

Comparing Political Discourse in Facebook Groups and Forums:
Ambivalence, Social Accountability, and Political Participation

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy
in
Communication

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

September 2011

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Abstract of thesis entitled:

This study examines the relationships among disagreement, ambivalence, social accountability and political participation. Based on Mutz's (2006) model that disagreements tend to induce ambivalence and social accountability, participants of Facebook groups which are expected to encounter less disagreements can be expected to have lower levels of ambivalence and social accountability. Hence, Facebook group participants are expected to be more willing to participate in related activities. On the other hand, forum participants who experience more disagreements are expected to participate less. Meanwhile, ambivalence and social accountability may mediate the relationship between disagreement and participation. Hypotheses are examined through analyzing the data from both content analysis and a college-based survey conducted in Hong Kong. The findings confirm the negative effect of disagreement on ambivalence and social accountability. Ambivalence is also found to mediate disagreement and participation. The theoretical and social implications of the findings are discussed.

Keyword: Disagreement, ambivalence, social accountability, participation, Hong Kong

Submitted by Stephanie Jean Tsang

for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Communication

at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in July 2011

論文摘要

本論文旨探討意見分歧，矛盾心理，社會責任和政治參與之間的關係。以 Mutz (2006) 的模式作為基石，意見分歧傾向增強矛盾心理和社會責任，因此參與Facebook群組的人會遇到較少的分歧而有較少的矛盾心理和社會責任。故此，Facebook群組的參與者將更有可能參與相關的政治活動。反之，論壇的參與者會因為體驗比較多的分歧，而較少參與有關的政治活動。同時，矛盾心理和社會責任可能斡旋於分歧和參與的關係之間。通過分析網上論壇和Facebook群組，以及在香港以大學生為基礎的調查數據，結果證實意見分歧對矛盾心理和社會責任的消極作用。矛盾心理也被發現可以解釋分歧和參與之間的關係。本研究將根據研究結果討論理論上的貢獻，並談及社會涵義。

關鍵字：意見分歧、矛盾心理、社會責任、政治參與、香港

Table of contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Theoretical Background	12
<i>Deliberative and Participatory Democracies</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Interpersonal Discussion.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Online Political Engagement</i>	<i>36</i>
Chapter 3: Framework.....	45
Chapter 4: Design and Methods.....	64
Chapter 5: Analysis and Results	76
<i>Results - Content Analysis.....</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>Results – Survey.....</i>	<i>82</i>
Chapter 6: Discussions.....	97
Chapter 7: Limitations and Future Studies.....	114
Chapter 8: Appendices	118
<i>Appendix A</i>	<i>118</i>
<i>Appendix B</i>	<i>120</i>
Chapter 9: References	137

Chapter 1: Introduction

On 1 July 2003, 500,000 Hong Kong citizens marched on the streets to protest against the Tung Chee Hwa administration and the then imminent national security legislation. In terms of a report on the demonstration written by Chung and Chan (2003), people who age below 19 years old constituted 11% of the total population involved, while those between 20 to 29 years old constituted around 33% and those between 30 to 39 years old constituted 31%. In other words, the majority of the protestors were found to be young adults. According to their understanding, the mobilization process was mainly done through the Internet, and they suggest that the effects of Internet mobilization cannot be lumped under one head as such effect was only shown to apply on some of the protestors, especially those highly educated professionals who age 20 to 30 years old and who are frequent Internet users.

Since the massive demonstration in 2003, demonstrations have become one of the most important tools for opinion expression in Hong Kong. Besides the one on 1 January 2004 which involved nearly 100,000 citizens calling for democratic reform, there was another one with 200,000 citizens calling for direct election of the Chief Executive. After that, there were three other large-scale pro-democracy demonstrations from 2005 to 2006. Apart from the structural reasons like decreased satisfaction towards different government policies, the demonstrations mentioned may be due to the increased use of Internet by young adults.

The controversy over the demolition of various cultural and historical sites is another example. During 2006 and 2007, large groups of people tried to prevent the Star Ferry Terminal and the Queen's Pier from being demolished by the Hong Kong government. Furthermore, many young adults joined the protest against the construction of the high-speed railway in 2010. Among the protestors in recent years, young adults constituted the majority, and they used many different ways to express their voices to the government and also to the public. Some chose to participate in offline activities like protests and voicing through the City Forum organized by the Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), whereas some chose to voice through the online platform.

Within the online platform, people created different websites with photos, videos, commentaries, new reports, etc. They even passed on YouTube clips regarding political events and politicians, self-made YouTube clips and posters to other people to promote their perspectives. Some even founded their own media channels such as People's Radio Hong Kong and Hong Kong In-media Web. With Internet, web users not only can obtain what the mainstream mass media miss but also updated information. In this sense, the Internet serves as a platform for exchanging political information; such exchange of information has been particularly pronounced among young adults who are frequent participants of the online community.

As mentioned, many have suggested that the increase in young adults participating in political activities might be related to their increased use of

Internet regarding politics. In the past, people communicated with each other mostly in the face-to-face context. However, with the fast pace of technological generation, their sources of information mainly come from the Internet instead.

The use of Internet regarding politics, especially by young adults, has been growing rapidly in Hong Kong. It is said that, the lack of existing official channels for them to voice and participate is the reason why Internet has become the alternative means to get involved and exchange information regarding current issues. Besides websites for spreading information, there are platforms to discuss different issues, to network with friends and non-friends, and even to plan political events and promote activities. As young adults are familiar with technology and they rely on the Internet for social purposes, they are good at utilizing the Internet for political purposes. In other words, they are able to spread their perspectives and messages to a large group of Internet users regardless of their location and time, and to mobilize other Internet participants for collective actions. Furthermore, people who cannot join the events can now get instant reports of what is happening at the venue, especially through social networking sites such as Facebook and Weibo. Moreover, by opening and joining online groups, members can encourage each other to participate in events more easily. In sum, Internet now provides a platform for individuals who share similar interests to gather, and also cheap resources to promote their views and exchange information with others. All these can help people develop stronger feelings towards the groups they side

with and might contribute to the increasing amount of youth coming out to the street.

Although more and more young adults who are Internet users are found to actively perform different kinds of political activities, conclusion cannot be drawn that the Internet is the reason behind the large-scale demonstrations. How does the Internet explain the emergence of new social movements as mentioned above? How actually is the Internet contributing to the participation of various political events, if any?

Within the online context, many platforms are available, and many of them can be related to mobilization. In this study, participants in both homogeneous (Facebook groups) and heterogeneous social networks (forum) are examined. How do they differ in terms of willingness to participate in related activities? To be more specific, do the differences in the deliberativeness in the two platforms affect the participants? If yes, in what ways?

Forum vs. Facebook groups

This study examines the relationship between Internet and political participation by comparing two Internet platforms. Besides the traditional online forums that many have studied, Facebook groups is chosen as it is expected to be different from forums in terms of amount of disagreements. Public forums have enjoyed growing interest over the past decade (Kleinke, 2008), and have become an established form of collective communication

(Claridge, 2007). Meanwhile, social networking sites like Facebook have just started to gain attention from researchers. They are both online platforms for citizens to discuss and exchange views on current affairs.

Facebook has started to gain attention by the media and public more frequently, and it has recently become a tool for people to achieve political purposes. People can now easily open and join a Facebook group for an issue, and discuss about it with others who are also interested in the issue. Forums are expected to be more deliberate than Facebook Groups; therefore, they are two platforms which can be used to test out whether there are differences in users' willingness to participate in the different online spaces. First, their degrees of deliberation will be explored by content analysis. One of the main research questions is what the differences between disagreements in Facebook Groups and traditional forums are. By using forums and Facebook groups which are believed to have different levels of deliberation, the users of both platforms and their levels of participation are then compared.

Research Focus & Aims

Half a century ago, a two-step flow theory of communication suggested that people do not only get political information from the news media, but also from opinion leaders. (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1968). Nowadays, it is suggested that social networks are taking over the role of opinion leaders (Liu, 2007). Although citizens are likely to access like-minded opinion leaders, opinion leaders no longer occupy the majority of citizens'

information sources. Instead, citizens are likely to gain information online from people they know and also anonymous strangers. Therefore, the influence of opinion leaders is likely to be cancelled out by other people who hold the opposite position in people's communication networks. According to Liu (2007), the path of influence regarding voter preference is better refined to be "media → opinion leaders → communication networks → the public." In this sense, with the rise of new communication technologies providing new communication networks, new deliberative potentials should be explored.

This study therefore focuses on online deliberation and connects it to offline participation. The widespread adoption of the Internet has triggered utopian predictions about its democratic potential in terms of creating opportunities for public discourse and political engagement. Optimists believe that the Internet provides a sphere for political expression, and that political discussion raises awareness about collective problems, highlights opportunities for involvement, and thereby promotes civic participation (Dahlberg, 2001; Kwak, Williams, Wang, & Lee, 2005). On the other hand, Mutz (2006) suggests that political networks are comprised of members with heterogeneous opinions; for that reason, people are less confident in their perspectives and hence less willing to participate. Such contradicting results are examined by comparing the deliberation and participation of users of discussion forums and Facebook groups.

When citizens become informed rational beings, how will their participation rate be influenced? According to Mutz (2006), the dilemma

regarding whether deliberation has mobilizing or demobilizing effect poses an interesting question with respect to the relationships between theories of participatory democracy and theories of deliberative democracy – does exposure to disagreement mobilize or demobilize people to engage in various political activities? Previous studies have suggested that political discussions and exposure to disagreements can play an important role in participatory democracy (Plane & Gershtenson, 2004; Thurner & Eymann, 2000), so what are the greater impacts on democracy? As “patterns of political communication are specific to particular political contexts, and hence they might vary across institutional and cultural settings” (Ikeda & Huckfeldt, 2001), it is important to study the online political discourse in the Hong Kong context.

This study aims to examine to what extent does exposure to disagreements appear within social networks, forums and Facebook in particular, have adverse implications for deliberative democracy and political participation of various kinds. Surveys were utilized to compare the relative outcomes of deliberation in the two settings, and the influences they have on people’s willingness to participate. In order to study the effects of disagreements, ambivalence and social accountability are examined. If people are exposed to dissimilar views, does that mean that they re-evaluate their own opinions? Does that influence their motivation to participate in further and future political discussions and events?

Significance

Under certain conditions, it appears that deliberation can produce more sophisticated and participative citizens (Fung, 2001; Fung & Wright, 2001; Luskin & Fishkin, 1998; Sulkin & Simon, 2001; Walsh, 2003), but at the same time, it seems that the outcomes that scholars have hoped for may be rare (Hendriks, 2002; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Holt, 1999; Mendelberg & Oleske, 2000). According to Ryfe (2002), at bottom lies the fundamental question: “As a practical matter, can deliberative democracy work?” (p. 50). This study hence examines whether deliberation can work to produce more participative citizens or not.

In a sociopolitical climate that is increasingly polarized on matters related to values or morals (Knuckey, 2007), understanding the role played by disagreement takes on particular significance. According to Wojcieszak and Price (2009), exposure to disagreement has not been systematically addressed. Besides, computer-mediated communication is another area which lacks examination in terms of deliberation. Few studies have specifically examined the online platforms to facilitate online deliberation of civil issues in terms of disagreements. Because such publicly accessible online forums offer unprecedented insight into the discursive processes occurring within, studying them is a ‘new and potentially quite powerful mode of scientific observation’ that ‘offers a more refined understanding of popular thought than might be gained from structured surveys’ (Price et al., 2006, p. 48). Although citizen participation in online political discussion has become an important research

focus, not much is known with regard to how the Internet affects the public and what the implications are in Hong Kong.

Moreover, very few studies so far have compared the effects of different online deliberation (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, Bichard, 2010). This study contributes to help identify the deliberative potential of the Internet, and it does not examine the Internet as one platform, but compare two online platforms at one time. Besides the usual focus on online forums, Facebook Groups are also explored, and samples of college students who report participation in political discussion forums or Facebook Groups within the past year are drawn on.

Another possible contribution is adding empirical evidence for how Internet might lead to participation. In this study, to what extent deliberation with respect to exposure to disagreements is examined by performing content analysis. Second, the extent to which exposure to disagreements have effect on ambivalence and social accountability of Internet users and their effects on participation is evaluated by conducting survey.

In order to be deliberative, a discussion should focus on “political alternatives” (Berelson, 1952, p. 323) and dissimilar perspectives (Mutz, 2006; Thompson, 2008). Scholars have always expected such exposure to be beneficial to democracy. However, such exposure is found to pull citizens away from political participation (Mutz, 2006). To date, no conclusion can be firmly drawn as evidence is largely inconclusive. Moreover, support for this demobilization mostly comes from survey reports on interpersonal discussion

networks. Therefore, this study not only collects survey data but also conducts content analysis so that the actual amount of disagreements, instead of perceived disagreements, can be obtained.

How do different forms of online political engagement, due to their different amount of disagreements involved, affect their offline behavioral political participation? Within the online context, many platforms are available, and many of them can be related to social movements. For instance, people in both homogeneous and heterogeneous social networks are examined in this study, by comparing political discussion forums (heterogeneous) and Facebook groups (homogeneous). Public forums have enjoyed growing interest over the past decade (Kleinke, 2008), and have become an established form of collective communication (Claridge, 2007), and social networking sites like Facebook have started to gain attention from scholars. They are both places for citizens to get involved in current affairs; however, do they have any differences in terms of mobilization? When we talk about democracy, we not only care about participation but also deliberation. Then, what are their differences in terms of deliberativeness?

Outline

This study focuses on the question of how users are affected by political discourse among laypersons in Internet-based political platforms. The next session reviews studies on the concept of participatory and deliberative democracy. I then place a review of the benefits of interpersonal discussion,

and how it affects political participation. Subsequently, there is a section focusing on online deliberation and its relationship with political participation. Lastly, the framework emphasizing on Mutz's (2006) potential mechanisms of influence that connect disagreements and political participation is introduced.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background

Deliberative and Participatory Democracies

Whether democracy can be achieved as expected depends on how it is exercised and practiced (Vitale, 2006). The different models of democracy are all about the procedures for and processes of political decision-making but they emphasize different aspects of democratic society. Although they carry different normative expectations on citizens (Stromback, 2004), they all touch upon the role of open discussions and the importance of citizens' participation (Gimmler, 2001).

One of the most popular theories, participatory democracy, aims to extend the different forms of direct democracy to include non-state structures. By guaranteeing the enjoyment of political rights of all citizens, it is said that it can reduce both social and economic inequalities. However, it was then superseded by the deliberative democratic theory. Scholars then emphasize studying how deliberation can enhance democracy; however, people nowadays are still struggling to find places to deliberate.

Recently, there are debates on whether the two theories are compatible or not (e.g. Mutz, 2006), as some scholars find deliberation to be mobilizing while some others find contradictory results. If we look at the definitions of the two theories carefully, we will find out that if there is something incompatible, it is not between the two democracies, but between deliberation and participation, which are the two core elements regarded to be important in democratic societies.

Participatory Democracy

At the very beginning, the Western world started the idea of democracy which is in the form of participatory democracy, which means popular sovereignty and people self-rule themselves (William & Darity, 2008). To trace back to the root of it, we can look at the work of Carole Pateman (1970) and C. B. Macpherson (1977). According to Pateman (1970), participatory democracy requires maximum amount of participation and individuals influence “not just policies and decisions but also the development of the social and political capacities of each individual” (p.43). Just as how it is named, decision-making through participation is the main aspect in participatory democracy.

Very often, people have a tendency to reduce such kind of democracy to mere voting. However, democracy, at least to the founders, is not only an institutional arrangement for electoral contests (Strömbäck, 2005). What participatory democracy actually emphasizes is citizens’ regular participation, which includes different kinds of civic and political participation. Such participation can range from writing letters to the media to voting. People are expected to engage in public life and participate in different types of political actions. They bond and develop democratically-sound attitudes through their activities. Limited participation raises concerns that a bureaucracy or special interest groups will increasingly influence political decision-making (Habermas, 1989; Nisbet, 1969), which might not be in the interest of the public. Therefore, all the above acts to enhance popular sovereignty by

making elected officials listen carefully to what the public expects. In sum, democracy is built and sustained by actions done by a large group of people (Pateman, 1970) on a variety of regular participation but not solely on voting.

Besides the wide range of participations, all citizens should have the chance to participate if they have the will to. According to Pateman (1970) and Macpherson (1977), the implementation of participatory democracy depends on a deliberation process which includes all members of a community. The large group of people should be able to equitably discuss and decide the everyday issues together. They should not be isolated from one another, as interactions among individuals and institutions are needed. In most time, issues are complex and citizens therefore involve in collective decision-making process to make decisions together. Individuals then get to elect delegates who debate and decide the issues at stake. In this sense, participatory democracy includes interactions by all members. In the words of Putman (2000), "Citizenship is not a spectator sport" (p. 341); instead, people should get involved.

Since every citizen can exercise the right to speak and vote, it is not only believed that both social and economic inequalities can be reduced, but democracy will also be improved as political practice go beyond just the representative system (Barber, 1984). Such increase in participation can develop citizens in terms of their social and political capacities. In sum, it is believed that political participation strengthens the process of collective decision-making and the individuals themselves.

As elaborated above, the decision-making process in participatory democracy is guided by collective political will-formation and it combines both direct participation and deliberation with mechanisms of representative democracy as complementary systems. Besides participation, deliberation is also an important element as Pateman, Macpherson, Barber's formulations of direct participation, participation only makes sense when individual can think, ponder, and change his or her original position as a result of their exchanges with others (Strömbäck, 2005).

However, much of the appeal of participatory democracy only works in small-scale institutions (Fishkin, 2009) and it is not applicable to the large-scale societies. In larger societies where town-hall meetings are not workable, such ideal participation does not occur as people no longer gather for political discussions. If citizens no longer get involved in deliberation and interaction, participatory democracy will not work as the founders had hoped for.

Deliberative Democracy

Deliberative democratic theory grew out of the more fundamental belief that greater participation by average citizens is beneficial to forming a healthier democracy (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970). With the then distant relationship between citizens and government, leaders and scholars were aware that participatory democracy is inadequate for solving collective problems. While participatory democracy emphasizes participation as a feature of political process, deliberative democracy emphasizes deliberation.

