the ability to span
> systematically differentiated contexts, or whether the systemic processes,

having become independent, have long since severed their ties with all contexts produced by political communication (Habermas, 1998:120–1).

Such a view suggests that the Internet's power of greater pluralism might be seen as a risk rather than as a saviour. The Internet has spawned large numbers of radical websites and discussion groups, allowing the public to bypass more moderate and balanced expressions of opinion in the mass media and to participate in homogeneous groups (Sunstein, 2001:59). Sunstein (ibid:62) claims, 'consider how these difficulties will increase if people do not know the competing view, [and] consistently avoid speaking with one another.' With a somewhat pessimistic prediction, he (ibid:87) concludes '...a fragmented communication market creates considerable dangers.'

By exploring the role of the Internet in transforming the nature of the public sphere, Poster (1997:209-210) considers whether Habermas' vision of the public sphere is applicable to the Internet's characteristics. For Poster, the most confused difficulty is the lack of face-to-face communication, which hinders attempts to take account of what the public discourse is. He claims that the communication on the internet is an 'electronic form of exchange of symbols' (ibid). Therefore,

> If 'public' discourse exists as pixels on screens generated at remote locations by individuals one have never and probably will never meet, ...how is it distinguished from 'private' letters, printface and so forth? The age of the public sphere as face-to-face talks is clearly over (ibid:209).

However, not all scholars regard the application of public sphere to the Internet as completely problematic. Hacker and van Dijk (2000:1-9) in partial agreement with Habermas's public sphere, suggest that the public sphere should be seen as not only a plural entity, but also as a de-centered entity. For them, net-related technologies certainly bear the potential to enhance direct democracy models, but only possess limited power within the representative models that are in place in most modern democracies. They also suggest that a commercial or public orientation influences how media like the Internet are employed within democracies. Furthermore, the Internet can show the extent to which media promote civic concerns and lively discussion, or simply reinforce the status quo (ibid:3). Rooted in the notion that the mode of communication for the Internet mixes interpersonal and group interaction, Sassi (2000:95) believes that a sense of commonality has grown in the Net world.

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Based on the dialogical function of the Internet, '...The Net public sphere can alternately operate... [and] ...this environment can produce conditions for a public to be born' (ibid, 95).

Even though the Internet bears the potential to unify several fragmented public spheres on issues shared by all, Keane (2000:80-84) views the Internet as most promising for the growth of *macro-public spheres*. Macro-public spheres[22], in Keane's ideal, '...normally encompass hundreds of millions and even billions of people enmeshed in disputes at the supranational and global levels of power' (ibid:77). He commends the Internet's ability to connect citizens on a global and regional level, and aptly notes the presence of users who treat the medium not as something to be surfed or travelled, but rather as citizens who generate controversies about matters of power and principle.

Doubtlessly, the arguments from the above scholars all support the Internet's discursive functions, but the diverse points they raise in terms of the qualities of the on-line users' discourses are markedly different. For example, in the previous discussion, Sunstein (2001) concentrates on the tendency of on-line users to seek out support from those with the same or similar voices, causing the production of discourses on the Internet to only reflect or strengthen personal opinions, without trying to accept other's stances (discussed in detail in chapter IV). Nevertheless, Sassi and Keane see the on-line users as more open-minded and civilised. This basic differentiation towards online users leads to polarised conclusions when analyzing the relationship between the Internet and public sphere.

My research purpose is to try to examine whether the Internet (in the form of an on-line forum) has the potential to pave the road for a realisation of the public sphere. The above scholars highlight the importance of discussions that further the democratic ideal, but they also present diverse viewpoints as a result of those discussions. It is therefore necessary to continue to discuss in detail whether the Internet really

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[22] Keane (2000: 77-79) proposes that the coffeehouse, town-level meeting and literary circle, widely identified as the early modern public sphere, can be termed micro-public sphere which focuses on local regions, and does not extend to a global view (i.e. macro-public sphere).

produces public discourse, to clarify the Internet's role as a public sphere and a stimulus of democracy.

What kinds of requirements, through the process of discussions, allow these discourses to be categorised as 'public discourses'? How can such public discourses bring benefit to democracy? In the following section, I will discuss in detail deliberative democracy, the global concepts of this topic, and whether the Internet does, or does not, have the capacity to carry out this ideal. Specifically, what elements of people's discussions are required, in order for them to be dubbed, 'public discourse'? Moreover, do peoples' discussions really contribute to democracy?

Theorists of deliberative democracy make concerted efforts to provide accounts for the above enquiries. Influenced largely by Habermas (Elster, 1998:1), the idea of deliberative democracy refers to the notion that legitimate lawmaking issues stem from the public deliberation of citizens (Bohman and Rehg, 1997:viii). In the next chapter, I will explain what deliberative democracy is, and go on to discuss the relationship between deliberative democracy and the Internet.

Chapter IV Deliberative Democracy and the Internet

The idea of deliberative democracy is not an innovative vision, but a revival of a concept which originates from Athenian democracy. In the fifth century B.C., Pericles made the following announcement in Athens, which allows us to observe how the conceptual and practical implementation of democracy was carried out in ancient times.

> Our public men have, besides politics, their private affairs to attend to, and our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, we regard the citizen who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless, and we are able to judge proposals even if we cannot originate them; instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all (Thucydides II. 40, quoted from Elster, 1998:1).

However, the Athenian government was based on a direct democracy which differs from a representative political system. For those proponents of deliberative democracy, though some citizens had a chance to speak and propose his plan, it was impossible for all present to be able to speak in the assembly because there were several thousand citizens there. Thus, deliberation would happen between a small number of speakers before passing the information on to the entire audience. For the speakers who passed on the information, their actions were geared towards persuading the whole audience rather than each other, in case they had to present their different arguments to citizens who also wanted to present their opinions. This procedure of the Athenian debating system reminds the advocators of deliberative democracy to consider such issues when establishing related theories (Elster, 1998:2).

Nevertheless, the spirit of deliberation as a tool for political choices still forms the main core of many scholars' thoughts, i.e. Rawls's (1971) *reflective equilibrium*, a condition of balance or coherence among a set of beliefs achieved by a process of deliberative mutual adjustment guided by general principals and particular judgements, and Habermas's (1990) *ideal speech*, through the elimination of all forms of coercion and through ground rules allowing all to speak, best supports the force of

good arguments winning out over others who present less rational, which insist on the principles of deliberations: equality, freedom and rational agency.

4.1 Deliberation, Public Deliberation and Deliberative Democracy

What is deliberation? In essence, deliberation can be distinguished from other types of communication such as discussion, which is definitely a less careful, less serious and less reasoned behaviour. In comparison, a deliberation presents a special sort of discussion which owns the characteristics of a careful and serious weighing of reasoning in support of, or against specific propositions. Alternatively, it can be an interior process through which one may evaluate the reasons for and against courses of actions (Fearon, 1998:63). The core virtue of deliberation is revealed in Dryzek's (2000:1) statement that,

> ...deliberators are amenable to changing their judgments, preferences, and views during the course of their interactions, which involve persuasion rather than coercion, manipulation, or deception.

For the theorists of deliberative democracy, deliberation is a means of encouraging citizens and their representatives to 'invoke substantive standards to understand, revise and resolve moral conflicts in politics' (Gutman and Thompson, 2000:161). In this respect, Joshua Cohen (1989:67-91) in the work of 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy' provides four characterisations in explaining of what an ideal deliberation is. Firstly, the ideal deliberation is free from constraining by the authorities of prior norms. The participants only tie themselves with the result of deliberation, and with the preconditions for the deliberation. Secondly, 'reasons' are highly stressed during the process of deliberating. In ideal deliberation, 'no force except that of the better argument is exercised' (Habermas, 1975:108). Ultimately, through the exchanges of reasons, the different parties would settle ready for their conditions. In contrast, the result can be seen while '...proposals maybe rejected because they are not defended with acceptable reasons' (Cohen, 1989:74). As to the third character, the equality has to be the set as the regulation no matter in a formal operation or in a substantive concern. Because under the regulation of equality, each one can 'put issues on the agenda, propose solutions, and offer reasons in support of or in criticism of proposal' (ibid), even can contribute '...has an equal voice in the

decision' (ibid). Thereafter, the final character will be achieved- through the ideal deliberation, a rationally motivated consensus will arrive

From the view of the deliberative democrats, deliberation is an ideal approach for the purpose of public use. For some scholars, public deliberation really offers a possibility to manifest the quality of the whole society through the process of explicit deliberations about the common good (Rawls 1971). In a discussion of how public deliberation provides hope for the benefit of people at large, Christiano (1999:244) points out, firstly, that it will enhance citizens' understanding in terms of their society and the moral principles which regulate the society, and then will improve the quality of legislation. Secondly, we can also have the greatest expectations for the laws which may tend to be rationally justified by the citizens' observations, rather than by those members of society who don't undergo an intensive process of deliberation on legislation. Finally, certain desirable qualities in citizens are enhanced when they must participate in the process of deliberation.

Thus, for Christiano, the intrinsic values of public deliberation are beneficial to a person or a society that goes through a well-conducted process of deliberation before making a decision. Furthermore, public deliberation contributes towards the realisation of mutual respect and concern among all citizens, if individuals treat participation in it as a basic part of a good life. In short, we can conclude that the outcomes of a public deliberation would be considered as a valuable political justification (ibid, 245-246).

Recognising the high value of public deliberation, many communitarian theorists define deliberative democracy as something that must be a legitimate process. They suggest, '...political decision making is legitimate insofar as it follows upon a process of public discussion and debates in which citizens and their representative, going beyond their mere self-interest and limited points of view, reflect on the public interest or common good' (Rehg and Bohman, 2002:31)[23]. That is to say, for them,

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[23] For example, Cohen (1989:17-34) 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimany', Fishkin (1991) *Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reform;* Dryzek (1990) *Discursive Democracy: Politics, Policy, and Political Science.*

the value of public deliberation is 'as a means of producing a shared vision and for transforming citizens' limited and self-interested perspectives' (Bohman, 1996:5).

However, such a view of legitimacy from Rousseauian and 'civic republican' is criticised by some defenders of liberalists, including Habermas and Rawls. It is because these interpretations of deliberative democracy demonstrate the political decisions are the expressions from the substantive values and traditions of a homogeneous political community or a general will, but they are not plausible in contemporary pluralist democracies, and even harmful to radical democratic ideals (ibid).

As Habermas describes that a deliberative politics subjects to a 'rationalized world' (1998a:302) that 'meets it halfway' (1990:207-208). As we know, many proponents who advocate deliberative democracy agree that its key spirit is rationality applicable to a deliberative process and its participants: a deliberative process itself is rational, as participants act with a reasonable mind. If this rationality is a crucial element to pave the road for the success of deliberative democracy, how can we make judgments to identify whether the process of democracy, and its participants' attitudes, are rational (reasonable) or not? To approach this question, it is necessary to discuss continually the theoretical nature of rationality.

4.2 Rationality and Deliberative Democracy

What does the word *rational* mean? According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2005:1049), *rational* means, "showing clear thought or reason rather than emotions". Concepts of rationality often originate from scientific claims proposing that science is to be developed for a better life; we rely on such claims because science provides definitions and reasons for clearly functional purposes. This type of claim is termed 'scientific rationalism' (Myerson, 1994:5) and in our modern society, the nature of reconstructive scientific rationalism is defined by Gellner (1992:78) as follows:

> [Within] the respectable mainstream tradition of rationalism... ...reason [is defined] as something clear, orderly, and individualist: a kind of lucid, self-guaranteeing agency, transparently at work in self-sufficient and autonomous minds operating on their own.

Continuing the discussion of Gellner's view, science is a high achievement of this kind of reasoning, and this reasoning aims to reach 'liberation from mere non-rigorous and hence error-prone, error-perpetuating accretion and accumulation of ideas' (ibid:55). Gellner has foreseen that this rationalism would be challenged or defeated by other threatening powers, yet he still has a generous hope that this type of rigorous reasoning would be beneficial to the realisation of scientific advancement and 'modern technology-based production' (ibid:24).

It is not only scientific rationalism that involves 'reason', but also human interaction such as dialogue (discourse), that provides a visible expression of interchange when observing human behaviours. In the book *Rhetoric, Reason and Society*, George Myerson (1994:6) reconstructs *reason* as dialogue, and discusses the essential elements on the success of dialogue that has a rational attitude. He describes it as 'dialogic rationalism', in which associates reason with interaction between people. Through the approach of defending reason, together with adopting science for interpreting reason, democratic progress can be achieved. For him, reason is good dialogue, in this sense, 'to show that understanding reasons means interpreting rational dialogue' (ibid:8). At the heart of reason, a good dialogue makes argument central, and provides different ideas inspiring on each other. Myerson also recognises

the contribution of rational disagreement, which is a path to a good society, and even makes a good society sustainable.

Actually, Myerson's dialogic rationalism briefly derives from Habermas's thinking on reason, dialogue and communication, particularly relying much on communicative rationality, which presented mostly in Habermas' book *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984). In this book, Habermas accounts reason from a historical analysis, and describes the story of its progress, flaws, and incompleteness. "Enlightenment" is the central term in supporting the progress of reason, and also provides the inspiration which constitutes the whole theory being broader than science. Among all the scholars, Max Weber probably provides a central key for Habermas as the basement of rationalism or rationalisation (Myerson, 1994:21). Habermas (1984:157) discusses Weber's version of rationalisation established on science and its' influence through which a Western progress achieved.

> The list of original achievements of Western rationalism is long. Weber points first to modern natural science, which put theoretical knowledge in mathematical form and tests it with the help of controlled experiments; he adds to this the systematic specialization of scientific activity in university settings. He mentions... ...the institutionalization of art... ...harmonious music... ...scientific jurisprudence, institutions of formal law... ...modern state administration... [and] calculable commerce (ibid).

Habermas summaries Weber's version in Western progress by using reason, and explains that rationality is derived from 'purposive rationality' which concerns means and ends, and from the correct calculation of methods to gain results. Habermas also deviates from Weber's theory by initiating a new version of rationality, one in which "rationalization of society would no longer mean a diffusion of purposive-rational action" (ibid:339). Differentiating from Weber, Habermas claims the rationality is not operated by purposive rational action or instrumental actions, but linked to human interaction in the modern era. In this respect, the theory of communicative action proposed by him will bring a new source of hope into our lives, and with it, a changed view of rationality; "The point of reference becomes instead the potential for rationality found in the validity basis of speech" (ibid). This is referred to as "communicative rationality". In the following account, Habermas (ibid:10) explains its nature:

...this concept of communicative rationality carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experiences of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views.

And the above mentioned rationality includes five principles, namely:

1. argumentative speech is central to rationality;

2. argument is interactive, it has a dialogic structure;

3. the interaction leads towards agreement when it is understood;

4. the achieved agreement is the foundation of a good society;

5. these requirements are compatible with science, but not reducible to the methods or conclusion of science (ibid:9).

In the process of modernisation, communicative rationality contributes to reaching a result of "successive release of the potential for rationality in communicative action" (ibid:155). Also, with a high expectation for language as an autonomous and dependent medium, the achievement of communicative rationality ought to reach mutual understanding. This mutual understanding of each other is a valuable capability for the people who live in this world. Reason is unifying after good discussions have lead to true consensus. In other words, true consensus is something linguistic, and people address it through a communicative process. However, if there is a lack of language capability among the participants, or if there is a detrimental intervention by certain social forces or institutions, this harmonious result remains unobtainable.

Another theorist, Hilary Putnam, takes a different approach to dialogic rationalism compared with Habermas. He identifies reason and rational methods through the process of debate, rather than through stories of historical developments. In his book *Reason, Truth and History* (1981), Putnam argues that there are always some concerns for us not to trust human reason. But it causes an immediate problem: what is the alternative to reason? Revealing truth from imagination or experiencing something instead of intuition? Ironically, these proposals still need to be examined by *reason*. He stresses this irony, which he calls 'a trap'. '...the temptation is to fall

into the trap of concluding that all rational argument is mere rationalization and then proceeding to try to argue rationally for this position' (163). The abovementioned rationalisation is not the claim which Weber suggests, but what he criticised is if we are only superficially rational, reason cannot be our central source.

In order to avoid this trap, he makes some connections; firstly, he identifies rationality with rational arguments and it means arguments between people are held with differing views. Thereafter, he connects *sense* with rational argument, because if we want to make sense of something, we can only do it through rational arguments. It is to say, for the people who hold clear and understandable views, they will defend their views via rational discussions. However, for Putman, a discussion doesn't need to be resolvable by reaching the so-called target of rationality. What he focuses on and stresses is the action of arguing, but not the prospect of consensus. Putnam believes when people argue properly in terms of an issue, they will improve their understanding toward it.

Habermas and Putman both focus on argument, and agree that argument can be a central approach to integrating reason with dialogue. Also, being rational is a primary concern before we respond to the views to others, and to ourselves. But how can we be rational and talk to other people with a rational attitude before we know each other? Deviating from Habermas's emphasis on rationality itself, for Giddens (1994), the exploration of rationality begins with emotions and emotional attitudes, which he calls *intimacy*. And he treats intimacy as the source of alternative values for the future in a new democracy.

> Intimacy is not being absorbed by the other, but knowing his or her characteristics and making available one's own. Opening out to the other, paradoxically, requires personal boundaries, because it is a communicative phenomenon; it also requires sensitivity and tact, since it is not the same as living with no private thoughts at all. The balance of openness, vulnerability and trust developed in a relationship governs whether or not personal boundaries become division which obstruct rather than encourage such communication. (ibid:94)

Giddens doesn't give up on reason, and is not saying that a good discussion is emotional rather than rational. Reason still contributes to intimacy, but reason does

not hold a position of supremacy in human activities. For him, the better interpersonal relations in a democratic process are constituted by intimacy within the rational model.

From Gellner's scientific outlook, to Habermas theory of communicative action, to Putman's trust reason from debate, to Giddens' concepts of the supportive role of emotions, the concept of rationality has been continually developed in line with the trend of social change. It is also the hope of these authors to contribute towards the progress of present and future generations. Habermas, Putman, Myerson and Giddens all highlight the contribution of reason to the discussion process for obtaining consensus results.

In a nutshell, Habermas's theoretical assumption is a hypothesis based on the fact that human beings have inherent highly-developed consciousness which affords the ability to communicate precisely without bias. Some critics present his thoughts as a prophecy, but as ideals which do not reflect our world explicitly. However, Habermas's efforts have drawn attention away from the macro-mind (the whole society as one) and directed attention towards locating the field of interpersonal reactions. His approach is designed to open a door that leads towards reaching the ideal of a golden age: enlightenment through super-efficient communication. If Habermas's view focuses on the cognitive part of the human mind, Giddens just switches his attention back to the emotional part, and tries to sort out whether people have to be independent (individual) rather than cooperative. Like Habermas, Giddens sees a new world emerging within our present society: a potential for another society within our own that is irreducible and encouraging. But for Giddens (1994:19), the foremost point is 'trust': he states that, 'Trust, of varying sorts and levels, underlies a host of day-to-day decisions that all of us take in the course of orienting our activities'.

Let us imagine a typical drama happening in our daily life: we discuss (deliberate) with our neighbours to decide the environmental policy for improving our community. We initiate the procedure by introducing ourselves (for instance, our names, age, and occupations), and then deliberate about the topic that caused our desire to have a discussion. The question is, if we don't trust each other, is it possible that we would want to participant in this event and provide our views about this policy? Giddens' claim therefore stands for a pre-deliberative position for the human being; his so-

called romantic viewpoint provides a more clear and practical tool for observing communicative rationality during a democratic procedure.

4.2.2 Rational Process and Reasonable Participants

In the previous section, a broad outline of deliberative democracy, and the rationales of the communicative process have been discussed. But when concerning the reasonable issues of the democratic process itself and all its participants, at least two interpretations have to be presented to clarify the meaning of rational process and reasonable participants.

Firstly, emphasising deliberation itself, which is oriented toward unanimity, its consequence ought to be one relying on all citizens converging together. Thus, Habermas's account requires that deliberation delimits that set of solutions which satisfy moral, ethical and pragmatic conditions of acceptability. Inclusion of all people affected by the process also assists the carrying out of principles of rationality and moral respect (Young, 2000:23). Furthermore, ensuring political equality is a guarantee of a rational process.

Secondly, as to the notion that all participants are 'reasonable', Young (2003:107) refers to 'the reasonable sense' which is 'a sense of a range of alternatives in belief and action', something that engages in 'considered judgment in deciding'. Those people who have reasonable sense are thus also able to willingly justify their claims and actions to others. Young has composed the following characteristic definition of a reasonable person:

> He reflects on some of the wrongs that come to people and non-human things and has an account of some of the social causes of those wrongs that he believes are alterable. He considers alternative means for bringing attention to those wrongs and calling upon others to help redress them, and he is usually quite prepared to justify the use of specific means on specific occasions, both to his comrades and to others...While his principles often lead him to protest outside of or disrupt the meeting of powerful people with whom he disagrees, one of his primary reasons for such protests is to make a wider public aware of institutional wrongs and persuade that public to join him in pressuring for change in the institutions (ibid).

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Reasonable people are highly aware of their right to abstain from agreement, and to choose not to follow others opinions. The values of dissent are understood; it not only produces insights, but also contributes towards decisions and agreements. The deliberative reason is that 'participants in discussion must be aiming to reach agreement to enter the discussion at all' (ibid:24). If the participants believe that some kind of agreement among them is possible in principle, they can in good faith trust one another enough to listen to and to persuade each other.

So far we have accrued a clear sketch of what reasonable participants are: they have open minds, listen to others, maintain a respectful attitude in relation to different opinions, try to understand other persons' ideas without any prejudice, and ask questions rather than making unconsidered judgments.

Publicity is an index referring to the interactions between participants during a deliberative process, through which people make decisions to clarify whether other's opinions are located within an acceptable domain. To reach the goal of mutual understanding within a context of plural public-speaking, participants must 'express themselves in ways accountable to all those plural others' (ibid:25).

For example, an introduction might include references to a person's background, experiences, interests, or to future proposals, and would be expressed clearly. Next, the interlocutors might begin to exchange their reasoning in ways that are easy for the others to recognise and accept.

4.3 Some Critiques of Deliberative Democracy

From the previous discussions presented in the last section, deliberative democracy seems to carry a kind of ideal vision for a better way to address the democratic purpose; however, deliberative democracy carries with it some issues which have to be sorted out.

Firstly, if the aim of deliberations is to foster understandings, which enable collective actions through the free and equal exchange of arguments from different sides, then political conversation should *not* be held among like-minded groups. But, empirical

research provides a different picture so far: according to a study of the frequency with which citizens engage in political discussion, and with whom they are most likely to talk with, results have shown that the most frequent political conversations occur among family, friends and people whose political views are similar (Berelson, 1952; Bennet et al., 2000; Wyatt, Katz and Kim, 2000). If the effect of deliberation is to move people toward a more extreme point in the same direction as their original tendency, why do we need to deliberate? This implication, which has been dubbed 'group polarization' by Sunstein (2003:80-101), hinders the role of deliberation in a public sphere which exists in a heterogeneous democracy.

In addition, like-minded people may participate in 'iterated polarization games'; they are people who meet regularly, without sustained exposure to competing views. These persons have a tendency to stick to the same identity, and this is a phenomenon that diverges from the assumptions of deliberative democracy.

Secondly, if 'inclusion', to include all the citizens, is a basic principle of the deliberative democracy, how can we begin to really practice this in our daily lives? Most theorists of deliberative democracy have made implications and assumptions that 'inclusion' occurs in any forum in which people participate with others directly, that is located in a small setting, or is in a legislature. Some of the scholars (Mansbridge, 1993; Barber, 2004) consider town meeting centres or neighbourhood meeting groups to be the foundation of strong discussion-based participatory institutions. This approach also raises two queries, the first is whether the discussion issues are extendable to a global dimension, or just focus on local concerns? The second enquiry is whether such an approach still adheres to the ideal of a deliberative process?

Most scholars have convergent views that the issues provided for a discussion have to include both global and local concerns. The empirical results collected by Mansbridge (1980, quoted in Schudson, 1997:301) in Vermont, actually run against other scholars' common expectations. Some of the interviewees told the researcher about their apprehensions which stopped them from participating in their town meetings. Firstly, in order to encourage all the participants to speak out about their opinions in public, it is important that all persons act within the boundaries of social etiquette. For

example, some interviewees were doubtful whether their responses were respected by others. They censored what they wanted to say in order to preserve their perceived public acceptance. One person gave the following example.

> Specially if you get up and make a boo-boo. I mean you make a mistake and say something, then people would never get up and say anything again. They feel themselves inferior (ibid).

Another interviewee, a house cleaner and mother of five, provides a diverse perspective on this doubt,

> If you go there and you speak up, they make fun of you for speaking up and so on, and I guess people just don't want to go and be made fun of (ibid).

There are other cases within Mansbridge's research that show how people refuse to talk in town meetings because they are so afraid of other people's criticisms, or to be treated in a rude way (ibid, 302). Based on these results, it is easy to see why people are sometimes less interested and less motivated to attend their town meetings.

Following the concern about the feasibility of deliberative democracy, Schudson (1997:297-309) presents a stance in contrast to those advocates of deliberative democracy who believe in its ability to carry out the principle of egalitarianism. He is concerned with real situations in which people undergo embarrassment. He also challenges that the success of conversations comes not from reason, something heralded by Habermas as a major factor of deliberative democracy, but from cooperative interactions.

Schudson uses Pinter's (1962) play 'A Slight Ache' as an example of explaining that all the standard features of conversations have been realised in our daily lives (for example, mutual engagement, even-handedness, egalitarianism, turn-taking exchange, give-and-take, and having power to transmit information, etc.), however, there is no mention in his play of public reasonableness. For all citizens, the question is: do they have the will to expose themselves in uncomfortable dialogical environments in which their discussions fall into the realms of 'public reasonableness'? Do they have the ability to articulate their thoughts clearly in such uncomfortable settings of public

discussion? For Schudson, conversation may not be at the heart of democracy if people don't want to be forced to be involved with public discussions. The critics of deliberative democracy support the view that this political ideal is both problematic and 'transcendental' (Michelman, 1997:150), which is counter-factual.

Other critics, also basing their arguments on empirical claims, consider whether we really deliberate in cases where we see the deliberation as a discussion about goals. In fact, the majority of political discussion concerns not goals, but means, as Przeworski (1998:140-160) puts it, 'not the question whether motherhood is good but whether the best way to promote motherhood is indeed to throw mothers and children on the street'. Thus, we rarely deliberate.

Michelman (1997:145-171) provides a view to consider the real stories of political conflict in the world. Following this respect, Johnson criticises (1998:165) that for the advocates of deliberation, they are conveniently not concerned about conflict, which is attached to the social status of the opponents, but more so about their goal of reaching a consensus. The advocates of deliberation tend to easily neglect fundamental political parties which stand for different statuses and ideologies, ignoring such real political situations in the quest for a subset of 'reasonable' political discussion. Within a framework of reason, during the process of deliberation, if one participant claims to be self-interested, prejudiced, or ideologically biased, others have to allow him to express and categorise those opinions as prejudices, ideologies or self-interests which make up his or her reasoning (ibid:166). Thereafter, this will be announced as 'a certain good faith of reasons' (ibid). Thus, should such a pedantic and compounded search for the reasons behind 'reasonable discussions', necessitate the abandonment of emotions and qualities such as laughter, joy, and humour in the deliberative arena?

Though Johnson recognises democratic deliberation is intuitively attractive, it is insufficient to deny some deficiencies of deliberative democracy. In particular he argues the assumption of deliberative democracy is built on a utopian base. In that sense, all the participants are requested to be heroes, and, '...it (thus) is unreasonable ...to anticipate that deliberation will massively transform the

preferences, capacities, or character of participants in normatively attractive ways' (ibid:174). For him, a plausible argument for deliberation actually engenders 'good faith' by enabling participants to develop great understanding of each other, and trust the deliberating process. But the ideal deliberative procedures which search for the substantive agreement on preferences or values is from the realistic, and isn't capable of normative appealing in a large, pluralist constituency. '..it would recognise that the demand for such agreement is too strong if we are looking to deliberation, ...as a remedy for the practical shortcoming (e.g., the instability) of outcomes generated by aggregation mechanisms.' (ibid:176).

As Elster (1998:12) argues, advocates of deliberative democracy don't offer any arguments on practicing decision-making. Instead, they take it for granted that the problems in democracy will be resolved by argument. One might ask the advocates of deliberative democracy whether their arguments have any purchase on actual political discussion. In reply, Habermas (1998:540) describes 'the actual course of the debates deviates from the ideal procedure of deliberative politics..., presuppositions of rational discourse have a steering effect on the course of the debates.' Nevertheless, Elster still questions the norms set up by Habermas may cause the self-interested speakers are forced or induce to argue regarding the public interest, which has been criticised by Fearson (1998) as the 'civilizing force of hypocrisy'. Fearson also worries, this hypocrisy will probably constraint the self-interested proposal into voting agenda that inevitably creates the biases or distortions from the real situation.

In the case of deliberative democracy, just as Elster (ibid:15) comments, '...normative and empirical studies address very different issues'; however, the gaps between the critics and the advocates still won't reduce the attraction of this ideal (which is Johnson terms 'intuitively attractive'). Those critics still await 'how' deliberation might function politically (Johnson, 1998:177), and these plausible deliberations would ultimately work 'as part of a democratic process of reaching legitimate, binding collective decisions' (ibid).

4.4 The Internet as a Medium of Deliberative Democracy

In chapter III, I have discussed the Internet's interactive character which may contribute to the development of democracy. In this section, I will continue to present a literary discussion concerning whether the Internet is a good medium for carrying out deliberative democracy.

Theoretically, there are three camps, each navigating a different course in their exploration of the question: is the Internet an ideal sphere in which to expand political deliberations?

The first camp claims that the Internet truly does have the potential to free up political dialogue (Stromer-Gallery, 2002:35; O'Hara, 2002:201), due to the fact that it assists people in crossing the psychological barriers that restrict their engagement in deliberations, and their claim have had support from the case studies. Downing (1989) traces the development of Peacenet, an online forum devoted to the discussion of peace issues, and finds that it fosters democratic discourses between over 50 states and in over 70 countries. From his observation, such computer networks enable the mobilizing of a constituency otherwise separated by time and space, and may functions as forums for developing the requisite language and agendas for political action. Another story from Indian newsgroups (soc.culture.india) also provides a positive view in support of a net as democratic use. For Indian citizens who may not meet in real space and time situations, but through discussions in this site, this group has harboured lively political discussion on issues that are pertinent to the political future of India (Mitra 1997:55-79). The Internet technologies offer the opportunities to across communicate across geographic borders, and to propose new avenue of political change.

Besides, the scholars from the first camp also stress the importance of Internet characteristics such as social presence and anonymity which can strengthen the

motivation of participating in online discussions. For them, a lack of non-verbal cues in the online environment leads to a lower sense of social presence and a heightened sense of anonymity which construct a successful condition for participating forum activities. It is to say, the Internet creates an environment which enables people to conquer their shyness and cooperate with others; the anonymity lets communications via computer networks become more intimate, spontaneous, personal, and more confessional. With higher expectation toward the online political forum for the purpose of democracy, some proponents hope to be able to announce a new era, a new renaissance of the 'republic of letters', whilst also maintaining a resistance to censorship and state power in the public sphere (Katz, 1997:184-191; Bohman, 2004:138). The empirical findings from Wallace (1999:124-125) supports that when online users believe that their actions cannot be attributed to them, they tend to discuss issues of difficulty more openly under such conditions of safe feeling.

However, the relations between anonymity and rationality are still questioned by the second camp scholars. Particularly when concerning the qualities of the political discourses produced on the Internet, some scholars (Buchstein, 1997; Papacharissi, 2004) doubt whether the online users will choose to insist upon principles of rationality, or not. The lack of face-to-face interaction and the abundance of anonymity create an anarchism which undermines the authenticity of any attempted rationality. In the view of one commentator, Buchstein (ibid:604), the Internet actually has a negative effect which dissolves the specific normative substance of a deliberative process. This 'puts deliberative democracy further on the defensive' (ibid).

The empirical results associated with the discursive qualities of anonymous forums also have not reached a concrete conclusion yet. For example, some experimental projects and forums, the Minnesota E-Democracy plan (Dahlberg, 2001:615-633), the aforementioned Peacenet and the Indian newsgroup, demonstrate the possibilities of the expansion of the public sphere through deliberations on the net. Conversely, some

studies have unexpected results of being far from a sounding board (Wilhelm, 1999:154-178), or of generating flames rather than discussions (Hill and Hughes, 1998), or of being deficient in constructing reasonable posts (Fang and Su, 1998). The opposite results from the above cases have left some room for further study.

The result from Jensen's (2003:349-374) comparative study may provide a way to consider this empirical diversity. In comparison to two kinds of online political forums launched in Denmark, one is a government-sponsored forum and another is attributed as an anarchic forum, Jensen finds the previous one more successful in achieving democratic ideals of openness, respect, argumentation, and deliberation. According to Jensen's analysis, there are three key factors that contributes to the success of the former case; firstly, rules and moderation; secondly, a geographical affiliation; and thirdly, the presence of politicians.

Jensen's work guides a thought to consider the sponsorship type of individual forums. The different motivations for the participants to choose which forum they prefer to take part in also engender the qualities of discussions. In the anarchic forum, '...as an informal discussion among friends or colleagues with quick replies or exchanges' (ibid:370), whereas, when discussants decide to be a part of discussions, '... resembles formal kinds of participation such as town meeting, hearing or consultations with politicians' (ibid).

The third camp of scholars (Sunstein, 2001:49; Van Alstyne and Brynjofsson, 1996:24) especially worry that the polarising effects originating from participants' choices would occur in the Internet. Like-minded people try to find others with voices that echo their own voices, and adopt this mono-directional collective opinion to support the reasoning behind their decisions.

The differentiation between the second camp and third camp is the assumption toward the backgrounds of participants. The third camp sees the participants coming from the

heterogeneous groups due to the easy-access nature of the internet benefits people by increasing the diversity of available ideas. But the polarising effects would hold back the potential communications via the online debates (Page, 1996:124; Dahlberg, 2001:121).

In summary, the varying points have been discussed among three camps of scholars. Regardless the perceptive differentiations of anonymity among them, those scholars contribute to guide such a thought, the accessible character of online forums actually expanding the possibilities of political engagement. However, these theoretical arguments still need the empirical examinations in support/ or against such views.

Chapter V   Research Methodology

5.1 Toward a Methodology: Some Research Enquires

In chapter II, I discussed the use of the media for democratic purposes in Taiwan's context, and in chapter III and IV I discussed whether online forums can pave the road for the virtual public sphere. A deeper exploration of deliberative democracy and rationality are discussed as well in chapter IV, from which some enquires have arisen.

Summarising the theoretical discussions in terms of the qualities of deliberation, it is essential to examine: *to what extent do online participants present rational arguments revealed from online forums?* Furthermore, *do those discussions present the thoughts of like-minded groups?*

The analysis of the three camps from section 4.4 reveals a variation among scholars. In this study, a related enquiry to identify which viewpoints most adequately reflect the real situation will be attempted to address the question, *is anonymity a major factor which attracts online participants to deliberate?* Continuing this line of thinking, *what are those online users' reactions and attitudes toward the lack of face-to-face communication? What is the consequence of anonymity?*

Finally, although the empirical researches of whether online political forums are an ideal public sphere haven't reached a contingent conclusion yet, the attributes of forums (i.e. sponsorship type) have been considered a factor which influences the discursive qualities. Based on this view, this research will examine whether different forum attributes bring out any different qualities of deliberation.

In order to answer these enquiries, empirical evidence will be collected and analysed in my continuing work.

5.2 A Brief Introduction to the Research Methodology

Through the Internet's network connectivity, a new style of communicative method for diffusing and exchanging opinions between interlocutors has been developed. The online participants communicate their opinions through the online forums (the virtual arena) in a way which allows them to observe the holistic public process openly. Online forums also allow researchers to participate easily. The nature of text-based interactions enables all the information related to users' communicative actions in to be downloaded and saved.

For researchers, the increasing number of on-line group studies from various disciplines, (such as communication, anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics, and science and technology), means that they now face a variety of types of on-line discussions, each with their own appeal for researchers who wants to explore different situations from diverse dimensions.

Online discussions occur across many types of forum for which researchers design specific methodologies for each type of discussion. Researchers may also be challenged when they encounter interactions within computer-mediated contexts (Kleinman, 2004:48). This research environment makes it difficult to choose methodologies devised of reliable, valid and ethical methods. For example, participant observation assists researchers in comprehending explicitly the whole context of the study, but this action might influence online users if they are aware that they are being 'observed'.

Furthermore, for the new arena of CMC research, which in many ways is distinct from the traditional convention of research design, it is necessary to find a suitable approach to a methodology.

The purpose of my research is to examine how on-line users discuss political topics in on-line political forums in Taiwan. In this chapter, I will describe the methodologies being employed in my research in detail, including explanations of the reasons for my

choice of research tools.