Instead of focusing on voting, deliberative democracy has been described as a “talk-centric” conception of democracy (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 290), which focuses on conflict and interaction (Shapiro, 1999). Rather than expressing opinions by means of voting, people are expected to converge toward a collective consensus after communicating with each other (Cohen, 1997; Dryzek, 2000; Freeman, 2000; Strömbäck, 2005).

Direct discussion among citizens and direct decision-making are keys to the deliberative theory (Dahlberg, 2001, p. 616). With the concern that even democratically elected representatives may act against the interests of the groups they represent while preserving their own interests (Chambers, 2003), citizens should have the right to discuss and make decisions by themselves. Deliberative democracy is what came out to apprehend it. It took Habermas’s norms as a descriptive ideal of deliberative public discourse to supplement the traditional representative democracy. It includes people engaging in deliberations, and citizens are expected to understand, accept and respond freely to others’ arguments in a successful deliberative model (Bohman, 1996). The concepts of reciprocity and mutual reason-giving, coupled with persuasion, necessitate a form of discourse that is rational, logical, and rhetorical (Gutmann, 1993).

According to theorists of deliberative democracy, deliberation as discussion is not solely but with specific requirements. Habermas’s (1962/1991) writings on communication and deliberation claim that there must be some deliberative norms in order to have a viable public sphere. It has

to be equal, open, with reason, and be inclusive. In any case, the impact of political discussion is expected to be dependent upon the existence or absence of such conditions and characteristics.

Deliberation has to be equal, which is normatively designed to mirror the Habermasian ideal in which the public sphere is marked by equality (Benhabib, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Dryzek, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1989; Mansbridge, 1980). According to Habermas (1989), political talk is an important element in the public sphere, and people are supposed to have equal rights to speak, be respected, be able to listen to different views and then come to consensus. Deliberative democratic theorists emphasize rational public deliberation among free and equal citizens about matters of common concern. Besides equality, deliberation has to be open (Gutmann, 1993).

As defined by deliberative theorists, deliberation must contain reasoned argument (Bessette, 1994; Gutmann & Thompson, 2000; Knight & Thompson, 1996), so that people can learn from each other. Citizens employ practical reasoning and weigh the choices available (Walton, 1996). Within the process, public politics should be weighted and judged (Gunderson, 2000), and the best options can therefore be carried out. In other words, deliberation corresponds to a collective process of reflection and analysis (Manin, 1987). Conversations is therefore said to reduce participants' cognitive inconsistencies (Zaller, 1992), which further lead to higher quality arguments (Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 2000; Kuhn, 1991). After deliberation, fully-informed

citizens are created, as well as well-considered opinions. Citizens not only have to engage in discussions, they must also be willing and able to shape and reshape their opinions through deliberation (Bickford, 1996). If not, engaging with other people does not lead to public-spirited individuals. In sum, the goal of deliberation is to come to an understanding of the common good of the society, which is the main achievement for deliberation.

Deliberation has been variously defined (Chambers, 2003), but it is essentially a democratic decision-making process which citizens listen to, learn from, and engage with alternative viewpoints (Burkhalter et al., 2002; Dryzek, 2000). It requires citizens to learn about and respect views and opinions that may be contrary to their own (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). The idea is that listening to others provides opportunities for individuals to be empathetic with the other and thus transforms their privately-oriented self to publicly-oriented ones through reasoned argumentation (Mendelberg, 2002). In other words, deliberation challenges individuals' conceptions of the "common good" by letting them engage with alternative views and ideas.

By learning from others, people can then make better decisions by taking into account more information. Proponents of deliberative democracy argue that through deliberation, citizens can become more enlightened about the merits of other viewpoints and the value of civic participation in general (Burkhalter, Gastil, & Kelshaw, 2002; Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Melville, Willingham, & Dedrick, 2005; Warren, 1992). By having mutual

reason-giving (Gutmann & Thompson, 2000) and reasoned argument (Bessette, 1994; Knight & Johnson, 1994) with a diverse group of people, people can then put their self-interests aside and engage in discussion of the public good (Bohman, 1996). Individuals no longer make their decisions based on their self-interests.

Another way to make citizens to be public-spirited is to be inclusive. Habermas' concept of public sphere was characterized by both quality opinion and inclusiveness (Carey, 1996). As Dewey (1927) puts it, "no man or mind was emancipated merely by being left along" (p. 168). Importantly, the legitimacy of the deliberative outcome depends on the inclusion of diverse populations, in which groups who are considered minorities are included (Benhabib, 1996, 2002; Chambers, 2003). With such inclusiveness, people can encounter more dissimilar views. Such diversity is essential because a deliberative body needs a wide range of views to be present in the deliberation in order to negotiate the best solution for the community as a whole (Hickerson & Gastil, 2008).

With the above qualities, decisions of public policy can be made based on the opinions after people justifying and debating. Indeed, deliberative theorists assert that the process contributes to a more legitimate representative democracy as elected officials can then respond to the recommendations which come out after deliberation (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2004; Dryzek, 2000; Gastil, 2000, 2008; Leib, 2004). Actually, deliberation among citizens is often encouraged by some. Even though the deliberative group may not be

empowered to create real policy decisions, deliberative democracy helps citizens to learn and acknowledge their leaders their collective desires (Cohen, 1989; Dryzek, 1990; Fishkin, 1991).

To conclude, deliberative democracy aims at producing well-considered opinions through the combination of equality, openness, rational thought and reasoned argument, and inclusiveness, leading to a rational and democratic discussion and decision on public policy. As stated above, according to Habermas (1989), some conditions are necessary for approximating the deliberative ideals. However, most of the time, it is unlikely to be achieved in reality. The problem has always been lacking deliberation that qualifies. Therefore, scholars have introduced deliberative polling, deliberation days, and citizen juries to compensate “good” deliberations that are supposed to happen in the households, schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Till now, people are still struggling to find places where deliberation can happen.

Participatory and Deliberative Democracy

From the above paragraphs, we can see how participation and deliberation are closely intertwined. Although deliberative democracy theory focuses on deliberation, other elements are not totally excluded. This is the same for participatory democracy; it does not exclude deliberation as a whole, but deliberation acts as a mean but not as a goal in itself. While deliberation is indeed a necessary element of participatory, it is not, as often implied, a

sufficient condition. On the other hand, participation in deliberative democracy is a mean to encourage more deliberation but not as a goal in itself (Englund 2000; Hansen 2004). As we shall see, contemporary theories of deliberative democracy are often described as participatory because they involve citizens deliberating about collective ends.

In addition, when people talk about deliberative democracy, they expect participation to co-exist with deliberation. Increased political participation is claimed to be one among many contributions that political talk and citizen-to-citizen deliberation bring to society (Fishkin, 1995). Some scholars go so far as saying that conversation is “the elementary building block of participatory democracy” (Katz, 1994, p. 30) and propose including political discussion alongside voting, volunteering, or donating money to candidates (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004). On the other hand, Mutz (2006) distinguishes the two theories, and points out that “there are fundamental incompatibilities between theories of participatory democracy and theories of deliberative democracy” (p. 2). Although many scholars blend deliberative democracy with participatory democracy, she is skeptical towards it. However, what is the relationship between political talk and participation? Can they go hand in hand like what the scholars have hoped for?

The debate on deliberative versus participatory democracy has been receiving increased attention scholars (e.g., Mutz, 2006; McClurg, 2006a, 2006b). Some see deliberation as a tool to reduce citizens’ political apathy, some see it to increase interest, knowledge, and even to pull citizens into the

democratic process (Fishkin, 1995). While many found discussion frequency to relate positively to participation (e.g., McClurg, 2003; Pan, Shen, Paek, & Sun, 2006; Scheufele, 2002), some showed that exposure to differing views, a core component of deliberative discussion, lowers participation (McClurg, 2006a; Mutz, 2002b, 2006; Parsons, 2010). Others argue that deliberation and participation may be mutually exclusive because encountering opposing views may increase ambivalence, issue complexity, and/or entail negative interpersonal consequences that turn citizens away from politics (Mutz, 2006). These findings suggest a deliberation-participation paradox: While deliberation is needed to bring collective decision, paradoxically fewer people would participate in future activities after deliberation.

Before discussing the influence of disagreement on participation, it would be appropriate to first clarify the meanings of the terms. According to Hilmer (2010), Mutz's conceptualization of what "participatory democracy" entails is problematic. Drawing on Pateman's (1970) and Barber's (1984) theoretical descriptions, Mutz (2006) defines participatory democracy as "meaningful opportunities for the people to participate in the political process" (p. 135). She narrowly defines participatory democracy, and only includes "more direct referenda at the national level and greater citizen involvement in community-level political institutions" (p. 135). As seen in Pateman's (1970) work, the scope and goals of participatory democracy, are much more extensive than what Mutz acknowledges. In other words, Mutz defined participatory democracy to include only voting and other formal

modes of political participation as the principal modes of democratic participation (2006, p. 135). However, how Mutz defines both theories do not affect her findings which suggest a paradox between deliberation and participation.

According to Lee (2009), disagreements do not always discourage participation, it depend on the type of participation involved. In his study, the demobilization effect only occurs in position-taking activities. In other words, those who discuss with disagreeing others are less likely to participate in activities which they have to take up a set position. However, discussion with disagreeing others is more likely to encourage participation in nonposition-taking activities. Actually, Mutz (2006) also suggests that network heterogeneity relates negatively to participation only among people who are conflict avoidant. Similarly, McClurg (2006b) shows that people who perceive higher level of political expertise in their discussion networks will be more likely to participate, and such positive impact is large enough to outweigh the negative impact of disagreement. In sum, when additional conditions are taken into account, the negative relationship between deliberation and participation may not be as unavoidable as Mutz suggest (Lee, 2009).

Deliberative political conversations are the “ideal speech situation” (Habermas, 1989); however, the benefits of them are not known. Very often, we want people to engage more in political discussions; nevertheless, we know very little about the outcomes and effects of such deliberation on

democracy in real life. It is necessary to retrieve the debate on participation in order to ascertain the real potential of deliberative politics. This study therefore aims at replicating Mutz's research and examines how the influence of disagreement may vary between two online political engagements.

Interpersonal Discussion

Interpersonal discussion has consistently been a central element of theories of democracy (Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 2000; Schudson, 1998) as it is considered integral to a fully functioning democracy. Just as Barber (1984) asserts, “At the heart of a strong democracy is talk” (p. 173), and most scholars believe that engaging in conversation on matters of public concern is an essential input for healthy democracy (Delli Carpini et al., 2004; Dewey, 1954; Fishkin, 1991; Levine, 2008). Since Katz and Lazarsfeld’s (1955) study, the importance of interpersonal discussion has been recognized by researchers in communication studies (Southwell & Yzer, 2007).

Many theorists see everyday political talk a part of deliberative system (Mansbridge, 1999), and the influence of political talk on democratic citizenship has been well documented (Scheufele, 2002). To date, interpersonal discussion is shown to heighten levels of political information, tolerance, opinion quality, and even participation (Eveland, 2004; Eveland & Thomson, 2006; Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999; Mutz, 2002a; Pattie & Johnston, 2008; Searing, Solt, Conover, & Crewe, 2007; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000). However, it is not just the interaction per se that matters but also its contents (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; McClurg, 2003). What matters are people should be able to articulate common concerns, transform preferences, and generate reasoned public opinion. In healthy democracies, a full range of perspectives must be articulated and considered (Gastil, 2000). In other words, deliberation is what matters, and it is regarded as an effective tool in the

democratic process (Macedo, 1999). This research therefore focuses on examining political disagreement, which has always been considered to serve as an essential component to a healthy and pluralistic democracy (Barber, 1984; Habermas, 1989; Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2004; Schudson, 1997).

Political Disagreements

Expressions of agreement and disagreement are important attributes of deliberation, and work on public talk and opinion shows that diversity can be a key indicator of a deliberative frame of mind (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Knoke, 1990; Krassa, 1990; Leighley, 1990; McLeod et al., 1999; Moscovici, 1976, 1980; Mutz, 2002a, b; Mutz & Martin, 2001; Nemeth, 1986; Nemeth & Kwan, 1985; Turner, 1991; Walsh, 2003). In order for discussions to be deliberative, discussants should be exposed to dissimilar perspectives (Macedo, 1999; Thompson, 2008) and engage in “political alternatives” (Berelson, 1952, p. 323). Nevertheless, individuals in homogeneous groups tend to privilege more intimate kinds of talk where conflict seldom appears (Eliasoph, 1998). This research aims to find out the civic potential of political disagreement.

Amount of Disagreements

Many scholars claim that people generally select discussion partners based on similarities (Laumann, 1973), and people choose to associate with

some individuals and to avoid others (MacKuen, 1990). In other words, people only interact with like-minded others and receive information from like-minded sources. This is even the case for strong partisans. Mutz (2006) found out that people who hold strong views in the political party they belong to are more likely to discuss with like-minded others, which means they tend to discuss with those who have the same party-identification as themselves.

In reality, we only have limited control over the incoming sources (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995) as the transmission of political information is often supplementary to cross-cutting social interactions. As much as we receive neutral information, we are also likely to encounter information that contains political or partisan biases. People often obtain political information unconsciously without explicit exchange of opinions. For instance, when individuals spot yard signs and bumper stickers put up by others, they are informed regarding the political preferences of people around them even though they did not ask for it (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995, p. 16-17). To extend their observations, in the age with Internet, a person can unconsciously be informed by browsing the Web. In this sense, political disagreement is an inevitable part of political interactions, and it is found that disagreements tend to persist even after many rounds of communication (Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2004). In sum, people can never totally avoid different forms of cross-cutting social interactions, and it can be said to be part of our everyday social interaction.

Regarding the frequencies of disagreement in daily conversations, Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) interviewed discussion partners at the end of the 1992 election campaign, and also those at the end of the 1984 presidential election campaign. They found that no more than two-thirds of the discussion partners held a presidential candidate preference that coincided with the main respondent whom named them. They claim their measures to be understating the overall levels of disagreement as their statistics are only based on dyads rather than networks. In networks, they expect the number to be much higher as dyads are much smaller networks. In this sense, political disagreement can often be found within individual's surroundings (Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2004).

Huckfeldt and Jeanette (2008) see a dynamic tension in which frequent discussion makes disagreement more likely, but frequent disagreement makes discussion less likely. If the experience of disagreement is a rare event, deliberation fails because individuals are not engaged in debates. On the other hand, if political disagreement is common, deliberation might fail because disagreement results in decreased levels of political involvement (Huckfeldt et al., 2004).

Potential Benefits

Recent research demonstrates that exposure to political difference has several tangible benefits. In discussions where dissimilar views are present, people are able to improve their understanding of others' perspectives through

exchanging information and confronting disagreements (Price et al., 2002). In fact, political discussions which involve political disagreement can also deepen the understanding of one's own viewpoint. Through learning from others, individuals engage in a deeper consideration of issues and are more informed. According to Fishkin (1991), this can ensure alternatives to political solutions to be fully considered by the participants. Consequently, better decisions can be made because participants can list a wider range of arguments and counterarguments and moderate their opinions after discussions (Smith, Tindale, & Dugoni, 1996). Therefore, it is not surprising to find researches suggesting that conflict benefits opinion quality (Nemeth, Brown, & Rogers, 2001; Schweiger, Sandberg, & James, 1986).

Not only enhancing individual's understanding and decision quality, De Dreu and West (2001) claim that disagreements in group discussions can make people more creative and having more divergent thinking accordingly. Moreover, people can estimate the distribution of public opinion more accurately (Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, & Levine, 1995), and learn to generate reasons for their choices and decisions (Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002). Besides, individuals who are confronted by a greater diversity of ideas tend to be more open-minded, and are more aware of others' viewpoints and therefore have a better understanding of the arguments and rationales behind. They therefore tend to have greater tolerance towards others (Barabas, 2004; Mutz, 2006; Price, Cappella & Nir, 2002). For instance, Mutz's (2002) empirical study found out that exposure to disagreement not only can improve people's

understanding of others' perspectives (Price, et al., 2002), but can also lead them to think not only for themselves but for the others.

In sum, diversity of views can let people examine and identify viewpoints besides what they have in mind, and establish higher tolerance and thus more sophisticated opinions and well-thought decisions (Arendt, 1968). Therefore, it is expected that deliberative discussion will benefit the members by encouraging greater interpersonal deliberation and intrapersonal reflection (Habermas, 1989), and is helpful in bringing up healthy democracies. Scholars who study the positive effects of disagreements examine how people engage in conflicts can bring up healthy democracy (Habermas, 1989; Schudson, 1997), and actually suggest that discussion of diverse political differences takes an important role in deliberative democracy.

Political Disagreements and its Mobilizing Effect

Besides all the benefits mentioned above, it is also said that people will be mobilized to political participation (Leighley 1990). First, political discussions ease the circulation of political information that otherwise would be costly to obtain. Such circulation of information plays an important role in structuring individual political behavior (Huckfeldt, Plutzer, & Sprague, 1993; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995), as Dahl (1989) suggests that people and/or groups will be mobilized to represent the different views at stake when differences of opinion exist. Scheufele (2002) further shows that political discussion strengthens the impact of political media use and participation. He

argues that discussing with others can motivate people to scrutinize media contents and help them make better sense of media contents (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005).

Scholars back in the old days have found that being involved in active social networks enhances the prospects for political participation (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). Indeed, discussion with politically significant others explains why social environments affect individuals' decision to participate (Kenny, 1992). Characteristics of neighborhoods are important in connecting ties between individual and political participation as different political cues are transmitted through social interactions (Giles & Dantico, 1982; Huckfeldt, 1979). In general, extended political discussion at work, cafes, school boards, or town hall meetings (Conover et al., 2002; Searing, Solt, Conover, & Crewe, 2007) as well as political talk at work, church, and volunteer groups can enhance political and civic engagement (Hardy, Brossard, Waismel-Manor, & Nisbet, 2006). Besides daily political conversations, formal deliberations are found to heighten participation too. For instance, jury deliberators were more likely to vote (Gasil, Deess, & Weise, 2002), and citizens who joined Fishkin's (1995) deliberative polls and participants of the National Issues Forums (Gastil, 2000) became more politically active after deliberation.

Moreover, deliberation may also enhance issue-specific participation. In a study on debates on social security, citizens who participated in the debate intended to lobby officials and express their views more than those

who did not participate (Cook, Delli Carpini, & Jacobs, 2003), and participants in debates about peace and social justice reported increased volunteering and donating money to related organizations after the debate (Wuthnow, 1994). In sum, discussions with fellow citizens who are different by age, gender, ethnicity, and party or ideology, can be associated with greater participation, both traditional and nontraditional (McLeod, Scheufele, Moy, Horowitz, Holbert, Zhang, Zubrick, & Zubric, 1999; Scheufele, Hardy, Brossard, Waismel-Manor, & Nisbet, 2006). Although many have found that disagreement acts as a mobilizing force, not much reasoning was found to explain such relationship.

Political Disagreements and its Demobilizing Effect

In the literature, the impact of disagreement on participation has been proven to be controversial as some other scholars have conversely argued that exposure to dissimilar views may decrease citizen participation in the democratic process (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Mutz, 2006). Despite the benefits mentioned above, a number of scholars have investigated the consequences of exposure to political disagreements within individuals' interpersonal networks (Großer & Schram, 2006; Leighley, 1990; McClurg, 2006a, 2006b; Mutz, 2002a, 2006; Ulbig & Funk, 1999) and most studies agree that it tends to depress participation. Some scholars find that cross-cutting exposure, whether it is talking politics with friends, family, or some others, is related to late voting decisions and lower political activity (Mutz,

2006; McClurg, 2006a).

The demobilizing effect of political disagreement is usually explained in two respects: first, exposure to information will induce ambivalence with respect to issues or candidates, which can make individuals less likely to take political action, and second, it would discourage political participation because of people's tendency to avoid conflicts, invoked by the need to be held responsible to conflicting choices (Hayes, Scheufele, & Huges, 2006; Mutz, 2002a; Ulbig & Funk, 1999).

Regarding the first aspect, recent analyses report that exposure to countervailing opinions in discussion networks can deter participation, in part by increasing doubt among citizens (Mutz 2002a; Mutz and Mondak 2006). For instance, a study which focuses on cross-pressures show that conflicts among political and socio-demographic factors may simultaneously pull a voter toward the Republicans and the Democrats (Lazarfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948), and this can delay voting decision. This is not the only study that shows how deliberation can cause participants to doubt their own perspectives. Another study also shows that participants can hesitate and wonder whether a "correct" decision is available at all after knowing more about an issue (Armor & Taylor, 2003; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). In sum, exposure to information that challenges one's political views can induce ambivalence, which can then make individuals less likely to participate in political activities.

Regarding the second aspect, adverse political networks can discourage political participation because of people's tendency to avoid conflicts. Participants are invoked with the need to be held responsible to conflicting choices causing hesitations (Mutz, 2006), and they may even feel anxious and frustrated after a deliberative discussion (Button & Mattson, 1999; Cook & Jacobs, 1999; Hendriks 2002; Kimmelman & Hall, 1997). As disagreements violate the norms of politeness, people would then try to avoid political discussions with others in daily interaction. Such avoidance can keep them from negative emotions and feeling uncomfortable. This is supported by psychological models, which suggest that individuals are conflict-averse, and will avoid conflicts wherever possible (Festinger, 1957; Ulbig and Funk, 1999). Yet, there is research which finds exposure to dissimilar perspectives and conflicting candidate preferences do not make a difference on both prediction of voting and decision timing (Huckfeldt, Mendez, Obsorn, 2004; Nir, 2005).

Democracy assumes open discussion with all opinions being expressed. Yet one consequence of such open interaction with people with dissimilar viewpoints might be to discourage participation, hence undermining democracy. On the other hand, if people were only exposed to the like-minded, they would not have the opportunity to deliberate, though they may have stronger incentive to participate. By combining the two positions, one that advocates disagreement is beneficial to deliberative democracy, and one says the opposite (Stomer-Galley & Muhlberger, 2009). As mentioned in the

previous chapter, Lee (2009) suggests that more have to be investigated, and additional conditions have to be taken into account so that the negative relationship between deliberation and participation will not present as unavoidable as Mutz suggests. With more precise examination in political discussions, the kind of political contexts and conditions that promote both deliberation and participation might then be discovered.

Online Political Engagement

Nowadays, people not only engage in offline political talk, but also in the online context. With Internet, new ways of conducting deliberation are provided. Online political discussion has actually been the focus of arguably the largest body of research in digital democracy, and many focus on how the Internet holds as an expansion of the public sphere based on rational discourse (Dahlberg, 2001). Within this group of scholars, some focused on the Internet's potential to provide a democracy-enriching communication platform (Dahlberg, 2001a; Dahlgren, 2005).

Whereas many people acknowledge the importance and benefits of deliberation in face-to-face settings, they are less certain about the effects of deliberation conducted in online settings. This is partly because there has been little empirical research investigating the effects of online deliberation on public opinion. Moreover, while more and more scholars study social networking sites, very few of them examined how those sites are engaging people in the democratic process. Therefore, this study puts online discussions into test.

Potential Benefits to Democracy

Since the inception of Internet, people have hoped that it would bring diversity of ideas and provide more space for political deliberation (Papacharissi, 2002). Many have hoped that the Internet will provide spaces that help diversify the marketplace of ideas and provide a forum for political

deliberation. As large-scale discussions in the old days were thought to be unrealistic (Goodin, 2003), online discussions are considered to be able to facilitate discussions which are desired by the political thinkers (Hauben & Hauben, 1997). Similarly, Tsagarousianou (1999) argues that new technologies have the potential to sustain public spheres as they not only enable communications among citizens, but also between citizens and authorities. Rheingold (1993) even argues that if the discussion board “isn’t a democratizing technology, there is no such thing” (p. 131) because online discussions allow citizens to participate in discussions that interest them while performing their daily activities (Hauben & Hauben, 1997). In general, scholars tend to have high expectations to what the Internet can bring to democracy.

The Internet not only facilitates the distribution of information (Shapiro, 1999), but also promotes interaction among people as it provides much equal and unrestricted access to information because people no longer have to be constrained by their identities and geographic locations. Such interaction can increase citizens’ awareness and knowledge about civic issues and shared problems. Politically active citizens can even use the Internet to connect with other like-minded citizens within the community and involve in issues that interest them (Kavanaugh & Patterson 2001; Kavanaugh, Carroll, Rosson & Zin, 2005). It also enables the emergence of online spheres like Facebook groups and forum for people to get together to interact regarding a common interest or problem (Plant, 2004). In sum, information is much more

accessible to a much broader population, and people are said to have greater opportunities to engage in discussions and political discourses with like-minded people.

On the other hand, the Internet encourages people to encounter opposing views, and people can have more access to a diversity of views through online platforms (Dahlgren, 2001; Gimpler, 2001; Papacharissi, 2004). In this sense, the Internet helps expand the public sphere and enhance democracy as it offers people the chance to confront different positions on various issues, including opposing voices. Such exposure then not only increases participants' interest in politics, but also the quality of their opinions and tolerance levels (Mutz, 2002). All these claims reinforce the statement that the Internet promotes the development of more democratic forms of government where citizens will be able to develop a much meaningful voice in the society (Norris & Jones, 1998).

Potential Damages for Democracy

Critics of online deliberation point out that the Internet allows people to polarize discussions. As the Internet facilitates communication with people around the globe without geographical and other constraints (Van Alstyne & Brynjolfsson, 1997), complete strangers can gather through Internet. Meanwhile, it is suggested that people select discussion partners based on political or ideological similarities because they feel more comfortable and are more willing to be exposed to like-minded views (Gomez, 2004; Hoar &

Hope, 2002; Mutz, 2006; Wilhelm, 2000). Such individual inclination might lead to the emergence of politically homogeneous online communities. In other words, although there is a diversity of online communities, Internet users can choose to engage themselves in platforms where their ideological perspectives will be reinforced rather than challenged. After all, people no longer have access to divergent opinions.

According to Wojcieszak and Mutz (2009), political discussion platforms expose people to similar perspectives to a greater extent than other types of online groups and some online communities are found to attract radical ideologues (Southern Poverty Law Center, 1999). Such finding is supported by Bellamy and Raab's (1999) study, in which they claim that the Internet will amplify the fragmentation of the public sphere, separating politics into multifarious and shifting constituencies (p. 169), and online discussions may become platforms for users to gravitate 'to their own discussion groups' (Davis & Owen, 1998; Sunstein, 2001). Just like what Barber (1999) has once characterized online discussions: "People talking without listening, confirming rather than problematizing dogmas, convicting rather than convincing adversaries." In other words, discussions can polarize debates, and little space is left for real discussions in the end.

Habermas (1996), for example, claims public sphere to be a network for communicating information and ideas within which citizens get together to debate and form opinions. If people are only fragmented into networks of the like-minded, no deliberative debates can happen. Consequently, such kind of

political spaces will undermine the prospect for deliberative democracy (Sustein, 2001). Although some scholars describe the online public sphere as a space for extremists, no studies have assessed whether existing online spaces indeed polarize members' opinions (Wojcieszak, 2010). Indeed, the answer to whether increased online discussions and groups will lead to increased extremism of participants is crucial (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009), but it is still empirically unaddressed.

Different kinds of online political engagement

Most importantly, the Internet is a wide platform, and it should not be examined as one empirically. There are indeed many different kinds of online political engagement. People have been using different websites, blogs and forums to exchange information. Besides exchanging textual political information, there are YouTube clips and posters and other pieces of materials circulating around the world. With Internet, web users not only obtain what the mainstream mass media miss but also many updated information. The Internet era is characterized by the age of social media. Users are able to create or co-create pieces of political information. With websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Weibo, they can even tag, post, rate, and share information with friends and members of their social network. Some even founded their own media channels online as the Internet allows low-cost installment for setting up and reaching large groups of audience. As there is such a diversity of online political engagements available, Internet should not

be seen as one, so that studies the negative relationship between online deliberation and participation can be examined more precisely.

Activities conducted online do not function in isolation with the ones done offline (Boase et al., 2006) because people who participate politically offline also belong to online social networks. With the ability to engage in sites such as YouTube, Facebook, or other platforms and the ability to access political information around the clock via different personal and public websites might actually help account for the significant increase in young adult participation. However, it is noted that the widespread use of Internet makes it difficult for researchers to know exactly what types and sources of engagement young adults participate in and what kinds of information they receive or distribute in the online context. Because it is virtually impossible to simulate the infinite possible online political engagements in a single experiment, this study aims to focus on two platforms to examine effects on young adult with two different levels of exposure to disagreement. These two platforms are chosen as they are both widely used and large differences in terms of their amounts of disagreement are expected to present.

Internet and Political Participation

Recently, researchers have shown that degrees of agreement and disagreement among individual's networks are important in explaining his/her political engagement (Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004; Mutz, 2006). Scholars have recognized that seeking information online is associated with

civic and political engagement (Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). As there are many kinds of online political engagements as mentioned, the different kinds of engagements should provide different impacts on political participation, and also different significance on democracy.

Engaging in online political discussion is found to produce stronger associations with political engagement because political talk is found to stimulate self-reflection and political participation (Eliasoph, 1998; McLeod et al., 1999; Pan, Shen, Paek, & Sun, 2006). Both Internet users (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003) and those who discuss politics in online groups are found to be more involved in their communities (Price & Cappella, 2002). Indeed, civic discussion is not only related to engagement (Shah et al., 2005), but also amplifies the effects of news use on participation (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005). In general, it is argued that an increase amount in online discussion is associated with higher levels of participation. In addition, not only in the offline context, participants in structured and moderated online debates were also more likely to engage in community activities than those who did not deliberate (Price & Cappella, 2002).

Some research on social networks has also identified the mechanisms by which individuals translate discussions into actions (Klofstad, 2007; McClurg, 2003). For example, McClurg (2003) shows that social networks are important sources of information on politics and current events. Information can motivate participation because it increases civic competence. In a more

recent study, Klofstad (2007) comes to a similar conclusion on the role of information. Individuals who engage in civic talk are more likely to be asked to participate in civic activities. Therefore, individuals have a higher chance of being recruited to participate in various political and civic activities.

Lastly, others have argued that the Internet might facilitate participation in like-minded online groups which provide a self-selected sphere for political extremists (Sunstein, 2001). Interacting in such ideologically homogenous online groups is expected to polarize participants' views toward more extreme positions, and ultimately mobilizing them to engage in civic activities.

Views about future prospects of Internet-based communication to foster political discussion and its capacities of heightening engagement vary widely. Empirical findings for both the optimists' hopes (Kelly et al., 2005; Papacharissi, 2004; Schneider, 1997) and the pessimists' fears (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Davis, 1999; Wilhelm, 1999) can be found. Regardless of their relative optimism or pessimism, most theorists and researchers share the notion that discussions among citizens is the foundation of sound public life and fostering civic engagement.

According to Wojcieszak (2010), although scholars recognize the connection between online and offline activities, the interplay between both fields with regard to their joint impact on political attitudes is still unclear (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005; Shah et al., 2001). The debate on whether the Internet is beneficial to democracy remains unsolved, and both sides have

their own support currently. Therefore, no definite conclusion can be drawn on whether the Internet is for or against political deliberation at the moment. Dahlberg (2007) suggests how the two sides, both supporting and opposing the Internet as beneficial to democracy, can work together to solve the dilemma, while Lee (2009) suggests to solve the “paradox” empirically by examining the additional conditions that regulate the relationship among the variables.

Chapter 3: Framework

To answer the questions raised in previous chapters, Mutz's (2002a) model is used as the framework for this research. She is aware of the many numbers of requirements for deliberation, and she chooses to put one of the elements, exposure to dissimilar views, to empirical testing. According to her, heterogeneous political networks are particularly important in bringing the cognitive benefit to discussants, as exposure to political disagreements, driving as awareness of rationales for oppositional views (Mutz, 2006, p. 74). Her studies (2002b, 2006) show that exposure to political disagreement benefits people by familiarizing themselves with legitimate reasons for holding opposing viewpoints and by deepening their understanding of their own views as they need to defend their positions to others and/or to themselves. In addition, Mutz (2002b) tries to find out the consequences for political participation. Her findings suggest that people who are in networks with more political disagreement are less likely to participate.

Mutz does not stop there, but continues to study the effects online with Wojcieszak (2009). What they get is reinforcement of like-minded political perspectives is common in the online forums. Although political discussions that occur accidentally within nonpolitical online groups involve diverse views, political chat rooms and message boards do not promote dissimilar discourse. They therefore conclude that political discussion groups are not the best place for cross-cutting deliberation (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009).

To summarize, Mutz (2006) has been trying to connect both quality and quantity of social interactions to democratic values, and her findings suggest that with people being able to be truly deliberative may lead to less political participation and activism. By being exposed to cross-cutting networks of political communication, people are more aware of the legitimate arguments on the other side of the controversies, and people tend to be more willing to extend civil liberties to groups they dislike. In other words, her findings do not support the statement that more deliberation per se is what politics need most. If one wants to maximize democratic ends, Mutz does not think diversity is the kind of social environments citizens should ideally have.

Mutz's model was chosen as a framework as it is rather complete for a starting point to answer the questions raised in previous sections. This study examines the relationship between online deliberation and offline participation in Hong Kong, and at the same time, put Mutz's (2006) model into test in the online context by comparing only two platforms. Her studies mostly based on self-reports rather than on actual observations; therefore, this study not only drew data from survey, but also from content analysis which examines the actual amount of political discourse in both online platforms, discussion forum and Facebook groups.

In her model, she accounted for two social psychological processes. First, people are more likely to hold ambivalent political views after deliberation, which in turn discourage their political participation. Second,

social accountability makes people avoid threatening the harmony of their relationships with others, which also discourages participation. See Figure 1.

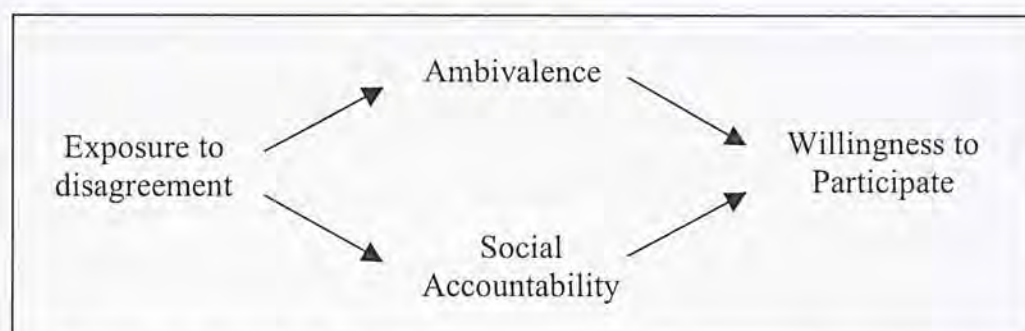


Figure 1. Mutz's Model

Other researchers have qualified the above findings. For instance, McClurg (2006a) reports that there are different impacts of disagreement in different contexts, and shows whether an individual is part of a local political majority or minority matters. His results suggest that political participation by individuals who share the majority view in their local context is unaffected by exposure to disagreement. But individuals who are in the minority are affected by disagreement in their discussion networks, thus are more vulnerable to the demobilizing effect of political disagreement.

In another research, McClurg (2006b) suggests that the extent to which an individual perceives his or her discussion partners to be politically sophisticated may alleviate the demobilizing impact of exposure to disagreement. Individuals are more likely to participate if they feel their discussants are politically sophisticated experts and are less likely to do so if they feel that the discussants lack expertise.

Potential Mechanisms of Influence

“Investigations of social influence and public opinion go hand in hand” (Price, Nir, & Cappella, 2006), as the processes that shape public opinions are inherently social–psychological. In other words, group interaction can influence individual opinions. When exposed to opposing views, it is proposed that two forms of social influence might be responsible – the normative and informative effects (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). According to Wojcieszak (2010), both effects might be present within ideologically homogenous online groups.