5.3 Research Subjects

In my study, three political forums have been chosen as my research subjects. They are *Yahoo! Political Forum*, *Palm BBS Forum* and *The Presidential Office Forum*. These three political forums represent three different sponsor types: *commercial, non-profit organisation* and *government organisation* respectively. Fig 5.3.1, Fig 5.3.2 and Fig 5.3.3 are screen captures of their web-pages; each forum and each page are described in more detail in the following brief outline.

Yahoo! (or Yahoo! Kimo) has become the most popular navigational-guide website in Taiwan since it merged with Kimo, the largest Taiwanese net-company, in November 2000[24]. The user-friendly access nature of Yahoo is based on the easy icon-use function of its web-design interface, which does not require users to have any computer language skills. This appeals to people, especially to young persons, to log in and participate in the forum's discussions. The Yahoo! Political forum is one of the most popular forums in Taiwan. Therefore, if the purpose of this study is to try to examine the communicative actions of interlocutors within online forums, then Yahoo! is a representative choice of research content.

During the period of the 2004 presidential election, Yahoo set up a link on its portal page connecting with its political forum. The only condition of participating in the forum discussions was to register a Yahoo email account. Yahoo also provided multiple ways to search for posts, including by key words, subject, author and time. The participants were able to efficiently find the topics that they were interested in, and could organise the contents of this forum by choosing the function of ordering. In addition, the participants could check others' mood from the icons shown on the page before clicking into the message page.

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[24] For further information see Chi-Wei Chang (2000) *The Secrets of Yahoo!*, Business Publishing: Taipei.

Board title

Welcome message

Mood icons

Search function (multiple choices)

Board moderator and his/her hyperlink

Order the contents of this forum

Author column

Manage your reading

Date/time column

Titles of posts

Go to first/ previous/ next/ last page

Go to a certain post
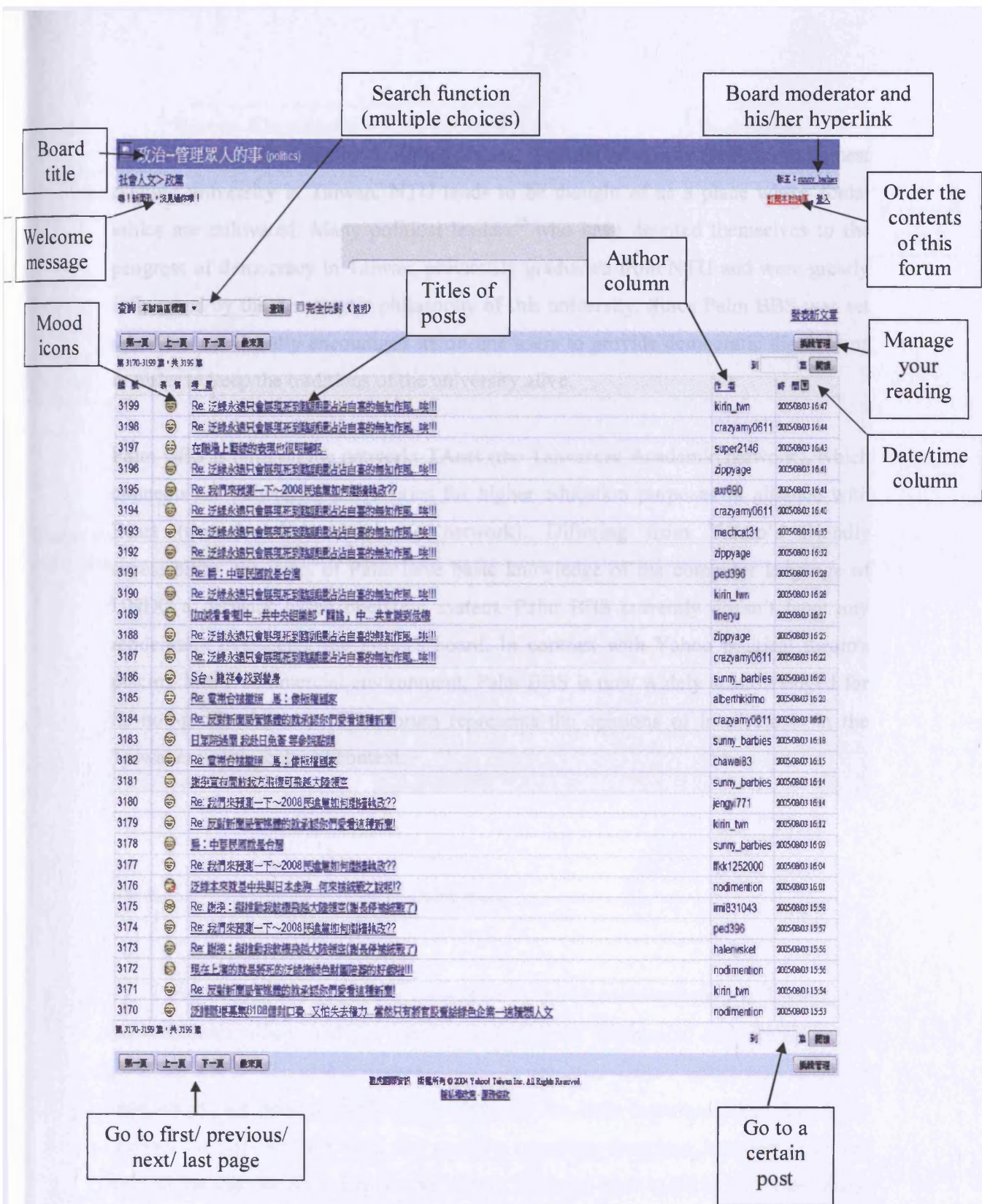
Fig 5.3. 1 The entrance page of Yahoo! Political Forum

Palm BBS was set up in 1993 in the National Taiwan University (NTU), the highest ranking university in Taiwan. NTU tends to be thought of as a place where social ethics are cultivated. Many political leaders[25] who have devoted themselves to the progress of democracy in Taiwan, previously graduated from NTU and were greatly influenced by the democratic philosophy of this university. Since Palm BBS was set up, it has continually encouraged its on-line users to provide democratic discussions in order to keep the traditions of the university alive.

Palm BBS is built on the network: TAnet (the Taiwanese Academic network), which connects all Taiwanese universities for higher education purposes in alliance with Binet (the American Academic network). Differing from Yahoo's friendly accessibility, the users of Palm have basic knowledge of the computer language of UNIX, a network based operating system. Palm BBS currently doesn't have any moderators overseeing the Politics board. In contrast with Yahoo political forum's placing in the commercial environment, Palm BBS is now widely acknowledged for its non-profit character. This forum represents the opinions of intellectuals in the Taiwanese socio-cultural context.

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[25] In recent history, there have been three presidents who have been elected by poll. The first president, Dr. Lee Teng-hui, the previous president, Chen Shui-bian, and the current president Ma Ying-jeou, are all graduates from Taiwan University.
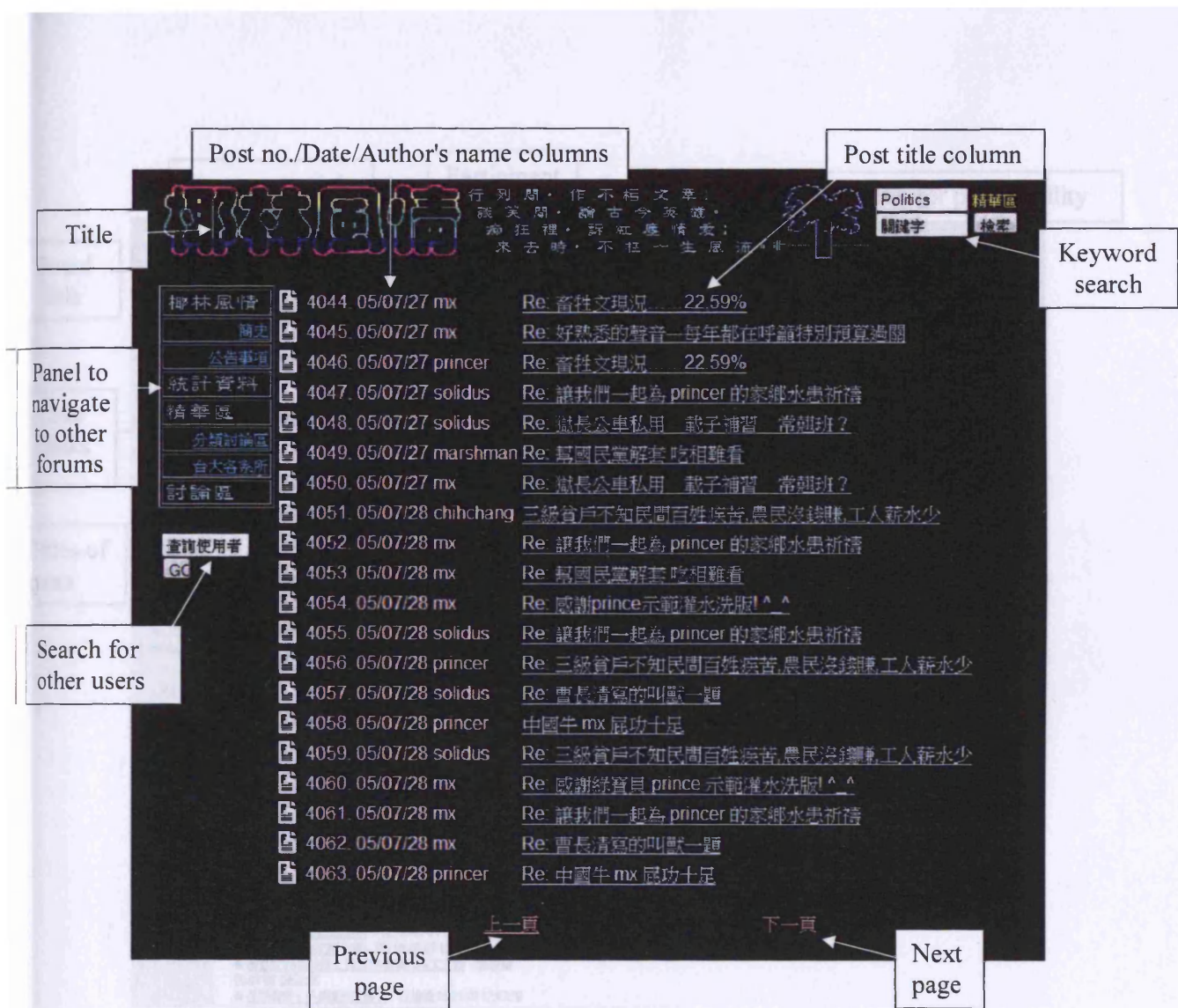
Fig 5.3. 2 The entrance page of Palm BBS

The Presidential Office Forum is sponsored by the highest institution in Taiwan, the governmental office, and provides a place for the submission and discussion of political issues concerning Taiwan. The Presidential Office doesn't have board moderators; the purpose of this forum is to for the civic communication. Similar to Yahoo, the Presidential Office also provides searching functions, however, it is less easy to use than the same function in Yahoo. The users have to fill in the fields with a concrete date, subject, author's name and content.

Post new article   Participant   Search for posts facility

Board title

Site links

Go to next page

Titles of posts

Date /time
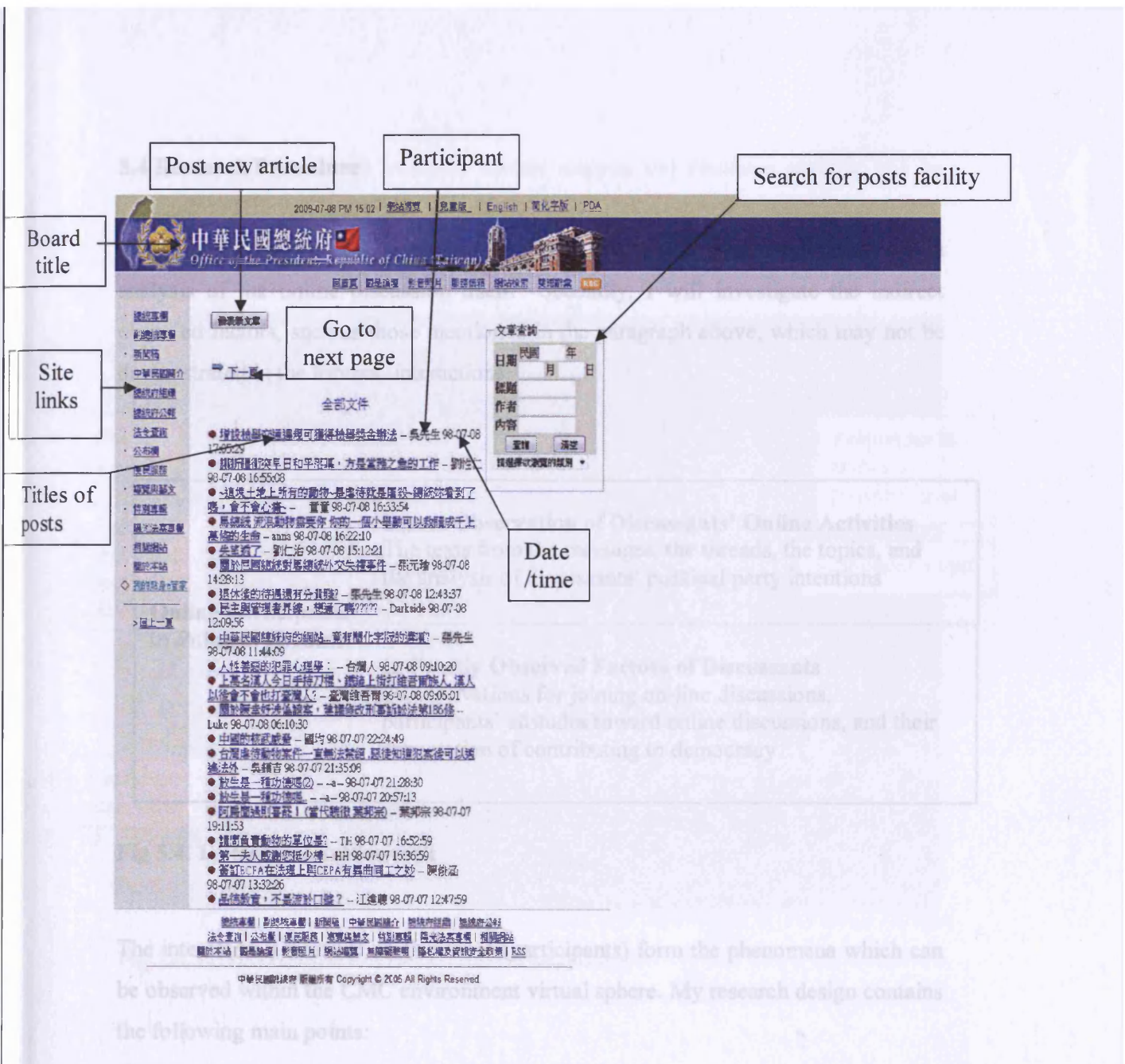
Fig 5.3. 3 The entrance page of the Presidential Office

Besides the online discussions in these forums, my research also considers a more complete study of online users. The method of in-depth interview is used here as a tool to investigate on-line users' motivations, attitudes, and inspirations for joining the forums, which are not shown directly in online observations. This will be discussed later in section 5.5.

5.4 Research Procedure

My research project can be divided into two sections: firstly, I will focus on an analysis of the online discussion itself. Secondly, I will investigate the indirect observed factors, such as those mentioned in the paragraph above, which may not be demonstrated in the forums' interactions.

Online Participants in Political Forums	**Direct Observation of Discussants' Online Activities** The texts from the messages, the threads, the topics, and the analysis of discussants' political party intentions
	Indirectly Observed Factors of Discussants i.e. motivations for joining on-line discussions, participants' attitudes toward online discussions, and their expectation of contributing to democracy

Fig 5.4. 1 Research framework

The interactive actions of on-line users (participants) form the phenomena which can be observed within the CMC environment virtual sphere. My research design contains the following main points:

5.4.1 Direct Observation of Online Discussants' Activities

- The texts contributed by on-line users are a good index for examining specific qualities of discussions, whether they are single posts, containing posts from interlocutory interactions (see fig 5.4.2), or from multiloguing posts. The texts observed in this study were directly produced by the discussants.

- I will then examine the categories of discussion topics, and the users' political party intentions, to obtain the empirical evidence I need to answer each research

question. Two research methods, content analysis and discourse analysis, will be employed for this purpose (see sec 5.5).

Fig 5.4. 2 An example of interlocutory discussions

5.4.2 Indirectly observed Factors of Online Discussants

- The *indirectly observed factors*, may not be immediately evident in the texts published in the forums, such as their motivations for participating in discussions, their habits, and their attitudes toward anonymity. The research method for conducting this enquiry is covered in section 5.5.

5.5 Research Methods in Online Discussion Section

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the argument existing between technological utopians and anti-technological utopians, which began with their differing perceptions of the discussion qualities of on-line users. The empirical evidence which researchers present could either show that the Internet has the potential to be the virtual public sphere, or that it does not. The aim of this section is to try to examine specific qualities of discussions in the above mentioned forums.

Following the threads of these discussions, I will examine the way the interactions between on-line users develop through this type of text-based discussion and communication. I will also study the agenda on-line users are concerned with, i.e. whether their interactions extend to broad and constructive topics, or instead follow the agenda set up by the mainstream media. Furthermore, I will observe the situations of citizens who are faced with different topics, to see whether they keep the same argumentative position in relation to the groups they support.

In order to ascertain the exact qualities of the on-line discussions, I will adopt content analysis and discourse analysis as my core research methods. The previous method will provide the quantitative data, and the latter one will assist with a qualitative analysis.

5.5.1 Content Analysis

Generally speaking, content analysis is principally a technique for quantitative analysis of extensive texts within a framework. It was created by Lasswell, Berelson, George, de Sola Pool, Holsti and others who developed the design of its theoretical foundations and elements (Lindkvist, 1981:26).

The basic assumption at the root of content analysis is that there is a connection between 'the frequency of linguistic units' and 'the interests of the text producer'. Content analysis reflects the phenomenon that the text producer is more 'interested' in frequent

units than in infrequent units. (Lindkvist 1981:34). As such, *manifest* and *objective* characteristics are foci in the procedure of content analysis.

Content analysis is defined by the following general principle: '...any technique for making inference by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages' (Holsti, 1969:14). In fact, there are many definitions of content analysis, for instance, Walizer and Wienir (1978, quoted in Wimmer and Dominick, 2003:140) describe it as 'any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information'. For Krippendorff (1980:175-182), content analysis is defined as 'a research technique for making replicable and valid reference from data to their context.'

Kerlinger's (2000) points out that there are three concepts involved in content analysis: *objective*, *systematic* and *quantitative* criteria, each of which format the principles of content analysis. The *objective* criterion, which later has been replaced by the term 'intersubjective', is a factor which ensures that this approach can be repeatedly tested by other researchers who follow the initiator's stated methods. Objectivity concerns the researchers' attitudes, which should not involve their personal idiosyncrasies or biases in their findings. The role of the *systematic* criterion is to ensure that all the research steps are based upon explicitly formulated rules and that these rules are consistent when they are later adopted. The *quantitative* criterion is a way to reach the goal of content analysis: the accurate representation of a body of messages. The quantitative approach of content analysis reduces the whole complex message to a set of isolated single elements which can be counted to examine characteristics in the message (Roller, Mathes and Eckert, 1998:167, Wimmer and Dominick, 2003:141).

5.5.1.2 The Shortcomings of Content Analysis

Wimmer and Dominick (2003:144) conclude that there are four weaknesses of content analysis in the area of media studies. Firstly, content analysis cannot be the sole basis for proving the effects of contents (e.g., media content) on audiences. Wimmer and Dominick (ibid) use a study of Saturday morning cartoons as an example to explain this limitation. The findings of their research reveal that 80% of cartoons shown on Saturday

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morning television are aired along with sugared cereal commercials. However, this sole finding could not stand as evidence for researchers that, children who watch Saturday morning cartoons on television desire to be customers of sugared cereal companies. Thus, if researchers want to ascertain how media contents affect audiences, an additional study related to the audiences themselves needs to follow the content analysis (e.g., cultivation analysis).

The second limitation of content analysis relates to the specific definition and framework of a study, without which it is difficult to obtain similar results in repeated studies. For example, a number of researchers have contributed to the exploration of TV violence; some have tried not to expose the contents of comic or slapstick humour associated with the violent images, whereas, others are concerned that this is an important issue for TV violence studies. It is a recurring situation in media studies, that researchers choose different genres for their main definitions and categories, and obtain varying results depending on their choices. As such, researchers who employ dissimilar tools for measuring will inevitably come to different conclusions (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003:144).

The third limitation of content analysis applies to research of specialist topics which have very few contents accessible for studying. Researchers need to obtain sufficient quantities of relevant contents in order to have enough data to arrive at a statistically satisfactory result.

The fourth limitation of this type of methodology, concerns factors of time and budget: content analysis does not lend itself to being applied to large volumes of data.

Moreover, the process of a quantitative approach in content analysis tries to reduce the complexity of whole message by isolating single elements to count specific characteristics within messages. These procedures have been criticised by scholars as 'too atomistic' and 'oversimplistic' (Kracauer, 1952/1953:632), and 'lacking in validity' (Roller, Mathes and Eckert, 1995:167-168).

Hence, for my own purposes to prevent an oversimplification of the meanings in the forums texts, which might both diminish the validity of the results and not reflect the genuine interactions of the on-line discussions, I also employ discourse analysis as a methodological approach in this section.

5.5.2 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a research approach for studying texts which are the consequences of language use by speakers (Muntigi, 2002:49). In recent years, the rapid growth of interest in discourse analysis has spread across the areas of arts, humanities and social sciences. Rather than having an epistemological basis, a traditional critical of social science classifies discourse analysis as based on *social constructionism, constructivism* or simply *constructionism* (Gill, 2000:173). Though there isn't an agreement about these terms, the common features indicate convergent views as follows; firstly, a critical stance of taken-for-granted knowledge and a scepticism of a perspective that the nature of this world can be observed impartially; secondly, the ways we understand this world are historically and culturally specific and relative; thirdly, knowledge is socially constructed, so the current ways we understand this world are not decided by the nature of this world, but from the social processes; finally, in order to explore knowledge, the actions and practices which connect with knowledge are examined (Burr, 1995, quoted from Gill, ibid).

According to Gill (ibid), there are at least 57 varieties of discourse analysis. He categories the three main theoretical traditions. The first is known as critical linguistics, social semiotics or critical language studies. This tradition is associated with the discipline of linguistics, and borrows the idea from semiotics and structuralists. From the core concept of semiological analysis, a sense of term is not derived from any essential correlations between signifier and signified, but from the system of oppositions in which it is embedded. Particularly, it is concerned with the relations between language and politics.

The second tradition is influenced by speech-act theory, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. Instead of looking at how accounts relate to the world, this tradition focuses on the details of the organisation of social interaction.

The third body is associated with poststructuralism, which breaks with realist views of language, and refuses the notion of unified coherent subject that has been a core value of Western philosophy (Gill, ibid:174). Among all the poststructuralists, Michel Foucault (1977; 1981) is momentous because his work characterizes genealogies of discipline and sexuality as discourse analysis. Compared with most discourse analysis, this work focuses on looking historically at discourses, but does not stress the analysis of the details of spoken or written texts.

In this research, concerning characteristics of the texts revealed from online political forums, the analytical view will adopt the stance from the first tradition – looking at how society constructs languages which relate to politics.

5.5.2.1 Themes of Discourse Analysis

Gill (ibid) concludes that discourse analysis has four main themes, they are: a concern with discourse itself, a view of language as constructive and constructed, an emphasis upon discourse as a form of action, and a conviction in the rhetorical organisation of discourse.

The first theme indicates that the approach of discourse analysis takes discourse itself as its topic. Discourse, in this sense, is not a mean of getting at some reality lying behind the discourse, but attracts the analysts to focus on the content and organisation of texts. As to the discussion of language being constructed, the metaphor of *construction* draws attention to the fact that discourse is produced out of pre-existing linguistic resources (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; quoted in Gill, ibid:175). This metaphor also indicates actually an account involves a number of different choices, so the choice made by the speakers or writers reveals their orientation.

Therefore, Gill (ibid) tries to emphasise the importance of 'action orientation' or 'function orientation' of discourse. Discourses are the results of social practices. People use discourses to act in this society, and interpret the context they live in. Inevitably, people attempt to construct discourses to fit in this context. Discourses are not manufactured and occasioned in a social vacuum. So, unpacking the discourse itself can trace the functions or activities of talk and texts.

Following this view, Gill leads onto the fourth point: discourse analysis treats talk and texts as organised rhetorically (ibid:176). For example, politicians are obviously attempting to lead the attentions of people towards their view of the world, and advertisers are attempting to sell us products, lifestyles and dreams. The rhetorical nature of texts guides us to notice the ways in which all discourse is organised to make itself persuasive.

5.5.2.2 The Limitations of Discourse Analysis

The first limitation of discourse analysis is that it prevents research results being generalized. The aim of discourse analyse is not set up to explore universal processes, but to identify and construct from particular interpretive resources, designed for particular contexts. Therefore, the results from discourse analysis fall short of the ability to generalise outcomes.

Secondly, discourse analysts are less interested in issues of representativeness. Though they don't reject quantification altogether, the criteria of judgement is arguable concerning how to decide whether something is or isn't an instance of a relevant phenomenon?

5.5.3 Summary

In a discussion of the advantages of content analysis, Deacon et. al (2007:138-139) point out that it is methodical. Content analysis stipulates that all material within a chosen sample needs to be examined under the same set of categories, which have been

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explicitly identified. The results offer a degree of rigour, precision and trustworthiness. However, they argue that qualities would be missing if the researchers just simply paste together 'certain selective quotations and sensational images in order to prove the point from which, tendentiously, you began' (ibid). Deacon et. al (ibid) therefore emphasise the need for cooperation between quantitative and qualitative approaches. In my study, content analysis and discourse analysis will be employed together in order to increase the credibility and validity of the results.

5.5.4 Measurement

5.5.4.1 Sampling Period and Assisting Software for Data Collecting

The data was collected from April 15th to June 15th in 2005. The data collection work was achieved through a type of software called Teleport which enables the downloading of an entire website's content. Due the amount of posts, typically more than 400 submitted each day, the traditional copy-paste method of collection proved to be inefficient. Teleport can download a whole website, maintaining its original order and structure, which allows the research data to be easily managed and retrieved for future studies.

5.5.4.2 A Sampling Approach and Units of Analysis

After finishing the collection of three months data, a systematic random sampling approach was adopted to choose every eleventh day (the interval is 16) within this period. There are 4548 posts to be analysed in this study. Each post is an analytical unit.

5.5.4.3 Conducting a Content Analysis

a. Coding sheet design - constructing content categories

The whole coding sheet is separated into three main categories: *descriptive data, examining discursive qualities,* and *political group orientations.*

The category of descriptive data aims to examine the information revealed from the posts, including date, post title, user ID, IP address (the locations of the participants), the nationality[26] of the participant, and the length of posts. A descriptive subcategory also operates to code the post sequence in order to identify whether each post is an initial post or reply. For the initial posts, further coding will be conducted in order to classify the schemata of the discursive topics (a total of seventeen options in this study[27]). In response to Fang and Su's (1998) finding that the Taiwanese Forums are deficient at initiating their own discursive topics, and instead follow the views or repeat the agenda of the mainstream media, my study will particularly examine the ability to initiate new topics within these online political forums (see appendix 1).

Another set of descriptive data comes from measuring the reply posts. In a previous study (Wilhelm, 1999:166-167), the first in a series of reply messages is dubbed a *seed* message that plants a seed for discussion, usually providing the groundwork for a topic. In this study, the reply post will be labelled if it fits the condition of a seed post. Those reply posts are also observed to examine whether they maintain the same topic, or go astray, and whether they quote the initial or the previous post. According to the results from participant observations before conducting this research, some quarrels which initiate from the reply messages do not keep the same scope of the initial topic, or quote the texts of the previous posts, therefore, two coding schema have been added into the coding sheet for a further measurement.

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[26] Taiwan and Mainland China have adopted different alphabetical systems since 1949. The alphabetical system used by Taiwan is the traditional system, whereas Mainland China developed a simplified character system instead. Therefore, the alphabetical system adopted by the participants serves as an identifier to distinguish their nationalities.

[27] The options are:
1 - economy, 2 - health and social welfare, 3 - diplomatic issues,
4 - a commentary of the political conflict between Taiwan's political parties,
5 - a critique of politicians' performance, 6 - education, 7 - crime, 8 - environmental issues,
9 - relations between Mainland China and Taiwan, 10 - a stance that reflects any Taiwanese independent issue, 11 - government performance, 12 - political groups, 13 - media, 14 - parliament, 15 - society benefit, 16 - a conflict between northern and southern Taiwan, 17 - others.

Three subcategories, *public-orientation*, *rationality* and *openness*, will be coded for the purpose of examining the discursive qualities. The public-orientation is designed for assessing the independence of online discussants in terms of political authorities (government) and market power (the enterprises). The enquiry of this section is as follows: *to what extent are the concerns driven by public-oriented participants in contradistinction to those of authority or market power control?* In response to this enquiry, the coding work will be processed through answering the following questions; firstly, does this discussant verbalise a critique towards the governments or the government members which diverges from the government's announcements? Secondly, does he/she suggest any policies for public affairs following his/her statement? Concerning the political situation in Taiwan, the third question will examine whether this discussant provides a vision, such as how to develop the democratic policy within the country, which diverges from the government's announcement. Besides, considering the political conflict between the Taiwan DPP government and Mainland Chinese government, the fourth question will examine the discussants' attitude toward Mainland Chinese people. The fifth question is designed for measuring whether the discussions are independent from market power or not. Via coding the question, does this discussant disagree with the decision of enterprises or CEOs during events of conflict in society? If the answer is 'yes', this message will be labelled as 'independent from the market power'.

In chapter IV, I discussed that rationality is a basic requirement for examining whether the discussions fit into a framework of deliberative democracy. The query of my research is: *to what extent do the online forums discussions reveal rational qualities in contradistinction to ad hominem argumentation?* The subcategory of rationality will be constructed by three coding schema: whether the content includes abusive terms, whether it is presented in the genre of a Chinese Argumentative Essay (a detailed explanation of which is on the next page), and finally whether it is made up of knowledge based content.

To examine the abusive terms is a counter way to reflect on the rationality of the discursive process. Some results from empirical studies (Wilhelm, ibid; Hill and Hughes, 1998) have pointed out that the emergence of ad hominem arguments would distract the

debates, and even generate ongoing flames. Three forums in my study all specially request the participants to not use any terms containing abusive intentions.

The coding schema of a genre of Chinese Argumentative Essay is a design concerning the language background in this research. Wilhelm (ibid) in his research, points out that valid rational discussions should be criticised and assessed, 'in light of the internal relations between semantic content of these expressions, their conditions of validity, and the reasons for the truth of statements, or for the effectiveness of actions' (ibid:162). However, semantic expressions in Chinese are totally different from English in every linguistic domain. For example, the perception of meaning, structure, alphabet, textual composition, pronunciation and grammar, etc. are all outside of the English language system. Thus, it is necessary to choose the most suitable tool constructed in the field of Chinese linguistics, in order to identify whether those posts have rational qualities, or not.

This study will attempt to code a genre of Argumentative Essays[28], (議論文 : Yi-lun-wen), which are used to present arguments among all the genres in Chinese Compositions. The function of Argumentative Essays stresses the notion that 'through rational presentations, the goal of an Argumentative Essay is to reach a mutual understanding, and allow others to agree with the author's opinion' (Chung, 2004:25).

Argumentative is the combination of two Chinese words '議' (Yi) and '論' (Lun). The original meaning of '議' (Yi) is to discuss or to deliberate, and is especially used in compositions that have a purpose of collective discussion. '論' (Luen) means 'presenting your own arguments' (Lee, 2002:10). The subtle meaning of the combination 'Yi' and 'Lun' implies a rational criticism. The format of the Argumentative Essay genre has remained in a state of flux during the past 4000 years, though the essence of its meaning has remained unchanged. The most recent form of change occurred in 1915, echoing the

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[28] Based on the National Education Ministry's (1997) classification, except *Argumentative Essays*, there are four other genres of Chinese compositions. The first one is *Practical Writing*, which applies to letter writing, invitations, or official documents. The second genre is *Lyrical Prose*, which aims to reveal the emotional or aesthetic feelings. The third genre is *Narration*, which aims to describe the facts within our daily lives. The last one is *Expository Writing*, which aims to present facts as truths beyond doubt.

claims of the evolving Vernacular Movement[29]. Since then, forms of writing style have remained relatively stable during the last ninety years. The characteristics of the Argumentative Essay genre have thus become established as 'deeply analyzing, presenting reasons logically, and stating your own arguments' (Shei, 2001:35).

If, based on the previous statement, we take into account all the conditions for the discussions in online political forums, the Argumentative Essay genre surfaces, in comparison with other genres of Chinese Compositions, as the most practical for allowing users to express their arguments precisely. In Chinese interactions, the discussants' intentions will constitute the type of genre that they use to form their message. The Argumentative Essay genre has a format which can be used for the purpose of argument, whereas, the other genres do not. If one's purpose is to argue with others (in Chinese) one must simply choose the Argumentative Essay genre. Thus, my study tries to identify whether the online posts can satisfy the requirements of a valid Argumentative Essay in order to examine the discursive qualities (see appendix 1).

The aim of coding the knowledge based content is to examine whether the information provided in the online political discussions is knowledge based or not. The knowledge based category is referred to in Hill and Hughes's (1998) research, which reveals that if discussants provide more sources of information in their posts (dubbed knowledge based content), then less cases of conflicting behaviour (flaming) would appear.

The subcategory of openness is evaluated from two schemata: firstly, the attitude of Taiwanese participants towards the political conflict between Taiwan and Mainland China, and secondly, their attitude toward the internal conflict within Taiwan's context. The first schema is designed to identify whether online discussions are restricted to national Taiwanese stances, or not. For example, participants who interact in the forums originating in Taiwan may, or may not, have an open-minded tolerance towards 'others',

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[29] The evolution of the Vernacular Movement emphasised the notion that the written word should be the same as the spoken word, casting away traditional ideas about writing style (*Pein-Ti*) which made texts more obscure and difficult to understand.

especially users from Mainland China. Therefore, my enquiry is: *will the Taiwanese participants mostly accept others' participation?* The following two questions are designed in order to answer this enquiry. Q1: Does this discussant verbalise a comment (or a critique) with a respectful/polite manner, e.g., use the respectful term for 'you' 您[30] regarding another's stance, when discussing the issue of the Taiwan Strait is relations? Q2: Does this discussant provide a vision for solving the conflict between Taiwan and Mainland China?

The internal conflict within Taiwanese borders is reflected in the confrontational relations between the Pan-Blue political camp and the Pan-Green political camp (the details will be explained later in the political group orientations section). The attitudes of participants will be examined during interactions with different political camps.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the phenomenon of like-minded groups creating results which diverge from the assumptions of deliberative democracy. The category of political group orientations is to examine whether on-line users prefer to participate in a like-minded group, or not. For example: online discussants may either want to join a group, or find a place where they can express their own ideas.

Based on Taiwan's political situation (see chapter I), I have selected seven groups as criteria for classifying users' group preferences within the political forums. They are:

1. Deep-Pan-Blue group: the fundamental supporters of the KMT Party, People First Party and New Party[31], supporting religiously.

2. Pan-Blue group: those having the intention of supporting the KMT Party, The People First Party and New Party.

3. Neutral: those that do not obviously show their party's intention, or who describe themselves as being in a neutral position.

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[30] In Chinese writing, the term '您' (meaning 'you') shows the writer's respect more than '你/妳' (also meaning 'you').

[31] The People First Party and New Party are separated from the KMT due to the KMT's internal conflict. Both of these parties support the reunion with Mainland China.

4. Pan-Green group: those who have the intention of supporting the Democratic Progressive Party and the Taiwan Solidarity Union[32].

5. Deep-Pan-Green group: the fundamental supporters of the Democratic Progressive Party and the Taiwan Solidarity Union, supporting religiously.

6. The Mainland China users.

7. Fa-Lun-Gong users.

The item of Fa-Lun-Gong users was added after pilot testing. Two coders found some Fa-Lun-Gong users involved with the forum discussions longitudinally and repeatedly. Their political stance is against Mainland China, including its culture, government and the Chinese Communist Party, and they promote their own religious beliefs. Thus, the political group Fa-Lun-Gong has been added into the options.

If a user with the same ID, posts two or more messages, this will only be coded once as the user's intention. I will then examine whether there is a significant deviation between these groups (via Chi-Square).

As to the question of whether a deviation exists among the three sponsorships' forums or not, a continued comparison will be processed.

b. Intercoder reliability and validity

The intercoder reliability (IR) is calculated by referring to the index developed by Perreault and Leigh (1989):

$IR = \{[(Fo/N-(1/k)][k/(k-1)]\}^{\cdot\cdot}$, for $Fo/n > 1/k$

Fo stands for the observed frequency of agreement between coders, N is the total number of judgments, and k is the number of categories.