Informational Social Influence

Informational social influence occurs when people learn from the disagreements available and accept the ideas of others as valid arguments (Burnstein & Vinokur, 1977; Vinokur & Burnstein, 1974). They are not only influenced by the group norms, but by the arguments that arise in the groups they belong and/or engaging in. When exposed to dissimilar views, they get to compare their views to those expressed by others. Comparison of views is said to affect participants’ levels of ambivalence (Mutz, 2006).

Ambivalence

Ambivalence is one of the mechanisms that influence political acts. The concept of ambivalence is not new at all, and social psychologists have empirically demonstrated the existence of ambivalence, which means people

hold separate positive and negative attitudes at the same time (Alvarez & Brehm, 1995; Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Cacioppo, Gardner & Berntson, 1997; Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Priester & Petty, 1996; Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995; Mutz, 2002b). In other words, there are competing considerations relevant to evaluating one subject (Lavine, 2001). Although there are competing considerations, it does not mean that accounting reasons for both sides demonstrate the presence of conflict of any kind (Alvarez, & Brehm, 1995). For example, voters are found to simultaneously hold both positive and negative feelings towards abortion (Craig, Kane & Martinez, 2002). Not only does it not signify an underlying conflict, individuals do not necessary hold weak attitudes or opinions. According to Huckfeldt, Mendez & Osborn (2004), it is likely for people to hold multiple strong attitudes which can lie on anywhere on a scale.

As most of us think in bipolar terms (Craig, et al., 2002), we tend to think of ambivalence in a one-dimensional way. Ambivalence is measured along a bipolar continuum that goes from very positive to very negative (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Besides holding competing considerations, two conditions regarding the magnitude are suggested (Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995). The scholars claim that there should be similarity in magnitude between positive and negative attitudes, and those two attitudes should be of moderate magnitude.

Reasons and Consequences of being Ambivalent

The consequences of political ambivalence have not been widely explored. Some claim it will decrease political participation, and the rationale behind is that higher levels of disagreement lead people to reevaluate their assumptions and opinions. Political ambivalence arises when exposure to competing ideas makes people uncertain about their own positions regarding issues or candidates (Mutz, 2002b), echoing what has been said in the previous section. Hochschild (1993) found that people who are uncertain about their views are driven by competing values in their minds. Those people have many considerations, both pros and cons towards an issue, which lead them to be uncertain, but not because of their lack of political expertise. Sniderman (1981) also noted this, and found that people who do not see political issues in just black and white manners, who recognize there is something to be said for the other side, will encounter ambivalence. These scholars tie ambivalence with people having more balanced judgments on political issues. Therefore, we can predict that disagreement leads to ambivalence.

At the individual level, disagreement forces people to think again about their own preferences (McPhee, Smith, & Ferguson, 1963), and hence it gives rise to an enhanced likelihood for individual change. Indeed, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) argue that citizens experiencing disagreement provide the necessary dynamic in collective democratic decision making. People who experience disagreements are less certain of their preferences and

more susceptible to persuasion; therefore, dissimilar views generate the potential for deliberation and change within short period of time. Moreover, Craig, Kane, and Martinez (2002) also found that citizens encounter difficulties to cast an issue-based vote as a consequence of being ambivalent. In this sense, individual's decision-making can be delayed because of his/her exposure to disagreements. This is also supported by Lavine (2001), who shows that ambivalence creates instability in candidate evaluations, and delays the formation of people's intention to vote. In other studies, scholars have supported the idea that people who are more moderate towards certain positions, they are less certain in political judgments (Guge & Meffert, 1998), and people tend to be unstable in evaluating candidates, and also delay their formation of voting intentions.

Nevertheless, political conversation can in fact facilitate an increased desire to participate in political activities (Katz, 1992) because the very act of talking to one another helps crystallize opinions. Also, deliberation serves to empower citizens (Warren, 1992), which can lead to more political activity. Not all studies are so pessimistic as shown in previous paragraphs. For example, a study found that experience of disagreement does not produce such a dramatic withdrawal in political participation (Huckfeldt, Mendez & Osborn, 2004), but they found some evidence of citizens having diminished interest levels as a consequence. There is also evidence that clearly demonstrates that exposure to disagreements increases electronic political participation (Barabas, 2004; Bimber, 2003; Chadwick 2006; Dahlberg 2001; Hague & Loader 1999).

Although deliberation has been proven by the majority of the scholars to facilitate political participation (Min, 2007), the hypotheses are set sticking to Mutz's findings as her model is being examined empirically.

Normative Social Influence

Second, affinity among members in online groups that contain few disagreements might encourage them to adjust their opinions according to others' expectations and to the prevalent views within groups, and normative social influence can then occur. It is present whenever an individual is motivated by a desire to conform to the positive expectations of other people. This concept is clearly the basis of Noelle-Neumann's (1983) theory on minorities silencing themselves under majority pressure. There are many incentives for meeting normative expectations which include boasting self-esteem and gaining social approval. Others might conform to avoid possible negative sanctions that might result from deviating from the majority which include alienation and social isolation.

The problem with exposure to disagreement in discussions is that such expressions violate expected norms of politeness, particularly in social interactions with strangers (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Eliasoph, 1998; Leech, 1983). Pomerantz's (1984) suggests that disagreeing with one another can be experienced as "uncomfortable, unpleasant, difficult, risking threat, insult, or offense" (p. 77), and even threatening (Goffman, 1959). The negative effects of disagreement give rise to the view that the public prefers to avoid political

discussion and deliberation (Eliasoph, 1998; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Mutz, 2006).

On the other hand, dissimilar exposure provides people with a more accurate sampling frame for estimating public opinion because the disagreements demonstrate to people that their strongly held views are not as prevalent in the population as they would like to believe. This in turn minimizes the chance that people will hold a wrong estimation of the climate of opinion. It is shown that both perceived disagreement and actual disagreement in structured online groups reduce the tendency to attribute own views to the general population (Wojcieszak & Price, 2009). Stromer-Galley (2003) also supports the notion that people in diverse online spaces report gaining an accurate perception of opinion distribution.

Social Accountability

Social accountability, another mechanism suggested by Mutz (2002b), can be regarded as a normative social influence. This term has not yet been widely studied in terms of democracy. Yet, the concept of social accountability is widely examined in the context of medical education (Ho, 2008) and in corporate settings (Samy, Odemilin, & Bampton, 2009). For instance, corporations have to deal with conflicts such as whether to gain more money or to protect the environment, and whether to maximize profit or to be accountable for the affected people and community (Clutterbuck, Dearlove & Snow, 1992). In many other sectors, conflicts of interests are

present. Just like people who work in the public sector, they face private interests that clash with the duties of public officials, and also conflicts that arise from ethical and accountable organizational cultures (Boyce & Davids, 2009). From the above literature, social accountability is often associated with one facing more than one interest, and one at the same time has to be accountable to multiple interests. For this study, social accountability is examined, as one has to be accountable to more than one political voice if one is exposed to dissimilar perspectives. In this sense, deliberation creates the need to be accountable to conflicting constituencies.

Reasons and Consequences

It is said that some people are more likely to assure social harmony, and they would like to please as many members of their networks as possible. As interpersonal disagreement might threaten social relationships, this would lead to anxiety in the person. Anxiety is created as people want to please all members of their networks and assure social harmony, and do not want to threaten social relationships. Therefore, there is a need to be socially accountable when they avoid such anxiety. Being exposed to conflicting political views more often make people more able to imagine how it is like to be in others' shoes, comprehend, as well as appreciate some perspectives of others (Benhabib, 1992). To make their lives easier, they often use "decision-evasion tactics" to avoid to be accountable to conflicts, for example, employing tactics like buck-passing, procrastination, and exiting the topic (Green, Visser & Tetlock, 2000). In other words, no matter which side an

individual takes will make others unhappy, and he/she does not want people in either side to be in that unpleasant situation. People are often caught in the middle, and do not know which way to go.

Verba and Nie (1972) found that the extent to which conflict with others is involved is an important factor that affects political participation. People always tend to avoid conflicting views and retreat from political participation to maintain social harmony (Eliasoph, 1998; Mansbridge, 1980). People are actually aware of and feel uncomfortable of the risks of hurting their interpersonal relationships if they say something that would upset others. Therefore, this mechanism would appear in mainly public forms of political participation (Mutz, 2002b). Ulbig and Funk's (1999) findings also show that conflict avoidance is negatively associated with participation of some kinds, especially participation in political discussions, protests and campaigns which are seen as more public in nature.

This logic is supported by Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock (1991)'s study. They suggest that although "you may not like your best friend's politics, but the disagreement is frequently tolerable, in large part because you are able to understand the motivation behind her opinions." That means when an individual knows both sides well enough, he/she tends to be tolerable and favorable to both sides. The individual will then be more uncertain in only one perspective. Extending their findings to those who are not familiar with, if one gets to know the motivation behind others' viewpoints, one is more likely to be more socially accountable. They are then expected to decrease their

motivation to participate after being socially accountable (Mutz, 2002b), as they can no longer choose only one side to support with confidence.

Willingness to Participate

In the literature regarding the consequences of being exposed to dissimilar views, some scholars examined the expressions of disagreement which are acted out in group discussions (Eliasoph, 1998; Leech, 1983). A number of scholars have investigated the consequences of exposure to political disagreements within individuals' interpersonal networks (Grober & Schram, 2006; McClurg, 2006a; Mutz, 2002b) and most studies agree that it tends to depress participation.

According to Mutz (2006), the demobilizing effects mainly have two reasons. First, one is exposed to information that challenges one's political views, which induces attitudinal ambivalence with respect to the corresponding issues or candidates. The individuals then are less likely to take part in political actions. Second, one has a tendency to avoid conflict, which is invoked by the need to be accountable to conflicting constituencies (Hayes, Scheufele & Huges, 2006; Mutz, 2002b). As having more discussion means having a higher chance in encountering conflicts, people will become less satisfied with the experience in the decision-making process (Morrell, 1999), and people whose networks involve greater political disagreements are found to be less likely to participate in politics (Mutz, 2002a).

Hypotheses

Mutz (2009) examined how often Americans talk about political topics in online chat rooms and message boards, and how often they are exposed to like-minded views. She not only studied political online spaces, but also online spaces for other topics, and concluded that online groups could still serve for deliberative purposes when politics suddenly appears in non-political online groups as people can have a chance to encounter dissimilar views but not in purely political online groups. In those political-oriented groups, people are self-selected into like-minded discussions in which no heterogeneous views could be found. In this study, I therefore examine not only online discussion forums, but also compare it with groups formed in Facebook, the most popular social networking site.

Online social networking has become part of our everyday lives, and one of the most popular sites is Facebook, where users communicate with friends, join groups, create groups, play games, and make friends with people around the world. Individuals seldom think and act independently, and they usually receive and process political information which can then affect their collective acts (Liu, Ikeda, & Wilson, 1998). In the case of Facebook, people are influenced by what others say, and the interactions among the participants.

Recently, a large number of groups were created for different causes and beliefs. In Facebook, groups can be used as forums and bulletin boards, for whatever voices people would like to express. People can invite others to join and share information in the group to all friends just by clicking a few

buttons. Nowadays, more and more activists and ordinary citizens use Facebook as their mouthpiece politically. Thus, political dialogue consequently becomes a significant function of the Facebook.

Previous studies have also demonstrated that politically active citizens use the Internet to increase involvement in issues of interest and to connect to both like-minded and diverse citizens within the community (Kavanaugh & Patterson, 2001; Kavanaugh, et al., 2005), which could be the case for Facebook. With Facebook, individuals can select which groups to click into and join by just looking at the titles of the groups; they are very likely to self-select like-minded groups, and therefore seldom encounter opposing views. The like-minded voices might lead individuals to be less ambivalent and less socially accountable; therefore, leading more of them to join protests in Hong Kong. However, no empirical evidence is found yet. By comparing it with forums, I can put the logic into test.

Based on the theoretical arguments and the Hong Kong context, I set up nine hypotheses for the analysis. One of the hypotheses is as follows:

H1: Forum contains a higher level of disagreement than Facebook groups.

Answer to H1 provides us with background information about how often participants would be exposed to disagreeing posts. The results, as we will see in the discussion section, also aid the interpretation of the findings regarding the impact of political talk on participation.

Eight hypotheses are set up for the impact of exposure to disagreement. The first two represent the effects of political discussion on ambivalence, and the third and fourth hypotheses on social accountability. The last four state the effects among disagreement, ambivalence/social accountability, and willingness to participate. See Figure 2 and 3.

Figure 2. Facebook Group model



Figure 3. Forum model



Ambivalence

As Facebook groups are expected to have less disagreement and more reinforcement, it is expected that users will acquire less knowledge in opposing views, thus become less ambivalent. When one recognizes there is something to be said for the other side, they tend to encounter ambivalence, and become less confident in their own perspective. As they are less confident in their choices, they are less likely to get involved in politics and might delay their decisions on action. Therefore, forum users are exposed to more disagreement, and thus they are less certain on their own perspectives, and they are then more ambivalent. Moreover, as it is difficult for forum participants to form groups, and at the same time, they are open to criticisms and debates, their levels of ambivalence are expected to be higher than those in Facebook groups (Mutz, 2002b).

In one study, Lee and Chan (2009) examined the role of ambivalence in public opinion in people's intention to protest with regard to democratic reform in Hong Kong. They found out that objective ambivalence reduces attitude extremity and weakened the predictive power of the attitude. Their results support the notion that exposure to disagreements increases ambivalence, which is in line with the hypotheses stated below.

H2a: Participation in Facebook group relates negatively to ambivalence.

H2b: Participation in forum relates positively to ambivalence.

Social Accountability

Facebook groups are expected to be used mostly by like-minded people to get encouragements from each other, and it is a platform to attack the opposing views as groups. As there are less disagreement and more reinforcement in Facebook groups, it is expected that users will be reinforced by agreements, meaning they do not face the need to deal with the conflict of multiple political views. They are therefore less likely to encounter the need to balance both sides, and there is no need to be accountable for both sides of information and people involved. The lower degree of social accountability makes them more confident in their one and only perspective and more willing to participate in politics. On the other hand, discussants in forums are more open to disagreements and they are more likely to be accountable for more perspectives after deliberation. Therefore, they are expected to be more socially accountable and less likely to be able to choose between the available perspectives. The deliberative process will tend to discourage them to participate in political activities.

Hypothesis 3a: Participation in Facebook groups relates negatively to social accountability.

Hypothesis 3b: Participation in forum relates positively to social accountability.

Willingness to Participate

Online spaces like Facebook groups which tend to be ideologically homogenous are expected to be more effective in mobilizing people to participate because they influence factors that are central to collective action (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002; Gamson, 1992). According to Putnam (2000), causal conversations on politics raise awareness and may spur collective action. Meanwhile, being in an environment which has fewer disagreements, participants are reinforced by the same view, and this may boost their efficacy and strengthen their in-group identification. Such solidarity within groups can then spur one another to act and promote enthusiasm that is central to motivating collective actions (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002; Hwang, Schmierbach, Paek, de Zuniga, & Shah, 2006; Warren, 1996). Moreover, exposure to fewer disagreements can foster their expressions to fit their perceived climate of their surrounding (McKenna & Bargh, 1998) and motivate them to stand up against the opposing groups (Spears et al., 2002). According to Stromer-Galley and Muhlberger (2009), increased participation in ideologically homogeneous discussion groups like Facebook groups will be associated with greater political engagement. Mutz (2002b) claims that homogeneous environment is ideal for purposes of encouraging political mobilization, is it the case for Facebook groups? On the other hand, forum participants, as stated in the hypotheses below, are expected to be less likely to participate in political actions.

Hypothesis 4a: Participation in Facebook groups relates positively to willingness to participate in related activities through ambivalence.

Hypothesis 4b: Participation in forum relates negatively to willingness to participate in related activities through ambivalence.

Hypothesis 5a: Participation in Facebook groups relates positively to willingness to participate in related activities through social accountability.

Hypothesis 5b: Participation in forum relates negatively to willingness to participate in related activities through social accountability.

It should be noted that the above hypotheses assume exposure to disagreement as the cause. Yet, it is also theoretically possible for ambivalence and social accountability to lead one to engage in platforms with more or less disagreements. This issue will later be revisited when discussing the findings.

Chapter 4: Design and Methods

Content Analysis

Political online discussions can be analyzed in several ways. The most predominant way is studying online discussions, and it usually involves a form of content analysis. This approach allows me to draw broad conclusions about the messages posted in the two platforms. As mentioned in previous chapters, the content analysis was designed to test H1 through comparing discussions in forum and Facebook groups. It was mainly quantitative, and it aims at exploring how people engage in online discussions, especially regarding the notion of public affairs. Both Facebook Groups and forum are platforms for voicing conflicts of interests. With the two different platforms, people may encounter varying degrees of exposure to disagreement.

Sampling

The scope of the analysis was restricted to a reasonable size that the author can handle. Therefore, analysis of forums only included one forum. Hkdiscuss.com (香港討論區) was chosen not only for its high volume of posts every day, but also its high volume towards political posts. Besides hkdiscuss.com, there are two major forums out there, hkgolden.com (香港高登) and uwants.com. To ensure they are about the same in nature, one day of these forums was coded to make their amounts of disagreements are about the same. Other forums were excluded because there were usually less or even no discussion going on and thus carry relatively less importance than those mentioned.

Within Hkdiscuss, the board for Hong Kong and world news (香港及世界新聞) was chosen within the news board (時事新聞). This board was selected because it was the “core” bulletin board regarding public affairs in hkdiscuss.com. It recorded the highest numbers of discussions and the topics related to political issues or local current news everyday.

Besides limiting the number of forum, the research could only include a limited number of posts in the analysis. I decided to include only posts regarding to two political issues, Housing Ownership Scheme (HOS) and minimum wage. The two topics were chosen for both content analysis and survey because they were heated topics that popped up sometime before the data collection period. Recent topics were chosen so that respondents were able to remember their attitudes and activities done related to the issues. Moreover, heated topics were examined because this could ensure respondents know something about the issue and possibly had engaged in online activities related to it. Finally, these issues were controversial, which could later be used in the survey to measure people’s attitudes towards particular issues. The analysis included posts related to these two topics only, and other topics are excluded since they are not expected to differ widely in terms of effects of discussions. By searching for threads and groups that contain the phrase “re-launch HOS” (復建居屋) in forum and in Facebook, a total of more than 100 threads and 27 groups were found respectively. By searching for “minimum wage” and “33” (最低工資 and 最低時薪 and 33) in forum and in Facebook, a total of more than 100 threads and 102 groups were found.

Besides the content, the time has to be taken into account (Krippendorff, 2003). To ensure fair comparison between forums and Facebook Groups, the approximate same period of posts in the two platforms were coded for each issue. As the issues keep developing along with time, having such time frame would be able to make sure people were engaging in more or less the same pace of the development.

There are a large amount of posts in forums, and therefore the date of the Facebook posts was used as a reference for the period being examined. For forum, threads were chosen according their date of initial post. For HOS, posts in forum and Facebook groups were extracted from April 26, 2010 to April 20, 2011, whereas for minimum wage, posts in forum and Facebook groups were extracted from Nov 3, 2010 to April 14, 2011. After controlling for the time constraint, 72 threads and 25 groups were left in the sample for HOS, and 107 threads and 95 groups were left in the sample for minimum wage. Many groups were included in the analysis and some of the posts fits the time frame and were included in the coding.

First of all, all threads and groups coded for their positions towards the issues; whether the posts were for or against the HOS and minimum wage. In order to make sure the actual number of disagreements can be captured, threads were extracted from the forum according to the proportion of their positions. Within each stratum of positions (for/neutral/against/cannot determine), the threads were then randomly ordered and coded. Within each thread, one out of three posts were coded, and the coding stopped when a total

of 300 posts were coded. The same procedure was done to Facebook Groups. The list of groups was also randomly ordered by Excel MS and 300 posts were coded according to the list. The process yielded a total of 600 messages for each issue, and a total of 1200 messages were read and coded.

Measurement

The posts were first coded into different nature – whether they are related to the selected issues or not (See Appendix A). Posts can be regarded as related to the issue if they pointed directly to the issue itself or people involved in the issue such as related governor and politicians, while posts pointed towards other political issues and those which are advertisements are not counted as related to the issue.

The posts related to the issue were then coded according to their positions towards the issue. Disagreement is defined as a statement that signals opposition with regards to two aspects. In this study, it is not only defined as a thought that signal disagreement with what a prior post expressed (Stromer-Galley & Muhlberger, 2009), but also with what the thread/group titles expressed. For Facebook group, it only counts when people comment on others' posts, while for forum, it only counts when people reply others directly, usually with the reply button where the prior person's post will be quoted in default. Regarding the second aspect, it measures whether the post aligns with the title of the group in which the post appears. If a thread indicates support towards the issue and a post signals opposition towards the issue; such post were coded as a disagreement. Posts were coded either for or

against, the issue; however, if there is indication of both conditions, it is coded as neutral, and if there is no clear indication of the above three positions, it was coded as cannot be determined.

As messages could only be interpreted correctly in the context of discussions, coders were trained before the actual coding. The intercoder reliability was checked by inviting another coder to code 50 percent of the 1200 posts. The threads that consist of the 600 posts crosschecked were randomly selected, and the Scott's pi coefficients for all questions ranged from 0.80 to 1.00.

Survey

In order to analyze the extent to which people engage in online political discussions and the possible effects on their attitudes, a survey was conducted. Most of the analyses in this research utilized a survey data set collected among college students. The survey aims at understanding the relationships of people's online media use and their ambivalence and social accountability and willingness to participation in political events. The ultimate goal is to find out the possible effects of online discussions on deliberative and participatory democracy.

Sampling

The limitation and distribution of available resources make it impossible to have the ideal research design with random sampling. As a result, a survey was conducted from March 28 to April 21, 2011. As ambivalence and social accountability has to be measured with particular

issues, I focused on the two issues, HOS and minimum wage, as discussed. College students were chosen as the target sample for the study because they are likely to have access to the Internet and participate in online discussions. Moreover, although anyone with a valid email address can register for a Facebook account, Facebook membership is predominately composed of college students (Creamer, 2007). Nevertheless, college students are one of the major users of Internet forums and Facebook, and they often use Facebook groups for networking, entertainment, and informational purposes (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009).

Surveys were distributed in the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and the City University of Hong Kong (CityU), which represents both first- and second-tier universities in Hong Kong. The multi-stage stratified random sampling method (Leung, 2001) was used to sample students at both universities. Departments were first randomly selected. Among the stratified list of 58 departments and programs in eight colleges in CUHK, a small department should have less than 100 students enrolled, a medium one is defined as one that enrolls between 100 and 300 students, and a large one consists of 301 students or more. As a result, there are 23 small, 28 medium, and 7 large departments in CUHK. To ensure a proportionate stratified sample from these 58 departments in the selection process, 7 small, 9 medium and 2 large departments, about one-third of each stratum was randomly selected using a random number generated by the random digit selection in MS Excel.

After selecting 18 departments, classes were then randomly selected.

The classes were selected from the stratified list of large, medium and small classes from the 18 randomly selected departments. There were a total of 401 classes in the 18 departments. A small class has 30 or fewer students, a medium class has 31 to 99 students, and a large class is defined as having 100 or more students. In order to select classes in proportion, 3 small, 7 medium and 1 large classes were randomly selected to represent the proper proportion of the student population in CUHK.

The questionnaires were administered in class with the voluntary agreement of the students. The students could choose to be involved in it or not. Most of the questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of the class and collected during break time. The response rate was 94.5%.

As the numbers of each department were not known, the exact same procedure was not applied to CityU. Among the six colleges in CityU, there were 5 colleges which provide undergraduate studies. Under each college has a list of programs. Four programs were selected from the Business College, 4 from Social Science, 5 from Science, 1 from Media, and 1 from Law College. Each program has a list of classes available, and 1 class was randomly selected again from each program, and a total of 11 classes were selected to represent the proper proportion of the student population in City University. At last, a total of 471 surveys were received, with a response rate of 95.5%. So there were finally 863 surveys in the sample, 413 from CUHK and 450 from CityU. This method not only enabled students from all departments to be able to participate in the survey, but also participate such that they represent

the school population proportionately.

Operationalization of variables

The operationalization of the key variables involved in the analysis are as follow:

Facebook group use and forum use. Participants were asked how frequent they participate in the two platforms after they reported use of either platform. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (none) to 5 (very frequent), forum users were asked how often they perform the six activities in related forum, which include browsing, commenting, uploading pictures/videos/links, opening a discussion, sharing groups' information to his/her friends, and inviting friends to join forum discussions (HOS: $M = 0.36$, $SD = 0.93$; Wage: 0.31 , $SD = 0.87$). A similar question was asked for Facebook group users, but with two more activities – liking and sharing groups' information on his/her own profile (HOS: $M = 0.43$, $SD = 1.01$; Wage: $M = 0.26$, $SD = 0.81$).

Perceived knowledge gain and perceived agreement. Respondents were asked how often they felt they are more familiar with the issues and how often they acquire more understanding of various viewpoints while using forums or Facebook Groups on the scale ranging from 1 (not often at all) to 5 (very often). The two were combined to form an index of perceived knowledge gain. They were also asked whether they generally agreed with the views expressed by other participants, with the response option ranging from

1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

Reevaluation. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), two questions concerning whether the discussions helped them uncover valid recommendations and assumptions were asked (“The group decision process made me critically reevaluate the validity of the assumptions and recommendations that I held personally” and “The group decision process uncovered valid recommendations and assumptions that I had not considered”). The two were then combined to form an index for reevaluation.

Ambivalence. As mentioned in the literature review, two conditions for ambivalence are suggested by Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin (1995). They claim that there should be similarity in magnitude between positive and negative attitudes, and those two attitudes should be of moderate magnitude. In this study, the equation used by Nir (2005) and others were used:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Objective ambivalence} &= (\text{intensity of attitude components}) - (\text{polarization of} \\ &\quad \text{attitude components}) \\ &= [(p + n)/2] - [p - n] \end{aligned}$$

where p is the positive or favorable attitude component and n is the negative or unfavorable attitude component.

According to the equation, the objective ambivalence measure will increase when the positive and negative attitude components increase and decrease when the attitude intensity is high and attitude polarization is low. The numbers of reasons for liking and disliking that the respondent provides

for the controversial issue are plugged into the equation. Assume that respondents offer five reasons for both sides ($p = 5$; $n = 5$) are maximizing their levels of ambivalence (Nir, 2005, p. 428-429).

There was also a question measuring subjective ambivalence. There were asked “Both sides have strong arguments towards the current issue, do you find it difficult to judge which side is right?” As subjective ambivalence and objective ambivalence are highly correlated ($\alpha = .63$), they were combined into one measure after standardizing and averaging the scores (HOS: $M = -0.02$, $SD = 0.93$; Wage: $M = 0.01$, $SD = 0.89$).

Social accountability. The scale averages the score of respondents’ responses to four questions regarding conflicts. Respondents were asked to rate using a 5-point Likert-type scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): “(1) I once considered the arguments of the opposite side; (2) I once changed my opinion in any way because of others; (3) I think I should learn more from others before making my own decision on the issue.” The three questions were then combined into one index, (HOS: $M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.77$, $\alpha = 0.67$; Wage: $M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.75$, $\alpha = 0.73$).

Future Deliberation and Deliberation Satisfaction. Measures from Schweiger et al.’s (1986) study was borrowed here. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), participants were asked about their willingness to work with their deliberation group in the future. The exact wording of the question was “I would be willing to work with this group on other projects in the future.” Besides, their willingness to

deliberate in the future was also concerned. They were asked whether they were satisfied with their group's recommendations, whether they would recommend others using such deliberation to address issues, and whether they learned a lot from the discussions. The three questions were combined into one index, satisfaction.

Willingness to Participate. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), respondents were asked if they expect themselves to participate in various activities with regard to the controversial issue, and six potential activities were listed out for them to choose. The six items included "discussion with others", "expression of opinion to government/politicians/other representatives", "expression of opinion through media channels (newspapers, magazines, radio stations, etc.)", "participation in collective activities", "online petition", and "petition in streets or other venues." The scores of each item were then averaged into one score (HOS: $M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.80$; $\alpha = 0.87$; Wage: $M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.82$; $\alpha = 0.87$).

Demographics. Personal data such as age ($M = 20.95$, $SD = 1.38$), gender ($M = 1.52$, $SD = 0.50$), education ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.85$) and family income ($M = 7.51$, $SD = 2.71$) were assessed and recorded. In addition, data on their interest in politics, internal efficacy, external efficacy, and collective efficacy was also collected. Interest in politics was measured by the average of respondents' answers, with two 5-point Likert scaled statements (1 = totally not interested, 5 = very interested), to two questions regarding: (a) the degree

of interest in Hong Kong's public affairs, and (b) the degree of interest in Hong Kong politics ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.88$; $r = 0.76$, $p < .01$). Internal efficacy was the average of respondents' agreement with two 5-point Likert-scaled (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) statements: (a) I have enough ability to understand politics, and (b) I have enough ability to discuss and participate in public affairs ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.90$; $r = 0.83$, $p < .01$). External efficacy was the average of respondents' agreement, with the same scale, also with two statements: (a) the current political system in Hong Kong can effectively respond to public opinion, and (b) the current Hong Kong SAR government can effectively respond to public opinion ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.93$; $r = 0.83$, $p < .01$). Collective efficacy was the average of respondents' agreements with another two statements: (a) collection action of HongKongers has a great impact on politics and public affairs, and (b) collective action of Hongkongers can reform the society ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.87$; $r = 0.70$, $p < .01$).

Chapter 5: Analysis and Results

Results - Content Analysis

Scholars promoting deliberative democracy believe that one have to engage in the back-and-forth of disagreement and discussion (Fishkin, 1991, 1995). How often do people encounter disagreement in the online environment such as Facebook Groups and forums? This study paid attention to how participants responded to other posts, how follow-up posts responded to a given entry and whether a certain degree of in-group homogeneity was reached in terms of the degree of disagreement on discussed issues among participants. For the results from the content analysis, see Table 1.

Table 1. Content analysis on Disagreement

	HOS				Minimum wage				Total			
	Facebook		Forum		Facebook		Forum		Facebook		Forum	
	(N = 263)		(N = 299)		(N = 255)		(N = 272)		(N = 518)		(N = 571)	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Positions												
For	59.7	157	40.5	121	68.6	175	37.1	101	64.1	332	38.9	222
Against	8.4	22	27.8	83	12.5	32	47.4	129	10.4	54	37.1	212
Neutral	0.8	2	21.4	64	3.1	8	3.7	10	1.9	10	13.0	74
Cannot determine	31.2	82	10.4	31	15.7	40	11.8	32	23.6	122	11.0	63
Postings in relation to entry header												
Agreement	63.5	167	39.1	117	74.5	190	36.8	100	51.7	357	38.0	217
Disagreement	4.6	12	30.8	92	6.7	17	47.4	129	5.6	29	38.7	221
Neutral	0.7	2	19.7	59	3.1	8	4.0	11	1.9	10	12.3	70
Cannot determine	31.2	82	10.4	31	15.7	40	11.8	32	23.6	122	11.0	63
Postings in relation to prior post (if any)												
	(N = 121)		(N = 151)		(N = 78)		(N = 116)		(N = 199)		(N = 267)	
Agreement	81.0	98	45.7	69	74.4	58	46.2	54	78.4	156	46.1	123
Disagreement	17.4	21	49.0	74	19.2	15	47.9	56	18.1	36	48.7	130
Neutral	0	0	4.6	7	2.6	2	3.4	4	1.0	2	4.1	11
Cannot determine	1.7	2	0.7	1	3.8	3	1.7	2	2.5	5	1.1	3

First, posts in Facebook groups and forum boards are examined in terms of their positions towards the two issues. Although coding their positions is not directly related to disagreement; however, we can see how

often participants get to encounter different positions in general when they participate in online discussions. The majority of posts in Facebook groups support both HOS (59.7 percent, 157 out of 263) and minimum wage (68.5 percent, 175 out of 255). The percentages of posts of the opposite position are only 8.4% (22 out of 263) and 12.5% (32 out of 255) respectively. Compared to forum posts, the differences between the amount of posts for and against the two issues are a lot larger, with a 51.3% difference for minimum wage and a 56.1% difference for HOS. In contrast, the percentages of posts in forum are more balanced, with a difference of 12.7% for HOS (38 out of 299). There is a 10.3% difference between the two positions for minimum wage (28 out of 272), with more posts against than support HOS. The amounts between the two platforms were significantly different for both HOS ($\chi^2(3) = 119.55, p < .001$) and minimum wage ($\chi^2(3) = 78.93, p < .001$). By combining the two issues, forum has just a 1.7% (10 out of 571) difference between posts which go for and against the two issues, compared to Facebook's 53.7% (278 out of 518).

In general, we can conclude that posts tend to lean towards one position (support minimum wage and HOS) in Facebook, while positions of posts tend to be more balanced in forum. For people who participate in forum or even who simply just browse the boards randomly will be more likely to encounter posts for both positions to issues. This reveals a big picture of how homogeneity of Facebook groups is, as compared to forum. The concept of public sphere presumes the homogeneity of participants and a potential to

reach consensus (Grbes̃a, 2003), in which the result of Facebook group is consistent to such finding.

To assess disagreement, researchers examined how people respond to prior speakers. Not all participants respond others by commenting on posts, so this only applied to people replying directly to specific posts. In the case of Facebook, it only counts when a participant comments under a particular post. In the case of forum, it only counts when the poster reply directly to a specific post, usually automatically quoted the entry being responded to. Within the samples, a total of 38.4% of posts (199 out of 518) are follow-up posts in Facebook groups, and a total of 46.8% of posts (267 out of 571) in forum.

The result suggests that the extent to which Facebook group participants presenting disagreeing to other users was limited. The majority of follow-up entries in Facebook groups, as shown in Table 1, tended to be consensus with the prior speakers. Agreeing replies constituted 81.0% (98 out of 121) for HOS and a 74.4% (58 out of 78) of total follow-up entries. It is significantly different from the results generated from forum, with $\chi^2(3) = 39.11$ for HOS ($p < .001$) and $\chi^2(3) = 17.93$ for minimum wage ($p < .001$). In forum, the amount of agreeing replies was found to be roughly the same as the amount in Facebook groups. However, there were a lot more disagreeing replies in forum, with a total of 49.3% (130 out of 267), whereas there was only a total of 18.1% (36 out of 199) in Facebook groups. In sum, people who browse the forum are expected to be exposed to disagreement more often than

Facebook group users, and forum participants who post in the forum are more likely to receive disagreeing comments than Facebook group participants.

Lastly, I look at how often participants agree with the entry header. This measures how often disagreement can be found within each thread/group. For instance, not only the creator of the Facebook group can experience such post as a kind of disagreement, but also those members of the groups. For the coding of HOS groups, there were only 12 posts (4.6%) showing disagreement to the group header, compared to 92 posts in forum (30.8%). The gap between the two was even larger in the case of minimum wage. There was 17 disagreeing posts towards the group (6.7%) in Facebook groups as compared to 129 (47.4%) showing disagreement towards the thread header. The difference for both issues were again significant, with $\chi^2(3) = 144.91$ for HOS ($p < .001$) and $\chi^2(3) = 114.78$ for minimum wage ($p < .001$). This is understandable as Facebook group participants are members of that particular group; therefore, they are less likely to have users with the opposite view to participate in the platform. However, forum users who chose a particular thread can participate due to his/her interest but not always because of having identification with the entry header. In this sense, it is not surprising to see Facebook having an overwhelming majority of posts (51.7%, 357 out of 518) agreeing with the group header. On the other hand, forum presents a different picture. While 38.3% (217 out of 571) of posts agree with the header, there was also approximately the same amount of posts that shows disagreement (38.8%, 221 out of 571).

Many posts in Facebook groups were coded as *cannot determine* (23.6%; 122 out of 518) as many participants post a related link without any comment or notes, while only (11.6%; 63 out of 571) for forum. As they can be either supportive or not supportive, they are coded as *cannot determine* in this case. Although one can argue that members who posted the link are usually in favor of the groups, we cannot assume that that is always the case. However, this will not affect what the results suggest, and it can even enlarge the difference between Facebook group and forum. All these findings suggest that participants tended to express disagreement in forum but not in Facebook groups. In this sense, forum users are more likely to be exposed to disagreement than Facebook group users.