Face validity is employed to evaluate the validity in this research.

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[32] The Taiwan Solidarity Union was established by former KMT chairman, Lee Teng-hui, who tends to be identified as the advocate of Taiwan independence.

c. Pilot study and implementing the coding

A pilot study was conducted when the first version of the coding frame was finished. Two coders[33] work with sixty posts selected from three forums (thirty posts from Yahoo, twenty posts from Palm and ten posts from the Presidential Office). The value of IR is 91.27%. Some more items were added into the coding frame, i.e. the participants coming from the Fa-Lun-Gong group, after the pilot study. Based on the amended coding sheet (see appendix 1), two coders initiated the coding work formally. 1500 posts were coded by two coders together first, then IR values were checked every 500 posts. The result shows the IR values between two coders are very stable (between 91.4% and 92.5%), which represents the stability and consistency between coders. Concerning the factor of time consumption and having high reliability between the two coders, the rest of the 3048 post were then coded separately.

5.5.5 Discourse Analysis Approach

Fig 5.5.1 is an example of the contents written in each post. Normally, each post will include the author's ID, his/her chosen nickname, title, post time, written contents and signature.

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[33] Both coders are trained by academic institutes in Taiwan.

Fig 5.5. 1 An example of analysing discourse

The title, texts, nick name and author's signature from each post will be analysed in this study. The linguistic terms created by the forum participants will be also examined particularly for the purpose of comprehending online sub-culture more deeply.

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5.6 The Procedure of Interviewing Online Participants

With reference to my literature review and research framework (see fig 5.4.1), in order to understand whether the anonymity of the Internet influences online participants' preferences to publish their posts or not, it is necessary to investigate what these online participants' motivations are. This will be achieved through the method of interviewing, specifically for the following three reasons.

1. My research criteria are conducted within an exploratory field.
2. There has been no questionnaire constructed within this topic so far.
3. To obtain a complete sketch of how online participants' discussions are formulated.

In consideration of those online users who may get used to the computer environment as a good communicative channel, the method of interview through software which allows interlocutors to talk (i.e. Skype, MSN, or Yahoo messenger), will be also employed as a research tool for answering the previous enquiries.

5.6.1   Research Methods for Investigating On-Line Participants

5.6.1.1 An Introduction to Interviews

If we trace the etymology of the word 'interview', it can be found to contain the meaning: to 'see each other'. Nowadays, the term 'interview' is to be identified as the active search for a full understanding of a person's life (Chirban, 1996:xi). Through the procedure of an interview, journalists, health professionals, or researchers can obtain the inner view of the interviewees, to comprehend people's lives, emotions, motivations or needs.

For a researcher, the approach of gathering data via the interview process, provides an opportunity to reach outcome such as, the understanding of individual perspectives, to probe or to clarify, to deepen understanding, to generate rich and descriptive data, to gather insights into participants' thinking, and to learn more about the context of the individuals' world view (Rossman and Rallis, 2003:180). 'Talk' is an essential tool which

helps the researchers to enter into the interviewees' world, and attain a deep understanding of their thoughts. But an interview is distinguished from natural talk, because it is created as an artificial event. 'A conversation with a purpose' (Burgess, 1984:102, quoted in Rossman and Rallis, 2003:180), 'a conversational partnership' (Rubin and Rubin, 1955:11), and a social 'encounter' (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002:3) are presented to describe the character of interview in the academic area.

Based on Patton's (2002:342-347) work on categorisation, there are three types of interview: *informal conversational interviews*, *the interview guide approach*, and *standardised open-ended interviews*. Rossman and Rallis (ibid:181) add *Dialogic interviews* as the forth type of interview, which are discussed in the following section.

a. Informal Conversational Interviews

Informal interviews can occur serendipitously when the researcher prepares to set up an environment for a more formal interview. This kind of warming up conversation is expressed in a more casual style, which may lead to doubts by inexperienced researchers as to whether it is real data.

b. Interview Guide Approach

The interview guide approach is adopted typically in qualitative areas. This kind of guided approach assists the researchers in drawing out the subject's inner view of the world, step by step. The researchers set up the categories or related topics, but the exploratory work doesn't restrain any new possibilities being provided by the interviewees as the topics are pursued. A few broad topics, or framed questions, will have been identified in advance by the researchers. The purpose of this design is primarily to help participants reveal their perspective, and to understand the meaning of their narratives. The essential spirit of this type of interview is to respect how the participants frame and structure their responses. The researchers have to keep a balanced tone during their interaction with the participants; for example, they pose open-ended questions

followed by requests for elaboration, and the participants respond with long narratives. This approach to interviews stands for the position that the participants' input should reflect an unfolding of their own views, not that of the researchers. Namely, the role of the researcher is to record the unfolding of the participants' views.

c. Standardised Open-Ended Interview

Standardised open-ended interviews, in comparison with the interview guided approach, have a tightly prefigured and fixed question order. But this approach doesn't restrict the participants' responses; on the contrary, the interviewees' free reactions are welcomed in the answers to the questions. It may be necessary to incorporate a degree of standardisation into the questions when many participants are interviewed. The attitudes of the researchers are important because they have to convey their acceptance and respect. In this way, participants will be encouraged by the knowledge that their views are valuable and useful.

d. Dialogic Interview

In comparison with the interview guide approach, a dialogic interview has a more balanced 'talk time' between the researchers and the participants. However, this approach is a complex procedure which is mutually developed by both the researchers and their interviewees. Through 'true' conversations, the researchers and interviewees talk together within the boundaries of a set topic, without any prefigured questions. Both are thus able to share each others' perspectives and understandings.

Interviewing is a decisive method through which researchers can gather abundant and detailed data of how people perceive this world. Nonetheless, there are still some limitations within this technique.

Firstly, interviewing relies on interpersonal interaction, therefore, the interviewers good communicative skills when interacting with participants are an essential factor to

guarantee the success of the interview. If the interviewers' attitudes make interviewees feel uncomfortable, the results of the data gathering might be poor because the interviewees' willingness to express themselves is influenced.

Secondly, the interviewees may not be willing to let the researchers freely explore their lives, or their views. This is also a factor that influences the gathering of rich data (Rossman and Rallis, 2003:181), which is determined by the varying interpersonal skills and attitudes of different interviewers.

The third limitation is related to possible language barriers. Sometimes the interviewers may not to be capable of asking questions in the rural accents or dialects of particular areas, which may raise an affective filter between interviewer and interviewee. For example, interviewees may feel more willing to share their inner views with a member of their own socio-lingual group, than with a perceived 'outsider'. Furthermore, cross-lingual barriers can also affect the quality of interviewees responses. In Taiwan, the majority of residents of the higher mountain villages are aboriginal groups, whose native languages are not familiar to the people living on the plain areas. Researchers in these high mountain areas therefore have to find translators in order to progress. During such interviews between two different lingual groups, the time gap that occurs whilst waiting for the translation may influence the flow of the interviewees' answers, hindering the potential richness of their responses.

The final limitation concerns the issue of the interviewees' trust in the interviewer. Wen (1992:576) particularly points out that the suspect attitudes of the interviewees formatted by the culture and political atmosphere in Taiwan's society, are the most serious obstacles for the researchers undertaking interviews in this context. For example, it is culturally ingrained that people should keep a distance from strangers by not exposing their true thinking, for example, when concerning the details of one's salary or sex-life.

Based on the result of my participant observations, showing that most on-line political forum users prefer to trust people who are more transparent, organised, and who do not

give others pressure, the technique of guided interview will be adopted as my research tool.

5.6.1.2 On-line Interviews

Let us now move the focus over to the Internet world. Considering the virtual world as the research environment, Kleinman (2004:50-51) recognises that doing interviews as part of online research, yields the following four strengths.

1. Interviewers can focus on key research interests using closed/open-ended questions.

2. Interviewees can be selected based on specific criteria.

3. Interviews can be audio-taped and transcribed for later content analysis.

4. Interviewees contribute to interpretation and analysis, by commenting on their experience and observations.

On the other hand, Kleinman's (ibid) case study experience in Ournet suggests that there are four weaknesses that arise if researchers choose interviews as the research method, namely:

1. Selection bias.

2. Inaccuracies due to interviewees' poor recall.

3. Bias due to poorly constructed questions/ interviewer's inadequate knowledge of the group.

4. Interviewees control which and how much information they reveal.

Summarising the previous discussions about the limitations of interviewing, and the weaknesses of on-line interviewing, three factors have to be considered in order to gather complete and abundant data for the later analysis.

1. How to win online users' trust?

2. How to communicate with them skilfully?

3. How to avoid inadequate knowledge of the participant's group?

In preparation for the initiation of the interview, the following approaches have been undertaken. The non participant observation of three chosen forums has been underway since September 2004, yet without being directly involved in the interactions. Participation in the real discussions of another political forum, 'Hello-uk' (www.hellouk.org), which serves as a forum for the Taiwanese people (most of them students) living in the UK, has allowed this researcher to observe, through the pragmatic interactions with on-line users, their terminologies and the new trends within the online environment. This period of long-term participant observation has clearly shown that setting up a personal blog is a possible way to win on-line users' trust. Thus, one blog has been established since April 2005 (mypaper.pchome.com.tw/news/smallpai) with the intention to form a network of trust within the online community. The relevant ethical concern will be discussed in 5.7.

In addition, MSN, Yahoo messenger, or Skype are all common tools for on-line users' communications. Nowadays, these software have been developed to include the functions of video conferencing and digital audio communication. Considering the online users' habits of communication, this research tries to adopt these software as fundamental communicative tools. Whether the interviewees show their preferences for telephone interviewing, or face-to-face interviewing, their ideal preference will be adopted as the interviewing tool. If the interviewees agree with the use of Skype (or MSN, Yahoo messenger) as a channel of interviewing, the assistant software, 'Total Recorder', will be used to record the whole interaction.

5.6.1.3 Interview Questions

The aim of my interview approach is to study the indirect factors of on-line participants' motivations, habits and expectations towards democracy, which may not be directly apparent in forum interactions. In the previous section, I have discussed that an interview guided approach is to be employed as my interview strategy. In order to reach my research aim, based on my literature review and the consequence of participant

observations, I have constituted three major interview frames. Each of these includes more specific questions to elicit the ongoing answers.

Frame 1: Investigating online users' expectations/ gratifications of their discussions.

Q1: What do you want to obtain when you participate in a forum's discussion?

Q2: Do you think that online forums are a good or bad arena for deliberations? Why do you think this?

Q3: Do you think your opinions posted in a forum are respected by the government or mainstream media?

Q4: Do you think the online discussions/deliberation will contribute to democracy? Why?

Frame 2: Investigating online users' motivations and habits.

Q5: Why have you chosen this forum as a place to publish your posts?

Q6: Do you think that this forum provides a good environment for deliberations?

Q7: After you have posted your opinion, have you ever checked another person's response? If yes, why? (Please state your reasons).

Frame 3: Investigating online users' attitudes toward anonymity.

Q8: Do you think the anonymity of forums attracts you to publish your opinion, or not?

Q9: Do you think that anonymous IDs make you more, or less concerned, with other people's responses?

Q10: Do you think the anonymity of forums motivates the discussants to provide constructive ideas of democracy, or encourages them to talk without taking responsibility?

5.6.1.4 Pilot Study

It is important to ascertain that the vocabularies and terminologies used in the interview procedure are clearly understandable by all participants in order to avoid any wrong interpretations when narrating the questions to the interviewees. The pilot study was processed during October, 2005. There were five interviewees from the Hello-UK forum that accepted my interview. The feedback from their perspectives shows that:

1. There are some ambiguous terms concerning anonymity in questions 8, 9 and 10.

2. Question 2 is similar to Question 6.

Referring to their responses, questions 8, 9 and 10 have been revised to make the term anonymity, more salient. Question 6 has been deleted, thus the final copy of the interview contains seven questions.

5.6.1.5 Conducting the In-depth Interviews

Via the snow ball sampling approach, there are a total of 20 participants (10 from Palm BBS, 6 from Yahoo, and 4 from the Presidential Office) from the online political forums who have been interviewed from November, 2005 to April, 2006. The average age is 30 amongst all the interviewees; the eldest is 40 years old, and the youngest is 22 years old. As to their educational background, 12 of them have masters or higher degrees, 7 interviewees have BA degrees, and only 1 interviewee graduated from high school. The analytic results will be explained in chapter IX.

5.7 Ethical Concerns and the Relevant Approaches

Bruckman (2002:1) proposes four requirements for researchers to examine whether their online research fits the concept 'to freely quote and analyse online information without consent' (ibid). They are firstly, for the content to be officially/publicly archived, secondly, for no password to be required, thirdly, to not break any site prohibited policy, and fourthly, to be non-sensitive research topics. In this study, the messages including participants' email addresses are openly published in the forums. The site owners don't list any policies that prohibit data access. Technologically, analysing the text data left in these forums does not break any ethical concerns.

However, concerning some participants who might refuse to be analysed in terms of their messages, two approaches have been taken, including sending explanation e-mails to the board moderators and posting messages on the boards. The contents of the emails and board messages contain a self-introduction, the purpose of this research, the data collection from their discussions, and contact details. If anyone disagrees with providing his/her messages as parts of this research, the relevant messages would be removed from the data. During the entire research period, none of participants expressed his/her

disagreement, therefore, all the messages collected from the chosen forums were preserved for further analysis.

As to the ethical concern of setting up a private blog for gaining the participants' trust, in this study, the following approaches have been taken in order to face the challenges of cyber-ethics, the ethical issues raised in cyberspace (Haigh and Jones, 2007:80). As the first approach, the content of the blog explains this research in Chinese. The second step is to provide a link to the webpage in JOMEC, Cardiff University, which explains this research in English. This Chinese blog is also shown on the JOMEC page. If anyone is interested in reading the blog articles, he/she would have clearer ideas about the contents of this research and the real identity of the researcher. The purpose of setting up a private blog is therefore to win participants' trust in an academic domain which shows no deceptive intentions.

In this study, for the participants who consent to accept my in-depth interviews, the confidentiality of their online identities (e.g. pseudonyms), offline IDs and private information (contact e-mail[34] addresses) are all protected.

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[34] The email addresses shown on the following chapters are quoted directly from the messages left in the forums.

Chapter VI Detangling Who Says What @ Political Forums - A Descriptive and Discursive Comparison

Proponents of deliberative democracy have high expectations for technologies that can be adopted for a democratic purpose, and the Internet has been thought of as a fundamental tool in support of the spaces that 'enable both deliberation (citizen to citizen communication)' and 'hearing (citizen to authorities communication)' (Tsagarousianou, 1999:195-6). Discussion forums can be conceived as democratic meeting places, and this has given rise to a number of different ideas, such as a 'virtual Habermasian public sphere' (Keane, 2001; Sassi, 2001; Tsagarousianou, 1998), 'electronic Athens' (Mulgan and Adonis, 1997) and 'electronic commons' (Blumler and Coleman, 2001; Levine, 2002, Starr, 2000).

In contrast to the use of oral expressions in the town meetings or policy debates, texts have become a major tool for online discussions since the first Bulletin Board System (BBS) emerged in 1976. Discussion on the forums has developed its own special terms and communicative habits. A 'post' is a message which has been presented by an individual online participant. The post which follows another under the same topic is called a 'reply', which may agree/disagree with, or go astray from the original opinion. A whole series of posts under the same topic is called a 'thread', wherein there may occur debates or flames. If a post doesn't attract any responses it is only half of an interaction, and therefore, there is no possibility of any 'discussion' activities within it at all. On the other hand, if the threads become too heated, the results from the discursive process are also questioned by some scholars, i.e. some doubt firstly, whether it is possible to debate properly in a multiloguing environment (Hill and Hughes, 1998; Wilhelm, 2001), and secondly, whether the forum can remain stable without crashing when too many users log in to take part in overly heated discussions (Fang and Su, 1998; Pai, 2005).

How to attract more participants and also maintain a stable discursive environment is a challenge for both websites and forum operators. In Pai's (2005:17-30) ethnographical

research, she observed the different strategies adopted by commercial and academic sites. During the 2004 Taiwan Presidential election, two major commercial sites (Yahoo! and Yam) strategically encouraged more participants to join the discussions about political topics. They designed iconic images and advertisements about the political forums and placed them on their front pages, and sent commercial emails entitled 'Talking about your political opinions on-line' to all members. As a result, Yahoo Political Forum successfully attracted more than 40,000 posts published each day in the week before the Presidential Election day. The most successful single post published in Yam, attracted at least 1,300,000 readers accumulatively. The interesting finding here is, the topic of this most popular post didn't connect with politics directly, but predicted the result of presidential election from interpreting an ancient Chinese prophecy - Tuei Bei Tu (推背圖), which is believed to have been written around 1, 800 years ago .

'Board name: 2004 Presidential Election (from Yam website)

Author: mensun

Time: 2003-12-31 18:12

Title: the key note is in the fortieth prediction from Tuei Bei Tu

(Interpretive translation from ancient Chinese language): 'One, two, three and four, there's no part of Earth that is not owned by the Emperor. A little star from the sky comes to the earth to be a governor.' ......the fortieth prediction also mentioned that 'ice will have melted'. What would be the melting ice? The answer is 'water'. Based on this, because the name of the candidate Chen Shui-bian (Shui means 'water') contains water, he will be the president again.'

The author of this post, mensun, described himself as 'a person who possesses psychic power and is assigned by the universal God'. His post advocates that the result of the Taiwan Presidential election is an assigned fate, and we can pre-examine it from decoding the ancient Chinese prophecy.

However, the official count of '40,000' posts in Yahoo doesn't reflect the true number of users. The total number of posts may have been far higher because the web technology was set to limit the amount of posts to 40,000 in order to safeguard the forum against a possible system crash. Another automatic filtering system was put in place; every day the system was set to automatically delete the first 24,000 posts stored in order to renew the space available for that day's new posts. Yam also announced they have to delete the old posts due to the system's crash. Later, this heated situation became calmer after the end of the elections, when the website manager strategically moved this forum from the main page to a suborder page.

In contrast to Yahoo and Yam, another political forum Palm BBS, which is sponsored and designed by an academic organisation, didn't adopt a similar approach during the same period. This site didn't change the order of its pages nor advertise for its political forum. The amounts of posts were higher than on ordinary days, and the contents of the posts were still related to political issues, e.g., from an American standpoint to analyse Taiwan's situation, or requesting other participants to be self-disciplined citizens in order to overcome the crisis arising from the political conflict (Pai, 2005:28).

From Pai's observation, the different strategies between commercial sites and academic sites greatly influences the amount of participants and the discussion posts. The differentiation among the political forums designed by different sites and sponsors also draws the attention of some scholars. Focusing on the impact of the design of political forums, Wright and Street (2007:849) notice that the discussants are influenced by the site design and the political clients' purpose. Wright and Street argue that the previous studies, no matter whether they support or challenge the discursive function of political forums, miss a key issue: the role played by site design. Site design for them is a political choice, and that will influence the possibilities of deliberation. They claim '...political clients commission websites, and in so doing they make choices about what function that site fulfils' (ibid:864), therefore, deliberation is facilitated or thwarted. Their finding echo Pai's observation that discussants are not in a vacuum-like environment, but are influenced by factors such as site design. However, for them, it doesn't mean that site

design determines deliberation, 'but that it can facilitate or impede it' (ibid). In this respect, online deliberation should be viewed as dependent on design (and the choices behind it) (ibid:849), rather than a predetermined product of the technology. Different designs and choices (formats, software) probably will influence the discussion results.

6.1 Descriptive Comparisons: Quantities of Posts, Authors, Rates and Lengths

In chapter V, I have discussed the details of three different sponsorships forums, Yahoo Political Forum (commercial), Palm BBS (academic) and the Presidential Office forum (government). In this chapter, I will analyse whether there are any differentiations among them.

Based on the mathematical guideline of probability, systematic random sampling is to be considered as 'effective as the random procedure' (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003:91), therefore, each unit has an equal opportunity to be chosen (ibid:85). In this study, I apply systematic random sampling to choose the sampling days (the interval is sixteen, a total of eleven days have been chosen) from a period of three months, a total of 4548 posts have been analysed across the three forums. Among the posts collected from the sampling days, there are 3956 posts from Yahoo Political Forum (86.97% of all the selective posts), 520 posts from Palm BBS (11.42% of all posts) and 74 posts (1.61% of all) from the Presidential Office forum. On average, the quantity of posts in Yahoo is 395.34 posts per day, greatly exceeding both Palm BBS (47.27 posts per day) and the Presidential Office forum (6.73 posts per day).

It is not surprising that the Yahoo Political Forum is more active than the other two forums. Yahoo Political Forum was originally established for the purpose of discussing the 2004 Taiwan presidential election. After the election, this forum was still maintained and operated by Yahoo Taiwan, but was moved from the first page to another page. As mentioned in the previous section, the amount of posts was enormous during the election period. Despite the election having passed, some of the discussants who participated in the 2004 Presidential Election discussions still chose to stay with this forum to publish

their posts regularly and diligently, because 'to post something in this forum has become my habit' (quote from participant Seafood, 06-16-2005 at Yahoo Political Forum).

As to the duration of each message posted in the Yahoo Political Forum, an average of 1.85 minutes per post is faster than those posted in Palm (average duration = 15.38 minutes per post), and in Presidential Office (average duration = 107 minutes per post). There are 407 authors participating in Yahoo's discussions, more than Palm (107) and the Presidential Office (65). On average Yahoo is more attractive to the users (82.09) authors per day involved in activities of on-line discussion.

Table 6.1. 1 Descriptive characteristic of posts across the three forums

	Yahoo	Palm BBS	Presidential Office	Total
Amounts of posts	3956	520	74	4548
Percentage of all posts	86.97%	11.42%	1.61%	100%
Total authors	405	106	60	565
Mean number of authors posting per day	μ = 82.09/day	μ = 19.81/day	μ = 5.09/day	
Mean number of messages per day	μ = 395.34/day	μ = 47.27/day	μ = 6.73/day	
Publish rate of each post	μ = 1.85 min / post	μ = 15.38 min/ post	μ = 107 min/ post	
Length of each post	μ = 307.65 words / post	μ = 141.11 words/ post	μ = 495.14 words/ post	

The result from the comparison of the length of each post shows that the Presidential Office discussants use nearly 500 words in each post to deliver their opinions, exceeding the amount found in Yahoo (307.65 words per post) and Palm (141.11 words per post) (see table 6.1.1).

Based on the texts, online forums are similar to written media in which debates would occur. In Jensen's identification, the debates/discussions can be seen 'as another kind of newspaper debate' (Jensen, 2003:371). If the readers want to participate in a newspaper debate, the requested word count for an argumentative script published in the press in Taiwan is at least 400 words[35]. Despite the three forums not restricting the word count for each post, the results show that the average post's word count is 495.14 words per post for the Presidential Office forum, which is the closest to fitting the request of press (see Table 6.1.1). Yahoo and Palm on the other hand, do not reach this requested 400 word volume.

Yahoo Political Forum stands out because it generates such a large quantity of messages, and at such a rapid rate, with more words per post than Palm BBS. In order to comprehend the reasons why the Yahoo Political forum can do this, the differentiation in terms of messages constructed within the three forums should be considered carefully.

In contrast to the regulations of Palm BBS - which forbids the publishing of posts copied from media reports, or comments lacking the discussant's perspective - the moderator of Yahoo Political forum allows members to quote directly from other sources, even though there may be a lack of the user's own interpretations. As to the participants of the Presidential office forum, it is assumed that the members already read and know the news, so they do not need to include this kind of repetitive content. Thus, they have the least inclination to act as 'copy cats', preferring instead to publish their own creations in the forum.

Table 6.1. 2 A comparison of words lengths in Yahoo Political Forum

Average length of each post (including Fa-Lun-Gong)	μ =307.65 words / post
Average length of each post (excluding Fa-Lun-Gong)	μ =103.74 words / post

[35] This information refers to the request conditions from the *Liberal Time Press*, the best selling newspaper in Taiwan.

Direct-quote posts can contain large chunks of text lifted from other sources, and are therefore much longer than posts without direct quotes. When the direct-quote posts from other media, i.e. by the disciples of Fa-Lun-Gong, are not calculated, the average length of each post in the Yahoo Political Forum is immediately reduced to 103.74 words/ per post (see table 6.1.2) from 307.65 words/ per post. This new statistical data provides evidence in support of the previous enquiry about how borrowing from others' creations (especially from journalists' reports) easily fills up space in a post.

6.2 What Discussants Talk About

What are the topics that people talk politics about in informal situations? Walsh (2004) in her study conceptualises 'context understanding', as something for participants to rely on as a basis for initiating a discussion topic. Context in this sense defines the environments the participants live in, and identify themselves as part of. From Walsh's observation, the participants usually start from a relevant event or issue which related to their social groups, then go on to expand to other topics which are still associated with their groups' identity (ibid:82-100).

Walsh's research provides a view to consider the issue of what political topics online discussants talk about. The participants are concerned with the importance of mutual understanding which is based on their group identity. However, whether online discussants identify themselves as loyal members of a virtual community, and to what level other discussants wish to be understood is arguable. Sunstein (2001) particularly worries that group identity is important in another way in online communication. 'If you are participating in an Internet discussion group, but you think that other group members are significantly different from you, you are less likely to be moved by what they say' (ibid:70). In this sense, the importance of group identity seems to create a big gap between real and online communication.

The empirical result from Fang and Su's (1998:160) research provides a way to consider how online discussant initiates their discussion topics. Fang and Su analyse the discursive topics in a feminist forum, and find aside from the feminist topics, other topics are included which are relevant to the social issues concerning the whole society at that time. It is to say, the discussants initiate the topics which attract their attention from their own concern. However, from their study, Fang and Su also observe a sub-group which emerged from a small number of heavy users. They try to dominate the issues of this forum, and argue with the discussants who are against feminist beliefs (ibid:161).

6.2.1 Distributions and Differentiations Among the Three Forum's Topics

In this study, the phenomena of sub-groups were also found during the participation observation stage before finalizing the category design of discursive topics[36]. Especially in Yahoo forums, some heavy users even repeatedly initiate discussion topics regularly without any concern for others' responses. To say the least, it was quite a challenge trying to classify all of the topics within online political discussions among these three different forum sponsor types. After the pilot study, seven extra sub-categories were added to the original design, in order to reflect more explicitly the topics which have been discussed in these political forums, especially for Yahoo which extends to users from Mainland China.

Table 6.2.1 indicates the distribution of the topics among the three forums. Compared with Palm BBS and the Presidential Office, Yahoo Political Forum shows more variation in the range of topics. Only seven topics appeared in Yahoo, and two of them were about political events that occurred in Mainland China (i.e. Fa-Lun-Gong), or conflicts with the Chinese Communist Party. In this sense, Yahoo is more accepting of a wider range of online discussants' topic choices.

There's still an ambiguous criteria for the distinction between 'all-embracing' and 'anarchic' in the explanation of the distributions of Yahoo's topics. From table 6.2.1, within 7 of the categories, there are no posts published in the Palm or Presidential Office forums; at least 5 of these categories do not belong to political issues, but relate to the forum's regulations (8 posts, 0.58% of total), conflicts between interlocutors (32 posts, 2.31% of total), science and history stories (2 and 12 posts, o.14% and 0.87 % of total), and even SPAM[37] advertisements (138 posts, 9.96% of total).

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[36] I have undertaken participant observation for three months (from January 2005 to March 2005), prior to the data collection in order to pre-understand the research subjects.

[37] According to Bell et all's (2004) explanation, the term SPAM has different definitions, it is most often used to describe 'any sort of unwanted post on a newsgroup or any unwanted email message, including unsolicited commercial email (UCE) and unsolicited bulk email (UBE).'

Table 6.2. 1 The distribution of topics among the three forums

The Categories Of the Topics	Forum Yahoo N	Yahoo % of forum	Palm N	Palm % of forum	Presidential Office N	Presidential Office % of forum	Total N	Total (percentage of all)
A critique of politicians' performance	210	15.15%	36	36.00%	10	15.38%	256	16.51%
Fa-Lun-Gong	196	14.14%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	196	12.64%
A commentary of the political conflict between Taiwan's parties	143	10.32%	9	9.00%	6	9.23%	158	10.19%
Performance of Taiwan's government	128	9.24%	16	16.00%	14	21.54%	158	10.19%
SPAM advertisement	138	9.96%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	138	8.90%
Relations between Mainland China and Taiwan	96	6.93%	2	2.00%	6	9.23%	104	6.71%
Others	71	5.12%	5	5.00%	4	6.15%	80	5.16%
Media	38	2.74%	12	12.00%	2	3.08%	52	3.35%
International issues and foreign policy	41	2.96%	4	4.00%	3	4.62%	48	3.09%
A stance that reflects any Taiwanese independent issue	44	3.17%	0	0.00%	2	3.08%	46	2.97%
Economy	36	2.60%	4	4.00%	4	6.15%	44	2.84%
Issues related to the Mainland China politics	39	2.81%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	39	2.51%
Crime	33	2.38%	1	1.00%	5	7.69%	39	2.51%
Political societies	35	2.53%	3	3.00%	0	0.00%	38	2.45%
People's livelihood	33	2.38%	3	3.00%	1	1.54%	37	2.39%
Conflict between online participants	32	2.31%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	32	2.06%
Health and social welfare	16	1.15%	2	2.00%	2	3.08%	20	1.29%
Conflict between southern Taiwan and northern Taiwan	13	0.94%	0	0.00%	1	1.54%	14	0.90%
Legislative council	9	0.65%	1	1.00%	2	3.08%	12	0.77%
Historical events/stories	12	0.87%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	12	0.77%
Education	9	0.65%	0	0.00%	1	1.54%	10	0.64%
Environmental issues	4	0.29%	2	2.00%	2	3.08%	8	0.52%
Forum regulations	8	0.58%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	8	0.52%
Science	2	0.14%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	2	0.13%
Total	1386	100%	100	100%	65	100%	1551	100%

Actually, SPAM advertisements are ranked in the top 4 of all the topics in Yahoo Political Forum (see table 6.2.2). The techniques adopted by the SPAM creators to place hidden advertisements between all of the discussions are fairly skilful. Some advertisers pretend to also be participants of political discussions, presenting a simple comment about the political events as the first paragraph, with following paragraphs containing product introductions and seller contact information. A few SPAM operatives leave messages signed by sexy girls who express their willingness to make friends with the participants in this forum.
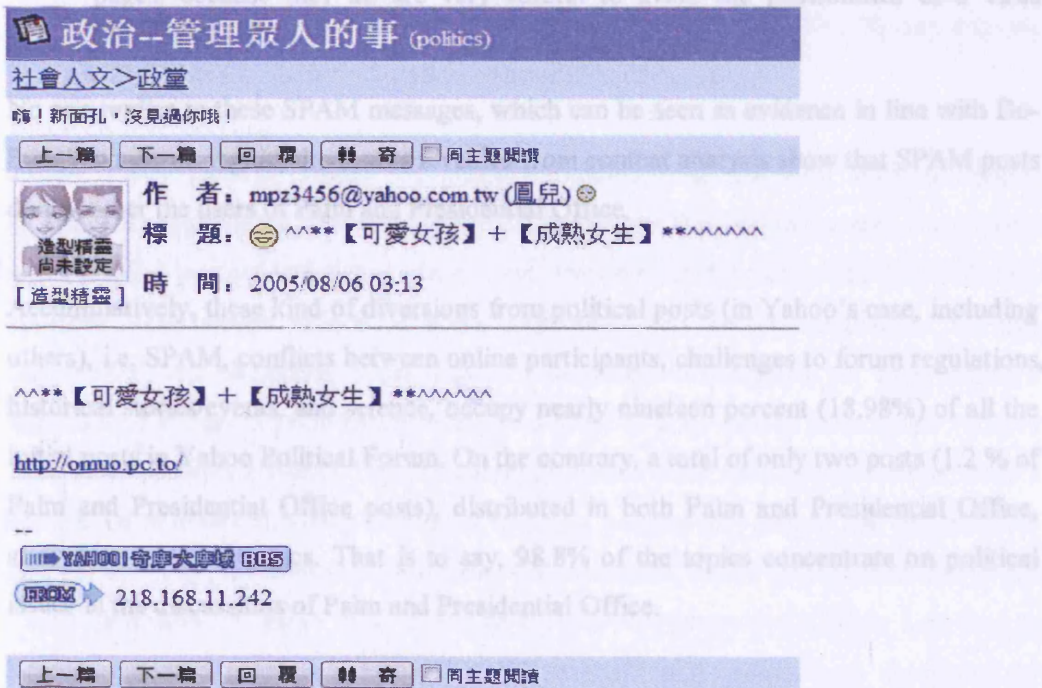
Fig 6.2. 1 A SPAM message in Yahoo Political Forum

The message left in fig 6.2.1 is 'a beautiful girl' and 'a mature woman'. As in other similar messages, the website addresses typed on the messages are all connected to pornographic services. But none of the SPAM advertisements are sponsored by the Yahoo enterprise.

The standard of site maintenance and website technologies in Yahoo are an issue of complaint for some users. One Yahoo user (nickname SandLin)[38] points out that Yahoo on the one hand tries to increase the number of users shown on the browser home page to attract more advertisements, and on the other hand, has no practical strategy to prevent the intrusion of SPAM. In reply to this issue, Do-Sung (one of Yahoo's forum participants) mentions that

> ...for those who have basic knowledge about the Internet already know the results of what the SPAM link page is, I think no one would be curious to open those pages, because they all are very careful to avoid the possibilities of a virus intrusion...

No one replies to these SPAM messages, which can be seen as evidence in line with Do-Sung's concerns. Again, the results revealed from content analysis show that SPAM posts don't bother the users of Palm and Presidential Office.

Accumulatively, these kind of diversions from political posts (in Yahoo's case, including others), i.e. SPAM, conflicts between online participants, challenges to forum regulations, historical stories/events, and science, occupy nearly nineteen percent (18.98%) of all the initial posts in Yahoo Political Forum. On the contrary, a total of only two posts (1.2 % of Palm and Presidential Office posts), distributed in both Palm and Presidential Office, stray from political topics. That is to say, 98.8% of the topics concentrate on political issues in the discussions of Palm and Presidential Office.

The empirical data from previous research (i.e. Wilhelm, 1999) doesn't find such a big difference in the topics presented between commercial sites and non-profit sites. To borrow the term 'ideal of entrepreneurialism' from Miller and Slater (2000:45), computer whizzes see the Internet as a place where they can gather their own information and start their businesses. They can market themselves without financial support. Fitting this

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[38] Refer to the following link: http://tw.myblog.yahoo.com/jw!kaxQbraLGwTsdql.mMw-/photo?mid=4720#4755

request, Yahoo provides multiple services for its users who can easily hyperlink from the discursive forum to any Blog or online shop site. Some discussants, including board moderators, set up personal Blogs in which they stress their political orientations. One discussant expresses the reason why he/she chooses Yahoo '...it is because people have more chances to share my life experiences' (quoted from Yahoo discussant Tenchudow), this stance is echoed by another discussant, '...in this marketing era, we have to find a way to market ourselves!' (quoted from Yahoo discussant Meowmeowcat).

According to researchers' findings, the 'self-discipline precept' (Janack, 2006:283-301, will explain in the following) and the board moderators (Davis, 2000:278) may provide leverage for some discussants to sustain and regulate discussions.

Janack (2006) studied online campaign discussions that function without official maintenance regulations from website owners, and found that the discussants developed a self-discipline precept which was obeyed and advocated by frequent participants. In this research, Palm shows a lack of board moderation but follows regulations through discussants' self-disciplined awareness. 'This forum is designed for high standard discussants! We should self-regulate ourselves to act as good quality discussants' (quoted from Palm discussant Hank). Despite Yahoo Political Forum having a moderator, there's no method to completely stop disorderly writings, because they simple can be published again if the board moderator deletes them. The discussant whose ID is Infinite states that '... to learn how to ignore those so-called women's-menstrual-posts is the best way to survive within this forum.' Women's-menstrual-post is a special term developed by online users. 'Women's menstruations' are a metaphor to reflect that the character of these posts is unnecessary, disgusting, bloody, boring and repetitive. In this study, though apparently Yahoo political forum is moderated, some discussants disobey the regulations, and ignore the importance of maintaining the qualities of their posts. They regularly produce women's-menstrual-post, and disregard how other discussants' value their posts.

Table 6.2.2 reveals in order of rank the top six main topics among the three forums. From table 6.2.2, we can see that there is a convergent tendency among the three forums' initial topics. Three topics, *a critique of politicians' performance*, *a commentary of the political conflict between Taiwan's parties*, and *the performance of Taiwan's government* span across the three forums top 5 ranking. *A critique of politicians' performance* stands out because it ranks as the number one popular topic in Yahoo and Palm, and the second most popular topic in Presidential Office.