The content analysis allows me to provide a subjective observation of the amount of disagreements in both Facebook groups and forum. Such observation can be used to as an evidence that forum participants have higher levels of exposure to disagreement than Facebookg group users.

Results – Survey

Among the 863 respondents, 408 (47.7%) are male and 447 (52.3%) are female. The average age is 20.9 (SD=1.53), ranging from 18 years old to 25 years old. The mean year of university-level education is 1.52 years (SD = 1.53). 128 of them (14.8%) reported prior Facebook usage regarding HOS while 97 (11.2%) reported forum usage, 30 (3.5%) reported using both, and 608 (70.5%) reported neither usage. Only 74 of them (8.6%) reported prior Facebook usage regarding minimum wage while 96 (11.1%) reported forum usage, 19 (2.2%) reported using both, and 674 (78.1%) reported neither usage.

The sample was split into four groups according to their past participation in related forum or Facebook group activities. Since comparisons between Facebook group users and forum users were examined with independent samples T-tests, forum users refer to those who only participated in related forum activities and Facebook group users to those who reported participation in Facebook group activities only. Those who participated in none were not included in the T-test analysis, whereas those who participated in both were examined through the paired samples T-test.

T-tests

Before analyzing the hypotheses, independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the forum and Facebook group participants, whereas paired samples t-tests were conducted to compare the scores of participants who reported use in both platforms. They were tested whether they are

different in terms of their perceived knowledge gain, perceived agreement in the platform, reevaluation rate, satisfaction towards their participation, and future deliberation. Table 2 and 3 shows the results of the independent samples *t*-tests.

Table 2. Independent samples T-tests between Facebook group and forum users

	Facebook	Forum	t-values
HOS			
Perceived knowledge gain	2.63	3.88	-12.57***
Perceived agreement	4.01	2.39	13.78***
Reevaluation	2.20	3.86	-16.66***
Satisfaction	3.50	3.33	1.79
Future deliberation	3.67	3.50	1.80
Minimum wage			
Perceived knowledge gain	2.68	3.95	-9.88***
Perceived agreement	4.25	2.05	17.02***
Reevaluation	2.48	3.81	-8.82***
Satisfaction	3.79	3.28	4.19***
Future deliberation	4.05	3.44	5.69

Note: Independent sample t-tests were conducted to examine the mean differences. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3. Paired samples T-test for users with both platform uses

	Facebook	Forum	t-values
HOS			
Perceived knowledge gain	2.16	3.64	-5.81***
Perceived agreement	4.09	3.36	3.46***
Reevaluation	2.30	3.58	-4.11***
Satisfaction	3.88	3.32	5.67***
Future deliberation	3.73	3.48	1.37
Minimum wage			
Perceived knowledge gain	2.84	3.84	-2.47*
Perceived agreement	3.67	2.67	5.75***
Reevaluation	2.69	3.94	-3.54**
Satisfaction	3.29	3.14	.74
Future deliberation	3.38	3.19	.84

Note: Paired sample t-tests were conducted to examine the mean differences.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Perceived knowledge gain. First, regarding participants' reported perceived knowledge gain, those who only participated in Facebook groups have significantly lower scores for HOS and minimum wage ($t = -12.57(207.87)$, $p < .001$; $t = -9.89(115.83)$, $p < .001$ respectively) than those

who only participated in forum. Facebook group users have significantly less perceived knowledge gain than forum users. Moreover, regarding those who used both platforms, the difference between the sample mean for Facebook group and forum for HOS was -1.48, with a 95% confidence interval from -2.16 to -0.96; $t = -5.81(27)$, $p < .001$). The results were similar for minimum wage, where participants reported higher perceived knowledge gain from forum than from Facebook group ($t = -2.47(18)$, $p < .05$). In this sense, all findings suggest that participants are more likely to learn and obtain information from forum than Facebook groups. This does not necessary mean that there is less information available in Facebook groups, but members who join groups without much browsing and participating in discussions and those who only leave a post at the first page without reading the rest would come to receive relatively less information from the platform.

Perceived agreement. We now turn to compare the scores for perceived agreement between those who only participated in Facebook groups and those who only participated in forum. There were significant differences between Facebook group users and forum users in terms of their perceived agreement (HOS: $t = 13.76(215)$, $p < .001$; Wage: $17.02(137.25)$, $p < .001$). Forum users who are expected to encounter more disagreement online indeed reported lower levels of agreements. Moreover, regarding participants' perceived agreement in the platform, the differences between the scores of users of both platforms were also significant ($t = 3.46(21)$, $p < .01$ for HOS; $t = 5.75(11)$, $p < .001$ for minimum wage). For both issues, Facebook group

participants are more likely to perceive agreement in forum. As groups in Facebook are generally formed and joined by people who agree with the group, they are therefore more likely to report higher perception of agreements than forum participants. Nevertheless, forum users are usually prepared to engage in discussions with users with different perspectives. Therefore, the above finding is not surprising.

Reevaluation. There are significant differences between Facebook group users and forum users in terms of their reevaluation rate (HOS: $t = -16.66(220.23)$, $p < .001$; Wage: $t = -8.82(90.83)$, $p < .001$). In both cases, forum participants have a reevaluation rate than Facebook participants. This is consistent with the paired sample T-tests results that show that users who participated in both platforms reported higher levels of reevaluation in forum than in Facebook groups (HOS: $t = -4.11(29)$, $p < .001$; minimum wage: $t = -3.54(15)$, $p < .01$). This is again not surprising as people join groups usually with certain levels of certainty towards their positions as joining a group can be seen as an act towards the issue; they are therefore more likely to be confident towards their decision and less likely to experience reevaluation during their participation in the groups. On the other hand, forum users are more likely to be open for reevaluation as there are no group identification in the platform.

Satisfaction. Regarding satisfaction towards the platform, the differences were not as significant. Only the scores in the independent samples T-test for minimum wage are significantly different ($t = 4.17(108.68)$),

$p < .001$). significant result can be found in the case of minimum wage, but participants who participated in related HOS Facebook groups and forum reported higher levels of satisfaction in Facebook than in forum ($t = 5.67(21)$, $p < .001$). The satisfaction levels are not as consistent and significant after looking at the two tests. The results suggest that even though forum participants tend to encounter more disagreements, this does not seem to lead to lower levels of satisfaction of the users.

Future deliberation. Again, the differences were not as significant. Only the scores in the independent samples T-test for minimum wage are significantly different ($t = 5.69(138.13)$, $p < .001$). On the other hand, regarding the paired samples T-test, no difference can be found. Participants in participated in both platforms did not find much difference in their willingness to participate in either platform in the future. As there is no significant difference in the participants' levels of satisfaction, it is understandable that their willingness to attend future deliberation in both platforms are not significantly different.

ANOVA

In order to test whether the participants who participated in Facebook groups, in forum, in both and in none of the platforms are different, one-way ANOVA statistical analysis was conducted to compare means and variance among the classifications. The one-way ANOVA tests whether two or more groups are significantly different. Drawing upon the research by Mutz (2002),

all measures in focus: the degree of ambivalence, social accountability, and willingness to participate have significant differences among the groups.

Among the four groups, their ambivalence levels were significantly different, with $F = 48.63$ ($p < .001$) for HOS and $F = 31.81$ ($p < .001$). This is also the same for social accountability, which has an F score of 23.11 ($p < .001$) for HOS and an F score of 34.20 ($p < .001$). Lastly, regarding willingness to participate, the difference between the four was also significant, with $F = 43.35$ ($p < .001$) for HOS and $F = 24.08$ ($p < .001$).

I then ran a Tamhane's T2 Test comparing group means to identify specific differences in the case of HOS. The results indicate that the collection of participants classified as Facebook group was significantly different from the classifications of none, forum, and both in terms of ambivalence ($p < 0.001$). Forum was not significantly different in level of ambivalence from both. None was also not significantly different from both.

Regarding social accountability, Facebook group and forum were significantly different from each other ($p \leq .003$), while both is not significantly different from any other groups of classification. Finally, Facebook group and forum were also significantly different from each other and with none ($p \leq .003$), while not significantly different from both. The results for minimum wage yields similar results.

Regression

Online use and ambivalence

I begin by tackling *H2a and H2b*, which are concerned with the effect of Facebook group use and forum use on ambivalence. A multiple regression analysis was conducted with ambivalence as the dependent variables. The independent variables were added into the analysis in three blocks. The first block included the demographics, while the second block included the other control variables. Facebook group use and forum use, the two keys to *H2a and H2b*, constitutes the third block. Although strictly speaking the cross-sectional survey does not allow us to discern causal direction, at least we can control for other variables.

Table 4. Facebook group and forum use and willingness to participate (HOS)

	Dependent variables		
	Ambivalence	Social accountability	Willingness to participate
Gender	0.43	0.07*	0.04
Year	0.02	0.03	0.07*
Income	-0.23***	-0.13***	-0.09**
Δ Adjusted R ²	4.2%	1.1%	3.9%
Interest	-0.10**	-0.06	0.33***
Internal	-0.10**	0.00	0.06
Collective	-0.04*	0.16***	0.05
External	0.01	0.10**	0.06
Δ Adjusted R ²	1.8%	3.4%	18.0%
Facebook use	-0.34***	-0.31***	0.22***
Forum use	0.26***	0.16***	0.02
Δ Adjusted R ²	17.1%	11.2%	4.3%
Ambivalence			-0.16***
Social accountability			0.05
Δ Adjusted R ²			1.4%
Total adjusted R ²			26.8%***

N = 862. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 5. Facebook group and forum use and willingness to participate (Wage)

	Dependent variables		
	Ambivalence	Social accountability	Willingness to participate
Gender	0.03	0.06	0.02
Year	0.10**	0.04	0.08**
Income	-0.09**	-0.12***	-0.04
Δ Adjusted R ²	0.7%	1.4%	2.5%
Interest	-0.22***	-0.01	0.35***
Internal	-0.23***	-0.11**	0.06
Collective	0.14***	0.15***	0.13***
External	0.13***	0.08*	0.01
Δ Adjusted R ²	11.8%	3.9%	22.6%
Facebook use	-0.23***	-0.29***	0.18***
Forum use	0.28***	0.23***	-0.03
Δ Adjusted R ²	12.0%	12.8%	5.6%
Ambivalence			-0.16***
Social			
accountability			-0.03
Δ Adjusted R ²			2.2%
Total adjusted R ²			32.1%***

N = 862. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 4 and 5 summarize the results. Among the demographic variables, age is consistently related to ambivalence negatively, i.e., younger people exhibit higher degree of ambivalence. Better-educated people are more ambivalent. These findings are understandable: People with more years of university-level education are more likely to be more exposed to a diversity of views and be more ambivalent. People with higher political interest are less ambivalent. Internal efficacy is negatively related to ambivalence. People who believe themselves to be capable of understanding politics are more likely to hold firmed positions towards issues.

As *H2a* predicts, Facebook group use relates negatively to ambivalence after controlling for the other factors. The negative coefficients obtained by the Facebook group use variable are statistically significant in both cases – ambivalence regarding minimum wage and HOS. The main effect of Facebook group use suggests that less ambivalent views are prevailing and pervasive mainly among participants of Facebook groups. On the other hand, as predicted by *H2b*, forum use relates positively to ambivalence after controlling for the other factors. The statistically significant relationship shows that more ambivalent views are prevailing mainly among forum participants.

Online use and social accountability

I then examine the relationship between online use and social accountability by both Facebook group and forum participants. *H3a* states that

participation in Facebook groups relates negatively to social accountability, and *H3b* states participation in forum relates positively to social accountability. Multiple regression analysis was conducted again, with social accountability as the dependent variable. All the blocks of independent variables were the same as in the previous model.

Table 4 and 5 again summarize the results. Year of university schooling again is positively related to social accountability. Internal efficacy is negatively related to social accountability, whereas external and collective efficacies are both positively related to social accountability. Understandably, social accountability is positively related to belief in the responsiveness of the government to public opinion as people who are more satisfied with the government are more likely to be tolerant towards the government and others. Also, collective efficacy concerns with people's beliefs in the efficacy of citizens as a collective actor, and many people who have high levels of collective efficacy have participated in collective actions in the past (Lee, 2006). It is possible that the experience of participating in collective actions and the feelings of collective efficacy have led people to appreciate democratic norms and are more tolerant towards others, thus they reported higher social accountability.

Facebook group use has highly negative relationship with social accountability, which is consistent with the results of much existing research on tolerance (Lawrence, 1976). Notably, similar to the results regarding ambivalence, Facebook group use does have a significant negative

relationship with the dependent variable when it is controlled. Moreover, forum use is also strongly and positively related to social accountability. *H2a* and *H2b* are therefore supported.

Online use and willingness to participate

We then examine the relationship between online use and willingness to participate. *H4a*, *H4b*, *H5a* and *H5b* expect relationships between online use and willingness to participate mediated by ambivalence and social accountability. In this case, the hypotheses are based on an argument with a causal claim: exposure to disagreement leads respondents to increase both ambivalence and social accountability. Multiple regression analysis was conducted again, with willingness to participate as the dependent variable. The first three blocks of independent variables were the same as in the previous model, whereas the final block included the ambivalence and social accountability for examining the four hypotheses.

Table 4 and 5 again summarize the results. People who experienced more years of college education are found to be more willing to participate. Moreover, rich people are less willing to participate, while people with higher levels of political interest are more willing to participate. Again, collective efficacy is related to willingness to participate. The other control variables have rather limited relationship social accountability.

Although forum use does not have any significant direct impact of willingness to participate, Facebook group use does have a significant direct impact on it. Combining the results from Tables 3 and 4 regarding *H2a*, Facebook group use may be considered as having an important indirect effect on support for willingness to participate mediated by ambivalence. This is what *H4a* predicts. The Sobel Test (Sobel, 1982) was conducted to examine this hypothesis. The results confirmed that there is an indirect effect of Facebook group use on willingness to participate through ambivalence is statistically significant in both cases toward minimum wage and HOS ($Z > 3.82$, $p < .001$ in the HOS case; $Z > 3.89$, $p < .001$ in the minimum wage case). On the whole, *H4a* and *H4b* are supported. Regarding *H5a* and *H5b*, there is no significant relationship found between social accountability and willingness to participate.

Figure 2. Facebook model



Figure 3. Forum model



Figure 2 and 3 illustrate the overall results graphically for a better understanding of the mediating effect of ambivalence. The figures were based on the results using the overall coefficients.

Chapter 6: Discussions

This article began with a question of how do different forms of online political engagement, due to their different amounts of disagreements involved, affect the users' political participation. Some political theorists claim that deliberation among individuals with diverse perspectives may help individuals refine their own opinions, develop greater tolerance, and identify common ground, and it is believed that disagreement in daily discussions has played an important role in people's attitudes towards political issues and participation.

The Internet allows for deliberation, the cornerstone of a well-functioning democratic society. It contributes to deliberative democracy by increasing people's exposure to political differences and providing unlimited amount of information to enlighten the public. Many hold the view that the Internet can eventually revitalize the public sphere; however, to what extent can the Internet contribute to or detract from the goals of diversity embodied in the concept of "deliberative democracy" (Habermas, 1989)?

The problem is that deliberation and participation may be at odds. Mutz (2006) finds that exposure to competing points of view in one's personal network is associated with increased tolerance for opposing views but decreased levels of political participation. This poses a dilemma for notions of citizenship: We would like citizens to participate in politics and at the same time respect and take diverse perspectives into account. Mutz suggests that there may be no good way to accomplish both ends. By emphasizing on

Mutz's (2006) potential mechanisms of influence that connect disagreements and political participation, Internet's contribution to democracy is discussed.

This study first examined the degrees of disagreement in both Facebook groups and forums. This study also tested the association between use of ideologically homogeneous Facebook groups and ideologically heterogeneous forum and ambivalence and social accountability. Finally, it assessed whether such mechanisms of influence affect the links between use of online platforms and willingness to participate in related activities.

In the literature, scholars have done little to describe the types of messages that were being produced by ordinary citizens through the use of online technology. Different from other studies, this study not only examines perceived disagreement but actual disagreement among the discussants. The content analysis results illustrate the different degrees of deliberativeness by examining how Facebook groups and forum are different in their compositions of disagreements and agreements. In this study, discussion forums are found to be a much heterogeneous platform than Facebook groups as posts in Facebook groups are generally leaning support towards one position. Although the amounts of agreement of the two online platforms are about the same, a substantial proportion of forum postings consist of disagreeing statements, while the general prevalence of disagreeing postings was low across Facebook groups.

It is argued that whether individuals experience such opposing statements as disagreement is important (Mutz, 2006; Scheufele et al., 2006); therefore, the perceived agreement was also measured. With such measure, we not only capture the actual existence of disagreeing posts, but also whether people actually encounter them and whether they understand the disagreements as disagreements. From the survey results, Facebook group users did report lower levels of perceived disagreements than forum users. In general, these findings suggest that people who participate in Facebook groups are less likely to encounter opposing views than forum participants.

Overall, compared to Facebook groups, forum is more a place for deliberation if deliberation involves certain degree of dissimilar views. Mutz (2009) did a research on studying how often Americans are exposed to like-minded views in online political chat rooms and message boards and concluded that no heterogeneous views could be found. Although deliberation entails a dialogue between opposing views, users tend to self-select themselves into like-minded discussions that reinforce their existing viewpoints. The case in Hong Kong would suggest a much favorable space for online deliberation even though disagreement is not a frequent event in Facebook groups. Even though people who participate in homogenous Facebook groups have little opportunity for a substantive exchange across ideological lines, they can still be able to encounter at least some disagreements.

On the other hand, discourse in the forum contains more disagreements and conflicts, and such results imply it has a greater potential for deliberative exchange. Moreover, forum users receive the benefits of learning about opposing points of view. Many were shown to have higher knowledge gain, and they therefore have more opportunities for revising their opinions than Facebook group users otherwise have.

Online and offline environments do not function in isolation and researchers have recently shown that degrees of disagreement among individuals in given structural situations is particularly important in explaining political engagement (Erickson, 1997; Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004; Mutz, 2006). The most significant finding here is not just that forum users encounter more disagreement than Facebook group participants but that users of Facebook groups were more willing to participate in related political activities while forum users are less willing to participate, which is in line with Mutz's (2002b) results.

In the literature regarding the consequences of being exposed to dissimilar views, studies agree that it tends to depress participation (Eliasoph, 1998; Grober & Schram, 2006; Leech, 1983; McClurg, 2006; Mutz, 2002b), and the rationale behind is that higher levels of disagreement lead people to reevaluate their assumptions and opinions. When people are being disagreed, there is a stronger need for them to justify their own views, and they might have to come up with arguments to defend themselves. It follows that there will be more factual information circulating in discussion forums, and they

can learn about both sides of the issues, and tend to re-evaluate their positions more often. Finally, as users like forum participants are exposed to the other sides of the arguments, they are more likely to be pulled toward both sides of an issue (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948), and such pulling towards both sides might cause them to doubt their own perspectives. This study confirms that people who experience higher levels of disagreements are more likely to hold more ambivalent views, in which they become less likely to participate because of being ambivalent.

Ambivalence, on one hand, might create instability in issue evaluations; on the other hand, it can create stability if an individual gains enough information to form a solid opinion. When people are involved in deliberation, they might gain more channels to participate in other ways, and at the same time, they might gain more knowledge to help them crystallize their opinions (Katz, 1992). In the case of Facebook groups, participants might think that they have already collected enough information solely from the groups with mainly agreements and reinforcements, and this could in turn facilitate an increased desire to participate in political activities. In this case, deliberation serves to empower citizens to more political activity (Warren, 1992). Therefore, deliberation in some platforms, in this case Facebook groups, can actually facilitate political participation.

Alternatively, besides the mediated results of ambivalence on participation, Facebook group experience can directly affect their willingness to participate in related events. In other words, Facebook usage can increase willingness to participate directly. This should not be surprising, as previous research has found that any form of association, including the networked relationships that are typical of the Facebook environment, helps political participation. For instance, Facebook and other SNSs is claimed to offer young citizens a place to be exposed others with similar interests, which could in turn stimulate their interests (Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2011). Likewise, the highly interactive nature of Facebook may encourage users to become more active and engage in more vigorous political behaviors (Vitak et al., 2011, p. 113).

Others have suggested such ideologically homogenous groups like Facebook groups are more effective in mobilizing members because they can influence factors that are central to collective action (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002; Gamson, 1992). First, like-minded groups may foster identification with a group and strengthen collective identity (Lea, Spears, & de Groot, 2001; Postmes, Spears & Lea, 1998; Postmes, Spears, Sakhel, & de Groot, 2001). Moreover, being in an environment which has few disagreements, participants are reinforced by the same view, and may boost their self-efficacy. This can then encourage them to express their views (McKenna & Bargh, 1998) and motivate them to stand up against out-groups (Spears et al., 2002). Facebook groups may be particularly likely to increase participants' confidence because

members are likely to overestimate public support for their own views (Wojcieszak, 2008) and anticipate that a large number of members to participate in collective actions (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002). Nonetheless, the results of this study do not suggest Facebook users have higher collective efficacy than forum users. In some cases, forum participants were found to have higher internal efficacy and external efficacy. This is understandable, as forum users who discuss politics with rationales and involve in debates should agree that they have higher ability in discussing and being involved in public affairs, thus should have higher internal efficacy. Moreover, forum participants are more ambivalent and tolerable; therefore, they should hold higher external efficacy as they tend to be less extreme towards the government and Hong Kong's political system.

Besides efficacy, Facebook groups constitute more extensive and accessible networks (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; McAdam, 1986). People can recruit new members, distribute information about possibilities for engagement, and even plan protests (Gurak & Logie, 2003). Thus far, this research suggests that increased participation in ideologically homogeneous online discussion groups will be associated with greater political engagement. Without further research, there is no real way to tell what the other motives behind the content might be.

Focusing on the associations between the tested factors, it is notably found that forum deliberation does not have a direct effect on mobilization to related events. Compared to Facebook groups, forum seems to be purely a place for discussion. Although it does not affect willingness to participate directly, it does have a tendency to reduce willingness to participate through increasing ambivalence. It is mainly because disagreement-induced ambivalence and complexities in opinions is likely to make people feel uneasy about taking up a position, while participating in forum does not require one to take up a “fixed and inflexible position” (Lee, 2011, p. 12), whereas joining and participating in most Facebook groups does mean that a certain person has already agreed with the perspectives advocated by the groups. By enhancing people’s understanding of different viewpoints, participation in forum is not likely to increase participation.

Besides ambivalence, users who encounter more disagreeing viewpoints are more able to learn about others’ rationale and take hold of others’ stories behind the opposing arguments. Such can then make them more able to understand others and feel the need to take account of the other side too. As forum users were more aware of the different arguments and reasons behind the different positions, they have a tendency to be accountable to conflicting constituencies (Hayes, Scheufele & Huges, 2006; Mutz, 2002b).

Contrary to the predictions, social accountability neither encourages nor discourages political participation. Adverse political networks do not discourage political participation because of people's tendency to avoid conflict, invoked by the need to be held responsible to conflicting constituencies (Hayes, Scheufele, & Huges, 2006; Mutz, 2002a; Ulbig & Funk, 1999). This holds for both issues being examined. When exposed to dissimilar views, people are more likely to avoid conflicting views but do not retreat from political participation to maintain social harmony as suggested by Eliasoph (1998). People do not retreat their participation because of feeling uncomfortable of hurting their interpersonal relationships and the risk of upsetting others. In sum, this study supports that users who experience more disagreement are more likely to be accountable to their opponents; however, it does not have any effect on participation.

Social accountability was not found to be mediating the relationship between deliberation and participation in this study, and there are several explanations for these results. As mentioned in earlier chapters, such kind of social pressure is the basis of Noelle-Neumann's (1984) theory on minorities silencing themselves under majority pressure. There are many incentives to silence oneself and meeting normative expectations which include boasting self-esteem and gaining social approval. Some might conform to avoid possible negative punishments that might result from deviating from the majority which include alienation and social isolation. However, given the fact that the survey was done in the context of college students, and Facebook

membership is still predominately composed of college students (Creamer, 2007), social accountability might not function as a mechanism of influence as expected.

Nowadays, younger demographics of people like college students are more willing to express their feelings and ideas without taking other's views into account. In other words, they are not scared to be seen as deviant and do not feel uncomfortable voicing minority viewpoints. Moreover, it was found that college students are frequent users of Facebook groups for socializing and self-status seeking purposes (Park, Kee, and Valenzuela, 2009). Facebook groups can be places for them to show off themselves being responsible citizens and hence build up their identities. In sum, social accountability might not work as a mechanism of influence because the research was done in the college context and the Facebook context.

To conclude, the analysis supports the findings regarding disagreement as a condition for political discussion to produce its normatively undesirable outcomes as suggested by Mutz (2006). The findings present a picture: Participants who are exposed to opposing views are more likely to be ambivalent and social accountable, and participants who become more ambivalent after deliberation is found to reduce participation in general. In general, engaging in more homogeneous social network increases participants' willingness to participate in related activities. Importantly, this relationship persists when controlling for such theoretically crucial confounders as political interest, internal efficacy, external efficacy and

collective efficacy. The potential trade-off between participation and deliberation noted by Mutz is therefore supported.

As shown, deliberative and participatory democracy may be mutually exclusive as deliberation and participation, the two core elements regarded to be important in democratic societies, are incompatible with each other. If one wants to maximize democratic ends, having diversity as a kind of social environments is still useful, as people are able to increase their knowledge towards the issues, reevaluate their own arguments, and make decisions with more orientation to public-good. Scholars have hoped that by providing easy access to information and by offering a sphere for deliberation, the Internet will pull citizens into the democratic process (Castells, 1996). However, political participation may not always result in positive social outcomes.

The popularization of new information technologies has changed the way many people participate in politics, and there is growing evidence that an increasing share of the population go online to engage politically (Bimber, 2003; Chadwick, 2006). As previous research has shown (Stromer-Galley & Foot, 2002), young people nowadays are attracted to social media, and are particularly interested in contributing to the digital body of knowledge. Therefore, the social networking sites like Facebook group can serve as an effective platform to breed political civic engagement more than the discussion forums.

The Internet provides users with different platforms and unique information. Individuals choose what information to access and what platforms and groups to be involved with. From this investigation, differences in different platforms in terms of their ability in mobilizing participants can be found. SNSs such as Facebook groups indeed motivate individuals to express their political beliefs and participate in related activities, and expressions of agreements can contribute to such motivating nature.

Therefore, it is broadly cautioned that the Internet might not be beneficial to democracy but instead might be rife with polarizing viewpoints (Sunstein, 2001, 2007). In Hong Kong, many have struggled for places to bargain with the government. Yet it is difficult for them to engage in rational discussions and promote their perspectives in the offline context. This present study shows that at least in the online groups and forum, people are able to engage in discussions and their voices can be heard. Online political discussions have the potential to contribute to the development of a civic culture. More political talk among supporters of democratization and people with different voices can generate a more informed citizenry. Of course, it can also be a place for polarization in the case of Facebook groups. As people can see the number of members in each group and perceive the overall environment in the online platform, and only people who perceive themselves to hold the majority views are willing to stand up. Deliberation among citizens themselves, therefore, might be polarizing, but at least can take a role in promoting discussions and exchanges of information in Hong Kong.

While it is obvious that Internet technologies are facilitating information exchange, it is less clear how the different platforms are forming and evolving. The Internet not only has mobilized some citizens to be aware of politics and collection actions, but has also reinforced people with strong views and has made it easier and less costly for them to mobilize people for collection actions. However, the Internet has widened the pool of platforms and groups but not helping every citizen in voicing their own voices. It is widely known that people select discussion partners based on similarities (Mutz, 2006), and homogeneous online communities emerge. Thus, rather than gathering people to talk to each other, the Internet has been gradually separating the citizens into different platforms. Online groups like Facebook groups, which people with similar views converge, are found to have the potential to mobilize participants to “socially detrimental actions” (Sunstein, 2001).

There are little overlapping between the two platforms, Facebook groups and forums. Respondents were either Facebook group users or forum users. Users between platforms do not communicate; meanwhile, people do not interact much with other out-groups within the platform. Once they find a platform or group suitable for them, they seldom change or participate in other platforms. As a result, it is reasonable to expect the people to be more and more self-selected where there is no deliberation. Rather, the people who log on to Facebook groups might be motivated by a desire of opinion reinforcement and active participation to the issue and related events.

Therefore, the Internet is used to be a tool for mobilization, organization, and participation. Thus, there is reason to worry about the consequences for the health of democracy (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000).

The Internet is both part of and contributor to the difficulties deliberative democracy is facing. Polarization is believed to lead to diminishing tolerance, and as Verba et al. (1995) suggests, "Citizen participation will be often loud, sometimes clear, but rarely equal" (p. 533). Although the Internet can make citizens' voices louder, and quite often loud enough to be circulated by the mass media; the results of this study suggest that polarization continues to be exacerbated. However, as access to the Internet becomes more widespread, there might be more citizens to take advantage of this mobilizing force and form their own groups in the future.

Significance

Social media has become an important political communication tool these years and offers many opportunities for further research. This research helps to specify mechanisms by which people are exposed to political difference in one online context or another, which is an essential piece of the puzzle suggested in earlier chapters. Although there are many different online venues for individuals to express their political beliefs and gather support for their stances, Facebook groups emerged as an influential platform for political engagement. Previous study on Facebook suggests that political conversations dominate among young participants, and this research adds on to suggest that

such online social network sites facilitate political involvement more than general discussion boards like forums do.

Through a broad range of communication features, Facebook groups and forums both facilitate user's communication with a large network of people with similar interests. However, Facebook groups can be mobilizing as it also provides users to communicate with people with similar stances, giving some individuals an effective platform for transmitting their political perspectives. This finding suggests that the popular SNS, Facebook, is a place for people to encounter people with the same beliefs rather than opposing arguments. Most importantly, this study has revealed that political engagement on Facebook is significantly related to more general political participation.

It should be noted, however, such direct effect of online use is not applicable to political activity in discussion forums, where users are able to experience some degree of opposing views. In this sense, as different types of online engagement can have varying results upon their effects, the Internet should not be treated as one platform for examination. With such diversity of online political engagements, examining them as a single virtual space might not tell the whole story of the Internet. This study contributes by just focusing on and comparing two online platforms, and suggests that the linkages between Internet and participation are more complex than has been generally acknowledged. Facebook groups, in which are shown to have higher levels of willingness to participate, whereas forums, appear to be more conducive to

participation. In sum, homogeneous networks seem to increase political participation.

Prior research has found that the Internet have strong democratic potentials (Papacharissi, 2004; Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu, & Landreville, 2006). Although one study cannot definitively lead us to dismiss the democratic potential of the Internet, it is of great significance to compare the content within Facebook where discussion mirrors that of discussion forums. By systematically analyzing the vast amount of content in the two platforms, this research is able to more concretely assess whether Facebook groups or forums have the ability to promote deliberative democracy or further accelerate the polarization of political viewpoints. This research also investigates the effects of exposure to political Facebook groups and forums in terms of users' attitudes, opinions, and participation.

Besides investigating two different platforms, this research puts discussion with disagreement, a narrower concept, to empirical research. Theorists of deliberative democracy conceptualize deliberation as discussion of common concerns, and exposure to disagreement being examined in this study is only one feature of it. As the list of ideal conditions never come with daily political discussions (Fishkin, 1995), there is always a gap between the normative theory and empirical research (Thompson, 2008). But as Mutz (2008) explicates, it is important to develop "middle-range theories" to verify some of the claims made by the deliberative democrats. Therefore, this research is one of the studies that examine narrower concepts, which inform

the theorization, and practice of deliberative democracy. Moreover, “patterns of political communication are specific to particular political contexts, and hence they might vary across institutional and cultural settings” (Ikeda & Huckfeldt, 2001). Consequently, this study is significant in a sense that it examines online political discourse in the Hong Kong context.

This study not only provides an answer as to whether ideologically homogeneous Facebook groups increase engagement in real-world actions, it also describes the links between online engagement and political participation, and test the role played by the online social environment. This study therefore offers findings that provide directions for more in-depth analyses.

Chapter 7: Limitations and Future Studies

As with any study, this study comes with several limitations. First, like much of the related literature, disagreement in discussion is treated as causally influencing ambivalence and social accountability, and such cross-sectional design limits the ability to make a strong inference about causal direction. The link between deliberation and political participation is not unidirectional and discussing politics online is itself a political act. Those citizens who are looking for support turn to the Internet for communication. This is especially true for political activists who may turn to Facebook groups for finding and gathering support. Detecting the link between online engagement and political participation does not indicate that one preceded the other. One who is more ambivalent may be more likely to participate in forum discussions, where a firm perspective is not necessary, and one is probably less confident in joining a Facebook group and expresses oneself as a side-taker.

In fact, as far as the direct relationship between discussion and ambivalence is concerned, the most likely scenario in reality is that the two reinforce each other. It can be argued that Facebook group users who are less ambivalent and more confident towards their positions are more likely to participate in groups, whereas those who are more ambivalent tend to participate less. However, people who take the initiative to post on forums are probably also people with a certain degree of confidence in their positions, whereas those who are more ambivalent and less confident are more likely to browse the threads without posting. From the content analysis of posts, forum

users are also shown to have their own points of views, for or against the issue, which they would like to advocate. In this sense, forum users who post should not differ so much, in terms of ambivalence and social accountability, from Facebook group users. In other words, ambivalence may have an impact on how they participate in the different platforms (post or do not post) but not which platform they choose to participate in (Facebook groups or forums).

This is the same with social accountability. Although it can be argued that people who are more social accountable are less likely to participate in Facebook groups and tend to participate more in forum. In forums, other users do not recognize their identities and they do not need to take account of the views of their friends like the case in Facebook. However, people in forum, although with more amount of neutral postings, they still have a stance most of the time. Therefore, social accountability may have an impact on how users participate (post or not post/ join or not join) but not which platform they choose to participate in. In this sense, it must be admitted that the uncertainty about causal direction remains a limitation of this study, but such cross-sectional design should not produce contradictions with the findings. Future research should validate the results with experiments which can test the causal relationships. Such evidence would complement the presented findings and would provide further insight into cases in which discussions with dissimilar views might be problematic. No matter whether ambivalence/social accountability or discussion is the cause, the relevant results can still be considered as having replicated important research findings in the context of

Hong Kong.

Furthermore, although the walls in Facebook groups were examined, we cannot rule out the possibility that certain Facebook group users had engaged politically in some other places besides the walls. However, based on the amount of posts on the walls, I believe I probably have already captured the most salient and important venue in both platforms. Although I coded for what deemed to be some of the most salient pieces of information on Facebook groups' walls, posted items like links were not coded. Those links might further explain the nature of groups in terms of disagreements, but it is difficult to be included as the intention of posting items varies greatly, ranging from posting in order to supply related information, support the messages brought by the links, or in opposition to the materials. Further analysis would be needed to determine the nature of this communication. However, again, it is not expected to change the findings of this study.

This study also suffers from the second perennial problem in survey research, the reliance on self-reported measures. Most importantly, the measures of feelings and changes are weak and indirect, in that they are self-reports provided after the participation occurred for a while. Future research should validate the results with more direct measures used during or immediately after deliberation. Such studies would increase the confidence in the results presented here and would more directly speak to the role that deliberation plays in the process underlying political engagement.

This article suggests that researchers can pay attention to identify different platforms which satisfy and/or do not satisfy the conditions for deliberation and examine how disagreements affect different kinds of political participation. Such endeavor can contribute to a more general theoretical understanding of the linkage between deliberation and political participation. Another interesting avenue of research would be to study whether this young population that is highly connected to the Internet and SNSs carries this behavior over the years. In other words, will these young adults continue to use the Internet and SNSs for political involvement and how will their deliberation and participation be different when more are familiar with such use of online platforms. In addition, scholars may look to investigate the motivations for posting to SNS political groups and forums by conducting in-depth interviews, focus groups, or surveys.