Table 6.2. 2 The top six ranking initial topics among the three forums

Forum Rank	Yahoo	Palm BBS	Presidential Office
1	A critique of politicians' performance* (15.15%)	A critique of politicians' performance* (36.00%)	Performance of Taiwan's government* (21.54%)
2	Fa-Lun-Gong (14.14%)	Performance of Taiwan government* (16.00%)	A critique of politicians' performance (15.38%)*
3	A commentary of the political conflict between Taiwan's parties (10.32%)*	Media (12.00%)	A commentary of the political conflict between Taiwan's parties (10.19%)*
4	SPAM advertisement (9.96%)	A commentary of the political conflict between Taiwan's parties (9.00%)*	Relations between Mainland China and Taiwan (9.23%)
5	Performance of Taiwan government (9.24%)*	Other (5.00%)	Crime (7.69%)
6	Relations between Mainland China and Taiwan (6.93%)	Economy/international issues and foreign policy (4.00%)	Economy (6.15%)

* the item of this category spans across three forums

In Palm BBS, nearly 40% of all initial topics criticise politicians' performances. If we add this to the criticisms of the performance of Taiwan's government, the total distribution of political criticism in Palm makes up over 50% of the topics. This high level of concentration on political and governmental situations similarly appears in Presidential Office (36.92% of all). For example, in a discussion of how to assist the

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traditional media, the discussant HIGHLANDER from Palm BBS suggests, '...the government shouldn't make judgements according to the concerns of its political party, but needs to follow a principle of impartiality.'

As I've mentioned in chapter I, Taiwanese citizens have been constrained to 'not talk about politics' during many periods of the country's history. 'Politics' has at times represented a 'taboo' topic for the ordinary residents in Taiwan, and politicians were at times constructed as 'living gods' for the purpose of worship only, but under no circumstances were they to be criticised.

During the past twenty years, Taiwanese residents have finally experienced the liberal democracy in which people can be concerned with politics, without fear of censorship or punishment from the totalitarian power. Now that 'politics' has turned into an open topic, the majority of Taiwanese residents' political concepts have become focussed on the 'performance of government' and 'politicians', which was taboo during the past century. Criticising government and politicians now is a sort of release from the previous totalitarian power, and a sort of pride in the 'democratic achievements' of Taiwan.

The homogenous result of the users' hot topic choices among the three forums reflects this. For most of the discussants, the precepts of topics about politics are highly concentrated on 'criticism of politicians' and 'criticism of the government'. A high tendency toward a focus on 'government' also appears in face-to-face political discussion groups. According to Walsh's investigation of the Old Timers, an informal political talk group in the USA (2004:215), over eighty per cent of interviewees recognised that they should pay attention to the government 'most of the time', when compared with a national sample, which just showed that twenty-seven per cent of interviewees were interested in government 'most of time'. 'Government' can be seen a favourite topic to initiate political discussions for both face-to-face and text-based political discussion groups.

News media perhaps might be another reason to attract the discussants to talk. In the traditional top-down structure of political news, 'politicians' are usually reported on by the media in a way which expresses what they want to do, without a voice from the citizens about the politicians' actions (Lewis, Wahl-Jorgensen and Inthorn, 2004:163). On-line forums seem to provide a channel to voice the opinions of the 'passive audience' constructed by the media, allowing them to change their role from passive to active. The results shown in table 6.2.2 above prove that the online discussants have a great deal of concern about politicians' performance: in Yahoo and Palm it is the top ranking initial topic, and in the Presidential Office it is the second to top rank. The question of whether present day discussants are more independent from the media will be discussed in the next section.

6.3 The Reliance on Journalistic Reports as the Sources of Initial Topics

As mentioned above, Yahoo adopts journalists' reports to fill up the contents of posts. The following finding also shows that approximately 77% of initial topics are also borrowed from journalists' reports. The result of a Chi-Square test (Chi-Square value is 108.770, df =4, p<.05) indicates that forum type is a factor in connection with the reliance on journalists' reports as the sources of initial topics (see table 6.3.1).

Table 6.3. 1 A cross-tabulation of the reliance on journalists' report as topic sources

			The reliance on journalists' reports as the sources of the initial topics		
			yes	no	hard to identify
Forum	Yahoo	N (% within forum)	1064 (76.8%)	140 (10.1%)	182 (13.1%)
	Palm	N (% within forum)	68 (68.0%)	25 (25.0%)	7 (7.0%)
	Presidential Office	N (% within forum)	25 (38.5%)	33 (50.8%)	7 (10.8%)
Total		Count	1157	198	196

Chi-Square value is 108.770. df=4, p<.05.

The distribution of frequencies in Yahoo (76.8% of the initial posts) is higher than Palm (68% of the initial posts) or the Presidential Office (38.5% of all initial posts). For the majority of the participants in Yahoo Political Forum, reporting journalists and/or their comments play a critical role as 'firsthand' information suppliers, which may set-up and filter the issues and agenda for interpreting public affairs. This finding echoes Mutz's (1988, quoted in Walsh, 2004, p.125) stance, which suggests that people having less direct experience of involvement with higher levels of governmental hierarchy tend to rely more on journalists for clues about how to understand political issues. Therefore, in this virtual place, a forum is not only a discursive place, but also a 'second-hand information gathering agora.' Media provide the news, and then online forums publish them. Fig 6.3.1 is an example of a post copying news directly from a newspaper without changing content or adding the post author's own comment in the message. From Fig

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6.3.1 we can find, the post title is exactly the same as news article's title (the title 林志玲 賺 4 千萬 健保月繳 607 元, means Lin, Che-Ling[39] earned NT $40,000,000, but only paid NHS fee NT$ 604), and is published on the same day as this news (27/07/2005). This author, porta_canary, just copies the journalist's report and then publishes the whole article as his content in Yahoo. The news provided by porta_canary attracted 107 replies during the following two days. The other discussants read the news supplied by porta_canary, and made their comments on this issue. As discussant peter9999.tw uses his neighbour's experience to criticise the unfair system of NHS in Taiwan. '...*my neighbour's income is very low, but she still needs to pay the same amount of Lin, Che-Ling..*' (29/07/2005).

Fig 6.3. 1 A demonstration of a message borrowing content from a news' report

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[39] Lin, Che-Ling is the most famous supermodel in Taiwan.

6.3.1 The Spectator vs. Virtual Spectator

Nevertheless, this new development of online forums posting news created by the media, inverts the historical examination of eighteenth century relations between the coffee shop and the published news; in those times journalists participated in activities in the coffee shop and then published the stories they had heard there (Connery, 1997, pp:164-165). For example, Joseph Addison (quoted in Connery, ibid) describes in the first issue of *The Spectator*, the way in which he collected news from the coffee shop in 1711:

> There is no place of general resort wherein I do not often make my appearance: sometimes I am seen thrusting my head into a round of politicians at Will's, and listening with great attention to the narratives that are made in those little circular audiences; sometimes I smoke a pipe at Child's [a popular coffeehouse with the clergy], and while I seem attentive to nothing but the potman, overhear the conversation of every table in the room. I appear on Sunday nights at St. James's coffee house, and sometime join a little committee of politics in the inner room, as one who comes to hear and improve. My face is likewise very well known at the Grecian and the Cocoa Tree.... I have been taken for a merchant upon the Exchange for above these ten years... (ibid:165).

Given the use made of coffeehouses by this early news writer, the contents of the discussions possibly would be released and printed as news in a newspaper. That is to say, coffeehouses were the first-hand-source suppliers to the media reports in the 18th century. Also, coffeehouses were the main subscribers to newspapers, and because they offered the opportunities for greater dissemination of the newspapers' contents they were of great interest to be the advertisers. In the coffeehouses, the newspaper was usually read aloud by one member of the clientele. Coffeehouses, thus, were in line with the news press.

However, this feature of the coffeehouses doesn't extend to the virtual agora, which is based on commercial sponsors, or even to the academic network in my study (Palm BBS). Forum discussants receive and repeat the topics/agendas set out by the media.

As opposed to the degree of reliance on journalists' reports elsewhere, in the Presidential Office forum the majority of topics do not follow the news, but are created by the

participants' own ideas. This finding echoes Jensen's (2003:365) research. In his study, Jensen finds that online users who participate in government sponsored forums tend to transmit their own issues of concern to the government. In my study, the participants of the Presidential Office forum also prefer to contribute topics which concern them, rather than simply copy/transcribe content from the media.

6.4 Who Discusses with Whom?

Table 6.4.1 indicates that Yahoo appeals to 405 authors to publish their posts, and this amount is four times more than Palm's 106, and 6.75 times more than the Presidential Office's 60.

Yahoo Political Forum attracts not only Taiwanese residents, but also people from Mainland China and Hong Kong to participate in the political discussions. Among these three forums, only one participant expresses his/her national identity as a Singapore citizen (other Chinese); Palm's participants all come from Taiwan.

Since China's government adopts a censorship policy to ban some Taiwanese political websites from Mainland China, it is surprising to observe that some participants still express that they are citizens of The Peoples' Republic of China, and reside in Mainland China. The interesting finding here is, none of the users log in from Mainland China, at least, it cannot be verified from their IP address. Any blocking technology put in place seems not to include Palm BBS; from Table 6.4.1 it can be seen that there are two posts with IP addresses logged in from Mainland China.

The result of examining the IP location reveals that more than ninety two percent of the total posts are published in Taiwan among the three forums, whilst very few originate from another location. This finding somewhat reverses the expectations of proponents about the Internet's capabilities to extend deliberations from a local to a global platform. In the case of this study, there are no other nationalities from other countries joining these discussions about politics in Taiwan.

Table 6.4. 1 The distributions of the discussants' nationalities and locations

Content categories	Yahoo	Palm BBS	Presidential Office	Total N
Total authors	405	106	60	571
Nationality:				
1. Taiwan	397(98.27%)	106(100.0%)	59(98.3%)	
2. Mainland China	4(0.99%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	
3. Hong Kong	3(0.74%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	
4. Other Chinese	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	1(1.7%)	
Location:				
1. Taiwan	3836(97.01%)	481(92.5)	71(95.9%)	
2. Mainland China	0(0%)	2(.4%)	0(0%)	
3. Other places	118(2.99%)	37(7.1%)	3(4.1%)	

Among the three forums, a great majority of the participants pop in for one day, leave their messages (see chart 6.4.1), and then do not post any articles during the other sampling days. The percentage of all the discussants who post one day only is in Yahoo nearly sixty-two percent, in Palm nearly fifty-nine percent, and in the Presidential Office nearly ninety percent. As to the result of examining how many participants contribute their posts to the discussions regularly, the amounts present for a two-day duration reduce dramatically compared with a one-day participating discussion. And the tendencies of posting days reduce gradually in line with the length of duration.
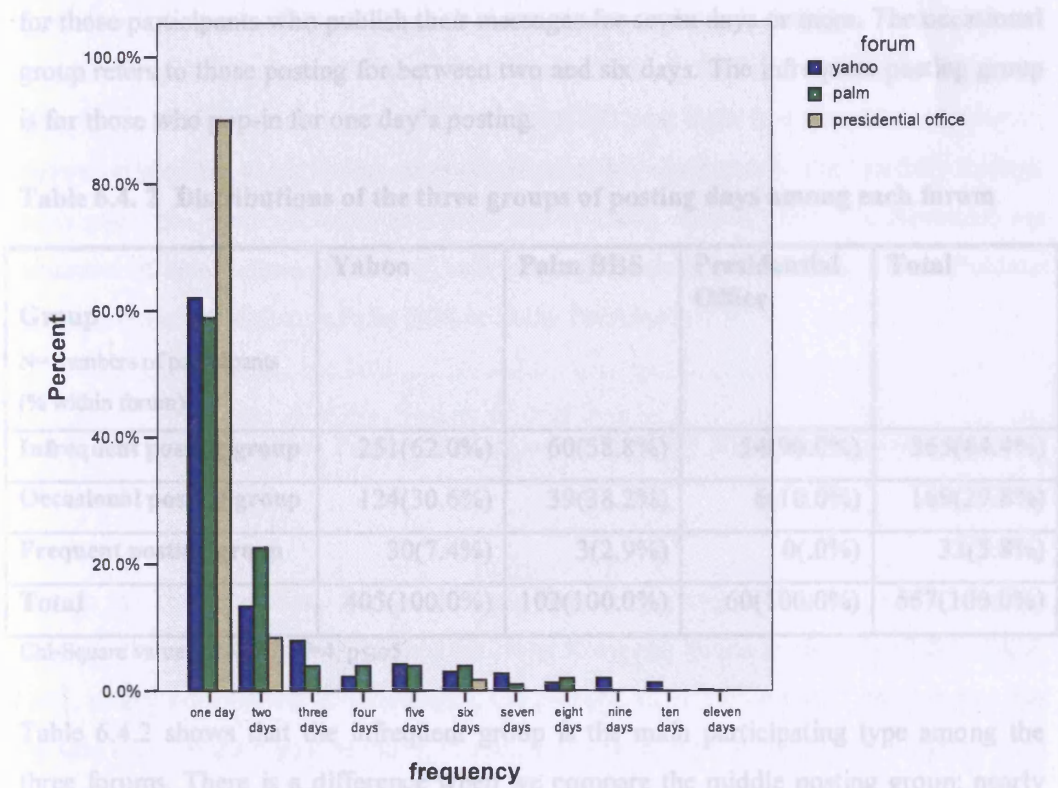
Chart 6.4. 1 Frequencies of posting days from the participants

From the distributions of the posting days, in fact, most of the three forums' participants don't post their articles to the discussions regularly. The typical pattern is to 'pop-in' for one day of activity, and then be absent from the discussions. This kind of temporary 'showing off' situation is very obvious in the Presidential Office. The longest posting days appear in Yahoo, with one participant's posts spanning eleven days of the sampling period; this longest duration is far more than Palm's eight days and Presidential Office's six days.

For the purpose of examining the collective features revealed by the three forums' participants, the data about posting days has been reassembled into three groups: frequent posting, occasional posting, and infrequent posting groups. The frequent posting group is

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for those participants who publish their messages for seven days or more. The occasional group refers to those posting for between two and six days. The infrequent posting group is for those who pop-in for one day's posting.

Table 6.4. 2 Distributions of the three groups of posting days among each forum

Group N= numbers of participants (% within forum)	Yahoo	Palm BBS	Presidential Office	Total
Infrequent posting group	251(62.0%)	60(58.8%)	54(90.0%)	365(64.4%)
Occasional posting group	124(30.6%)	39(38.2%)	6(10.0%)	169(29.8%)
Frequent posting group	30(7.4%)	3(2.9%)	0(.0%)	33(5.8%)
Total	405(100.0%)	102(100.0%)	60(100.0%)	567(100.0%)

Chi-Square value is 24.086, df=4, p<.o5

Table 6.4.2 shows that the infrequent group is the main participating type among the three forums. There is a difference when we compare the middle posting group; nearly thirty-eight participants choose to discuss in Palm BBS for more than one day, more than Yahoo's thirty-one per cent, and far more than the Presidential Office's ten percent. Seven point four percent of Yahoo's participants publish their posts in the Yahoo forum quite frequently, compared to 0% in the Presidential Office. The Chi-Square test result (df=4, p<.05) provides statistical support to verify whether there are connections between the forum type and the group of posting. The statistical consequence proves that the forum type is related to the frequencies of participants' posting.

The heavy users who occupy more space to 'announce their voices' loudly (Fang and Su, 1998:35), cause the other participants' right of speech to be somewhat impeded by their extensive involvement in discussions. According to Fang and Su's (ibid) observation, these heavy users try to intervene in others' posts to protect their forum. In my study, the way that heavy users post also reduces the possibilities of others' voices to be heard. The heavy users in the Yahoo Forum not only participate in the discussions quite diligently, but also contribute large amounts of messages. There are totally 1788 posts, and over

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forty-five per cent of these posts were published by these frequent posting group members (total 30 authors, 7.4% of all authors in Yahoo). As Fang and Su comment, the posts from non-heavy users are submerged, but the post from frequent users are always shown on the first page. Unless other participants have patience to dig carefully through each page, the posts of infrequent users are so easily missed (ibid:36). However, the situation of heavy users publishing bulk messages only appears in the Yahoo Political Forum, and is not shown in Palm BBS or in the Presidential Office.

6.4.1 The Most Frequent Posting Participants: Do They Have a Designated Political Purpose?

Within the Yahoo Political Forum, the most frequent posting participant, who is also the most productive participant, comes from Hong Kong and he/she appears in all the sample days, totally contributing 238 messages. On average, there are nearly 22 posts in one day by this user. If each post requires 15 minutes to read, type and respond, it means each day this so-called addictive participant spends five and half hours interacting with other participants. His/her posts are quite obviously aimed at encouraging Taiwanese residents to give up their idea of Taiwanese independence.

Title: Re: America tries to construct Japan as 'UK in Asia'

Author: alberthkkimo@yahoo.com.tw (Chin-Kei-Shen)

Time: 2005/07/01 16:07

...you are absolutely wrong! No matter whether you agree that Taiwan is a part of China, or you try to deny this situation. The truth is: Taiwan belongs to China. Even though the supporters of Taiwan's independence refuse to recognise this truth, their denial cannot change the fact that Taiwan is part of China. Don't just ignore this truth; accept it as the only truth in your mind.

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The frequent posting group in the Yahoo Political Forum also includes two participants who identify themselves as Mainland Chinese residents living in a city in Mainland China, but their IP addresses are shown to originate from Taiwan. It is quite possible that they are assisted by advanced technology which allows them to mask their real IP addresses. An online user can hide their real IP by connecting through a router or software which redirects his/her IP address to another country's IP address, so the terminal machine will accept this new redirected IP address as the user's IP. There are some hacker webpages instructing how to hack this system, or how to break through the barriers of some IP examining machines. For example, in order to access a Korean website to watch TV programs without paying, one must have a Korean IP address. Using software provided by the website will allow people to cheat the terminal machine. The board moderator of Anti-Media (http://www.anti-media.tw/phpBB/portal.php) in Taiwan also points out that from his experience, through a redirecting browser, Mainland Chinese participants can easily redirect their real IP address to appear as if they originate from as area of Taiwan. Since the Mainland Chinese government bans political forums from Taiwan, how and why are these frequent participants from Mainland China able to so eagerly participate in the discussions about political issues, and deliberately hide their real IP addresses?

Many participants have stated that they suspect that the Chinese government dispatches spies, known as 'net spies', to become involved in online discussions.

Subject: RE: Net Spy assigned by the Chinese Communist Party has attacked us!

Author: Kelly_Julin

Communist Party has attacked our forum!

Time: 2005/07/11 22:31

Content:

.....*Why don't we delete Net spy posts...He just creates chaos for the whole forum!*

Kelly_Julin's post represents the majority of participants' doubts about the Yahoo Political Forum. Though there's a lack of direct evidence to prove that net spies really are assigned by the Chinese government, Cho and Wang's (2004) work and some recent media reports have provided a way to consider this situation.

Cho and Wang (2004) in their book *Unlimited Battle* point out that two generals in China Communist Party at the end of the 20th century, announced a new type of battle that will not only happen on the battle field, but will also occur through attacking the opposing camp's economies, media, and even by assigning hackers to destroy the Internet environment. This new type of war without a real battlefield is described by these two generals as an 'unlimited battle' (ibid:78). A Canadian researcher recently claimed that a cyber spy network based almost entirely in China hacked into computer networks around the world, and stole classified information from governments and private organisation in more than 100 countries, especially documents related to the Dalai Lama (Dizon, ABS/CBN News, 30/03/2009:1). According to the news report from *The Spiegel* (Goetz and Rosenbach, 10/04/2009:1), Hans Elmar Remberg, the deputy head of German domestic intelligence, announced that his agents had determined the attacks were coming 'from Chinese sources', and that he assumed 'that government employees, or at least people working on behalf of the government' were behind the attempted espionage. Taiwan's government have also traced the sources of hacker attacks to be from the same locations as the military camps in China (Shui and Lo, 2009:1).

The concept of unlimited battle and the media reports all point to the complexity and vulnerability of the virtual world. In this sense, who discusses with whom, has became a more complex issue: not only regarding the protective anonymity of the forum, but also the possibility of 'some people' being assigned for a political purpose.

In a nutshell, the participants' concern about net spies reveals that the conflict between Taiwan and Mainland China not only exists between the two governments, but has expanded to involve residents of both places. Taiwan's participants clearly tolerate the speech of 'others' because no posts are being deleted simply because the authors identify

themselves as Mainland China users. The umbrella of 'freedom of speech' protects all the participants' freedom to publish their opinions in the Yahoo Political Forum.

One particular author who advocates Fa-Lun-Gong, the biggest religious group banned by the Chinese government, is the second most frequent poster in the Yahoo Political Forum. On average, the same author solely posts 19.81 messages/ per day quoting from the *Da-Ji-Yuan Daily News*, which is the main press sponsored by the Fa-Lun-Gong organisation. Each message length from this author is 2156.63 words per post. However, no instances of this author participating in any discussions could be found, nor could any responses to any enquiries by other users. Possibly, this non-interactive behaviour also lessens other users' desire to communicate; in fact, it was found that no one responds directly to this user's posts.

Through the examination of the content published by the disciples of Fa-Lun-Gong, we observe that there is an unusual feature apparent in every post: some terms have additional dots between each word, as shown in Table 6.4.3.

Wu (2007:133) in her field study, points out that some key words, i.e. Fa-Lun-Gong, Da-Ji-Yuan, and the leaders' names of the DPP, are banned via online filter systems in Chinese organizations. It is impossible to forward any emails that contain these sensitive terms to recipients who live in Mainland China, due to machines running software designed to censor and block all such messages. But by typing some additional dots between each word, the artificial intelligence software has difficulty identifying the whole meaning of the terms. Thereafter, possibly, those messages quoting Fa-Lun-Gong's newspaper will slip through the automatic email blocking system of the Mainland China government, if any of the discussants want to forward Fa-Lun-Gong's messages to Mainland China's people.

Table 6.4. 3 A list of key terms separated by dots from Fa-Lun-Gong posts

Normal terms	As shown in post contents	Meaning of translation
共產黨文化	共…產…黨…文…化	Culture of Communist Party
九評共產黨	九…評…共…產…黨	Ninth comments of Communist Party
修煉	修…煉	Spiritual practice
大紀元	大…紀…元	Da-Ji-Yuan: the main daily press of the Fa-Lun-Gong organisation
法輪功	法…輪…功	Fa-Lun-Gong
法輪功學員	法…輪…功…學…員	The members of Fa-Lun-Gong
中共	中…共	Abbreviated form of China Communist Party
江氏	江…氏	Surname of the previous president in Mainland China
江澤民	江…澤…民	The full name of the previous president in Mainland China
人權	人…權	Human rights
六四	六…四	Abbreviated form of the Tian-An-Men Incident
六四天安門事件	六…四…天…安…門…事…件	Tian-An-Men Incident of June 4th, 1989.

Due to the participants' concerns about net espionage and the unusual posts by Fa-Lun-Gong members quoting messages from the *Da-Ji-Yuan* press with dots in the content, the Yahoo Political Forum is not an ordinary online forum providing a simple arena for the discussants to take part in. The purposive participants bring with them their own particular political concerns without contributing to constructive discussions, or being willing to deliberate with other participants This situation also reflects Fang and Su's (1998) worry that heavy users' voices broadcast loudly results in participants being unreceptive to discussion/communication with others.

6.5 Polarised Group Effect?

Some deliberative democracy scholars (Sunstein, 2001; Wright and Street, 2007) worry that online forums might attract homogeneous political groups alone, and fragment the possibilities of communication between different groups. However, the results from the content analysis in this study show that all the political groups located in Taiwan are distributed quite evenly among the three forums (see table 6.5.1). The statistical test (Chi-Square value is 394.126, df=14, p<.05) shows that the sponsor types are connected with the political groups' distributions.

Table 6.5. 1 The distribution of political groups among the three forums

Political Groups		Forum			Total
		Yahoo	**Palm**	**Presidential Office**	
Deep-Pan-Blue group	N (%)	1070 (27.1%)	110 (21.2%)	10 (13.5%)	1190 (26.2%)
Pan-Blue group	N (%)	714 (18.1%)	72 (13.8%)	14 (18.9%)	800 (17.6%)
Neutral	N (%)	331 (8.4%)	132 (25.4%)	35 (47.3%)	498 (10.9%)
Pan-Green group	N (%)	357 (9.0%)	115 (22.1%)	9 (12.2%)	481 (10.6%)
Deep-Pan-Green group	N (%)	801 (20.3%)	73 (14.0%)	3 (4.1%)	877 (19.3%)
The Mainland China users	N (%)	264 (6.7%)	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)	264 (5.8%)
Fa-Lun-Gong	N (%)	201 (5.1%)	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)	201 (4.4%)
Hard to distinguish	N (%)	216 (5.5%)	18 (3.5%)	3 (4.1%)	237 (5.2%)
Total		3954 (100%)	520 (100%)	74 (100%)	4548 (100%)

Chi-Square value is 394.126, df=14, p<.05

Throughout all the groups, the Deep-Pan-Blue group is the biggest camp that is trying to 'discuss' or 'express' their opinions across the three forums (see table 6.5.1). The second largest group is the Deep-Pan-Green group, which is slightly smaller than the Deep-Pan-Blue group.

In the Yahoo Political Forum, the two extreme groups Deep-Pan-Blue and Deep-Pan-Green are still the largest and the second largest groups. The Deep-Pan-Blue group, together with the Pan-Blue group, renamed as the 'Allied Pan-Blue-group', is the largest group (nearly forty-five percent of all posts), and the second largest is the Allied Pan-Green-group (Deep-Pan-Green together with Pan-Green), who make up nearly twenty-nine per cent of the Yahoo Political Forum.

The Deep-Pan-Green extreme group within Palm BBS, don't publish their posts as often as they do in the Yahoo forum. The biggest political group is still the Deep-Pan-Blue group, but the second and the third biggest groups are the Neutral group and the Pan-Green group.

Palm BBS is based in Taiwan University, which in the past initiated the democratic movement, known as the Wild Lily or 'March' student movement, by revolting against the KMT regime, before going on to cultivate the DPP (Democratic Progress Party). Taiwan's Wild Lily student movement was a six-day demonstration for democratic reform held in 1990. The sit-in at Memorial Square in Taipei, initiated by some students from National Taiwan University, drew the participation of over 300,000 demonstrators. Protesters wore white Formosan lilies and created giant replicas of the flower as a symbol of democracy. The Wild Lily student movement is widely regarded as a turning point in Taiwan's transition to democracy. President Chen Shui-bian from the DPP party recognises '...the March movement ...changed the way the Legislative Yuan and the National Assembly are elected, and a consensus on realizing the direct election of the president also set a timetable for further reform' (Huang, 2005:1).

Nevertheless, strong support for the DPP has declined since this party won the Presidential Election in 2000. The character of the transformation regarding the political groups in the Palm BBS forum might reveal some information about the change of the political atmosphere. Deep-Pan-Blue group, who are determined to support the KMT party unconditionally, kept silent during the Wild Lily movement; now, it is the biggest group in Palm BBS. On the contrary, the Deep-Pan-Green group has tended to lower their

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political voices gradually. A great number of the participants still tend to support the DPP. The evidence shows that the Allied Pan-Green-group is the largest group (36%) in Palm BBS, slightly more than the Allied Pan-Blue group (35%).

In the Presidential Office, Neutral is the largest group, which accounts for forty-seven per cent of the participants. This number is far more than the Allied Pan-Blue-group, and the Allied Pan-Green-group. But in this government sponsored forum, the Allied Pan-Blue-group is twice as large (32.4%) as the Allied Pan-Green-group, who supposedly were in the same camp as Taiwan's government, who at that time were still in power.

Here, 'which political groups encounter which political groups' is clearly separated into two distinct scenes among the three forums. The first scene shows Allied Pan-Blue and Allied Pan-Green political groups' encounter each other in Yahoo and Palm BBS, but the second scene, in the Presidential Office, shows the discussants from the Neutral group being the majority over other political groups. Yahoo attracts more evenly the extreme political groups.

Hence, apparently, Sunstein's (2001:90) concern that the Internet's deliberative function suffers from polarisation through the predictable choices of the discussants, might not happen among these three forums. But a further concern is: do participants through their discussions (discourses) dissolve the boundaries between each other, or reinforce their groups' points of view instead? As Dryzek claims,

> An account of democracy grounded in communicative action in the public sphere and civil society highlights the degree to which engagement is possible across the boundaries of different discourses. (2000:163)

If the first point is true, the discussants really can cross their groups' boundaries via communicative action, and thereafter the online forums could be celebrated as a deliberative area. However, if the second case were to reflect the real situation, the different groups still would not traverse their boundaries, and the discursive function would still be influenced by group polarisation wherein 'members of a deliberating group

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predictably move toward a more extreme point in the direction indicated by the members' predeliberation tendencies' (Sunstein, 2003:81). Inevitably, the fragmentation would still work against the ideal of deliberative democracy.

For the purpose of clarifying the previous two inquiries, the discursive process will be examined, and will be analysed in the next chapter.

6.6 Conclusion: the Trend of Web 2.0?

In this research, statistical evidence supports the idea that participants' discursive behaviours (topics' choices, political groups and posting days) are connected with the sponsor types. These findings are in line with Wright and Street's (2007) concern: that deliberation online depends on web/forum design and the discussants. These findings lead us to consider 'the filtering' action of online forum participants. In Sunstein's (2001:54-56) view, online discussants would filter out unnecessary forums through their own choices, and stay with the forums they prefer to take part in. These 'predictable mechanisms', which exist within the users minds already, cause them to have the motivation to take part in the discussions and will dictate the extent to which they contribute in discussions and in what way.

Sunstein's concern about predictable mechanisms provides a way to consider why no SPAM or Fa-Lun-Gong posts appear in the Palm or Presidential Office forums, but are published quite regularly in the Yahoo Political Forum. The Yahoo Political Forum is sponsored by Yahoo! Taiwan, the biggest site of online advertisements in Taiwan. In 2007, online advertising on Yahoo! Taiwan hit 4,587,000,000 $NT (approximately £ 917,400,000), which is more than any other online agent or site (IAMA, 2008:6). The image of Yahoo is rooted as a commercially orientated enterprise rather than as a public service (Chen, 2007:1). Though the CEO of Yahoo! Taiwan argues 'it is the age of Web 2.0', a way that businesses embraces the strengths of the web and uses it as a platform (O'Reilly, 2006:1); however, Yahoo! Taiwan is still criticised as 'a big monster' (Chung, 2006:1) because it keeps merging other blog suppliers, entrance web companies, and online shopping platforms.

The success of Yahoo's market occupation rate and highest popularity promises that any post given to the Yahoo Political Forum will have a greater opportunity to attract readers or potential customers. So, operating according to predictable mechanisms, the purposive users (Spamers and Fa-Lun-Gong) filter off improper forums in advance, and expose themselves in their designated forums.

The question of 'What do people talk about?' in this research presents a twofold finding, firstly, the content analysis result reveals that online political forum participants are concerned with the government and politicians rather than other political issues; secondly, when discussing sensitive issues, Yahoo presents more varieties of such topics than the other forums. From table 6.2.1, we can see that in Palm BBS no participants choose to discuss Taiwan's independence or relations across the Taiwan Strait.

But the majority of posts in Yahoo come from a reliance on journalistic reports, thus, the traditional news generated from the forum (coffee house) totally reverses the position of the supplier and receiver in the modern virtual agora, where participants supposedly 'deliberate rationally to be the articulation of this society'. In this sense, Palm also presents quite a high degree (68%) of reliance on news reports. The discussants in the Presidential Office tend to create original topics. As Jensen (2003:371) mentions, the motivations of the discussants for why they want to participate in the government-sponsored forum usually is that they want to deliberate with politicians directly. This is a bottom-up communication type, thus, the participants contributions in the Presidential Office are not peer-to-peer communications, but are designed to elicit the political elites' 'responses'[40].

Whilst group polarisation doesn't come out as predicted, different like-minded groups have the possibility to discuss with each other. As to whether they are really trying to convince the other groups via their reasonable arguments, or monotonously repeating a one-sided view without interaction, still needs clarifying. In the next chapter, the threads will be analysed to try to enhance our understanding of the gap between an ideal deliberative democracy applied in the virtual place, and the real situation in the Internet world.

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[40] There are more discussions in chapter VIII.

Chapter VII   Good Cybercitizens/ Good Discussants? Attitudes toward Government and Others

The technological attribute of discursive spaces online, including chat-rooms and political forums, seems to allow more opportunities to create rational debate, because the discussants can choose to respond asynchronously. They have more time to consider and justify the contents of their discussions. On the other hand, the type of synchronous discussions that occur in real-time virtual chatting spaces restrict the participants from spending sufficient time to considerately interact with each other, thus, it is quite common to see 'small talk' and 'jokes' rather than discussions (Janssen and Kies, 2005:321).

In the past two decades, the discursive nature of online discussions has attracted a growing number of studies focusing on the extent of discursive qualities revealed from online political forums (i.e. Schneider, 1997; Davis, 1999; Golding, 2000; Dahlberg, 2001). The results from different studies present divergent outcomes. Some researchers arrived at disappointing findings, suggesting that discussions were merely 'flames without debates', or 'lacking in reciprocal attitudes', or 'discussing with monologues' (Davis, 1999; Wilhelm, 1999; Dumoulin, 2003;). Other studies present more positive results, such as: 'comparable to letter to the editors' in a government-sponsored forum (Jensen, 2003), and even: 'the quality of debate was close to the rational-critical ideal' (Albrecht, 2006).

These empirical data indicate that the concerns toward the discursive qualities in online political forums can not be simplified as 'all good' or 'all bad'. Janssen and Kies (2005:322-323) suggest that 'political culture and ideology' need to be considered when analysing the qualities of discussions online. They argue that geographical and cultural zones will influence the qualities of online deliberations. The discussants from 'Asiatic, European or Arabic worlds', or from 'the same cultural regions and within countries' generate different discursive qualities (ibid:322). In this sense, the qualities revealed from

the forum discussions will present different standards depending on the country/culture where the discussants reside.

Janssen and Kies attempt to clarify whether the discursive qualities are influenced by political cultures, cultures and countries of residence. However, they don't provide any concrete approach to evaluate at which level the discursive qualities are influenced. Here I also argue, the adoption of 'country' as a criteria, actually doesn't fit all real situations. For example, the result of Dahlberg's (2001:624) case study points out that the discussions within MPD forums, located at the centre of Minnesota E-Democracy in the USA, have developed rational-critical deliberations. The strategies adopted by the Minnesota E-Democracy are the key factors, which assist in the shaping of the deliberations. But the opposite result from Wilhelm's (1999:154-178) analysis indicates that, '...there is insufficient evidence to support such a salubrious picture of the political public sphere in cyberspace...' while he processes the forum discussions in America.

Yu's (2006:303-326) case studies in China also provide other evidence in support of the previous argument. In his studies during the SARS epidemic, the online users play active roles in appropriating successfully the internet forum as an alternative public space for articulating alternative political discourses. However, Wu's (2007) research presents her concerns about self-censorship in the forums. Since the forum (located in China) was monitored and censored by the forums' moderators, the discursive contributions revealed from the forum would not be akin to the ideal of deliberative democracy.

Therefore, the country in which the forum exists is not the absolute factor which influences its qualities. In Yu's case studies, it is serious and emergency social events that encourage the discussants to articulate alternative political discourses. From Minnesota E-Democracy's experiences, successful strategies of management contribute toward creating a suitable environment for the discussions. Here, I suggest that the analytic unit should be narrowed down from Janssen and Kies' 'country' to 'forum' itself, considering a forum's political cultures, discursive climates, and management strategies.

Compared with traditional media, which generally do not allow audiences to determine/affect the contents of programs, online users have more opportunities to create the contents on the net. As I've mentioned in the previous chapter, online users usually expose themselves to cyberspaces through the engagement of a 'filter system' (Sunstein, 2001:55): filtering what is available to them before choosing to engage with the websites/forums/e-media/blogs that they want to participate in. Their preferences come from psychological requirements, 'people often know, or think they know, what they like and dislike' (ibid:55). In this sense, the decision making of which forum to join as a place of participation is the outcome of a process of 'active' choices. They may sense the cultures and discursive atmosphere of the forums, be concerned with how to cooperate with/incorporate the regulations, and consider how to interact with other discussants. When choosing which forum to access, the discussants are full of awareness.

If the discussants can be aware of how to act like citizens rather than private consumers, then for Sunstein (ibid:113), this will be the key to successful discussions online. Sunstein argues, on one side, that the convenience of consuming products from the net may increase our life qualities because we have more time to exercise, relax and accompany our family members. On the other hand, when millions of consumers simultaneously try to find goods, in Sunstein's description, they place themselves on a kind of 'treadmill' in which 'each is continually trying to purchase more and better, simply in order to keep up with others and with the ever-shifting frame of reference' (ibid:120). When a whole society focuses on consuming goods it creates trouble, such as people paying less attention to improving crime prevention or environmental issues. So, Sunstein concludes 'If citizens are reflective about their practices and their lives, they are entirely aware of this fact' (ibid:121). In arguing whether the citizens are equal to consumers, Sunstein particularly points out that consumers lack the abilities of citizens to search for long-term larger democratic goals (ibid:122). Thereafter, the qualities of discursive cyberspaces are constructed by the discussants' conscious choices - either acting/ or rejecting to act as 'good citizens', or acting/rejecting to act as 'consumers'. If they regard themselves as consumers, the discussions are like infotainment – quick and

without consideration. As citizens, they would like to contribute their efforts towards common worthy goals.