Chapter 8: Appendices

Appendix A

Codebook

Unit of Data Collection: Each post under the thread, and each post and comment in the Facebook Group/Page.

Nature: Indicate whether the post is related to the issues or not ($\alpha = .96$)

1. Related (Directed related to either the issues or people involved in the issues)
2. Not-related
3. Advertisement

Position: Indicate whether the post/comments is for/against the issue. ($\alpha = .87$)

1. For
2. Against
3. Neutral
4. Cannot determine

Agreement L: Indicate whether the post/comment agrees with the thread/group/page. ($\alpha = .88$)

1. Agree
2. Disagree

3. Neutral
4. Cannot determine

Agreement S: Indicate whether the post/comment agrees with the previous post. ($\alpha = .96$)

1. Agree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Cannot determine

Reason: Indicate whether the number of argument(s) the author used to support the author's opinion/argument. ($\alpha = .93$)

1. None
2. One
3. More than one

Two-side: Indicate whether that given author mention or propose any different or opposite idea(s) in one single post? ($\alpha = .81$)

1. Yes
2. No

Links/videos without individual comments/opinions are coded as cannot determine.

Appendix B

Survey

請於你的選項左邊的空格□填上「✓」號。

第一部分 媒體使用

1. 在過去一星期□，你每天平均用多少時間看報紙？
 - 1. 完全沒看
 - 2. 15分鐘或以下
 - 3. 16分鐘至30分鐘
 - 4. 31分鐘至45分鐘
 - 5. 46分鐘至一小時
 - 6. 多於一小時
 - 9. 拒□回答

2. 在過去一星期□，你每天平均用多少時間收看電視新聞？
 - 1. 完全沒收看
 - 2. 15分鐘或以下
 - 3. 16分鐘至30分鐘
 - 4. 31分鐘至45分鐘
 - 5. 46分鐘至一小時
 - 6. 多於一小時
 - 9. 拒□回答

3. 在過去一星期□，你每天平均用多少時間使用互聯網接收時事資訊？
 - 1. 完全沒有
 - 2. 15分鐘或以下
 - 3. 16分鐘至30分鐘
 - 4. 31分鐘至45分鐘
 - 5. 46分鐘至一小時
 - 6. 多於一小時
 - 9. 拒□回答

第二部分 復建居屋

4. 你有多關注復建居屋這議題？
 - 1 完全不關注
 - 2 不關注
 - 3 一般
 - 4 關注
 - 5 非常關注
 - 9 拒□回答

5. 你有多支持復建居屋？

- 1 非常不支持
 2 不支持
 3 一般
 4 支持
 5 非常支持
 9 拒□回答

6. 你覺得香港市民對復建居屋的支持度有多少？

- 1 少於20%
 2 21-40%
 3 41-60%
 4 61-80%
 5 多於80%
 9 拒□回答

7. 以下是有關你對復建居屋看法的句子，你有多同意？請圈出答案。

	非常 不同 意				非 常 同 意	無 意 見 / 不 知 道
1. 復建居屋有助解決高樓價問題	1	2	3	4	5	9
2. 居屋可以幫助低收入人士置業	1	2	3	4	5	9
3. 居屋可以減輕中產家庭的供樓負擔， 舒緩社會分化和深層次矛盾	1	2	3	4	5	9
4. 政府須確保市場有足夠數量和價格相 宜的房屋供應	1	2	3	4	5	9
5. 用納稅人的金錢幫助其他人買樓是不 公平的	1	2	3	4	5	9
6. 政府不應推出居屋措施影響樓市及金 融體系	1	2	3	4	5	9
7. 居屋數量有限, 所以復建居屋不能解 決整體樓宇供應以及價格問題	1	2	3	4	5	9
8. 居屋政策實行上有很多漏洞，導致政 府資源被濫用	1	2	3	4	5	9

8. 有些市民認為在復建居屋這議題上，正反雙方都有很強的論點，所以很難判斷誰是誰非。你有沒有相同的感覺？

- 1 完全沒有
 2 一點點
 3 某程度上有
 4 有
 9 拒口回答

9. 以下是有關你對自己談論復建居屋看法的句子，你有多同意？請圈出答案。

	非常不同意					非常同意	無意見 / 不知道
1. 我曾經站在另一方的立場想過	1	2	3	4	5	9	
2. 我曾經因為其他人而修正自己對復建居屋的看法	1	2	3	4	5	9	
3. 我覺得自己應多吸取其他人的看法和論點才決定自己對復建居屋的立場	1	2	3	4	5	9	

10. 就復建居屋這議題而論，如果有以下的活動，你有多大機會會參與？請圈出答案。

	一定不會參與					一定會參與	無意見 / 不知道
1. 跟身邊的人討論	1	2	3	4	5	9	
2. 跟政府官員/議員/其他民意代表接觸表達意見	1	2	3	4	5	9	
3. 透過媒介表達意見 (例如報紙/刊物/電台)	1	2	3	4	5	9	
4. 參與組織舉辦的集體活動	1	2	3	4	5	9	
5. 簽署網上有關的請願書	1	2	3	4	5	9	
6. 於街頭或其他場合簽署有關的請願書	1	2	3	4	5	9	

第三部分 最低工資 - 最低時薪不應少於\$33

11. 你有多關注最低工資這議題？

- 1 完全不關注
- 2 不關注
- 3 一般
- 4 關注
- 5 非常關注
- 9 拒□回答

12. 你有多支持最低工資定為\$33？

- 1 非常不支持
- 2 不支持
- 3 一般
- 4 支持
- 5 非常支持
- 9 拒□回答

13. 你覺得香港市民對最低工資的低薪定為\$33的支持度有多少？

- 1 少於20%
- 2 20-40%
- 3 40-60%
- 4 60-80%
- 5 多於80%
- 9 拒□回答

14. 以下是有關你對最低工資的句子，你有多同意？請圈出答案。

	非 常 不 同 意					非 常 同 意	無 意 見 / 不 知 道
1. 最低時薪不少於\$33才能保障僱員生活水平和福利	1	2	3	4	5	9	
2. 將最低時薪定為不少於\$33的價位能有效防止工資持續下滑	1	2	3	4	5	9	
3. 最低時薪越高越能減少僱主剝削僱員的機會	1	2	3	4	5	9	
4. \$33的最低時薪比其他較低的定價更能促使僱員分享經濟成果和社會和諧	1	2	3	4	5	9	
5. 把最低時薪定為\$33無形會削弱中小型企業的競爭力	1	2	3	4	5	9	
6. 最低時薪越高越會令低技術、低學歷及年輕工人失去就業機會	1	2	3	4	5	9	
7. 最低工資定價為\$33將嚴重破壞香港自由市場的原則	1	2	3	4	5	9	
8. 最低時薪定為\$33會令一些中小企業或服務性行業以裁員節省開支而加劇失業	1	2	3	4	5	9	

15. 有些市民認為在最低時薪應否定於\$33這議題上，正反雙方都有很強的論點，所以很難判斷誰是誰非。你有沒有相同的感覺？

- 1 完全沒有
- 2 一點點
- 3 某程度上有
- 4 有
- 9 拒口回答

16. 以下是有關你對自己談論最低工資看法的句子，你有多同意？請圈出答案。

	非常不同意	1	2	3	4	5	非常同意	無意見 / 不知道
1. 我曾經站在另一方的立場想過		1	2	3	4	5		9
2. 我曾經因為其他人而修正自己對最低工資的看法		1	2	3	4	5		9
3. 我覺得自己應多吸取其他人的看法和論點才決定自己對最低工資的立場		1	2	3	4	5		9

17. 就最低工資而論，如果有以下的活動，你有多大機會會參與？請圈出答案。

	一定不會參與	1	2	3	4	5	一定會參與	無意見 / 不知道
1. 跟身邊的人討論		1	2	3	4	5		9
2. 跟政府官員/議員/其他民意代表接觸表達意見		1	2	3	4	5		9
3. 透過媒介表達意見 (例如報紙/刊物/電台)		1	2	3	4	5		9
4. 參與組織舉辦的集體活動		1	2	3	4	5		9
5. 簽署網上有關的請願書		1	2	3	4	5		9
6. 於街頭或其他場合簽署有關的請願書		1	2	3	4	5		9

第四部份 Facebook的使用

18. 請問你有沒有註冊為Facebook成員？

1. 有
 2. 沒有 (請跳到27。)

19. 在過去一星期，你每天平均用多少時間在Facebook上？
- 1. 完全沒有
 - 2. 10分鐘或以下
 - 3. 11-30分鐘
 - 4. 31分鐘至1小時
 - 5. 多於1小時至2小時
 - 6. 多於2小時至3小時
 - 7. 多於3小時至4小時
 - 8. 多於4小時
 - 9. 拒答
20. 在過去一星期，你平均每天大約花多少時間參與有關Facebook政治/新聞/時事的群組？
- 1. 完全沒有 (請跳到27。)
 - 2. 10分鐘或以下
 - 3. 11-20分鐘
 - 4. 21分鐘至半小時
 - 5. 多於半小時至1小時
 - 6. 多於1小時至2小時
 - 7. 多於2小時
 - 8. 拒答
21. 你有沒有參與有關復建居屋的群組？
- 1. 有
 - 2. 沒有 (請跳到24。)

22. 你有多經常於有關復建居屋的群組裡進行以下的活動？請圈出答案。

	完全沒有					十分經常	無意見 / 不知道
	1	2	3	4	5	9	
1. 瀏覽	1	2	3	4	5	9	
2. 留言	1	2	3	4	5	9	
3. 讚好	1	2	3	4	5	9	
4. 上載相片、影片、網址等	1	2	3	4	5	9	
5. 開新主題	1	2	3	4	5	9	
6. 將群組裡的資訊放在自己的版面 (profile)	1	2	3	4	5	9	
7. 將群組裡的資訊傳給自己的朋友	1	2	3	4	5	9	
8. 邀請朋友加入群組	1	2	3	4	5	9	

23. 以下是有關你對參與Facebook復建居屋相關群組後的句子，你有多同意？請圈出答案。

	非 常 不 同 意					非 常 同 意	無 意 見 / 不 知 道
1. 你對有關議題有更廣泛的認識	1	2	3	4	5	9	
2. 你對有關議題不同的論點有更深入的了解	1	2	3	4	5	9	
3. 通常你與其他人在有關議題方面的意見大致相同	1	2	3	4	5	9	
4. 參與的過程曾令你重新評價自己的論點	1	2	3	4	5	9	
5. 參與的過程曾令你發掘更多以前未接觸過的論點	1	2	3	4	5	9	
6. 未來如果有機會的話，你樂意再參與類似的Facebook參與	1	2	3	4	5	9	
7. 你對其他發表者的參與很滿意	1	2	3	4	5	9	
8. 你會推薦其他人參與類似的Facebook群組	1	2	3	4	5	9	
9. 你從中有很多得著	1	2	3	4	5	9	

24. 你有沒有參與有關最低工資的群組？

1. 有
 2. 沒有 (請跳到27。)

25. 你有多經常於有關最低工資的群組裡進行以下的活動？請圈出答案。

	完全沒有					十分經常	無意見 / 不知道
1. 瀏覽	1	2	3	4	5	9	
2. 留言	1	2	3	4	5	9	
3. 讚好	1	2	3	4	5	9	
4. 上載相片、影片、網址等	1	2	3	4	5	9	
5. 開新主題	1	2	3	4	5	9	
6. 將群組裡的資訊放在自己的版面 (profile)	1	2	3	4	5	9	
7. 將群組裡的資訊傳給自己的朋友	1	2	3	4	5	9	
8. 邀請朋友加入群組	1	2	3	4	5	9	

26. 以下是有關你對參與Facebook最低工資相關群組後的句子，你有多同意？請圈出答案。

	非常不同意	1	2	3	4	5	非常同意	無意見 / 不知道
1. 你對有關議題有更廣泛的認識	1	2	3	4	5	9		
2. 你對有關議題不同的論點有更深入的了解	1	2	3	4	5	9		
3. 通常你與其他人在有關議題方面的意見大致相同	1	2	3	4	5	9		
4. 參與的過程曾令你重新評價自己的論點	1	2	3	4	5	9		
5. 參與的過程曾令你發掘更多以前未接觸過的論點	1	2	3	4	5	9		
6. 未來如果有機會的話，你樂意再參與類似的Facebook參與	1	2	3	4	5	9		
7. 你對其他發表者的參與很滿意	1	2	3	4	5	9		
8. 你會推薦其他人參與類似的Facebook群組	1	2	3	4	5	9		
9. 你從中有很多得著	1	2	3	4	5	9		

第五部份 討論區的使用

27. 在過去一星期□，你每天平均用多少時間在討論區上？

1. 完全沒有 (請跳到 35。)
2. 10分鐘或以下
3. 11-20分鐘
4. 21分鐘至半小時
5. 多於半小時至1小時
6. 多於1小時至2小時
7. 多於2小時
- 8 拒□回答

28. 在過去一星期□，你大約用了多少時間在參與有關政治的版面？

1. 完全沒有 (請跳到 35。)
2. 10分鐘或以下
3. 11-20分鐘
4. 21分鐘至半小時
5. 多於半小時至1小時
6. 多於1小時至2小時
7. 多於2小時
8. 拒□回答

29. 你有沒有參與有關復建居屋的討論區？

1. 有
2. 沒有 (請跳到32。)

30. 你有多經常於有關復建居屋的討論區裡進行以下的活動？請圈出答案。

	完全沒有					十分經常	無意見 / 不知道
1. 瀏覽	1	2	3	4	5	9	
2. 留言/評論	1	2	3	4	5	9	
3. 上載相片、影片、網址等	1	2	3	4	5	9	
4. 開新主題	1	2	3	4	5	9	
5. 將群組裡的資訊傳給自己的朋友	1	2	3	4	5	9	
6. 邀請朋友加入有關討論區	1	2	3	4	5	9	

31. 以下是有關你對參與復建居屋討論區後的句子，你有多同意？請圈出答案。

	非 常 不 同 意					非 常 同 意	無 意 見 / 不 知 道
1. 你對有關議題有更廣泛的認識	1	2	3	4	5	9	
2. 你對有關議題不同的論點有更深入的了解	1	2	3	4	5	9	
3. 通常你與其他人在有關議題方面的意見大致相同	1	2	3	4	5	9	
4. 參與的過程曾令你重新評價自己的論點	1	2	3	4	5	9	
5. 參與的過程曾令你發掘更多以前未接觸過的論點	1	2	3	4	5	9	
6. 未來如果有機會的話，你樂意再參與類似的Facebook參與	1	2	3	4	5	9	
7. 你對其他發表者的參與很滿意	1	2	3	4	5	9	
8. 你會推薦其他人參與類似的Facebook群組	1	2	3	4	5	9	
9. 你從中有很多得著	1	2	3	4	5	9	

32. 你有沒有參與有關最低工資的討論區？

1. 有

2. 沒有 (請跳到 35。)

33. 你有多經常於有關最低工資的討論區裡進行以下的活動？請圈出答

案。

	完全沒有				十分經常	無意見 / 不知道
1. 瀏覽	1	2	3	4	5	9
2. 留言/評論	1	2	3	4	5	9
3. 上載相片、影片、網址等	1	2	3	4	5	9
4. 開新主題	1	2	3	4	5	9
5. 將群組裡的資訊傳給自己的朋友	1	2	3	4	5	9
6. 邀請朋友加入有關討論區	1	2	3	4	5	9

34. 以下是有關你對參與最低工資討論區後的句子，你有多同意？請圈出

答案。

	非常 不同 意				非常 同意	無 意 見 / 不 知 道
1. 你對有關議題有更廣泛的認識	1	2	3	4	5	9
2. 你對有關議題不同的論點有更深入的了解	1	2	3	4	5	9
3. 通常你與其他人在有關議題方面的意見大致相同	1	2	3	4	5	9
4. 參與的過程曾令你重新評價自己的論點	1	2	3	4	5	9
5. 參與的過程曾令你發掘更多以前未接觸過的論點	1	2	3	4	5	9
6. 未來如果有機會的話，你樂意再參與類似的Facebook參與	1	2	3	4	5	9
7. 你對其他發表者的參與很滿意	1	2	3	4	5	9
8. 你會推薦其他人參與類似的Facebook群組	1	2	3	4	5	9
9. 你從中有很多得著	1	2	3	4	5	9

第六部份

35. 你對香港的社會及公共事務感多大興趣？

1. 完全沒有興趣
2. 沒多大興趣
3. 一般
4. 有興趣
5. 非常有興趣
- 9 拒□回答

36. 你對香港政治感多大興趣？

1. 完全沒有興趣
 2. 沒多大興趣
 3. 一般
 4. 有興趣
 5. 非常有興趣
 9 拒□回答

37. 以下是有關你對自己和香港政府看法的句子，你有多同意？請圈出答案。

	非常不同意					非常同意		無意見 / 不知道
	1	2	3	4	5	9		
1. 我有足夠的能力理解政治和公共事務	1	2	3	4	5	9		
2. 我有足夠的能力討論和參與公共事務	1	2	3	4	5	9		
3. 香港人的集體行動對政治和公共事務有很大的影響力	1	2	3	4	5	9		
4. 香港人的集體行動可以改進社會	1	2	3	4	5	9		
5. 香港現時的政治制度能夠有效地回應市民的訴求	1	2	3	4	5	9		
6. 現時香港特區政府能夠有效地回應民意	1	2	3	4	5	9		

個人資料

1. 性別
 1. 男 2. 女

2. 年齡：_____

3. 就讀年級
 1. 一年級 2. 二年級 3. 三年級
 4. 四年級 5. 五年級

4. 家庭每月收入
 1. 少於\$2,000 2. \$2,000—\$3,999 3. \$4,000—
\$5,999
 4. \$6,000--\$7,999 5. \$8,000--\$9,999 6. \$10,000—
\$14,999
 7. \$15,000--\$19,999 8. \$20,000—\$24,999 9. \$25,000—
\$29,999
 10. \$30,000—\$39,999 11. \$40,000—\$59,999 12. \$60,000或
以上

-- 問卷完，多謝合作！ --

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