7.1 The Roles of Cyber-citizens and Governments

In the previous chapter, I've mentioned that the three forums I've chosen represent respectively a 'commercial site', an 'academic/elite site' and a 'government-sponsored site'. In this chapter, I am interested in finding answers of the following questions: since the discussants filter what is available to them before choosing which forum discussions to participate in (refer to chapter VI), does the extent of their awareness of what it means to be good citizens, rather than private consumers on a treadmill, among these three forums? Are there differences in the discursive qualities among these three forums?

What are good citizens in the Internet age? Sunstein (ibid:114) explains that citizens don't think and act as consumers, and distinctly identify their roles to support public issues, antidiscrimination laws and environmental protection. Their choices won't be confused and disturbed by their consumer's intentions. 'In their role as citizens, people might seek to implement their highest aspirations in political behaviour' (ibid). Yu (2006:303) also argues that the concept of citizenship via the Internet shouldn't be considered as formal or institutionally given. The participants can '...check the authority, and (even) challenge the political agenda of the government...' (ibid). In this sense, cyber-citizens (or netizens) are aware of their roles independent from the government and dominant powers.

7.1.1 Response to the Former Authorities

To study the issue of whether the Internet can reinvigorate democracy, scholars have focused on the influential power generated by the government and dominant political players. The intentions of some political authorities are to try to distribute their resources and pre-exiting power advantages in order to 'control and neutralise any pluralist tendencies' of the Internet (Gibson and Ward, 2000:21-23, Davis, 2000:189-203).

Resnick (1999, quote in Gibson and Ward, 2000:22) argues that increasingly, the large traditional political forces will come to predominate as they do in other media: marketing their policies and pushing their top-down messages (ibid).

The research of Wu (2007) and Hill and Hughes (1996) represent two different examples concerning the degree of government involvement. From Wu's (ibid:128-145) analysis, Mainland China's government not only censors the topics of online discussions, but also bans messages that have negative content in them. Some of the younger generations volunteer to supervise and delete messages written by those who don't express themselves in line with the government propaganda. Eventually, those volunteers 'inevitably become a part of the online surveillance' (ibid:140).

The empirical research conducted by Hill and Hughes (1996:47-75) in the USA, conveys a more positive stance that differs from Mainland China's situation. Results from their analysis reveals that more online discussants choose to express anti-government positions rather than cooperated with government views.

As I've discussed in the chapter I, Taiwan's discursive environment used to be similar to China's. Political topics were well known taboos that people could not talk about or discuss during the time of being ruled by the KMT authoritarians. Propaganda through public education in Taiwan was an important tool in creating a Chinese national identity among Taiwanese, and preparing the people for 'a counter-offensive' against the PRC. The people were educated in the evils of the Communists, and the good of the Nationalists, with many Taiwanese remembering lore taught in elementary school on the wisdom of Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the KMT authorities. The Government Information Office was a major official institution for diffusing propaganda. The KMT state owned and controlled various media establishments: the commercial TV and radio stations, a film bureau, as well as a police radio station which often broadcast 'educational' plays with propagandistic value.

The Taiwanese political environment became more open and liberal after the Martial Law ended in 1987. Also, during the late 80's, politics in Taiwan underwent a series of drastic changes that peacefully transformed the polity from an authoritarian to a democratic one (see Tien, 1989; Cheng, 1989; Chu, 1992; Lin, 1998). The succession of Lee Teng-hui as President in 1988 signified a new stage of Taiwanization. Lee was the first native Taiwanese to become the President of the ROC - Republic of China, and the Chairman of the KMT. Under his rules, a series of reconstructive policies were developed that brought positive changes to Taiwan's democratic environment, including open media markets and direct polls for the Presidential Election in 1996. In 2000, the opposite party-DPP (Democratic Progress Party) won the Presidential Election, and so the reins of government were passed from the KMT to the DPP peacefully.

Table 7.1. 1 A comparison of critiques' positions against the KMT authoritarian propaganda among the three forums

Forum	Yahoo	Palm BBS	Presidential Office
N (% within topic)	481 (79.8%)	76 (79.2%)	23 (85.2%)

When there are discursive topics related to the KMT authoritarians, the results shown in Table 7.1.1 present the stances of a great degree of posts against the KMT authoritarian propaganda, which was established and diffused by Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo between 1949 and 1988. Chiang's regime advocated, the Chinese Community Party is Taiwan's enemy, Chiang Kai-shek is a savoir of the world, ROC is the only legal regime in Mainland China, the Chinese Community Party stole the property of the KMT, and the PRC does not exist legally, etc. In Yahoo and Palm the posts that contradict propaganda reach nearly eighty percent, and in the Presidential Office, more than eighty-five percent. The result of a Chi-Square test (df=2, p=.776>.05) supports the idea that there is no connection between the forum type and the contents of the discussants' criticisms toward the KMT authoritarian propaganda. This finding indicates that after

twenty years of democratisation, the residents in Taiwan have more awareness of and independence from the KMT authoritarian ideologies.

The following thread quoted from the Yahoo Political Forum[41] represents an example of how the online discussants feel about the previous KMT brainwashing. Starting with Mayforce's (discussant's name) message,

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'Devotional Song for the ROC (Republic of China)...ROC, ROC, you will last forever (lyrics of Devotional Song for the ROC)! U guys might call it a brainwash song[42]... but whatever... just a love and a passion for ur own country.. ok?'

In Mayforce's post, even though she/he is aware that the 'Devotional Song for the ROC' is a brainwashing song, emotionally she/he still identifies 'Taiwan' as 'ROC', the only legal representation of Mainland China. Mayforce's opinion attracts a series of comments, many discussants are surprised that she is still influenced by the propaganda, as TW's (discussant's name) response points out,

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'Come on! Don't be trapped by Former President Chiang Kai-shek! Be awake of his 'marijuana politics'! It is ridiculous to say that the authoritarian power will last forever! If we follow your logic, it means we should request to be ruled by the Ching-dynasty?'

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[41] This thread is quoted from the discussions on Aug 3rd, 2005 in Yahoo Political Forum.
[42] In this context, the discussant adopts a mix of Chinese and English language. The sentence of 'u ...ok' is written down by this author, here I keep her/his original content.

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DT (discussant's name) also tries to remind Mayforce 'Cherish what we have after democratisation.'

TW's post points out the political illusion created by the former KMT authoritarian leader, Chiang Kai-shek. In the KMT authoritarian propaganda derived from his belief, ROC was the only representative regime in Mainland China. The Devotional Song for the ROC was composed for the purpose of reminding the residents in Taiwan, that they are the legal residents of the ROC. The Devotional Song for the ROC usually was to be sung at military gatherings, and the birthday celebrations of Chiang's family. The 'marijuana politics' mentioned in TW's post is a kind of metaphor that reflects the way the KMT authorities tried to brain-wash the residents via singing patriotic songs. What TW wants to do if ask Mayforce to wake up from being ruled by authorities' unconscious control. The Ching dynasty was the last imperial regime in Chinese history, and was ended by the revolution led by Dr. Sun Yet-sun, the first chairman of the KMT in 1911. TW argues that according to Mayforce's logic, if the authoritarian regime should last forever, then they should still be ruled by the Ching dynasty rather than the ROC. DT's reminder aims to advocate the value of democratisation after 1988.

7.1.2 Attitudes toward the Current and Former Governments

In the previous chapter, the finding from content analysis showed that government performance is the main topic of online discussions. Table 7.1.2 provides more concrete analytical data about which government, the DPP, former KMT (lead by Lee Teng-hui), the Chinese government, or others, are criticised.

Table 7.1. 2 Governments which are criticised by the online discussants

Forum Governments	Yahoo N (%)	Palm BBS N (%)	Presidential Office N (%)
Taiwan-DPP	258 (49.5%)	33 (46.5%)	12 (37.5%)
Taiwan-KMT	39 (7.5%)	29 (40.8%)	5 (15.6%)
China's government	201 (38.6%)	1 (1.4%)	15 (46.9%)
others	23 (4.4%)	8 (11.3%)	0 (0%)
Total	521 (100%)	71 (100%)	32 (100%)

The population that supports each camp, the KMT or the DPP, is quite evenly distributed among all the citizens in Taiwan. Based on the result of the Presidential polls in 2004, there was only a small difference (0.2%) between the DPP candidate and the KMT candidate. The polls for the DPP were fifty point one per cent, and for KMT forty nine point nine per cent[43].

DPP, which constitutes the current government, is the most frequently criticised government within Yahoo (49.5%) and Palm (46.5%). The number of polls for KMT (49.89%) is quite close to the percentage of online participants criticising the DPP government in Yahoo and Palm.

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[43] Source: Announcement of Central Election Commission,
http://210.69.23.140/vote3.asp?pass1=A2004A0000000000aaa

The former government in Taiwan, the KMT, is criticised very regularly (40.8%) by Palm's participants. This situation doesn't appear in Yahoo or the Presidential Office; the numbers drop down dramatically in comparison with Palm's distribution. Yahoo only has seven point five per cent; Presidential Office has fifteen point six per cent. The Chinese government is the most criticised government in the Presidential Office forum, and also holds second place as the most criticised government in Yahoo.

It is not surprising that the DPP government and the former KMT government are criticised so frequently (refer to Table 7.1.2) by the online discussants in Palm BBS. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Palm BBS is located is in The National Taiwan University, where the traditional campus spirit is to encourage students to be enlightened, and to critically examine authorities. From the most famous student movement against the KMT government, The Lily movement, eighteen years ago, to the present student organisations (i.e. Coolloud Net, which aims to support Labour movements against the governments), there is still much involvement with social movements. Lee and Chen both graduated from this university, and for the current students, to criticise the DPP and former KMT government is to exercise and practice how to challenge the authorities.

Influenced by Taiwan's recent economic decline, and the negative news about the DPP government aired in most of the mainstream media, the DPP government has gradually lost the trust of the people. The DPP government is currently being criticised for its closed-door policy, which forbids flights and exports, or limits the budget of investment in Mainland Chinese businesses. The reason the DPP government gives in explanation of the country's slower economic growth is that the opposite party's (KMT) boycott is to blame. Many online discussants also 'boycott' the DPP's accounts. For example, concerning the issue of whether fruits should be exported to Mainland China, one discussant, tuga0624, criticises the attitude of the DPP government as being 'GGYY', which means 'lousy, and lacking the ability to make the right decision'. In a discussion of

economic policy, a discussant, Wind, says '...*I support the DPP, but their economic policy is not successful. Don't always blame KMT's boycott...*'

The DPP government is criticised for its weak performance in economic growth. The Mainland Chinese government is criticised for disrespecting human rights. In the forum provided by the highest bureaucrats in Taiwan's political system, the Presidential Office, the Chinese government is the most criticised. As we know, there were tensions between these two governments, initially in Chiang Kai-shek's era, and later carried through to recent times by Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian. The Chinese government refuses to recognise Taiwan as an independent country, and tries to isolate Taiwan from the international world. The most famous case was during the SARS epidemic; the Chinese government protested about the decision of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to assist Taiwan in dealing with the SARS outbreaks (Hickey, 2004:8). Some discussants were concerned about the threats from the Chinese government, and the purpose of their online discussions was to find a medium through which to transmit their constructive messages to the government directly. Formed by the highest authorities, the forum of the Presidential office is the best choice for this purpose.

7.1.2.1 Presidential Office: Constructive Messages for the DPP Government

The Presidential Office forum, in my research, accepts a variety of voices; despite being a government-sponsored forum, nearly thirty-eight per cent of the posts criticise the DPP government. A major number (46.9%, refer to table 7.1.2) of the discussants publish their opinions in terms of the Chinese government's offensive.

The sampling date of my research was 2005, which coincided with the Chinese government enacting an Anti-Secession Law aimed at discouraging Taiwan from

pursuing independence [44]. The tensions between the two sides peaked after this announcement, and the Chinese government claimed they would initiate war whenever Taiwan announces its independence[45]. Thus, the issue of how to assist the Taiwanese government in breaking through this predicament became a prevailing subject in the Presidential Office discussions. The following message left by Roger (discussant's name) is an example of one of those posts:

Topic: Don't hide behind the door.

How to respond to the Mainland Chinese government's threat? It is useless to just hide behind a door. ...There are too many political problems in Chinese society. So, I encourage Taiwan's government to adopt the proper strategy in order to conquer the threats from the Chinese government...

The subject of the post, 'Don't hide behind a door', is aimed at encouraging the Taiwanese government. This post obviously tries to communicate with the government or government members directly. Thus, in response to the threat from the Chinese government (i.e. the Anti-Secession Law), the author proposes strategies to the government themselves, rather than to other discussants. The receiver setting of the posts is 'government member', so it is not intended for the ordinary discussants.

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[44] Based on Anti-Secession Law, Article 1: This Law is formulated, in accordance with the Constitution, for the purpose of opposing and checking Taiwan's secession from China by secessionists in the name of "Taiwan independence", promoting peaceful national reunification, maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits, preserving China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and safeguarding the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation.

[45] According to the War Mobilization Act of the Chinese government, the preparations of war are in place.

7.1.2.2 Palm BBS: Prevention of Suspicious Political Agents' Invasions

Palm's discussants reveal a certain level of awareness of how to prevent political authorities that intend to deliberately intervene in the online discussions. If messages are too overtly biased towards any political party in Taiwan, online participants are able to trace the real identity of the discussant(s). The following provides a case of how to catch 'Ban-Gong' to elaborate this argument.

'Ban-Gong' (版工, meaning board agent) is the special term for discussants who are suspiciously assigned by political parties in Taiwan. Basically, Ban-Gong have the same characteristics as mythological 'trolls' who seek to cause disruption; they deliberately disrupt the discussion in the comments thread (Janack, 2006:291). According to Herring et al. (2002:372), trolls (sometimes called 'trollers') are not the same as flames, which are those who intend to insult/provoke/rebuke, or the act itself of sending such a message. The messages from trollers are 'outwardly sincere' and 'designed to attract predictable responses or flames' (ibid, 374). In practice, both trolling and flaming can lead to extended, aggravated arguments (ibid:372).

Donath characterises trolling as 'a game about identity deception' (1999:45), nevertheless, how to disclose Ban-Gong's deception is a big test for political forum moderators. The following case is provided as a reference for considering Ban-Gong's existence. During the time of the Taipei Mayor election in 2006, one of the famous political forums, Anti-Media, found that there was a series of messages containing the same rumour left in the board. The contents described how this author received money (1700 NT – approx. GBP£26) from the DPP party to bribe him to vote for the DPP candidate. So this author was confused and questioned why the DPP was so bad. When some other discussants challenged the credibility of what he said because they lived in Taipei city, and never received any money from the DPP, he still insisted on his story. Because this author's

action was against the Electoral Law, 'to forbid the diffusion of rumours attacking a particular party nearing the election period', the board moderator reported this post with this author's IP address to the DPP office, and the DPP office requested the police to clarify who this author was. The result showed that this discussant was a university student who registers and lives in another city, therefore, he had no right to elect the Taipei Mayor. In addition, he was an intern journalist from the KMT media. Later, the KMT party announced that his action originated from his own personal decision, and denied any involvement[46].

In Palm BBS, the discussants have also been alerted to suspicious Ban-Gong interventions. The abnormal messages from discussant Mx attracted other discussants' attention as follows. Firstly, Mx intended to 'board-wash' - publishing many duplicate messages at the same time - deliberately (see chart 7.1). Secondly, his/her messages lacked any constructive opinions, but contained many terms which are typical of a trolls' style, so other discussants named his posts 'Chu Shen Wen' (畜生文), which in Chinese means that the qualities of his posts are as bad as articles written by a beast.

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[46] More details are referred to on the website Anti-media www.socialforce.tw.

Fig 7. 1 The board-washing posts from Mx

Fig 7.1 demonstrates the way Mx 'washes' the Palm BBS web pages. Mx replies to nine different topics, and initiates eight new topics within a short period of time. Mx doesn't care whether he/she replies the discussion threads properly, but tries to spread out his messages across the whole board. Thus, when the next participant logs into this forum, he/she can only read Mx's messages because they occupy the first few pages.

Mx's posts are classified into two types by another discussant. One type attacks the DPP government, including government members; the second type contains articles that benefit the KMT party. The following post shows that through an analysis of the qualities and quantities of Mx's posts, online discussants in Palm try to uncover his/her true intentions.

Subject: the situation related to Chu Shen Wen....22.59%

Author: Ynyf

...This guy's (referring to Mx) posts occupied 22.59% of all the posts... ...Every day, the quantity of his posts amounts to around 20, however, he doesn't participate in our discussions with a rational attitude, instead he attacks the DPP deliberately and adds posts which monotonously applaud KMT articles....

Ynyf's analysis throws light on Mx's board-washing behaviour and his/her political party intentions. Ynyf's post also expresses a reason why Mx's posts are so annoying because he/she lacks any rational attitude to participate in their discussions. Following this notion, it implies that the suspicious Ban-Gong usually posts his/her articles from an irrational and biased stance. Other participants echo this view. For example, Window (user's ID) provides evidence in support of most of Mx's posts being far from the truth. Requesting the suspicious Ban-Gong, Mx, to stop his disruptions and participate in normal discussions has become a popular topic among the board.

Mx's attitude toward those requests are fierce; in his/her responses, he/she denies that he is a Ban-Gong, but insists that for those who are against his/her stances are DDP Ban-Gong. '*I request Pan-Green (who supports DPP) to be more rational. Don't use the collective verbal violence to attack me and tell me to stop board-washing!*' (quoted from

Mx). He/she also takes revenge by replying to all the participants who try to analyse his/her behaviours. For instance, he/she swaps the original title from '*thanks Mx for demonstrating how to wash board*' to '*thanks princer (discussant's name) for demonstrating how to wash board.*' His/her reactions become the bait for flames, and gradually the messages containing interactions with him/her become full of abusive terms, and stray even further from a rational attitude.

Andrew (1996, quoted in Herring et al. 2002:372) identifies two kinds of trollers in the discussion forums; the first type is called *simply motivated trollers*, who simply try to attract attention only, and the second kind are *career trollers*, who are assigned by particular groups and deliberately set out to disrupt groups and/or make trouble. In Palm BBS's case, the suspicious Ban-Gong, Mx, doesn't only try to attract attention, but also interrupts the discussions successfully. He strategically takes revenge by revising those posts from the discussants, who reveal their suspicious toward his/her motivations. He even labels other discussants as DPP Ban-Gong though those participants don't board wash, or attack Pan-Blue group supporters. Mx's behaviour is closer to a career troller rather than a simply motivated troller.

The purpose of tracing and examining suspicious Ban-Gong (troller) is to protect the discursive forum from political interventions. However, the whole process still creates the side-effect of marginalising certain participants. As Janack (2006:291) notes, 'Such marginalizing practices did not seem consistent with the spirit of the town hall meeting'. For most of the discussants in Palm BBS, how to maintain this place as an ideal forum and also follow the spirit of rational debate simultaneously is a dilemma and a challenge. Firstly, the troller (possibly more than one) they face is 'fundamentally uncooperative: he (they) seek to confuse and deceive, rather than to be clear' (Herring et al. 2002:380). Secondly, the marginalising actions are questioned concerning whether they follow the spirit of deliberative democracy. In Palm BBS, there are efforts made to create a rational

environment for discussions; unavoidably, Palm BBS still struggles with how to react to and manage trolls.

7.1.2.3 Yahoo: Fluid Attitude toward Taiwan's Government

Since 2000, after the political party changed following the Presidential Election, the DDP turned into the main target of assault by the Chinese government. The Chinese government adopted many censorship strategies to prevent ideas of Taiwanese independence from entering the Mainland Chinese people's consciousness. For example, the Internet filter system forbade 'DPP' and 'Lu Shiu-lian' (the name of the vice president) to pass through its online censorial surveillance (Wu, 2007:133).

The media censorship in China only allows TV programmes which pass their examinations to be broadcast on their TV channels, basically; only a one sided, negative image of Taiwan's government is constructed through their programmes and reports. A discussant, Winniefortune, who is a Taiwanese resident working in Shen-Chou (深圳) in southern China, shared her media experiences:

' ...When I turned on the TV Channels, they were full of bad news about Taiwanese politics. It was impossible to receive the signals from Taiwan's commercial TV...the images of Lien Chan (the former Chairman of KMT) are shown again and again, and the narrator praises him for being so merciful, as the greatest grandfather... '

Winniefortune's experience provides two main themes describing the portrayal of Taiwanese politics in the Mainland Chinese media: firstly, Lien Chan and the KMT are good; secondly, Taiwanese politics is bad.

Gaine, a discussant coming from Mainland China, exemplifies one type of reaction in support of the Mainland Chinese government. Gaine declares,

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'...actually, I don't think our government is bad. Hu and Wen[47] are so respected by the ordinary people. Your A-Bian[48] government is terrible.... Lien Chan is better than A-Ben.'

Taiwanese discussants criticise the DPP, KMT, the Chinese government, and others (i.e. American government). Generally, their attitude toward the Chinese government is negative due to the Chinese government's disregard of human rights, and their censorship of peoples' freedom of speech.

The following example is Jaco153's answer to a Mainland Chinese participant about the problems of a possible reunification between Taiwan and Mainland China:

'...(quoted from the previous discussant's message) you don't have to worry about your freedom of speech, the Mainland China government will provide your special right to talk freely.

(response by Jaco153) Come on! Can you encourage your government first to allow you to talk without fear? I also want to protect your freedom of speech.'

Referring to the Chinese government's censorship toward the media and Internet, and restriction of the people's freedom of speech, some Taiwanese discussants express their

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[47] Hu and Wen are the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party's surnames.
[48] A-Bian is the nickname of president Chen Shui-bian.

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attitude towards the Taiwanese government as follows, '...*even though we know our government might not be so perfect, at least we can criticise them and scold them until we are satisfied...* ' *(Sabrina)*

The responses of Taiwanese discussants toward the government can so far be separated into two modes. The first mode is to criticise the current government and the previous authorities when they discuss Taiwanese internal politics, and the second mode is to change their attitudes to back Taiwan's government when they encounter Mainland China participants.

7.1.3 Summary

In response to the former authorities, the three forums present quite a high degree of critical stances. Also, a certain number of messages tend to be critical toward the government. Intrinsically, the three forums still present very different positions concerning the issue of invasion by the government/dominant power.

7.2 Attitudes towards Others

In chapter IV, the image of reasonable participants has been shown to include several features, such as open-mindedness, listening to others, maintaining a respectful attitude in relation to different opinions, and making efforts to understand other persons' ideas without any prejudice.

In Taiwan's context, the concept of 'others' is constructed as meaning 'Mainland Chinese people' by the Taiwanese government. Under the ruling period of Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, the Mainland Chinese people were constituted as victims, who needed to be rescued from the Chinese Communist Party. The ideologies diffused by the KMT cast the Mainland Chinese residents as compatriots of the Taiwanese. Ironically, the 'rescued' Mainland Chinese residents in Taiwan were still forced to accept 'The Three Principles of the People[49]' as their core thinking, instead of the Communist Party ideologies.

After the end of Chiang's rule, the Taiwanization development plan was initiated (see chapter I), and gradually, the Mainland Chinese residents were not compatriots of the Taiwanese anymore, but became identified as 'others' who come from the P.R.C.

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[49] The lectures of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who is a national father of R.O.C. KMT announces his lectures are the ideological foundation of the R.O.C.

Table 7.2. 1 Attitude toward Mainland China residents

Forum	Yahoo		Palm BBS		Presidential Office	
Attitude	within topics	pro-portions of within forum posts	within topics	pro-portions of within forum posts	within topics	pro-portions of within forum posts
	N (%)	%	N (%)	%	N (%)	%
Friendly	225 (32.5%)	5.7%	10 (8.0%)	1.92%	2 (16.7%)	2.7%
Neutral	331 (47.8%)	8.4%	25 (20.0%)	4.8%	3 (25.0%)	4.1%
Hostile	137 (19.8%)	3.5%	90 (72.0%)	17.30%	7 (58.3%)	9.5%
Total	693 (100%)	17.6%	125 (100%)	24.02%	12 (100%)	16.3%

Table 7.2.1 reveals the content analysis result from a comparison of discussants' attitudes toward Mainland Chinese residents among the three forums.

Those posts coded as 'friendly', are written by discussants who express a position in line with Mainland Chinese people. Yahoo is friendlier than the other two forums; approximately 33% of the posts contain expressions of friendly greeting in the Yahoo

forum. This number is far from that of Palm's 8%, and the Presidential Office's seventeen per cent. Approximately twenty per cent of the posts are shown to contain a hostile attitude toward Mainland Chinese residents in Yahoo.

As such, Palm is the most antagonistic forum toward the Mainland Chinese people. More than seventy per cent of posts are unfriendly in Palm BBS. Most of these hostile posts are full of discriminating terms toward Mainland Chinese people. The following case shows how Sarahtsai (discussant's ID) reacts when she/he encounters Mainland Chinese people who challenge the national identity of Taiwanese students in the UK.

'..If you don't like the way things are, go back to your China, nobody begs you to stay here, and forces you to listen to the words you can't accept. Go back to your China, and then you can say whatever you like to say (can you? I doubt it). But remember, IN THE UK, YOU MUST RESPECT EVERYONE. I say the Communist party is rubbish...SO WHAT.................don't like it? Then what................'

The Presidential Office also presents a high degree (nearly 60%) of hostility towards the residents who live in Mainland China. The result from a Chi-Square test (df=4, p<.05) proves that the attitude toward Mainland Chinese people is related to the forums sponsorship types.

7.2.1 Abusive Terms Applied for the Mainland Chinese People

A great degree of online users among the three forums' posts tend to express their attitudes toward Mainland Chinese people as not friendly. Some terms are used in their posts to particularly describe the Mainland Chinese People during the online discussions. These terms are either newly created through Internet usage or re-adopted from the KMT authorities' propaganda, i.e. 共匪 (pronounced 'Gong-fei', explained later), for the

purpose of discriminating against the Mainland Chinese users. Based on the usages, connotations and pronunciations in Chinese language, I will classify them into five categories, and account them explicitly as follows.

1. The Mainland Chinese persons have a lower status, which is equal to domestic animals: 支那豬 (pronounced as 'Jhih-na-jhu'), 支那牛 (pronounced as 'Jhih-na-niou'), and 中國牛 (pronounced as 'Jhong-guo-niou').

The terms '支那豬' (meaning 'Chinese pig'), '支那牛' (meaning 'Chinese cow'), and 中國牛 (also meaning 'Chinese cow'), have become the terms of abuse adopted by the discussants to describe the people they don't appreciate. In Yahoo's regulations, the board moderator makes a clear announcement to ban those messages which contains '支那豬' (Jhih-na-jhu). The term '支那' (Jhih-na) originates from the word 'China', but it also has an additional hidden humiliating meaning attached that implies a lower status. 'Pig' and 'Cow' in Taiwanese culture also have the meaning of 'idiot' and 'lazy'. 'Lower status pig coming from China' or 'Lower status cow coming from China' is therefore a multifaceted disrespectful term.

Some of the aggressive discussants use the terms 支那豬 (Jhih-na-jhu), 支那牛 (Jhih-na-niou), or 中國牛 (Jhong-guo-niou) to express their annoyance with the Mainland Chinese residents. For instance, Purplecomingfromeast (user's ID) expresses his attitude toward Mainland Chinese people as, '...*Jhih-na-jhu needs to be washed by clean water; Jhih-na-jhu is polluted by the dirty dirt*'

In the discursive environment, 支那豬 (Jhih-na-jhu), 支那牛 (Jhih-na-niou), or 中國牛 (Jhong-guo-niou) are not solely associated with Mainland Chinese users, instead the terms have been transformed and expanded to include participants of any nationality who are not appreciated. For example, Princer (user's ID) indicates 'Jhong-guo-niou' (中國

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牛）*Mx's farts are so incredible .*' Actually, the user 'Mx' has been suspected of being a 'Ban-Gong' (as mentioned earlier), assigned by the KMT. Princer still teases Mx by calling him a 'Jhong-guo-niou' in order to reflect how unbearable Mx is: he/she is as unbearable as a cow from China.

2. Two different written terms which are homophonous: 憤青 and 糞青 (both pronounced as 'Feng-cing'). '糞青' (Feng-cing, meaning *hit-youth*), which originates from '憤青' (Feng-cing), meaning an aggressive youth with Mainland Chinese nationality whose speech is radical and aggressive.

Many online discussants have similar experiences of encountering so-called 'aggressive youth' in an online political forum. An aggressive youth usually presents his/her extremely loathing attitude toward the issue of Taiwanese independence and insists on Taiwan's eventual unification with Mainland China. Due to most aggressive youths' lack of rational attitude when participating in the deliberations, most of the Taiwanese discussants have negative experiences of interacting with them. In this sense, it is not surprising that the words 'shit-youth' have come to replace 'aggressive youth'.

Within the context of the discussions, '糞青' (Feng-cing) represents an adjective that describes those discussants who are irrational, aggressive and non-knowledge-based. For example, we may see the comment, 'your speech is as the same as 糞青'.

3. The Bandits assigned from the Chinese Communist Party: 共匪 (pronounced 'Gong-fei') and 匪諜 (pronounced 'Fei-dei').

In Chinese, the term '共匪' is a combination of two words: '共' is an abbreviation of '共產黨' - Gong-chan-dang (meaning 'Chinese Communist Party'), and '匪' - Fei (meaning 'bandit'). So the term '共匪' means 'a malicious Chinese Communist Party member'. Similarly, the term '匪諜' is made up of two words, where '匪' indicates 'Chinese

Communist Party', and '諜' means 'secret agent'. The meaning of '匪諜' is literally 'a secret agent assigned by the Chinese Communist Party'.

If we trace the source of these two terms, we find that they originate from the KMT party's propaganda conducted by Chiang Kei-shek and his successor Chiang Ching-kuo (1949- 1987). The KMT authority has made efforts to educate the Taiwanese people into loathing the Chinese Communist Party for being as bad as 'bandits'. Now, the terms have been kept as adjectives to describe discussants' speech or behaviour which appears as morally depraved or inappropriate.

4. A Taiwanese term for Mainland Chinese people: 阿六仔 (A-liou-zih)

This term '阿六仔' (A-liou-zih) is less strong than the previous three categories, and literally means 'Chinese people' in Taiwanese language. It is quite similar to the Mainland Chinese people's name for the Taiwanese, '呆胞' (pronounced as 'Dai-bao'), which means 'stupid Taiwanese people'. Making use of this ironic similarity between the two names, '阿六仔' (A-liou-zih) ridicules the Mainland Chinese people for having a lower-IQ than Taiwanese people.

5. Illegal immigrants and immigrant brides from Mainland China: 人蛇集團 (pronounced 'Ren-she-ji-tuan') / 偷渡客 (pronounced 'Tou-du-ke') or 大陸新娘 (pronounced 'Da-lu-sin-niang').

Despite the fact that the Taiwanese government has forbidden Mainland Chinese people entering Taiwan without permission, there are many illegal immigrants from Mainland China living in Taiwan. '人蛇集團' ('Ren-she-ji-tuan', indicating the illegal organisation which assists such illegal immigration), '偷渡客' ('Tou-du-ke', meaning 'people who are illegal immigrants') and '大陸新娘' ('Da-lu-sin-niang', meaning 'a bride who comes from Mainland China') are all reflections upon the weak economic situation and lower social status of Mainland Chinese immigrants who come to Taiwan. Thus, if any one of

these terms is adopted in the discussions, the writer means, 'you are lower than me'.

In the discursive process, the previous five categories of terms are used to express a hostile attitude not only toward Mainland Chinese discussants, but also toward Taiwanese discussants. If the discussants are known to be Taiwanese, but are still described using any of these categories, the connotations are that 'you are as bad as the Mainland Chinese people, and we are not in the same camp'.

Young notes (1996:121) that in free and open dialogue, others usually test and challenge the ideal of deliberative democracy. But Young proposes that there is, '...something to be learned from the other perspectives...' and that, '...communicative democracy is better conceived as speaking across differences' (ibid:127). In my study, some Taiwanese online discussants try to bridge the political conflict on both sides of the Taiwan Strait; they try to be friendly to the Mainland Chinese residents, however, there are a large number of Taiwanese discussants maintaining unfriendly attitudes toward the Mainland Chinese people. The unfriendly attitudes aren't solely cultivated by the political conflict or previous KMT authoritarian propaganda, but also by the negative interaction with the extreme patriots (such as Aggressive Youth) or the one-China policy advocates of Chinese nationalism and the Chinese government. Some worthy perspectives are possibly just ignored or missed due to the distrustful interactions. The terms of abuse contribute little to bridging the differences, or reaching mutual understanding.

7.3 Conclusion and Discussion

In chapter I, the historical and political reasons which affect the complicated issue of Taiwanese residents' nationality have been discussed. For the past one hundred years, Taiwanese people have experienced a complicated identification process of nationalisation followed by authoritarian transformations. Swinging between 'Japanazation' - 'de-Japanazation', 'Chinization' - 'de-Chinization' and the recent 'Taiwanization', consequently, the issues of Taiwanese national identity have become the main themes for Taiwanese residents' political discussions.

In this context, it becomes very difficult to know how to act as good cybercitizens (netizens) whilst also being independent from the emotion of trying to identify one's ethnic background (i.e. Bensheng Ren, native Taiwanese, and Waisheng Ren, Mainlander ethnic group, see chapter I). The following case provides an example of this difficulty. During the 2008 Taiwan Presidential Election, Chiang Yo-bor, the grandson of Chiang Chin-kuo, wrote about his attitude toward the spirit of democracy in his blog[50]. He describes the symbolic contribution of changing the name of the Memorial of Chiang Kai-shek into Liberty Square. For him, it would mark a great progression for all Taiwanese no matter Bensheng Ren or Waisheng Ren to step away from his grand-grandfather's influence. However, his articles were scolded by his family members, and some Waisheng Ren. He was abused as a bitch and traitor by the supporters of the KMT authoritarian government online.

Chiang Yo-bor notices that even though he was kicked out by the KMT traditional supporters, he was accepted by the DPP supporters using the Internet. He tries to claim that his political stance is neutral, and he searches for the mass benefit which democracy can facilitate (2008/5/9:1), however, the Net participants still automatically classify his political party intention. In the current Taiwanese society, the issue of national identity has been simplified as 'supporting KMT': succeeding the post Chiang Chi-kuo period of democratisation, and including Waisheng Ren and a few Bensheng Ren, and 'supporting DPP': which represents the Bensheng Ren group. From Chiang Yo-bor's perspective, there is very little space left in which one can avoid this simplified classification.

Chiang Yo-bor's experience and observations reflect that the influence of the real political power makes it very difficult for online discussants to be good cybercitizens, as Sunstein's and Yu's propose. In this study, though a great number of online discussants express their independent through their disagreement with the previous KMT state, they are still influenced by the political conflict between Taiwan's and China's governments, especially in Palm BBS and the Presidential Office forums. The abusive terms created to demonstrate their hostile intentions towards Mainland Chinese residents can be seen in

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[50] Refer to this webpage- http://www.yubou.tw/content.asp.

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this study. The images of cybercitizens therefore cannot just simply be constructed as 'good' and 'widely accepting of others'.

Chapter VIII   Participating to Deliberate? Generating Rational Discussions or Creating Flames

The proponents of E-democracy advocate that online political forums can pave the way for a 'virtual public sphere' (Papacharissi, 2002) or 'virtual sounding board' (Wilhelm, 1999:154). The discursive natures of online forums promise the possibility of being online arena, through which an ideal of deliberative democracy can be practiced. However, the central question is: to what extent are rational qualities revealed from these forums?

Without any face-to-face contact, the discussants in online forums are located remotely when communicating with each other. The whole process doesn't provide any social cues to assist the discussants in identifying each others' social status, educational background or incomes. The issue of whether debating in online environments without social cues can contribute the rational qualities of discussions, is still arguable. Some research results show that the absence of social cues makes some participants 'play' roles which mask their true identities (Turkle, 1996; Danet, 1998), so the qualities of debates are disturbed by these deliberately illusive users (Dahlberg, 2001; Hurremlmann et al. 2002, quoted in Albrecht, 2006:67. How the online participants play such roles to influence the discussions will be discussed in the next chapter). On the other hand, an absence of social cues is believed to be a factor which encourages shy people to participate in and contribute to rational discussions. It is to say, the depersonalized nature of online communication may benefit and maintain debates concentrating on 'rational-critical argumentation' (Hurremlmann et al, quoted in Albrecht, ibid), because participants are able to avoid the person-oriented style of communication which is observed frequently in many face-to-face interactions (ibid).

Albrecht (ibid:73) finds that the result from his empirical research totally opposes some researchers' findings (Sproull and Faraj, 1996; Kollock and Smith, 1999), which observe situations of flame wars, and self-interested and non-rational arguments. In Albrecht's chosen case study of the Leitbild Forum, which aims to collect ideas for future

development in Hamburg and influence future government decision making, the participants demonstrate not only a high level of discipline, but also present their debates as deliberative argumentations. Albrecht accounts for the diverse differences between his observations and other studies' results by pinpointing the level of involvement of moderators. The site he observes is not completely free; for the purpose of guaranteeing that 'rational debates' occur, four professional moderators are employed and are involved in the discussions quite often (contributing to 12.4% of the total discussions). The atmosphere of the debates is constituted as constructive, mutual and rationally orientated (ibid), which supports and encourages the participants to be rational discussants. However, for the atmosphere of the forum to be so rational and constructive is far from some participants' expectations, as one discussant describes, 'I was surprised by the contributions being so constructive and positive - in other forums, I always saw people scolding and bothering each other...' (ibid:73-74).

The results from Albrecht's study showed that the qualities of discussions depend on the forums' characteristics. Rational debates could be built upon by establishing a highly controlled environment, i.e. by the site owner employing professional moderators. The following sections will examine whether there is any differentiation of qualities among the three forums, which are sponsored by a commercial site, an academic organisation and the government.

8.1 Flames: Ignoring the Merits of Arguments

The emergence of flames collapses any possibilities of rational debates. Flaming or flaming wars, a form of outraged conflict, are those heated online discussions which present 'individual messages containing hostile or abusive language' (Bell et al., 2004:85). In the online environment, due to a lack of additional non-verbal communicative channels such as tone of voice, gesture, or inflection. Therefore, contention can escalate more quickly (ibid:86).

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In Hill and Hughes' (1998:59) account, *'..flames are vitriolic attacks on individuals, ignoring the merits of an argument (or even the lack of them) in favor of a personal, ad hominem attack'*. Flaming is therefore the opposite of 'rational discussions'.

Table 8.1. 1 A comparison of abusive terms among the three forums

Forum Item	Yahoo	Palm BBS	Presidential Office
Posts contain abusive terms N (%)	1540 (38.9%)	195 (37.5%)	12 (16.2%)
Mean frequencies of abusing terms	0.81/per post	0.86/per post	0.20/per post

In my study, the average amount of posts among the three forums that contain abusive terms (38.41%) is higher than in any other researches. Previously, the highest level is thirty per cent reported by Papacharissi (2004:276), who analyses whether messages contain abusive terms in the Usenet political groups. Papacharissi's finding shows that almost all of the impolite and uncivil messages emerge in reply posts. The result from my research reveals that approximately 74% of abusive posts are responses to a discussion, but 26% of abusive posts initiate a new topic with flames (approximately 10% of all posts). This number is higher than in previous studies.

The results in this study partially echo Hill and Hughes (1998:125) claim that a 'flame fest' of flaming generated by the process of debates can occur. In the context of my research, heated discussions are not the only reason to motivate the discussants to generate flames. Some discussants consciously create flames with others. They don't act as trollers, who are waiting for vulnerable users to take their bait; but they act deliberately without patients and attack individuals or groups. These kind of participants have been dubbed '放炮' (pronounced Fan-pou, original meaning 'to shoot blindly'), which in this

situation means 'releasing emotional or abusive terms deliberately.' In the next chapter, I will explain why some participants prefer to act in a 'Fan-pou' manner, despite being aware that this action does not reflect a rational attitude.

Table 8.1.1 presents the distribution of abusive terms used among the three forums. Yahoo shows that approximately 39% of the posts use abusive terms, and Palm BBS is just short of Yahoo by around 1%. The amount of posts containing abusive terms in the Presidential Office is half the amount found in the other two forums. A Chi-Square test provides evidence in support of the relations between the forum sponsorship type in connection with abusive terms used (Chi-Square value is 16.073, df=2, p<.01).

Accumulatively, Yahoo participants create 3217 occurrences of abusive terms, and Palm BBS participants use them 450 times. The discussants in the Presidential Office only use them 15 times. On average, each post in Yahoo and Palm contains 0.81 and 0.86 abusive terms, higher than 0.20 in Presidential Office (refer to table 8.1.1). ANOVA test results (df=2. p=.47<.05) support that the abusive terms are distributed differently among the three forums.

In the 1980s, the prevailing account of flaming in the Internet was that it was a side-effect of CMC.   But some experimental data reveals little or no significant flames (Hiltz, Turoff and Johnson, 1989; Lea and Spears, 1991) and others show more instances of flaming (Siegel et al., 1986).   Kaynay (1998:1135) argues that the Internet itself isn't a primary determinant of online uninhibited behaviour; it is more akin to a neutral communicative medium, and it is the social context in each forum which is the more reliable factor. 'If flaming were medium-dependent, flaming should be found universally across every newsgroup, bulletin board, and network' (ibid:1136). His empirical study proves that the four different background groups in the Usenet (Arab, Canada, Japan and India) create significantly different levels of flames amongst them.

In my study, the amounts of abusive terms used reach a statistical difference amongst the three forums. This result reflects Kaynay's argument that each forum represents a social context, and the content of each forum is the interactive result of that context. In this

sense, regarding all forums as the same is in opposition to the real communicative outcomes.

8.1.2 How Do They Abuse Each Other: A Rhetorical Convergence

Without any face-to-face interaction, texts become the only tool for communication. Table 8.1.2 reveals the results of the content analysis related to a classification of the abusive terms.

Accumulatively, of the total posts, 'defamation' has the number one rank (21.21%), and the second rank is 'ridicule' (18.11%), third and fourth ranks are 'name calling' (14.46%) and 'belittling' (14.38%). In the top three ranking subcategories of individual forums, 'defamation' and 'belittling' are the items which also span across all three forums; 'name calling' and 'ridicule' cover two forums (see table 8.1.2).

The following section linguistically analyses the first four sub-categories that span across all three forums.

Table 8.1. 2 The distributions of abusive terms in sub-categories among each forum

Forum Sub-categories	Yahoo N (frequencies) %		Palm BBS N (frequencies) %		Presidential Office N (frequencies) %		Total N (frequencies) %	
Defamation	678	21.10%[1]	100	22.22%[2]	2	13.33%[3]	780	21.21%[1]
Ridicule	613	19.08%[2]	49	10.89%	4	26.67%[1]	666	18.11%[2]
Name calling	412	12.82%	118	26.22%[1]	2	13.33%[3]	532	14.46%[3]
Belittling	471	14.66%[3]	56	12.44%[3]	2	13.33%[3]	529	14.38%[4]
Synonyms for liar	252	7.84%	7	1.56%	0	0.00%	259	7.04%
Erotic	202	6.29%	38	8.44%	0	0.00%	240	6.53%
Irony	169	5.26%	26	5.78%	4	26.67%[1]	199	5.41%
Slang	182	5.66%	12	2.67%	0	0.00%	194	5.27%
Threatening	154	4.79%	19	4.22%	1	6.67%	174	4.73%
Hyperbole	64	1.99%	23	5.11%	0	0.00%	87	2.37%
Others	16	0.50%	2	0.44%	0	0.00%	18	0.49%

1, 2, 3, 4 are the marks for the rank orders in each column

8.1.2.1 A linguistic analysis of abusive terms which span across the forums

- Defamation

In a defamatory speech/expression, a false fact would be asserted, and be harmful to the reputation of individuals (Wolfson, 1997:64). Defamation is a way to reduce truthfulness (ibid:65). In my study, the high quantity of defamatory terms used represents a relatively low degree of truthfulness resulting from the political/party conflicts in Taiwan's context.

Accordingly, there are two camps that form the targets of defamations in the online discursive process. The first group is the politicians, or so-called 'political superstars'. For example: President Chen Shui-bian and Ma Ying-jeou, the new Presidential candidate for the 2008 elections.

Table 8.1.2. 1 Examples of abusive terms used in defamation

Examples of abusive terms used	Pronunciations	Direct translations into English	Explanations and connotations
只愛作秀	Jhih-ai-zuo-siou	only love to show off to people	Implies President Chen doesn't do any good things for people.
假拼經濟亂花錢	Jia-pin-jing-ji-luan-hua-cian	the economic policy is fake; spending budgets without any good plans	Implies President Chen' policies are all bad.
阿扁已經發大財	A-bian-yi-jing-fa-da-cai	A-bian (Taiwanese President) has become very rich	Implies President Chen is corrupt.

Ma Ying-jeou, and some officers who work for government, all form topics for heated discussion containing defamatory speech. Any of the words they choose for their speeches, their facial expressions, or their actions, so easily become the sources of defamations for some discussants.

One famous case related to the defamation of politicians involves a critique of Ciou Yi-ren, the former Director General of the National Security Bureau. Ciou played an important role in the 319 'two-bullet event'[51], his facial gesture, which was broadcast by the electronic media on March 19th 2004, has been interpreted as 'a foxy smile'. The

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[51] On March 19th, 2004, before the date of the Presidential Election, Presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian was shot by two bullets when he was marching in Tainan. As a General Director of the National Security Bureau, Cho stopped the marching, and made a decision to dispatch Chen to the Ci-Mei hospital. Another candidate, Lien Chan, also quit all the activities immediately. Later, the rumour was diffused to say, the killer was assigned by the DPP, or by Ciou. The whole event now is named as the 'two-bullet event'.

symbol of a fox, in Chinese and other languages, represents a 'cunning' person, thus, the foxy smile of Ciou implies that he is a major suspect for planning the assassination of Chen. This idea was initially published in the online political forum, PTT, and later diffused to other online political forums. Here is an example echoing the 'foxy smile' image, posted a year after the event happened (quoted from the post in Yahoo on May 15th, 2005).

Author: love_24h_love

It is quite hard to forget Ciou, Yi-ren's foxy smile on March 19th, 2004. His smile reflects the truth already! Let's vote for another party and terminate the DPP's authority.

In response to this defamation, Ciou, in a later interview (published in *Weekly News*, Oct 16th, 2005) made a joke about himself 'I am cunning, and I am really a dirty politician. Don't trust me, because I am a politician.'

The second group that forms a target for defamation is the online discussants themselves. Without physical contact, conflicts are based on their political group preferences that are shown within the text-interactions. As to the conflict between the different political groups, defamations are created quite frequently by the discussants. The following is an example. The discussant alberthkkimo expresses his stance as opposite to deep Pan-Green, and responds repugnantly to those posts which support stances in line with the DPP. Aside from discussing politics, the deep Pan-Green supporter, dinohuang, publishes a message to describe where and in which situation he met alberthkkimo (quoted from the post in Yahoo on July 17th, 2005),

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'*...I observed him (alberthkkimo) entering a brothel, it is so unbelievable that he needs three prostitutes to satisfy his desire...I wonder, is he a normal man? Or maybe it is because he is a colonial labourer in Hong-Kong?*'

The way Dinohuang releasing his/her anger toward alberthkkimo is by defaming his/her reputation concerning sexuality and profession. The IP address shows that alberthkkimo is located in Hong-Kong, and he/she usually claims he/she is a professional manager working in a professional field. The texts from Dinohuang's writing reflect a higher extent of distrust between him and alberthkkimo. Dinohuang doesn't trust that alberthkkimo is an ordinary person with a professional background as he/she describes. Thereafter, he makes a defamatory remark in order to defeat alberthkkimo.

- Belittling

In Chinese culture, to belittle someone is a common way to pull down the opposite discussant's status. As I've discussed in the previous chapter, some terms that are created or re-used are related directly/indirectly to Mainland Chinese people. Most of those terms are based on the belittling approach.

Table 8.1.2. 2 Examples of abusive terms used to belittle others

Examples of abusive terms used	Pronunciations	Direct translations into English	Explanations and connotations
小鼠輩	Siao-shu-bei	Little mouse	Describing a person as being 'as cunning as a mouse'.
版豬	Ban-jhu	A pig of the board	Here Ban-jhu specifically indicates the board moderator. Board moderator, 版主, is a homophone of 'Ban-jhu'. So the discussant uses 'Ban-jhu - a pig of the board' to deride the board moderator.
弱智	Ruo-jhih	Retard	Ruo-jhih is a term describing the people who have the lowest-IQ.

Here, I classify the belittling terms three categories, based on the adjectives which are used in a Chinese context to express lower status. The first is to belittle someone as being an 'animal'; the second, as a 'criminal', and third, as an 'idiot'. Pigs are adopted as symbols of laziness and stupidity, cows as stubbornness, and mice as cunning. '支那豬'

(pronounced as 'Jhih-na-jhu') and '支那牛' (pronounced as 'Jhih-na-niou') have been analysed in the previous chapter. A similar approach creates more abusive terms, i.e. '版豬' (pronounced 'Ban-jhu'), indicating the board moderator (please see table 8.1.2.2).

'匪' (fei) is a good example to help explain the second camp's approach. 'Fei' usually represents those people who are impolite, or uneducated. So, '共匪' (Gong-fei, see page 172), and '土匪' (pronounced 'Tu-fei', meaning local bandits) are used by the discussants in order to indicate somebody's speech and attitude are rude, non-intellectual or violent. In the example of 'Board washing' posts - posts that duplicate messages in the forums from the same day - are restricted in most forums. If a discussant deliberately 'washes the board', he/she annoys other discussants, and would be criticised as '土匪' (Tu-fei), because washing the board is seen as a disruptive behaviour in online discussions.

The third camp chooses to belittle the opponent as being as stupid as an idiot or as being retarded. The most common terms that appear in these contexts are '笨蛋' (pronounced 'Ben-dan', meaning 'idiot'),' 白痴 ' (pronounces as 'Bai-chih', meaning 'extremely stupid'), and ' 弱智 ' (pronounced 'Ruo-jhih', meaning 'lower IQ'), which are all straightforward terms to abuse the antagonists.

• Name calling

In Taiwan's political context, the conflict between the two big groups, Pan-Blue and Pan-Green has become more and more serious due to the historical background, ethnic groups and different languages (please see chapter I). In this study, I've found this conflict also extends into the online political forums.

Table 8.1.2.3 provides four examples which originate from the two political groups, Deep-Pan-Green and Deep-Pan-Blue. 陳阿扁 (Chen-a-bian) and 飯綠 (Fan-lyu) are

created or used by the Deep-Pan-Blue group; conversely, 軟腳馬 (Ruan-jiao-ma) and 飯桶 (Fan-tong) are produced and used by the Deep-Pan-Green group.

Table 8.1.2. 3 Examples of abusive terms used in name calling

Examples of abusive terms used	Pronunciations	Direct translations into English	Explanations and connotations
陳阿扁	Chen-a-bian	Chen, A-bian	A nickname transferred from Chen's name. 'Bian' in Chinese also has the meaning of 'to be beaten'. So, the connotation here is: Chen needs to be beaten.
軟腳馬	Ruan-jiao-ma	A horse's legs are weak	Ma Ying-jeou is the former Chairman of KMT. Ma is his surname. In Chinese, 'Ma' means horse. Because his style is criticised as too soft and indecisive; calling someone 'Ruan-jiao-ma' is a way of laughing at their lack of boldness in decision-making.
飯桶	Fan-tong	A rice container	In Chinese, Fan-tong usually is used to describe people who are lazy and stupid. Here, Fan-tong is the homophone of '泛統' - a camp supporting the unification with Mainland China. Thus, 飯桶's connotation is 'stupid and lazy people who support the unification with Mainland China'.
飯綠	Fan-lyu	The rice colour is green	Fan-tong is created by the Deep-Pan-Blue group. Green represents the people who support Taiwanese independence.

Group leaders and colours are the source of inspiration for creating such terms. Following this logic, abusive terms are produced during the discursive process online. Table 8.1.2.4 provides more examples of name calling.

Table 8.1.2. 4 Abusive terms created by the deep-pan-blue and deep-pan-green groups

Political Group Abusive terms	Created and used by Pan-Green group	Created and used by Pan-Blue group
For politicians or party leaders	軟腳馬(Ruan-jiao-ma)， 馬小九(Ma-shai-jeou)， 跛腳馬(Bo-jiao-ma) etc	陳阿扁(Chen-a-bian)， 陳狗扁(Chen-go-bian)， 陳被扁(Chen-bay-bian) etc
For political group preferences	藍教徒(Lan-jiao-tu)， 泛藍(Fan-lan)， 飯桶(Fan-tong) etc	綠寶貝(Lyu-bow-bei)， 泛綠(Fan-lyu)， 飯綠(Fan-lyu) etc

The characteristics and names of each politician are the basis for creating abusing terms. Whether Ruan-jiao-ma, Ma-shai-cheu or Bo-jiao-ma, they all indicate that Ma Ying-jeou, the former chairman of KMT, is unreliable. By contrast, President Chen Shui-bian is more determined and strict, and many discussants want to 'beat' him. His first name, Bian, is a homophone with the verb 'to beat' in Chinese, thus Chen-a-bian, Chen-go-bian or Chen-bay-bian all imply that 'he needs to be beaten by people'.

Lan-jiao-tu and Lyu-bow-bei have the strongest connotations with the male sexual organs. Lan means blue, but due to Lan-jiao being a homophone with '爛鳥' (Lan-jiao), which means 'male genitals' in Taiwanese language, the extensive meaning of 'Lan-jiao-tu' calls someone 'the disciple of a man's sexual organs'. Similarly, lyu means green, and 'bow-bei' is another nickname for a man's genitals, 'Lyu-bow-bei' thus has connotations linked to sexual organs.

• Ridicule

'Wa-ha-ha-ha' and 'ho-ho-ho' are the imitations of the sound of laughter. Wa-ha-ha-ha originates from a character within China Opera, and ho-ho-ho imitates the character's voices from Japanese cartoons. Wa-ha-ha-ha is a stronger expression rather than ho-ho-ho. In the discursive process of online forums, these terms are used either at the very beginning of the posts, or put at the end of the posts.

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In the sentence 'It is too ridiculous! Pan-blue groups damage them and kill themselves! Wa-ha-ha-ha!'[52] the object of ridicule here is pan-blue, so by adding 'wa-ha-ha-ha', it implies 'I am laughing at you, and I am higher than you.' Sometimes, the author would add the symbols ')))))' after 'wa-ha-ha-ha'. It means the sounds of wa-ha-ha-ha will echo extensively.

'Ho-ho-ho' is less abusive compared with 'wa-ha-ha-ha'. It can be used more widely when accusing anybody. For example, 'Ho-ho-ho, Sea-Food (a nickname of an online discussant) is an idiot[53]!' Ho-ho-ho is used to entertain the author him/herself; the direction of the sounds is toward the author himself/herself, not openly towards the public, rather like an inner monologue.

Table 8.1.2. 5 Examples of abusive terms used to ridicule others

Examples of abusive terms used	Pronunciations	Direct Translations into English	Explanations and connotations
哇哈哈哈	Wa-ha-ha-ha	The same as ha ha.	Imitating the sound of laughter outwardly.
呵呵呵	Ho-ho-ho	The same as ho ho.	Imitating the sound of laughter inwardly.

8.1.3 Responses to Flames

Flaming is described as a war in the virtual world (Bell et al., 2004:85). The conflict in my study is a reflection of the political conflict between Mainland China and Taiwan, and between the different political groups in Taiwan.

Many new terms have been created during the process of online discussions. As online discussant Postman states, *'political forums online are arenas which are full of verbal disasters and monsters.'* In Kaynay's (1998:1140) study, the topics related to politics

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[52] Adapted from the post in Yahoo on Sep 15th, 2005.
[53] Adapted from the post published in Yahoo on Aug 17th, 2005.

have a higher tendency to generate flames than other topics. My study echoes this finding, that 'discussing politics' seems to generate flames more easily than other topics of discussions.

Board moderators are usually offered the right to edit or delete the inappropriate messages which break the board regulations. Their attitudes play a key role in adjusting/editing those abusive terms, however, their actions of adjusting, editing or deleting sometimes create more arguments or flames. The discussants insist that they have the right of freedom of speech, so they should have the right to talk about whatever they want to. If the board moderator deletes their messages, usually it creates a serious conflict between them. The following is an example of a discussant's reaction after he/she realises his/her post has been deleted, and the reason is stated with abusive terms on the heading (quoted from Yahoo Political Forum, 13/08/2005).

Author: fu6ai61312d@yahoo.com.tw

Title: I call their name Fan-tong (see page 187) and you delete my post immediately, but Fan-tong can discuss whether Taiwanese women are bitches or not. The person who deletes my post is a real bitch.

Content: *You, board moderator, are so afraid to hear people call Fan-tong as Fan-tong, ok, I will call them right now as much as I can, Fan-tong Fan-tong*

Fan-tong Fan-tong, what's wrong with my action? I have the freedom of speech! ...You say you are neutral without being influenced by any political stance, but your actions just prove that you are a bitch! Bitch, bitch, bitch, wa-ha-ha-ha-ha

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However, the board moderators also insist on their duties of maintaining the board order. In answer to the aggravated fu6ai61312d, the board moderator, Sunny_barbies, describes her rules are follows.

Author: sunny_barbies

Title: if you don't like to be regulated by a board moderator, please go to those boards that have no board moderators

Content:

The posts discussing the issues of Taiwanese women, however, are just discussions. And that is why they use '?' at the end of their titles. This topic is an open-ended question. By contrast, it is very obvious that you use abusive terms in the title, but not an open-ended question for the later discussion! It is the game rule in this forum, if the title contains any abusive terms, I definitely will delete them without hesitating. .....if you don't like my style of management, you are so welcome to move to another board! I wouldn't force you to stay here to accept my judgment.

Sunny_barbies's experience reflects that, as a moderator in a political forum, it is so easy to be doubted and suspected of being a supporter of certain political parties. The anger from the discussants usually will create flames between participants and moderators. So, some political forums, i.e. Palm BBS, finally adopts 'natural policies' through which to delete all the posts every few days or every few months without management. Alternatively, some adopt a so-called 'non-suing, non-managing' policy, which means that the board moderators only delete or edit those messages that are reported by other discussants, as a major way to moderate the flames.

For most of the online discussants, encountering troublemakers who deliberately create attacks is an unpleasant experience. Some of them learn how to use abusive terms to retaliate, while other discussants choose to leave the online political forums altogether. Of course, some discussants choose to lurk[54] in order to avoid this language war. The

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[54] 'Lurk' means a passive, non-interactive action in a chatroom or newsgroup. Usually, the users just read the post in the forums without replying to the previous posts or initiating any new topics.

postman's (user ID) post published in another forum (exchange diary) explains, '...*online political forums are designed for those people who want to argue or fight. If you are peaceful people, lurking is enough for you. Don't involve with any flames in the political forums, trust me, it is really terrible...*'

8.2 Ready to Argue Rationally?

By examining the flames in this study, it appears that approximately 40% of the posts use abusive terms. Still, 60% of posts don't contain any abusive terms in their contents. In chapter IV, I discussed the idea that rationality is a basic requirement for examining whether the discussions fit into a framework of deliberative democracy. The query of my research here is: to what extent do the participants present rational contents during the discursive process?

In chapter V, I discussed the reason why the genre of Argumentative Essays (議論文： Yi-lun-wen) is used for the purpose of rational deliberation in Chinese. The function of '議' (Yi) is to discuss or to deliberate, and is especially used in compositions that have a purpose of collective discussion. '論' (Lun) means 'presenting your own arguments' (Lee, 2002:10). The format of the Argumentative Essay genre is designed for 'deeply analyzing, presenting reasons logically, and stating your own arguments' (Shei, 2001:35). If any discussant intends to discuss with sufficient reason, he/she has to present their ideas as a genre of Argumentative Essays. Only through this genre, a clear argument can be constructed completely, and the communicative meaning for the purpose of debates can be transmitted to other participants. The skills of writing Argumentative Essays are restricted to certain approaches[55] in the leading part and body of the text, and also have to follow a set sequence 起 (pronounced 'Ci', meaning 'beginning'), 承 (pronounced 'Cheng', meaning 'following'), 轉 (pronounced 'Jhuan', meaning 'transmit'), and 合 (pronounced 'He', meaning 'convergence'). However, these skills are not seen in other

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[55] Directly pointing out the main stance: (by opening the door you can see the mountain immediately.) 2. Leading to the point and stating the background knowledge. 3. Interpretation of what the subject is. 4. Enquiry into the issue. 5. Quote from another's words (e.g. old sayings, famous people's speech). The aim of the main body is to verify the arguments, usually three skills are adopted, such as presenting his/her arguments directly only, refuting other people's arguments only, or a mix of both.

genres of essays[56], such as Practical Writing, which is aimed at constituting official documents, Lyrical Prose, for revealing the emotional or aesthetic feelings, Narration, for recording our daily lives, and Expository Writing, for presenting facts as truths beyond doubt: none of these have such strict presentational rules.

Based on the texts as the communicative means, the online discussants have to write their arguments down. The genre of Argumentative Essay is the most suitable choice for the discussants to present their reasons logically and completely. The discussant who is eager to participate in a rational debate would choose to present his/her contents in the genre of Argumentative Essays. Overall, the results from the content analysis shows that 20.40% of all posts are argumentative essays, and this number is lower than the posts contain abusive terms. The diffusion of the argumentative essays among the three forums is significantly different. Table 8.2.1 indicates that the Presidential Office is almost three times higher than Yahoo, and two times higher than Palm BBS. The degree of deviations reaches the statistical significance (Chi-Square value is 16.073, df=2, p< .01).

Table 8.2. 1 A Comparison of the presentation of argumentative essays across the three forums

Forum	Yahoo	Palm BBS	Presidential Office
N (%)	735 (18.6%)	144 (27.7%)	49 (66.2%)

Chi-Square value 16.073, df=2, P<.01

Among the three forums, the discussants in the Presidential Office are more eager to provide Argumentative Essays compared with the other two forums. In chapter VI, the length of words in the Presidential Office on average is 495.14 words/per post. Wu

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[56] Based on the National Education Ministry's (1997) classification, there are four genres of Chinese Compositions. The first is Practical Writing, which applies to letter writing, invitations, or official documents. The second genre is Lyrical Prose, which aims to reveal emotional or aesthetic feelings. The third genre is Narration, which aims to record the facts within our daily lives. The last one is Expository Writing, which aims to present facts as truths beyond doubt.

(2007:128), in her field study in China, finds that in the designated in-depth board, the moderator requests each post to be written with more than 500 words for the purpose of encouraging a higher quality of argument. The board moderator thereafter chooses the submitted posts to publish. In my study, the length of words in the Presidential Office forum is very close to the request of the in-depth board in China, even though the board moderator doesn't insist on a minimum length of words in each post. Intensively, the Presidential Office discussants act more closely to reasonable participants, using less abusive terms or flames, and writing argumentative essays with more words to construct their arguments.

8.3 Providing Sources of Information

As Sunstein (2001:91-103) notes, the process of sharing experiences and knowledge is a kind of social glue, which supports certain functions for the whole society, such as problem-solving and mutual understanding, or works as a vehicle for self-identification. In a heterogeneous society, such sharing via the spreading of information possibly would aid the improvement of the whole society. Doubtlessly, new technologies play a significant role in diffusing information.

However, such sharing also carries with it a potential threat against this salutary process. Since individuals operate this diffusive system, especially on the net, there are a lot of possibilities to receive 'risky' messages from unknown sources, containing false information which cascades easily through the channel of the Internet without examination. That is to say, if users receive this false information, beneficial processes will be interrupted because the opportunity to learn from others' shared experiences will have deteriorated. By contrast, the beneficial process would not be diminished if the information provided proves to be veridical (ibid:103). In this respect, examining the source of the information's provider is a way of testifying whether online posts tend towards a veridical 'information provider' (Wilhelm, 1999:160) or not. If the former is true, the quality of the discussions could be expected to be higher.

Table 8.3. 1 Amounts of information with sources provided among the three forums

Forum	Yahoo	Palm BBS	Presidential Office
N (%)	609 (15.4%)	92 (17.7%)	30 (44.59%)

In my study, through the use of content analysis, approximately 16% of all the posts provide their sources of information. Separately, there are more posts providing sourced information in the Presidential Office than in the other two forums (see table 8.3.1). The quantity of posts amounts to around 44.59%, which is higher than Yahoo's fifteen per

cent and Palm BBS's approximately 18%. The result revealed from the Presidential Office is quite similar to Hill and Hughes's (1998:47-76) empirical research in Usenet Newsgroup. A Chi-Square test (df=2, p<.01) also supports that the quantities of information with sources provided is connected with the forum sponsorship' type.

Table 8.3. 2 A comparison of information sources and the ANOVA test of frequencies of information adopted among the three forums

Forum Sources of Information	Yahoo %	Palm BBS %	Presidential Office %	Significance value of ANOVA test*
Newspaper (or TV news) reports/comments	79.80%	68.04%	42.18%	.818
Academic research	3.37%	3.09%	15.70%	.000**
Online database	7.19%	11.34%	8.82%	.020*
Laws	2.45%	6.18%	15.70%	.000**
Historical events based on official reports, or pop writers' books:	2.14%	1.03%	7.78%	.004**
Official statistical reports	3.68%	10.31%	9.82%	.356
Articles from private Blogs:	1.37%	0%	0%	.733

* p<.o5, ** p<.01

From table 8.3.2, it can be seen that relying on news as the main source of information is quite common across the three forums. Yahoo presents a highly concentrated distribution (approximately 80%) in adopting news as the main source of information, as well as Palm BBS (near 68%), while in the Presidential Office it is less than 50%. This finding

echoes Hill and Hughes's (ibid:58) empirical research which shows that most information comes from press releases. Namely, for most of the online political forum discussants, news/reports have a higher credibility for use in support of their points.

ANOVA tests prove that there are four items reaching statistically significant differences (refer to Table 8.3.2). They are: academic research (journals, conference papers, books, and theories), on-line databases, laws, and historical events based on official reports (or pop writers' books). This reflects the fact that the three forums participants have different preferences within these four items.

The participants of the Presidential office are more likely to adopt the items of academic research, laws, and historical events as their information sources, compared with the other two forums. Palm BBS participants on the other hand show higher preferences than the other forums' discussants for items from online databases and official statistical reports.

The second rank of information source provider in the Presidential Office is academic research and laws. Based on the research about persuasion conducted by Hovland (1953, cited from Won, 1992:96), one important factor influencing the persuasive consequence is the trustworthiness of the information source. In this case, the results gained from academic research and carefully considered laws, represent a high quality of reliability. Hovland's analysis also shows that any expertise revealed by the information would be a factor to influence the acceptance of receivers.

Through the process of analysing the content from the Presidential Office, a unique phenomenon presents itself which doesn't appear in the other two forums: some authors (thirty percent of all authors) tend to publish their real names and titles instead of nicknames or IDs. Usually, the content of their posts are related to research results, or a suggestion about revising the law. The following two posts are provided as examples. The first one is related to the Constitution, while the second shows a discussion about the Pin Yin policy. 'Pinyin' is a system which uses Roman letters to represent sounds in

Mandarin or another Chinese languages. In this case, the Pinyin system is designed for Ho-Lo language, which is used by the majority of the population in Taiwan (Tsao, 1997:4).

Title: Constitution of Republic of China

Author : Jain-Ann Lee.

Points of view

Chapter II. RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF THE PEOPLE
Article 7 All citizens of the Republic of China, irrespective of sex, religion, race, class, or party affiliation, shall be equal before the law.....................

Article 24 Any public functionary who, in violation of law, infringes upon the freedom or right of any person shall, in addition to being subject to disciplinary measures in accordance with law, be held responsible under criminal and civil laws. The injured person may, in accordance with law, claim compensation from the State for damage sustained.

Request:
Please add to Article 25, the people shall have freedom to be without fear of being threatened or kidnapped

Jing-Chin-Jyun-An,
Jain-Ann

In this case, Jain-Ann Lee (Lee is her surname) provides a vision of how and why it is important to add article 25 into the Constitution of the Republic of China. *Jing-Chin-Jyun-An* (敬請鈞安), similar to 'sincerely yours' written at the end of a letter, particularly shows the author's respect for those with higher status. The polite terms 'request' and 'Jing-Chin-Jyun-An' in her post's content very rarely appear in online discussions.

The following example was posted by a PhD candidate studying at Tokyo University, who also teaches in De-Jin University in Taiwan. She provides information from linguistics research in order to revise a policy's error related to the government's research.

Topic: response to 'Two kinds of Pin-Yin Systems' - whether the Japanese Pin-Yin System works with Ho-Lo language?
Author: Ten-Huei, Do

Contents: ...i.e the word 'be ki', for the user of Pai-Hwa system will mean 'to forget', but for the user of Tong-Ung system it will be considered to mean 'fly higher' . From this comparison we can find, the Pin-Yin system adopted by the government doesn't really provide as consistent an understanding as the researchers who work for government have announced. I don't quite understand why the government accepts this system as an official standard. Would you please to consider revising it?

Jing-Cing-Jyun-An
Do, Ten-Huei,
PhD candidate of Linguists studying in Tokyo University.
(Also a lecturer at De-Jin University)

Actually, whether we look at the first case or the second case, the words used by the authors don't reflect a peer-to-peer group tone, but instead are more akin to a 'lower to higher' discourse, e.g. words like 'request', 'Jing-Cing-Jyun-An' or phrases like 'would you please consider' are used. 'Request', 'Jing-Cing-Jyun-An' or 'would you please to consider' usually are adopted in official writing in Chinese, and can particularly be seen in documents submitted to the government. There is a Chinese genre of Official Writing to the Bureaucracy (公文, pronounced 'Gong-wen', only used for documents written to the bureaucracy), and it is an essential code of conduct to provide the full name of the

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author. In this respect, these authors already assume the person they want to pass their messages to is not an ordinary resident, but a member of the government, so they choose terms carefully in order to fit the category of Official Writing to the Government.

The petition style of writing is used by these participants as well. They would like to present their situation in order to request help from the government or to suggest something to the government.

Topic: Alternative thinking aside from the political conflict

Author: Gu-Da, Hung

Contents:

The atmosphere of the Taiwanese Political environment has only left conflict. This essay is provided as a contribution to the issue of how to solve this problem. The aim of this essay is to indicate how to learn to love each other...government plays an important role in teaching the importance of love. 'Love' is the only way to solve the political conflict.

Please reply to me.

The discussant in the above post intends to communicate with government members rather than ordinary participants. He requests the reply from the government, but doesn't show any willingness to discuss the issue with other discussants. If the purpose of giving a post in the forum is to deliver a 'memorandum speech' to the policy maker and avoid the second and later steps in the communication process, the discursive function is ignored and abandoned. Finkel (1985:892-893) discusses the factors of political participation, and points out that the psychological variable 'sense of political efficacy' influences the process of participants' involvement. With a sense of political efficacy, the individual is capable of acting effectively in the political realm. When the participants have this sense, they would feel themselves to be able to influence government and

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politics, and the government would respond to their demands (Craig and Maggiotto, 1982, quoted in Finkel, ibid). In my study, some authors intend to bridge the hierarchal gap between bottom and top. Their efforts are not to contribute to deliberation in the forum, instead, they would like to intervene in the policy making individually rather than through a deliberative mechanism to reach a collective consensus. They are influenced and guided by political efficacy, and with strong belief they trust the government will respond to them. Online activities (in this case, publishing their messages) are the means to implement their political self-competence.

8.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the abusive terms/ flames are created frequently (almost 40%) during the process of online discussions, and this number is higher than any other studies. Furthermore, 10% of posts initially and purposefully adopt abusive terms. This data shows that not all the discussants adopt abusive terms because they want to respond to the ad hominem argumentations.

Overall, approximately 20% of posts are identified as argumentative essays, and 16% of posts provide the source of information, yet, the proportions of these two categories are lower than the posts contain abusive terms.

Through comparisons of the three forums, a clear feature emerges: the qualities of the discussions differ according to the forum sponsorship types. The Presidential Office presents less abusive terms and flames, and more discussants choose to publish argumentative essays. A unique phenomenon occurred in the Presidential Office: nearly one third of the discussants preferred to give their real names instead of their user IDs. Yahoo, sponsored by a commercial site, shows its anarchistic tendency through a high percentage of posts containing abusive terms, the least proportions of argumentative essays adopted, and the least amount of references to information sources.

The qualities revealed from the discussions among different forums could be varied due to the online participants having sensed/predicted what the characteristics of those forums are, and with whom they would encounter. Leaving the real names on the Presidential Office forums provides a point to engage with this argument.

Chapter IX Talking Politics @ Anonymous Online Forums: Inviting Anarchy, or Fostering Deliberation?

With the hope of reviving a form of public life, online forums seem to provide a place for people to take part in public debates. Text-based communication allows researchers to observe the process of discussions, and examine the qualities revealed from their contents. In the previous two chapters, I have analysed the results from a content analysis of the forum discussion posts in my study.

In order to clarify how the online participants identify their roles for engaging in discussions, which may not directly appear in the texts published in the forums, the method of the in-depth interview has been adopted; a methodology through which we can understand how "to gather insights into participants' thinking, and learn more about the context of the individuals' world view" (Rossman and Rallis, 2003:180). Based on the qualitative discourse analysis of twenty online users' data, gathered from political online forums in 2006, it has been possible to analyse participants' perspectives towards online discussions.

9.1 Motivations for Participating in Online Discussions

9.1.1 Learning from Discussing/Arguing

Why does a participant want to take part in online discussions? Kollock (1999:227-228) lists five possible reasons. The first is that a person anticipates reciprocity that he/she has valuable information to contribute to a discussion, and expects to receive useful and helpful information in return. The second possibility is that the person is motivated to cultivate his/her reputation. He/she can demonstrate written skills, a willingness to help other discussants, or an ability to supply high quality information, all of which work towards increasing one's prestige in an online community. The third possibility is that the

discussant wants to have some effect on their world. The fourth reason is to share some information that meets in individual or group's needs. The final possibility is the participant's desire to search for a group in which to remain and interact with others, to satisfy his/her emotional needs.

In my study, most of the interviewees (16 out of 20, 80%) express that the main reason for their involvement in political forums is their deep concern for political issues. They choose online forums because they can exchange their thoughts without some of the distractions or pressures related to face-to-face interaction. Especially when engaging in serious discussions related to political debates, the characteristic of asynchronous responses allows them to have more time for consideration. Generally, they revealed that they were motivated by a mix of anticipated reciprocity and a willingness to affect.

[Interviewee - Murmurgirl[57]] '...online discussions allow me to response asynchronously, so I have plenty time to construct the content of what I want to discuss or debate with others. This is very important to me, as I have no ability to argue with others immediately, even if I know they are wrong.'

The interviewee Murmurgirl expresses that she lacks confidence in oral/face-to-face debates. Text-based communication however, provides her with an opportunity to be involved in such discussions.

When participants take part in forums, they don't always get involved in discussions; sometimes they lurk and read messages without posting any comments. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents recognise that they would have more motivation to get involved with discussions when they are associated with heated issues reported on by the mainstream media.

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[57] Murmurgirl is one of participants of Yahoo Political Forum. In order to protect the virtual confidentiality of my interviewees, I use names which they have agreed to show on this study.

As to what sparks participants' initial engagement in discussions, or makes them decide to begin a new topic, the main motivating factors are, firstly, when issues being discussed are associated with participants, and secondly, when incorrect information is revealed in the threads.

[Interviewee - WP[58]] '...the moment for me to start taking part in the discussions is when I find issues that I am profoundly concerned with, and I feel I have to say something.
[Interviewer] What kinds of issues attract you to discuss with others?
[Interviewee - WP] For example, the conflict between deep-blue and deep-green; this issue influences the stability of this (Taiwan's) society, so I am deeply involved with these issues. If I find other discussants publish comments which contain incorrect information, I feel it is my responsibility to provide accurate information.'

If the issues discussed in the threads are relevant to their interests or concerns, the interviewees choose to become discussants in the forums. When they read others' comments about their messages which present a biased interpretation, they re-comment on this reply. The interviewee, Meichu[59], is interested in international affairs and humanitarian issues; she therefore couldn't ignore another discussant's effort to challenge her humanitarian stance. On one occasion, she encountered another discussant in the thread discussing the London Tube Terror attack.

[Interviewee - Meichu] '....I was really bothered by one guy's reply to my previous post. Later, I posted a message to him on the discussion board in order to clarify what his real motivation was.
[Interviewer] Bothered? Why?
[Interviewee - Meichu] Because he said those terrorists 'deserve' to die. So I wanted to make sure he meant to say that, and I was trying to give my view on this issue.

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[58] WP and Handsome Handsome Man are participants of Palm BBS.
[59] Meichu is a participant of the Presidential Office Forum.

Most of the interviewees believe that they can benefit from the process of interacting with other discussants. They appreciate their messages being challenged or examined by other discussants, if the arguments are constructive and meaningful. Interviewee Handsome-Handsome Man shares his view about the benefit of participating in the discussions:

> ...you can encounter some professional persons ...interacting with them can extend your vision ...they will help you to correct the errors you made in your posts.

The results from the in-depth interviews show that 'obtaining extensive knowledge' is the key element discussants consider when judging whether or not they participated in a successful discussion. Quite a high proportion of interviewees (85%, 17 out of 20) cared about whether any useful knowledge was revealed from the discussions. The contents of messages would not be meaningful otherwise. For the interviewees 'useful knowledge' includes explanations of laws, interpretations of historical events, and arguments surrounding theories.

For example, interviewee Snow[60] presents an analysis of the clothing market when arguing about the issue of whether the Taiwanese government should undertake commercial negotiations with the Chinese government. She reveals information drawn from her professional experience as a manager of a clothes manufacturing company. According to her observations, though some other discussants in the forum which she participates in still hold diverse views, they recognise that they have been involved in a good discussion and have learnt from what she has written.

The process of discussion not only provides a chance to learn something from the interaction, it also allows the discussants to share and exchange their insights. In this respect, 'arguing' is an acceptable approach for establishing a foundation of mutual understanding. Whether the respondents believe that 'no arguing means no gain!' (interviewee Tooger[61]), or 'argumentative issues create more understanding through the

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[60] Snow is a discussant in Palm BBS.
[61] Tooger is a discussant in Palm BBS.

process of debates' (interviewee James Wang[62]), all emphasise the importance of arguing.

However, by their definition, 'arguing' is not the same as 'quarrelling', which has been dubbed '口水戰' (Ko-Shuei Zhen - meaning 'saliva war'). Interviewee TX[63] provides a definition of how to clarify the differences between 'arguing' and 'Ko-Shuei Zhen'.

[Interviewee - TX] 'For me, arguments contain good points, and are backed up with excellent theories and references ...by contrast, Ko-Shuei Zhen present no main points, and contain abusive terms sometimes.
[Interviewer] Can you provide any examples of Ko-Shuei Zhen?
[Interviewee - TX] For instance, some discussants always try to reinforce the gaps between different ethnic groups or stances. But they don't want to communicate with each other; they just stick to their own stance. There are famous cases of discussions involving some users from Mainland China who refuse to listen to our (Taiwanese) voices; they just demonstrate the same point repeatedly, despite the fact that we provide relevant evidence proving the errors of their points.'

The discursive qualities of 'Ko-Shuei Zhen' are usually intolerance and pointlessness. Most of the interviewees express that they avoid involvement with Ko-Shuei Zhen, 'because getting involved with Ko-Shuei Zhen just wastes time' (quote from TX). The reason why some discussants love to initiate Ko-Shuei Zhen is because they enjoy quarrels, 'it is very obvious that those guys create quarrels deliberately, and wait for someone to get trapped in their nonsensical, never-ending quarrels' (quote from TX).

9.1.2 Satisfying Desires Arising from Emotional Drives

As we have seen, not all participants have reasonable motivations for taking part in discussions; some even exhibit emotional or irresponsible attitudes. As Kollock

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[62] James Wang is a participant in the Presidential Office Forum.
[63] TX is a participant in Palm BBS.

(1999:227) mentions, some discussants participate in forum discussions in order to satisfy their emotional needs through finding a group to take part in. Interviewee Phdsimon[64] was banished from the forum member list due to his posts containing erotic innuendoes. He expresses his motivation for attending discussions as 'Da-Pi' ('Da' means 'slap', and 'Pi' means 'butt'). The combination of 'Da-Pi' is a Chinese slang which has come to mean 'chitchat without specific topics'. Phdsimon seeks a place where he can chitchat to kill time, and disagrees with the view that participating in discussions has to be so serious, because 'the freedom of speech is a basic right of human beings, they (the board moderators) should respect different users.'

Another interviewee, Kui-Lan, publishes her posts irregularly. She tends to post in moments of despair when she can no longer contain her anger about the political chaos in Taiwan. Therefore, for Kui-Lan, online political forums are a channel for her to release her emotions.

[Interviewee - Kui-Lan] '...I cannot tolerate the terrible atmosphere around Taiwan... Most of the posts I publish in the political forum are articles which arise from my repressed emotions. I need a place to release my emotions, and imagine that somebody in the forum might listen to me.'

Emotions motivate Kui-Lan to search for a place to post her messages. Although emotions are generally abandoned as a 'rational base' for establishing insightful deliberation, Kui-Lan tells her stories to connect her interests and the whole society in which she lives. Wahl-Jorgensen (2007:116) argues that we shouldn't ignore the values of private experiences and stories that people tell when concerning the issue of democratic participation in a diverse society. Emotion actually is 'required for the exercise of reason because without it, we wouldn't bother to participate in the discussion' (ibid:113). Emotions can therefore be seen as an essential ingredient in democratic deliberation and political judgment (Marcus, 2002, quoted in Wahl-Jorgensen, ibid). It is

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[64] Phdsimon and Kui-Lan come from Yahoo Political Forum.

to say, although Kui-Lan is motivated by emotions, without them she could not participate effectively in any public deliberation.

'Ease of access' is the reason Kui-Lan chooses to participate in Yahoo Political Forum. She recalls the first time she posted something, 'I had had enough of seeing the politicians on TV! They are so disgusting.' But for Kui-Lan, she doesn't care about the reactions other participants might have and ignores responsibility for the content of her posts. She justifies this by stating that she has no time to pay close attention to the forum discussions, 'I am not the kind of person who is addicted to the Net all day. I have no expectations about the discussions.' Emotions lead phdsimon and Kui-Lan to be a part of the online political forums. However, they are not faithful to the forum discussions, and are not concerned with what they can contribute to the online political forums. They would rather satisfy their emotional demands through activities conducted in the virtual world. Their concerns are about whether or not they can obtain self-gratification to compensate for the misfortunes or frustrations encountered in their daily lives.

9.1.3 Why Discussants Choose Certain Forums to Participate in

Basically, the discussants who accepted my interview said that they had made their decision to access a certain forum because they had 'heard of' or 'known about' the forum's existence. They may not have known that other forums existed, or even if they knew, they still inhabited only one forum, therefore, they had no motivation to 'migrate'. In most of the Palm BBS users' cases, they studies in Taiwan University, so it was quite natural for them to participate in Palm's discussions. The interviewees from The Presidential Office were attracted by the forum's title from the very beginning. Some of them worked as assistants in The Legislative Yuan, so they were motivated to 'communicate' with the higher officials. But after they realised it was inefficient to try to use The Presidential Office forum to directly contact officials, they either chose other ways (i.e. sending mails to the Presidential mailbox), or maintained their posting habits in this government-run board. Yahoo's participants were attracted by Yahoo's promotions when they logged in; following Yahoo's links, they easily found Yahoo's Political Forum.

9.2 Posting Habits

9.2.1 Comparing How Respondents Trace/Read Responses within the Careless and Involved Camps

In the debate about whether there is a strong tie between online participants and the virtual community, as exists between people and their communities in society, some scholars (Hiltz and Turoff, 1993; Kiesler and Sproull, 1992) argue that without physical, social cues, and immediate feedback, it is perhaps difficult to support strong, intimate relationships. As Stoll (1995:24) comments, 'Electronic communication is instantaneous and illusory ....without emotional investment...' The interviewees Phdsimon and Kui-Lan represent those participants (classified as the 'careless camp' in this study) who do not care about how other discussants respond to their posts. On the one hand, they search for emotional support through being part of a group, yet on other hand, they don't want to invest their emotions or be tied in a virtual interaction. For them, online political forums are places where they can express their self-centred minds. They read/lurk in the post which contain responses to their previous posts occasionally, but they wouldn't reply continually and seriously. As Kui-Lan expresses, 'I just come and go, so spending time to check replies kind of wastes time. Don't forget, time is money.'

Phdsimon checks the replies irregularly, and doesn't care to give responses. He occasionally replies to the previous posts because he might spontaneously decide to write some erotic innuendoes. He seldom becomes involved in any discussions, because in his view '...we should not be serious! It is just a virtual game!' (quoted from interviewee Phdsimon).

Contrary to these careless participants, some interviewees (classified as the 'involved camp' in this study) demonstrate active attitudes toward tracing and responding to follow-on messages. They are willing to read and check people's responses, and reply back if they want to follow the discussion. Though they invest more time on initiating

new topics, reading, and responding, they don't intend to build up a strong tie. They search for a knowledge-based interaction, rather than emotionally close friendships.

The main reason for participants to read reply posts carefully is to stimulate their thoughts by absorbing others' opinions. As interviewee Meichu states, '… I would like to know what other people think of my posts/opinions …again, once I take part, I take this as an opportunity to stimulate my thinking.'

For those online participants who are involved profoundly with the activities in the political forums, others' responses represent an extension of their opinions. A complete discussion has to include feedback comments, even though those reply messages might not stand in line with the author's point.

From interviewee Kait[65]'s experiences, the process of how to interact with other discussants is more important than solely announcing his own stance.

[Interviewee - Kait] '…the online forum is a place designed for discussions; I always spend some time reading other discussants' responses to my posts, and I like to interact with them. 'Discussions' are two-way interactions, so I think the spirit of political forums is 'interaction'. I am happy to see how different opinions can be exchanged.'

Both Meichu and Kait stress the importance of reading and tracing others' responses during the online discussion. They are concerned about how to communicate with other forum participants, and want to examine whether their opinions are acceptable or likely to be challenged. The whole process of getting involved in the discussions, publishing posts, reading responses, and replying back, is seen by them as the behaviour of a responsible discussant.

Influenced by the responsible discussants in the online political forum, the interviewee Snow, after lurking for several months, finally decided to act as a responsible discussant.

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[65] Kait is a participant of Palm BBS.

[Interviewee - Snow] '...I believe in the political forums, most of the discussants come from a higher social status. They are elites in this society ...they know that they should take responsibility for their posts.

[Interviewer] Maybe they just lurk, without posting?

[Interviewee - Snow] Well, I agree that we can learn from lurking in posts. But my experience is: after you read a lot of good posts, you want to contribute, and publish good posts as well. Or you can say, you want to act as they do.'

Snow graduated from college and failed to be accepted on any university courses. After working in the fashion market and having been a manager for over 15 years, she went abroad to study and obtained her MA degree finally. In her mind, she is still rejected by the traditional definition of the elite in this society. However, via contributing to some intelligent standpoints she feels akin to those with 'a higher social status'. Snow always prepares sufficient information in support of her arguments. From her experiences, if she prepares more, other's responses would stimulate her more, 'like a great brain-storming session'.

The members of the involved camp hold positive views about online discussions. They like to meet participants who have similar attitudes toward the whole process of discussions; based on this common responsible attitude, good deliberations are created. They criticise the careless camp users as 'sources of misery' (quoted from Kait), and 'a malignant tumour in the board' (quoted from TX). However, they have learnt to skip these 'garbage posts', in order to 'save more time for the worthy posts' (quoted from TX).

9.2.2 Interaction between Participants in the Involved Camp

The participants in the involved camp typically like to trace other discussants' responses to their posts. They are happy to read the responses supporting their points of view, and appreciate other discussants expressing how they have benefited from reading their posts.

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'It is a kind of feedback (reward) for participating in the discussions when you read good comments from other discussants' (quoted from interviewee - Tsilencer[66]).

However, if they find that reply posts are not in line with their stances, they have divergent responses. Some interviewees claim to have a great level of tolerance toward posts which oppose their stance. They accept ideas if they listen to different opinions which widen their vision. As interviewee Handsome-Handsome Man states, 'through the procedure of reading different opinions presented by online discussants, my life experiences have been extended, and my thoughts have been stimulated.' They believe the intrinsic qualities of this world can be presented from different angles; 'you cannot expect all the people to say exactly the same thing as you perceive. Listening to different views is a basic attitude for an intellectual person' (quoted from interviewee - HNancy[67]).

Contrary to those participants who describe their attitudes as open-minded, others are less likely to embrace opposite standpoints. As interviewee IRIT s explains, if the viewpoints of others' posts go against her content, her words are de-valued and made to look unpopular. In her experience, she feels helpless when facing this kind of situation which always makes her feel embarrassed. Due to these concerns, she would rather cease to participate in a discussion.

[Interviewee - IRIT] '...it is very embarrassing whenever I read other people's replies pointing out that my words are incorrect or problematic, even though sometimes I know that they interpret my words unfairly. I would simply stop being a part of these discussions... In particular, I don't want to read any flames generated by my words.'

IRIT identifies herself as one of the 'least aggressive' discussants, the ideal online forum in her view 'is a peaceful and a fully rational environment.'

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[66] Tsilencer is a discussant in Yahoo Political Forum.
[67] HNancy and IRIT are discussants in Palm BBS.

Not all the participants in the involved camp are as afraid of generating flames as IRIT. Instead of maintaining harmonious tones, some of the interviewees express that they like to examine 'who' responds to their posts. If the respondents are classified as 'good discussants' who have good reputations or who are known by most of the discussants in the forums, they would respond to them with a polite attitude and communicate with them diligently. On the contrary, if they encounter other discussants who have been marked as 'trolls', 'flame-makers', or 'trouble-makers', they would either deliberately interact with them in an unconcerned manner or ignore their posts entirely. They believe that following the doctrine of 'an eye for an eye', indicating that any participant's negative action against the forum will receive the same back, helps to strengthen the efficiency of the communication process.

[Interviewee - TX] 'An eye for an eye is a strategic approach to achieve efficient communication in a political forum...don't waste time on those unworthy guys.'

[Interviewer] 'Can you provide some examples to make it clear who the so-called worthy or unworthy guys are?'

[Interviewee - TX] 'All right, one guy's ID is Haeindifinite. The contents of his posts never really reply to your topics directly, but stray away to support his political party instead. ...sometimes, I couldn't bear his words containing sexual harassments. ...Kait (user's ID) is good. He replies to your posts rationally and logically. I respect how he always provides sufficient evidence in supports of his arguments. He is an expert in forum discussions.'

The approach adopted by TX in pursuing his 'an eye for an eye' approach is to try to end the forum membership for 'unworthy' participants. TX rarely tolerates immoral posts in the political forums. After encounters with Haeindifinite on several occasions, he decided to take some steps to terminate the membership of Haeindifinite. In TX's logic, because Haeindifinite 'terminates' the possibility of good discussions in the forum, he would 'terminate' the qualification of Haeindifinite. He sent a complaint mail to the board moderator, in which he collected a lot of Haeindifinite's posts revealing abusive terms.

Later, the board moderator accepted his suggestion, and cancelled the membership qualification of Haeindifinite.

As to the interaction between Kait and TX, even though sometimes Kait reveals that his party intention is different from TX's, TX still admires Kait, and wants to be his friend because 'he is a good debater' (TX).

Kait, who is recommended as an 'expert debater' by TX, offers a three step approach to deal with others' replies which disagree with his stances.

[Interviewee - Kait] '...the first step is: I would review the content carefully, then, I would check the author's background and decide whether he/she is worthy to interact with. The final step is regarding my mood.' When Kait has a bad mood, he would 'bite back' to those authors identified in his category as trollers, trouble-makers or flame-makers. ...I don't mind you calling me a 'semi-troller' (laughter).'

Like TX, Kait also expresses that 'an eye for an eye is the best way to survive in the political forum.'

Kait is answer shows that he doesn't pay attention to maintaining consistency throughout all of his posts. His primary consideration is with whom he interacts. On occasions when he couldn't identify clearly who responds to his posts, the principle nature of his response would be governed by the qualities revealed from the reply.

> ...if the reply is reasonable, I will follow this reply's reasonable style; however, if the content is terrible, I will react terribly...(interviewee Kait)

Kait exhibits the flexible style of a constant forum user. He is dubbed as 'Lao-Da' (similar to 'Big Kait') by many forum discussants. They admire him because they are so attracted to the intellectual qualities revealed by his posts. According to his experiences, 'it is a waste of time to argue or debate with bull-shit guys. That is why I prefer to tease them rather than discuss with them.'

Wellman and Guila (1999:181) observe in some cases what Wireman (1984) calls 'intimate secondary relationships' wherein informal, frequent and supportive community can be built up, especially within special groups. i.e. voluntary organisations. In my study, the involved camp tries to build relationships that are concerned with political 'broad knowledge' issues, rather than to construct emotionally supportive groups. They respect the knowledge providers and have no will to search for intimate secondary relationships.

9.2.3 Role Transformations: The Effect of Time Restrictions

Concerning how to manage time between real life and online life is a big issue for some writers who worry that high-involvement in internet activities detracts from real life involvement. Especially for those online participants who are identified as 'cyberaddicts', a great involvement in online relationships causes them to neglect real-life relationships with family and friends (Hiltz and Turoff, 1993; Barlow, 1995; Rheingold, 1993), they are scolded for their tendency to '...lose all sense of time' (Wellman and Guila, 1999:181).

In my study, the interviewees don't reveal this addictive intention. If the situation forces them to have only one option, they would choose their real life. This choice will even change their attitudes and their roles in online activities. The results from the in-depth interviews also show that the discussants can transform their roles from concerned users to those who trace replies periodically, to non-concerned users, depending on the availability of time.

Ideally, if the participants in the involved camp can spare more time to take part in Internet activities, they will try to contribute to online discussions more responsibly. As illustrated by interviewee Su[68]'s concern, 'I usually need to take more time to think about the appropriateness of what I write down.' From Su's experiences, it is quite normal to spend more than one hour to post one article.

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[68] Su is a participant of the Presidential Office Forum.

Interviewee Tooger's experience provides an example of why his role changes due to the influence of not having sufficient time. Tooger used to check responses every day, and replied to all posts very carefully. But now he refers to himself as an 'I don't care' user. After he graduated from university, he found it impossible to access the Internet conveniently and as frequently as when he was a student.

[Interviewee - Tooger] 'When I was a university student, I had plenty of time to argue or respond to other discussants. But now, I am too busy. I have to pay attention to my job.'

However, Tooger still published some posts in the political forum, despite having no patience to read or response to other participants' comments.

[Interviewer] '...but you still keep posting your articles?
[Interviewee - Tooger] 'Yes, I do. Publishing articles in the forum has become a habit in my daily life. After you cultivate this habit, it is not easy to quit.'

Interviewee Triplep[69] has similar experiences to Tooger. She used to be a very active board moderator, but after she became pregnant, in order to maintain her career and family life, she chose to resign from the position of board moderator. In her new role, Triplep states that, 'I will log in, and lurk over the posts in the forum as much as I can'.

From Tooger and Triplep's perspective, their 'real lives' are their careers and family life. Online discussions are part of their 'virtual lives', which are a less important option when they have to make a choice. They are still concerned about the forum discussions, but have to compromise due to the priorities of their time arrangement.

9.2.4 How to Resolve Misunderstandings

All the interviewees recognise that communicating just through text in the forum makes it all too easy to misinterpret other authors' meanings. If they intend to resolve

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[69] Triplep is a participant of Yahoo Political Forum.

misunderstandings, their approaches would be to adopt further steps, i.e. reply to another post to confirm what meaning the authors wanted to express, or send a private email to have an under the table negotiation. In addition, experienced discussants would be careful to quote content properly, and avoid quoting the discussants' previous comments unnecessarily; otherwise, it is quite easy to create yet more misunderstanding.

[Interviewee - Michelle[70]] 'I was annoyed with one guy because I quoted all of his posts, and then added my comments. Actually, because I used the 'quote' function, all of his words were included. However, I should have been more careful to isolate and point to the one part which I didn't quite get, instead of including all the parts of his post. He misunderstood that I fully disagreed with all of his comments, but I only wanted to ask a simple question...'

As interviewee Snow points out, 'it is very easy to misunderstand other discussants' misunderstandings of your words'. Quarrels usually arise from a lack of mutual understanding, 'you can avoid quarrels if you know the way to resolve misunderstandings' (quoted from interviewee Snow).

All the interviewees in the involved camp have experience of the misleading qualities of the tone, writing style, and icons contained in other discussants' posts. Some of them also notice that the personalities of the discussants sometimes are quite different from the impressions obtained from the discussions process. They all have learned gradually that the image constructed by virtual interaction would differ from that of face-to-face contact. Interviewee Turtlewin[71] provides an example from his 'natural experiment'. He used a feminine-looking drawing as his icon, and then he found other discussants would call him '妳' (which implies a person is female), even though he had introduced himself as a male and provided a link to his personal album.

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[70] Michelle is a participant of Palm BBS.
[71] Turtlewin is a discussant in Yahoo Political Forum.

In Triplep's experience, she would like to know other discussants personally, rather than just through their words, before she finishes creating an image of them. She learned this lesson from interacting with another discussant whose ID is Bee-woman, the pronunciation of which in Chinese is quite similar to 'crazy woman'. The discursive style of Bee-woman was very sharp and critical, so Triplep used to categorize Bee-woman as an 'unreasonable and intolerable old woman'. One day, she received a request from her friend to help her take care of her relative who had just moved to the same city. When she invited her friend's relative to have a meal together, they had a great chat. Triplet found her friend's relative was a very sweet polite girl, and liked her very much. Later, when they shared her experience of forum participation, she realised this girl was Bee-woman. It totally collapsed her previously imagined image of who Bee-woman was. 'The world is really small' (quoted from Triplep). Due to this experience, she likes to reserve her criticism unless she has really met the discussants face to face.

9.3 Changing Roles from Audiences who Receive Messages to Active Producers

9.3.1 Dominant Speech

In the contexts of traditional media, such as the press or TV, audiences usually expect to receive messages or information, rather than to contribute information in return. Compared with this expectation toward traditional media, online forums provide participants with an arena in which they can publish their own creations.

What attracts interviewee Fatty[72] to publish his messages in online political forums is the availability of this new interactive platform which contends with traditional media.

[Interviewee - Fatty] '...this forum has higher standards, compared with other forums. It has an independent spirit which sets it apart from the misleading quality of traditional media.'

[Interviewer] 'Can you explain what the misleading quality of traditional media is?'

[Interviewee - Fatty] 'For instance, the political talk shows on TV; they are terrible and miserable!'

[Interviewer] 'What is the reason which makes you regard these political talk shows as terrible and miserable?'

[Interviewee - Fatty] 'By participating in online discussions I can hear two sides of an argument (Pan-blue and Pan-green). Political talk shows just broadcast their own ideologies which are backed by their supporting groups.'

The genre of 'talk shows' involves more communication between hosts and audiences than other TV programs (Timberg, el at. 2002:3). In Taiwan's context, famous political talk shows such as '2100 Broadcasting for All Citizens' and 'Criticizing Journalism', provide direct telephone lines for audiences to call-in on. Established in 1995, the program 2100 Broadcasting for All Citizens aims to provide a place for the politicians

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[72] Fatty is a discussant in Palm BBS.

and audiences (via call-in) to have a chance to communicate directly. However, this program is criticised for its political position which tends towards the Pan-Blue group rather than the Pan-Green group (Lee and Chu, 2008:1). 'Criticizing Journalism' has been produced by Sun-Lee TV Set since 2002, and supports the Pan-Green group. But the feature of this program is independent from Sun-Lee's surveillance, and provides a direct line to the politician or the main role players of heated events. However, this program is still criticised by the Pan-Blue group for taking sides with the Pan-Green group.

Exactly 'whose voices are allowed to be heard' is still doubted by many audiences and communication study scholars (Lin, 2008). Fatty's response above reveals his worries about political talk show programs, which have been accused publicly for being a 'major source of misery' in Taiwanese society (Lee and Chu, 2008:1). In the twenty-eighth central advisory committee held by the Academia Sinica, the highest research institute in Taiwan, the members passed a proposal which criticised the discourses of political talk shows for having negative effects upon the whole society due to the extensive abusive language contained in their programmes (Lee, 2008:1). The chairman of humanities and social sciences in Academia Sinica indicated that the Politicians took advantage of talk shows for their own aims rather than contributing to a democratic process or establishing a citizen society (ibid).

Participating in online discussions might therefore be an alternative way for those who intend to announce their opinions. The Internet stands out as the most openly accessible media, compared with letters to press editors or TV call-in programs. The latter two are accessible, but letters still have to pass editorial selection processes (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007:68), or fit with TV production teams' plans. The Internet on the other hand, offers actual control over the publishing of content.

[Interviewee - Tsilencer] '...I do agree that online forums are an excellent arena for discussions. They're such an easily accessible media for us to use... The users of the Internet attribute closer social statuses and backgrounds, so the standard of the discussions are higher than in the press or call-in shows.'

The press or TV stations do now provide net-access forums for discussions. The interviewees in my study believe that online forums which are not sponsored by the traditional media are better places for discussions. Interviewee WP prefers not to attend the discussions conducted by the news press.

[Interviewee - WP] 'I thought, if the participants are BA graduates, or higher, this forum would present a more rational atmosphere for discussion... Online forums provided by the press are miserable, participants quarrel all the time...'

WP uses the term 'quarrel' instead of 'argue' to describe the discussions happening in the forums provided by the traditional media. For WP, the reason why participants prefer to quarrel, rather than discuss, in online press media forums is that '...they (discussants) don't treat the discussions seriously.' For WP, if he wants to state his most concerned opinions, he still chooses to send letters to newspaper editors to be published in the traditional media.

9.3.2 Expectations Associated with Participant's Posts

The theorists of participatory democracy (Pateman, 1970; Thompson, 1970) appreciate the value of a 'sense of political efficacy', the sense of being capable of acting effectively in the political realm (Finkel, 1985:892). They stress '...the human results that accrue through the participatory process provide an important justification for a participatory system' (Pateman, 1970:24-25).

However, in this study of exploring the discussants' expectation toward online deliberation, none of the interviewees have the expectation that the government or mainstream media would pay attention to their posts. For them, they have presumed that online political forums don't represent the whole population, and are not widely used by all citizens as a platform for proposing any democratic issues. As thus, both the government and mainstream media haven't found reasonable grounds to 'listen to' or accept the issues generated by online discussions. Poster's (1997:212-213) claim echoes

this lack of expectation from the government and media. He explains that despite the way the Internet folds into existing social functions and extends them in new ways, institutions still treat the internet as their extensions or sub-institutions, restraining participants' accessibility and pursuing approaches to protect themselves rather than allowing participants to 'suggest possible long-term political effects' (ibid:213).

According to Su's experiences, the best way to obtain the government or media's attention is by 'direct contact' through letters or emails to the government or media offices. Su used to work in the mainstream media, so she knows the criteria through which a press room accepts or refuses letters to editors. '...You can earn some money from a newspaper if you send a letter to them. ...for me, it is an active way of broadcasting my opinions, and it is more efficient than publishing them in posts.' Interviewee King of Tayoun[73], who has successful experience of obtaining a response from the officer of the Presidential Office, echoes Su's view. He suggests sending emails directly to the President's email account, rather than publishing posts in online political forums.

Participatory online discussions, according to the interviewees' responses, carry the least expectation of effecting the government or mainstream media. But the interviewees are aware of what the effective approaches are, and through which they still can implement their political efficacy.

The results from the in-depth interviews also reflect that the government or media somehow have been labelled (by respondents) as experts who understand more about political issues than the discussants in the forums. In their minds, the government and media understand political issues more than respondents' 'ordinary talk' (quoted from Interviewee Tooger) because their field of study is politics. Members of the government and journalists have been well trained as 'professional workers' in the political domain (quoted from Handsome Handsome Man). Interviewee Tooger observed during the past few years that if the forums' agenda is related to public affairs, usually it wouldn't attract

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[73] King of Tayoun is a discussant in the Presidential Office Forum.

too much following concern from discussants because this is the domain of government 'experts'. The conflict between the two political groups, Pan-Blue and Pan-Green on the other hand, is embraced by the forum discussants. This division between what belongs to the government to discuss, and what belongs to the forum members to discuss is illustrated by Tooger's pessimistic viewpoint, 'as long as the media and government know more about how to play a kind of strategic game, it is impossible to motivate them to read our discussions carefully and respectfully.' For the government or mainstream media, the forum discussions are less valued as a reference for public policy. Their concern and hesitation echoes Poster's worry, 'if one understands politics as the restriction or expansion of the existing executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, one will not be able even to broach the question of new types of participation in government' (1997:213).

As an example in support of Tooger's observation, during the presidential election period in 2008, *The Apply Daily press*, a mainstream media, revealed the discursive results from some of the biggest online political forums. The content of the news focused solely on what the younger generation voting intentions were, and what nicknames the candidates were given by the young online discussants. The online political discussions were represented as carnivalesque activities, and nothing was mentioned in relation to the topics of public issues or suggested policies.

WP also has a very pessimistic attitude about whether the government will make any effort to hear discussants' voices from the forum discussions. The government does not refuse to take notice of the value of discussions, it is just that too much is being said at one time, '...too many divergent opinions are broadcasted in the political forums... ...It is like throwing a stone into the sea; your opinion would end up being submerged...' (quoted from interviewee WP). For online discussants, online political forums are the places where different discussants' views can be shared, rather than a place for collecting/contributing concrete suggestions which might later be adopted by the government or media. The term '爽' (pronounced 'Shuang' - meaning 'to give oneself an orgasm') is used by WP to describe the feeling of release after posting. He uses this

symbolism to explain that writing a post in a forum is feeble behaviour, compared with the effectiveness of participation in protests on the street. '爽' (Shuang) implies the process of participating in online discussions is to satisfy private desires, but not for constructing public discourse.

It is worth noting that the collective lack of expectation revealed from the interviews does not mean that discussants '...do not want attention or responses from the government or main-stream media' (quoted from interviewee Tooger). Their purpose is to contribute their suggestions and broadcast their voices to a wider audience, however, in reality, the limitation of the forums' features, and the struggle to gain respect from the government and mainstream media, have gradually completely eroded discussants' expectations.

9.4 Anonymity and Self-Identity

9.4.1 Attracted by Anonymous Character of Online Forums

As noted previously, anonymity has been considered by some scholars (Connolly et al. 1990; Reinig and Mejias, 2004) as the primary factor which attracts internet users to engage in online forum discussions. The results revealed from the in-depth interviews in this study also echo the stances of the above scholars; almost all the interviewees agreed that anonymity is a core reason for the appeal of taking part in online discussions. Only one interviewee expressed that she does not care whether online forums have an anonymous character or not. As she is not a celebrity or well known person, even though she publishes her real name, no one will identify her or want to know who she is.

However, the character of anonymity provides a protective umbrella which can strengthen discussants' confidence to debate without any physical disturbance. Especially in the initial stages, anonymity assists online discussants to make their first uncertain steps and encourages them to publish their opinions. Comparatively, face-to-face communication creates a 'very tense atmosphere', for interviewee Murmurgirl, who always worries that she might lose her friends if she were to talk in front of them. Also, in a face-to-face context, the conversation would be interrupted if any person spoke of things or in a way that embarrassed the interlocutor. However, online forums 'initiate a new possibility, particularly for girls, to express straightforwardly [their] political views' (quoted from interviewee Michelle).

As O'Brien (1999:78) highlights '...gender rests in the way in which we experience and understand our 'selves' in relation to communication with other human beings.' The experience of political forum use by the interviewee Michelle reflects that anonymity can be a protection which allows her to escape from traditional Taiwanese values. In the traditional concept of 'a good girl', girls/women have a lower status than boys/men. Talking about politics is only for men, not for women. If one fits the traditional view of a girl, it is impossible to discuss politics in front of the entire family. The gender issue constituted by Michelle's family members brought her some pressure as she grew up. For

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Michelle, the Internet is another world where she can construct different images, which differ from her real life identity. Michelle's case echoes Pattanaik's claim (1999, quoted in Wu, 2007:148) that 'information communication technologies offer women, a traditional subordinated group, a new means for their struggle for equality.'

Online political forums construct a 'virtual world' where participants can share, debate or argue without disrupting their 'real lives'. They can maintain harmony in their lives, but can also access secure channels for releasing their political opinions. As I mentioned above, Michelle recognises that she takes advantage of anonymity in order to create an online personality. The image she tries to constitute is aggressive, mean and tough, which is the opposite of her daily life personality. The role she prefers to adopt within her family is that of a tender, sweet girl, which is acceptable and popular according to Taiwanese traditional values. After ten years of being involved in online activities, she is very confident in her ability to not mix up the roles she plays in 'social reality' and 'virtual reality' situations.

Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1969:326) describes 'I am my body to the extent that I am'. In the physical world, the norm is 'one body, one identity' (Donath, 1999:29). But in the virtual world, the identity is composed of information rather than matter (ibid), therefore, 'One can have, some claim, as many electronic personae as one has time and energy to create' (ibid). In Michelle's case, she comprises her social identity as given by her family, and creates her virtual identity with a different personality in order to release the creative expression of herself.

In a nutshell, the findings from my in-depth interview show that if the environment allows participants to maintain anonymous identities, they would be encouraged to really say something. This finding echoes the experimental results from studies of anonymous communication in CMC environments (Hiltz, Turoff and Johnson, 1989; Reinig and Mejias, 2004). These scholars find that if the participants feel secure in anonymous environments, so they would like contribute more to the construction of comments, rather than flames.

For example, IP addresses can reveal much information if participants want to others' locations and Internet service providers. *Whois* is an online br (http://www.whois.net/) which can be used to detect the specific towns people live the broadband companies they employ.

A famous case occurred in Taiwan: a discussant whose ID was Catkiller pub descriptions of how he tortured two helpless kittens, including photographs, in the *A with Cats Forum* (http://bbs.movshow.com/) located in Mainland China. Th examining the users IP address discussants were able to find out that the user came Taiwan, so they posted this information in the *Love Pet Forums* in Taiwan. receiving this information, Taiwanese forum participants confirmed the location of t address, and encouraged people to rescue the abused kittens. After obtained co information about the location, they immediately mobilised a group of discussa rescue the kittens from the offender's house (Chen, *United Daily News*, 2006:A11).

Another possible way for online discussants' information to be revealed is through moderators. They possess the personal data of all discussants who register as members, and this information may be disclosed in special circumstances. For ex; as I've mentioned in the previous chapter, during the period of election for the City Mayor in 2007, the moderator of the Anti-Media Discussion Board worked to with the telecommunication police to apprehend a person who tried to diffuse ru about one of the Taipei City Mayor candidates.

answered that they were "not bothered". For instance, WF still likes to contribute to discussions; his first concern is the convenience of discussion boards, he also appre that they are better communicative channels than other forms of media, an particularly enjoys the potential for instant responses from different participants ' which I can examine my views, and I like to be examined...'.

A consistent attitude toward the issue of pseudo anonymity revealed from respondents' answers is 'I am not afraid to be recognised'. Though they are awar some private information might be revealed from checking their IP addresses, o their registration data may be exposed by the board moderators, their attitude generally along the lines of '...if I don't do anything wrong, why do I need to wc (quoted from interviewee Handsome Handsome Man).

9.4.3 Anonymity and Responsibility

Though anonymity in the virtual world is praised by one set of scholars as the 'sav personal freedom' (Donath, 1999:53), others condemn it as 'an invitation to ana (ibid).

Some are concerned by the association of anonymity with the social learning mod deindividuation. In Zimbardo's view, 'anonymity ...should reduce inhibitio behavior... Deindividuated behaviors are more likely when loss of personal id occurs in a group setting than alone' (1969). So in this sense, the anonymity of c forums should be an ideal environment for anarchy to thrive.

The answers collected from eighteen interviewees (ninety percent of my in-
interviews), show a similar result to Reinig and Mejias's finding. Interviewees state
they won't consider creating anarchic contents, despite acting in an anony
environment. Far from being trouble makers, they express their deep concern
taking responsibility for their posts. Despite interacting in an anonymous way, there
trend towards deindividuation and consequently more uninhibited behaviours.
interpersonal communication still deeply influences their lives, even though it is a v
contact. '...maybe you can be naughty sometimes, but other discussants' response
influence you, unless you want to be isolated completely from this virtual world' (q
from interviewee Michelle). [74]

The key point concerning deindividuation is what kind of anonymity exists in the
forums, a complete anonymity or a partial/ pseudo anonymity. It is clearly the
because other discussants do have identities, albeit virtual ones, which are traceab
people are still connecting with each other as individuals; 'other discussants' resp
still influence you' (Michelle), and so there is a collective concern for responsible a
which makes deindividuation impossible.

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[74] The collective responses toward being responsible discussants apparently confront the high degree
abusive language discussed in previous chapter. Two possible reasons are provided here in explanati
this situation. Firstly, the unavoidable shortcoming of snow sampling in this study is that only one so
trouble maker accepted my interview. Most of the trouble makers, (i.e. trollers or suspicious net spies
create high quantities of posts containing abusive language, refused to accept my interview. The
discussants who accepted my interview request usually have a good reputation in these forums. Seco
the phenomenon of using substitute IDs means that they are incapable of promising to maintain a
sustainable quality of discussions. I will explain this phenomenon in next section.

[Interviewer] 'Are you concerned with other discussants' responses to your ID?'

[Interviewee - Meichu] 'I think I am to a certain extent, because for me it is a part (identity....even though I don't know these people in person.'

Similarly, Kait also regards his online ID as an extension of himself, thus, there is n between the online identity and real life identity. 'My real name and ID both repr me.' (from interviewee - Kait). If some mistakes are revealed from their posts, and been corrected or criticised by other discussants, they would feel embarrassed and r these events as unhappy experiences. 'I know I won't be recognised by most o discussants, but psychologically I still feel hurt...' (from interviewee - TX).

The interviewee Tsilencer expresses his opinion that one can maintain an ID utilisir concept of brand operations.

[Interviewee - Tsilencer] 'If I don't have any motivation to create a good reputati the brand name 'Tsilencer' sport shoes, I won't care whether 'Tsilencer' has accepted or not accepted by other discussants.'

[Interviewer] 'From your experiences, do you care whether 'Tsilencer' represents a brand or a bad brand?'

[Interviewee - Tsilencer] 'I hope I can always successfully separate the online name and my true self. I hypnotize myself everyday, "Tsilencer is just another name of shoes; don't be trapped by the shoes' brand".'

Tsilencer states that he manages his ID as 'just another brand name', so apparently unattached to it. But when asked if he would consider changing IDs, he implies t

opinion about my ID.

Emotionally, most of the interviewees focus on using one ID as their
'representation' during the forum discussions. Just as Tsilencer does, they cultivat
main IDs as extensions of themselves. Especially after being involved with
discussions over time, they become particularly concerned with the importan
maintaining the reputation of their main IDs.

[Interviewee - Tooger] 'Gradually, you get to know more discussants from readin
words and interacting with them, no matter if it is from direct interactions (forum
or from under-the-table communication (such as sending private mails). ….and the
will realise you should maintain a good reputation for your ID.'

Sometimes, if Tooger wants to criticise other discussants whom he knows, he woul
the approach of creating a new ID, and then using it to publish his posts. The interv
TX dubs these IDs created under intentional pretence as 'substitute IDs'. He admi
he has at least five different IDs which function as covers for his main ID when he a
with some tough discussants, or as fake respondents to create an illusion that his
ID's posts are popular by other discussants.

[Interviewee - TX] 'One time, I tried to debate about the issue of religious freed
Muslim countries. After I left the message in the forum, I found that one guy held a
in opposition to mine, and he/she was good at finding statistical data to use as sup
evidence. The responses from other discussants seemed to agree with his/her stan
not mine, so I decided to use my substitute ID to publish an article, and the content
in line with my first post…'

quite aware of how to create a different textual composition. These interv

understand very much that 'writing style can identify the author of a posting' (D

1999:53), so they would like to create different writing styles, to distinguish them

their main ID. For example, interviewee Michelle's normal style is to complete a

paragraph without adding a line space until the meaning has been revealed thoro

(see demonstration 1).

理解啊！怎不會理解呢？神愛世人，這是毋庸置疑的，就算不是信仰，我們世

括萬事萬物也都一直在上帝愛的滋潤下成長，所以樹長高了，花兒開了，果實

了....[75]

Demonstration 9.4. 1 The composition of Michelle's normal style

The presentation style of her substitute ID differs by adding line spaces after

punctuation mark (see demonstration 9.4.2).

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[75] The translation of the whole paragraph is:

'Understood! How can I not understand? God loves all beings, I wouldn't doubt it. Even though yo
belong to any religion, we (including all beings) are still growing through God's grace. That is v
trees are growing taller, and the flowers are blossoming, and the fruits are growing bigger...'

我們世人包括萬事萬物也都一直在上帝愛的滋潤下成長，

所以樹長高了，

花兒開了，

果實豐碩了...

Demonstration 9.4. 2 The composition of Michelle's substitute ID

In addition to creating a new style of layout for her substitute ID, Michelle is also car
not to present the same IP address as her major ID. Technologically, she would u:
dial-up connection, or log in from a PC in a different location in order to avoid show
the same IP address. Michelle deliberately prevents revealing any links between her n
ID and substitute IDs, therefore, she can easily use her substitute IDs to write re
terrible content to abuse her virtual enemies.

Both TX or Michelle couldn't guarantee the discursive qualities of their substitute IC
They are careful to maintain the good reputation of their main IDs, and just allow a
of their close online friends to know that they have other secret IDs. Just as Tsiler
maintains the good brand image of 'Tsilencer', TX and Michelle try to sustain the w
behaved images of their main IDs which have been constructed through their time
effort.

In Wu's (2007:150) study, one interviewee recognises that he has more than
pseudonyms, and another interviewee claims that the reason for him/her to have mult
IDs is to avoid flames. According to the interviewees in my research, the function
substitute IDs is not always for avoiding flames, but also to deceive other discussa
Therefore, they can maintain a good reputation for their main IDs, which is their n

participants have expectations about interacting with other members of vir

communities. Firstly, from previous forum discussions they can predict that there wil

numerous potential readers who will receive their messages. Secondly, some of tl

expect to benefit from the process of discussions/debates.

Regardless of which camp they belong to or what result they expect, in this study, all

interviewees put less emphasis on the outward responses they receive (i.e. from

government or other organisations), and more emphasis on creating a reward

themselves to fulfil their inner satisfaction. The term '爽' (Shuang) implies that

process of joining online discussions is comparable to giving oneself an orgasm. Pleas

comes from satisfying individual desires, rather than from contributing to the possibili

of public deliberation.

The lack of positive responses and encouragements gained from the extend environn

might be a reason for participants to persuade themselves to lower their expectations

accept that '爽' (Shuang) is a sufficient reward. Furthermore, if the participants becc

firmly self-oriented whenever they join discussions, it would cause the problem

inhibiting potentially meaningful discourses. They might stop themselves from get

involved in a good debate due to their emotional concerns, i.e. they dislike the pel

who they will interact with, or they are afraid of being unpopular. In this respect,

rational ideals of forum deliberations would be disrupted by the influences of emotic

drives.

Actually, the whole procedure of in-depth interviews revealed that participants ha

consistently disappointed perspective toward the potential contribution of online poli

forums. Aside from obtaining little attention from the outside environment, particip

hindrance, as there is no opportunity to have face to face contact or use body langua

communicate. However, all the interviewees accepted text based communication

well without a problem, and even use e-mails to assist communication and help

resolve misunderstandings between each other.

Online search engines (Google, Yahoo, etc.) also lend an electronic hand whe

information is needed as evidence in support of their arguments. Apparently

convenience of Internet applications strengthens and accelerates the efficienc

communication. However, there is an underlying concern about information obt

from high speed net searches concerning the extent of trust that can be put i

reliability and credibility of such information.

The answer may well be pessimistic. A report from an expert-led investigation cond

by Nature Journal revealed that the accuracy of online encyclopaedias is

controversial. Findings showed that numerous errors occurred in both Encyclop

Britannica and Wikipedia, two of the most popular sources of online information (

2005:900-901).

The information available from the net can be supplied quickly and conveniently, ji

fast food can be collected by drive-through consumers without them even needi

leave their cars. For online political forum discussants, they may be aware tha

information obtained in such a 'drive through' manner is possibly lacking in nut

(reliability) and quality (credibility), but it is hard for them to resist taking a bite be

The standard of discussion quality is also brought down when participants decid[e] manipulate matters by using their substitute IDs. The functions of substitute IDs ar[e] nip at opposing discussants, and to create the pretence of multiple discussants stan[ding] together in the same camp. These IDs are disposable and replaceable, so maintai[ning] good reputations is not necessary. Such deception and lack of authenticity influence[s] quality of the discussions.

To summarise, the image of online discussants insofar revealed from the in-d[epth] interviews is mostly active and self-determined, and the convenience of the Internet [could] assist the speed of online discussions. However, if some of the political forum discuss[ants] only want to create popular illusions about their opinions, and experience 'high s[peed] deliberations' without confirming the accuracy of the information they present, [it is] possible that a fragmentation of online debates would inevitably become present.

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[76] In Taiwan's context, the Google Scholar service does not provide a Chinese version yet. As t[o] academic journals and theses, an online subscription service is provided but is only accessible to a limited number of users.

to discuss the theoretical meaning, this chapter aims to reaffirm the main argument of

research. Instead of classifying and ignoring the intrinsic differences existing amo

online political forums, online political forums should be treated as heterogeneous.

discursive qualities amongst different forums are formed by and result from or

discussants' pre-chosen filtering decisions.

Before reviewing the main findings and theoretical discussions, I would like to bri

review the background knowledge chapters (I and II), which offered a historical

structural analysis in terms of this research subject - Taiwan, and literature rev

chapters (III and IV), which formed an analytic foundation for the further exploratio

empirical conduct.

1. The Democratic Paths: from Real to Virtual

From the historical exploration of Taiwan's political evolution in chapter I, the comp

identity politics in Taiwanese society has been illustrated. The distrust and conf

amongst ethnic groups - *Waisheng Ren* and *Bensheng Ren*, which form the two m

political parties KMT and DPP, engender the collective uncertainty about nati

identity - who are qualified to be *true* Taiwanese? Are Taiwanese equal to Chines

respect of culture and genealogy? This informed background knowledge helps to re

the residents' concern for what politics is in Taiwan. Especially after Taiw

democratisation, the informal talk about politics has been influenced enormously by

ideological identity issues.

that the alternative media have founded a good basis for a public sphere. It was noted after the lift of the media ban in 1988, the trend of commercialisation and capitalisatio the media industries gradually eroded the deliberative and autonomic spirit of alternative media, which became driven and guided by the commercial mar Nowadays, since the media management have become concerned mostly with searcl for enterprise profits, the media have been named *the source of society's disasters* (1 2008:1) rather than being seen as a constructive tool. Therefore, as an alternative, development of the Internet has been considered an arena where people independently deliberate, and probably form public discourses. It was anticipated that Internet, in this sense, would succeed the role and spirit of the alternative me demonstrated prior to the period of Taiwan's democratisation.

Chapter III and Chapter IV provided theoretical discussions in terms of Haberm public sphere and the proponents of deliberative democracy, which constitute theoretical foundation to consider the application of the Internet for democratic purpo While, chapter III provided a theoretical analysis to examine how applicable the Inte can be, or is expected to be, to a virtual sphere, chapter IV focused on delibera democracy, and aimed to establish the requirements for examining the democratic use online forums. Rational debates and reasonable discussants are the expectations of advocates of E-democracy. Rational debates demonstrate the qualities of deliberat and to be reasonable discussants is the condition the participants must meet.

2. Mediated Participation via Cyberspace

In the information age, Yu (2006) argues that the concept of citizenship can no longe considered as something formally given by an institution. Concerning the developr

debates, and secondly, proper topic choices. In a survey of Americans' talk about polit

the users of email/the Internet discuss mostly about astray topics such as entertainm

sports and personal/family matters (Wyatt, Katz and Kim, 2000:79). Local/State m

government and foreign happenings are the least talked about topics by online discuss

(ibid).

The data shown in this study differentiates from the investigation results in the USA.

criticisms of the performance of politicians and governments were highly concer

about by all three forums' discussants. This convergent phenomenon demonstrated

the choices of political topics are centralised around politicians and governme

Another common topic across all three forums was the political conflict betw

Taiwan's parties - pan blue and pan green. Here I argue that although a phenomenor

polarised political groups did not appear in this study, the contents (including topics

messages) were polarised. Politicians and governments were classified as 'green grou

and 'blue groups', which were actually associated with the popular topic - the con

between the parties in Taiwan's context. The polarised groups won't cross their

boundaries, but they regarded the online political forums as a contesting areas rather t

comprehending/communicating spaces.

In this study, it was proven via a Chi-Square test that topic choice was associated \

forum sponsorship types. The topic subjects were more various in Yahoo, including

Lun-Gong, SPAM and conflicts between online participants, which weren't shown in

other forums. The deliberative function in Yahoo's case was disrupted by some he

posting participants' individualised intentions. The constant users, Fa-Lun-Gong

SPAM, contributed approximately 25% of all posts; yet they never responded to o

threads, and never 'answered' the doubts from other participants.

to Fa-Lun-Gong, the most frequent posting users were the citizens of the PRC in Yal

forums, whose posts repeatedly encouraged the residents of Taiwan to give up the ide

being independent, and repeatedly 'fight' or 'shoot' back at those discussants v

identified themselves as *Taiwanese,* not *Chinese.* Their monophonic expressi

engendered other discussants to suspect they are Net spies assigned by the Chir

government to get involved with online discussions.

In addition to the parties' conflicts, the involvements of other political tensions (Fa-L

Gong vs. Chinese government, Chinese government vs. Taiwanese government) m

the issue of talking about politics online become even more complex in Yahoo polit

forum. I argue, the so-called extreme groups assigned by particular political group:

order to diffuse their particular ideologies, though they might 'appear' in the same

(Sunstein's prediction was the extreme groups would choose the same voiced site

participate in) and 'involve' themselves with certain topics, they are still incapable

'deliberating' and thereby 'sharpen participants' understandings of their confli

(Mansbridge, 1996:47). The discourses they constituted are contesting, which car

transform 'interests or reveal previously unrealised areas of agreements' (ibid). Yahc

situation reflects the warning Mansbridge shares,

> ...the deliberation arena should ideally be equally open to all, and power - in
> sense of the threat of sanction or the use of force - should not interfere with
> impact of argument (ibid).

Two things need to be noted here. Firstly, the users of Fa-Lun-Gong and suspected

spies from Mainland China did not get involved in the other two forums' discussi

Secondly, Yahoo political forum set up its own board moderators (Palm and

Presidential office didn't). The attitudes of Yahoo's moderators towards how to man

embraced by Yahoo's board moderators; however, they had to face the tensions betw

Mainland Chinese users and those identified as Taiwanese users. Many discussants

conflicted with suspected net spy groups had warned the moderators that they had

complained emails to report the moderators to Yahoo. These threatening actions v

also extended to board moderators' private spheres. The blogs of moderators v

targeted with accusations and reported to the blog company as follows: 'the bo

moderator of Yahoo political forum abuses the discussants'[77].

Yahoo closed its political forum down on June 4th, 2007, but maintained its forums

business, consumer groups, entertainment, sports and social networking. Yahoo di

announce any reason to explain this closure, the company simply provided a s

announcement to state that they would not preserve any of the content of the board,

suggested the original participants to try other functions (groups, friends, and blog;

their site (http://tw.promo.yahoo.com/webbbs.html#q4). Yahoo's actions ec!

scholars' concerns about the formation of cyber-capitalism (Frechette, 2005:555-

Hannabuss, 2006:126-127; Pieterse, 1994:11-29), which could 'dominate the market

users' and inevitably 'threaten the Internet, and the wider information commun

(Hannabuss, 2006:126).

In contrast to Yahoo's suddenly termination of its political forum, Palm and

Presidential Office insofar (until 2009) still carry on their forums' operations. The

profit feature of these two forums might be a reason supporting their operation.

Presidential Office didn't change any regulations even after the new president,

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[77] Refer to the following link
http://blog.sina.com.tw/blog_adm/article.php?comment_page=6&pbgid=25101&entryid=249329&con
n=1&trackopen=#mycomment

In discussing the historical development of the public sphere, Habermas(1989) notes

crucial feature of rational argument,

> ...the public process of critical debate lay claim to being in accord with reason
> intrinsic to the idea of a public opinion born of the power of the better argu
> was the claim to that morally pretentious rationality that strove to discover
> was at once just and right (ibid:54).

Rational argument, followed by Habermas's account, is 'the sole arbiter of any is

(Calhoun, 1999:13). Deliberative democracy is established on rational process

reasonable participants.

The data collected in this study showed that the amount of abusive terms amongs

three forums on average (38.41%) was higher than in other researches. The ten:

between Mainland China and Taiwan (including governments and residents),

between the Taiwanese political groups (pan-blue and pan-green groups) were the n

sources for online discussants to create rhetorical and bulk amounts of abusive mess:

In particular, the tensions engendered by identity politics in Taiwan's current poli

context, arguably defined by Taiwanese residents' ethnicities - Waisheng Rei

Bensheng Ren, or Taiwanese is or is not Chinese - were inevitably amplified in the oi

discursive arenas. I argue here that since identity politics decided by ethnicities

intruded into online discussions, the rational qualities have become inevitably weake

The participants who engaged in identity issues (both Taiwanese and Mainland Chi

discussants) quarrelled and abused the different ethnic groups, and ignored the conc

of publicity and rationality. This phenomenon observed in this study actually ref

Calhoun's notion of a gap between identity politics and the ideal of the public sphere,

If the online discussants won't embrace their differences to listen to or react to o

ethnic groups with rational attitudes, but repeat their own voices and even abuse otl

instead, the rational qualities will inevitably crash. As to the issue of whether on

forums can be a bridge between different ethnic groups, according to the data collecte

this project, my attitude has become more pessimistic. Habermas claims that v

rationality employed, '...the interaction leads towards agreement when it is understc

(1984:9). In Taiwan's context, the identity issues are mixed up with historical tragec

i.e. the 2/28 incidents, and historical oddities, which enlarged the gaps between diffe

ethnic groups. Without explanations from the previous authorities and their polii

successors to account for those historical tragedies, an agreement can not be reac

based on mutual understanding between them and the Bensheng Ren - the na

Taiwanese group. The non-negotiable and determined attitude of the Mainland Chii

discussants towards the Taiwanese identification irritates Taiwanese discussants. As

interviewee TX in my study explained, the result of interacting with Mainland Chii

discussants was a 'saliva war', which is far from the rational arguments.

As to the extent to which rationality was revealed in this research, the three for

presented a certain degree of discrepancies. The participants of the Presidential Of

forum revealed lower amounts of abusive terms (16.2% of all post, Yahoo was 38

and Palm BBS was 37.5%), higher amounts of argumentative essays written (66.2% o

posts, (Yahoo was 18.6% and Palm BBS was 27.7%), and higher amounts of informa

with sources provided (44.59% of all posts, Yahoo was 15.4% and Palm BBS

17.7%). This comparative result demonstrates that the discussants in the Preside1

Office forum, the government-run forum, intended to deliberate with more rati

attitudes. In this research, some discussants in the Presidential Office also had

intensions were to communicate directly with the bureaucratic power, rather than with each other. The data of seed amounts (5 seeds, 6.7% of all posts, see appendix disclosed that there were very few threads formed in the Presidential Office which di satisfy the set purpose of the Presidential Office - to form public discourse via c communication.

4. Strong Publics vs. Weak Publics

However, the interviewees who accepted my in-depth interview all put less emphasi the outward responses they received (i.e. from the government or other organisations, experienced discussants in the Presidential Office accepted my interview expressed they were aware they won't obtain any direct responses), and more emphasis on crea a reward for themselves for their own inner satisfaction. The lack of positive respo and encouragement gained from the outside environment over time, might be a reason participants to lower their expectations and accept that '爽' (Shuang), meaning 'its g to give oneself an orgasm', is enough.

Nancy Fraser (1989) discusses the relation between deliberation and decision mak and based on citizens' perspectives, the most obvious and important distinctio between 'weak' and 'strong' publics which in effect are the two components Habermas's model, 'the informal public sphere and formal decision-making bod (Bohman, 1996:179). A weak public is one 'whose deliberative practice con exclusively in opinion formation and does not also encompass decision making' (Fr ibid:134-135). A strong public, such as parliaments, can reach binding decisions and institutionally organised to do so because their discourse 'encompasses both opi

discussants constantly, and finally realised that the political conflict could never really sorted out by their discussions. As a result, they gave up their participation in on forum discussions, and turned back to the real society, either to search for o opportunities to play a part or potentially influence the strong publics, or to accept 'the need for real life is more important than participating in online discussic (interviewee Handsome Handsome Man).

The image of online discussants revealed from the in-depth interviews was mostly ac and self-determined. It is worth noting that their ambivalent attitudes and self-dri intention towards the character of online anonymity resulted in uncertain discur: qualities. On one side, the anonymous environment initiated and secured t participation, however on the other side, they could act deceptively and abandon rational qualities. In this study, the profoundly involved users did care about their n IDs' reputations, which were popular and respected by other discussants. To pre reducing their popularities, substitute IDs were created for the purpose of supporting main IDs' arguments, or vilifying opposing groups.

Deliberative democracy (on the basis of face-to-face communication) is criticised as civilizing force of hypocrisy' (Elster, 1998:12); individuals find that they have to 'cc arguments in terms of the public interest rather than the self-interest that may t motivate them' (Dryzek, 2000:46). The creation of substitute IDs reflects contradiction between self-interest and public-interest. Are online discussants intere in the debates of public affairs? Or, are online political forums places to 'talk' al politics through which they may know more friends?

debates would inevitably become present.

5. Brave New Net World or Virtual Battle Field

Steven Clift, a well-known and respected globally advocator, who runs an on

deliberative space *Minnesota E-Democracy*, has warned that,

> Those hoping for an almost accidental democratic transformation fostered
> information technology will watch in shock from the sidelines as their favourite
> medium becomes the arsenal of virtual civil-war - civil war among partisans a1
> levels...Instead of encouraging networked citizen participation that improves
> public results delivered in our democracies, left to its natural path, the Internet
> be used to eliminate forms of constructive civic engagement by the other 90 per
> of citizens. A 10 percent democracy of warring partisan is no democracy at
> (2003, quoted in Dahlberg, 2007:130)

As to the question of whether online political forums can pave the road for

implementation of public spheres, based on the empirical results in this study, the ans

is more pessimistic than optimistic, and echoes Clift's claim that the discursive arena

the Internet are turned into the arsenal of virtual civil war. However, the transforma

of online political forums from the expectation of a brave new net world to virtual ba

field shouldn't simply be attributed to the lack of discussants' rational respon

neglecting the concern of the ordinary discussants about possible unexpected intimida

from the political authorities.

The Taiwanese scholar Fong (2009) comments on online political forums as foll

'...online political forums attracted few people to participate, but these few repeat

announced conversational or bureaucratic points (are they a kind of call-in soldier

(ibid:78). In Taiwan's context, call-in soldiers are a suspected conjecture that s

No matter whether they are 'a kind of call-in soldiers', 'suspected Ban-Gong' in P

BBS (chapter VII) or 'suspected net spies' in Yahoo (chapter VI), they all enger

concern for the ordinary discussants that the discursive qualities will be thwarted

unexpected (or say unwelcome) participants, who don't really want to contribute

exchange their opinions with other discussants through rational attitudes. Via repea

monophonic voices, 'biting' other participants or creating flames in the online foru

the normal discussions are disrupted. If call-in soldiers, Ban-Gong or net spies are re

assigned by certain political groups/authorities, they don't participate in order to ext

agonistic politics or to create a deliberative enclave in the public domain (Dahlb

2007:133).

In relation to this issue, we should ask two relevant questions. Firstly, what are

reasons which cause online discussants to worry so much? Secondly, if their wor

about assigned disrupters are true, what is the purpose of these assigned participants?

answer to the first question is, they are worried by the chaotic contents of cer

participants' posts, whose terms are written in order to abuse repeatedly the ta

political group, i.e. the camp of Taiwanese independence and president Chen Shui-b

The interviewee Kait, who had observed online discussions for a long period of ti

guessed that some net spies were assigned by the Chinese government, 'their claims

like super military experts who can supply excellent evidence of missile diffusior

Mainland China, if Taiwan dares to announce its independence. It is possible that they

patriotic 'aggressive youth'[78], however, personally I don't believe that an ordir

aggressive youth is capable of presenting such detailed military information.'

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[78] For more information on aggressive youth, see chapter VII

the same message, 'don't vote for the DPP', in the political board, however, the disappeared collectively after the election.

Despite a lack of direct evidence to prove the existence of net spies or other suspect assigned participants, it can be certain that the normal discursive function is thwart while encountering suspected net spies; they act as trollers or flame makers, who distu the discursive atmosphere. Fragile participants would avoid participating in onli deliberations continuously in order to escape from the chaotic environment.

If some participants deliberately disturb (or clash with) ordinary online discussions w an assigned political purpose, online political forums are invaded by the force of politi power. Deliberating democracy via cyber space in Taiwan's context confronts struggle of being autonomous from intervening power, which discourages the ratio and constructive arguments. Online political forums are not only the places of 'sali wars' (chapter IX), but are the virtual battle fields where an unlimited war and civil w coexist.

6. From Republic.com to Republic.com 2.0 - Some suggestions for Further Researches

I would borrow some of Sunstein's words from the preface of his book *Republic.com 2* the new edition of *Republic. com*, as the start of my recommendation for furtl researches.

> Technology has been changing at an amazing pace...I have also added a n chapter on blogs, whose remarkable rise the original book did not anticipate. am happy to say that I have greatly altered the discussion of pol

new technology actually enrich and create more virtual spaces which are potential pu
spheres.

In a recent case which occurred in Taiwan during Typhoon Morakot in 2(
microblogging participants (Plurkers) used Plurk as a communicative platform to dis
and forward instant messages about assisting the damaged areas caused by the mas
flood. The volunteers later incorporated Google to establish a map presenting v
detailed information collected from online sources (blogs, BBS or microblogging),
this was created faster than the official site. *Countrymen* (see introduction) or Plur
obtained information from the Internet to help enable a disaster relief mobilisation
which functioned amazingly well in the emergency situation.

My first suggestion for further research would be to interweave different new form
discursive sites to scrutinise how these sites are connected at the age of web 2.0. Wl
of these sites' connective mutual cooperation in constructing public spheres, is worth
exploration in both theoretical and empirical dimensions.

My second suggestion is to focus on the subculture of the Internet as a research sul
when studying the possible factors which influence online political forum discussi
During the process of discourse analysis, I noticed particular terms are created
adopted by the online participants of political forums, i.e. 嘴砲 (pronounced 'Chui-p
meaning 'mouth cannon'). The discussants not only use these special terms to exp
their meaning, but also attach icons particularly designed for these terms. The discuss
seem to have an agreement about the meaning of these terms, and know wher
download these icons. To understand why and how these subculture terms are cre

A2   Post title:

A3   User ID:

A4   Forum: 1 - Yahoo   2 - Palm BBS   3 - Presidential of

A5   Post sequence: 1 - Initial 2 - Reply

A5-1   Initial post only, if it is not, go to A5-2

A5-1-1   The categories of the topic:

1 - Economy
2 - Health and social welfare
3 - Diplomatic issues
4 - A commentary of the political conflict between Taiwan's political parties
5 - A critique of politicians' performance
6 - Education
7 - Crime
8 - Environmental issues
9 - Relations between Mainland China and Taiwan
10 - A stance that reflects any Taiwanese independence issue
11 - Government performance
12 - Political societies
13 - Media
14 - Parliament (Legislative council)
15 - A conflict between northern and southern Taiwan
16 - People's livelihood
17 - Conflict between online participants
18 - Conflict between southern Taiwan and northern Taiwan
19 - Historical events/stories
20 - Forum regulations
21 - Science
22 - Fa-Lun-Gong
23 - SPAM
24 - Others

A5-1-2: Does this initial post present its point as a reflection of something reported by
mainstream media? 1 - Yes 2 - No 3 - Hard to identify

A7   Post seed (the first in a series of reply messages) 1 - Yes   2 - No

A8   User's location: 1 - Taiwan   2 - Mainland China   3 - Another place
Please record the IP address

A9   User's native country (his/her nationality):
1 - Taiwan
2 - Mainland China
3 - Hong-Kong
4 - Other Chinese speaking Asian country (Singapore, Malaysia, etc.)
5 - Hard to distinguish

Part B: Qualities of the Discussion Content

B1   Public-orientation

B1-1

Q1-b1-1: Does this discussant verbalise a critique towards the governments (inclu
the Mainland Chinese government) or the government members, which diverges 1
government announcements?
1 - Yes - go to Q1-b1-1-1
2 - No - go to Q2-b1-1
3 - N/A - go to Q2-b1-1

Q1-b1-1-1: Which government does this discussant criticise?
1 - Nationalist KMT party
2 - KMT – Lee's government
3 - DPP
4 - Mainland Chinese government
5 - Others

Q2-b1-1: Does this discussant verbalise a critique towards government members, whi
diverges from the government's advertisements?
1 - Yes
2 - No
3 - N/A

2 - No

3 - N/A

Q5-b1-1: What is the discussant's attitude towards Mainland Chinese people?

1 - Friendly

2 - Neutral

3 - Hostile

4 - Not mentioned

B1-2 If the issue of the topic is especially related to the conflict between enterprise the society, then do the following coding

Q1-b1-2: Does this discussant disagree with the decisions of enterprises or CEOs du the conflict event in society?

1 - Yes

2 - No

3 - N/A (go to Q1-b2-1)

Q2-b1-2: If the answer is 'yes' (Y), then this message will be labelled as:

1 - Independent from the market power

If the answer is 'no' (N), then this message will be labelled as:

2 - Non-independent from the market power

B2 Rationality

B2-1 Heated discussions

Q1-b2-1: Does this discussant use any abusive terms?

1 - Yes, continue Q2-b2-1

2 - No, go to Q1-b2-2

Q2-b2-1: How many abusive terms are used?   times

Q3-b2-1: Sub-categorizing those abusive terms as

1 - Name calling: times/post

2 - Aspersions: times/post

3 - Synonyms for liar: times/post

B2-2

Q1-b2-2: Does the writing style of this post belong to a genre of Argumentative Ess
(議論文)? (if the answer is No, please go to Q4-b2-1)
1 - Yes
2 - No

Q2-b2-2: Opening (leading):

Q2-b2-2-1: Which genre of opening approach does the discussant adopt?
1 - Directly pointing out the main stance: (by opening the door you can see the mount
immediately.)
2 - Leading the point and stating the background knowledge
3 - Interpretation of what the subject is
4 - Enquiry into the issue
5 - Quote from another people's words (e.g. old sayings, famous people's speech)

Q3-b2-2: Main body (verification of the arguments)

Q3-b2-2-1: What kind of verifying skills does the discussant use?
1 - Presents his/her arguments directly only (go to Q3-b2-2-2)
2 - Refutes other people's arguments only (go to Q3-b2-2-3)
3 - A mix of both

Q3-b2-2-2: What kind of approach does this discussant adopt, if he/she chooses
present his/her arguments directly?
1 - Providing examples
2 - The deductive method (deduction)
3 - Inductive method
4 - Contrast
5 - Analogy
6 - Metaphor (simile)

Q3-b2-2-3: What kind of approach does this discussant adopt, if he/she uses the skill
'refuting other people's arguments'?
1 - Refuting other's argumentative points (pointing out that other's stances are wrong)

2 - No: go to B3-1

Q4-b2-2-1: Calculate the frequencies of source information in this post:
1 - Academic research (journal, conference paper, books, theories):   times
2 - Official statistical report: times
3 - On-line database (e.g.Wikipedia, google search):   times
4 - Laws: times
5 - Newspaper (or TV news) reports/comments: times
6 - Articles from personal Blogs: times
7 - Historical events based on official reports, or pop writers' books:

      times
8 - Others (please specify)   times

B3   Openness

B3-1
Q1-b3-1: Does this post relate to the relations between Mainland China and Taiwan?
1 - Yes
2 - No…go to Q4-b3-1

Q2-b3-1: Does this discussant verbalise a comment (or a critique) with a respectful/po
manner (for example, the term used respectfully for 'you': 您) regarding to oth
stances when discussing the issue of the Taiwan Strait is relations?
1 - Yes
2 - No

Q3-b3-1: Does this discussant provide a vision for solving the conflicts between Taiv
and Mainland China?
1 - Yes
2 - No
3 - N/A

Q4-b3-1: Does this post relate to the conflict between the Pan-Blue group and Pan-Gre
group?
1 - Yes
2 - No….go to Part C

C1 Political groups:

1 - **Deep-Pan-Blue group** (the fundamental supporters of the KMT Party and the People First Party, supporting religiously).

2 - **Pan-Blue group** (those having the intention of supporting the KMT Party and the People First P...

3 - **Neutral** (those that do not obviously show their party's intention, or who describe themselves as b... in a neutral position).

4 - **Pan-Green group** (those who have the intention of supporting the Democratic Progressive Party... the Taiwan Solidarity Union).

5 - **Deep-Pan-Green group** (the fundamental supporters of the Democratic Progressive Party and th... Taiwan Solidarity Union: supporting religiously).

6 - **The Mainland China users.**

7 - **Fa-Lun-Gong users.**

8 - **hard to identify.**

Threatening	去屎吧	Cyu-shih-ba	Go to eat shits	In Chinese, '屎 (shih)'s pronunciation i quite similar to 'death'. Cyu-shih-ba is a transformation '去死吧！', means 'go to di This term is les threatening tha 'go to die'.
	打得你滿地找牙	Da-de-ni-man-di-jhao-ya	I will beat you until your teeth will be lost from your mouth, and fall over to the ground.	It is a quite violent term in the discussions. Usually showe the author lose his temper.
Irony	是不是很像國王的新衣？	Shih-bu-shih-hen-siang-guo-wang-de–sin-yi	Is it similar to the King's new clothing?	This term originates from story for children. Here implies the politicians are liar.
	民蔡黨	Min-jin-dang	The Party of Forbidden Democratic Progress	'蔡' is the homophone as '進'. '民進 黨"Min-jin-dang' is the Pa of Democratic Progress. So, th participants us '蓋' to replace '進' in order t satirize the Pa of Democratic lose his ideal, b turn into be another authorities.
Threatening	去屎吧	Cyu-shih-ba	Go to eat shits	

2

				like taking headquarter	relations to promote himse
Erotic	難歪	Ji-wai	The sexual organ is not straight	Accusing other opinions are n straightforwar
	欠操，欠幹	Cian-cao, cian-gan	Lack of a fuck	A sexist term
	打嘴炮	Da-zuei-pao	Sexual intercourse through the mouth	It usually indicates the meaningless confliction in t forums.
Slang	國之將亡必有妖孽	Guo-jhih-jian-wang-bi-you-yao-nie	When a country collapsed, there must be a monster over there.	Accusing somebody will damage the wh country
	別人吃米粉你在喊燒	Bie-ren-chih-mi-fen-ni-zai-han-shao	Another people eat rice noodle, and you shout 'too hot'!	It is not your business. Just attention on yourself.

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