The Internet and Agenda Setting in China:
The Influence of Online Public Opinion on Media Coverage
and Government Policy

YUNJUAN LUO
Texas Tech University, USA

Within the theoretical framework of agenda setting, this study examined whether and how online public opinion influences the issue agendas of the traditional media and the government at the national level in the Chinese context. The data showed that online public opinion did not have an agenda-setting effect on the government, whereas the government could set the online public agenda on some occasions. Bidirectional agenda-setting influences were found between the online public agenda and the traditional media agenda. Overall, the evidence in this study suggests that online public opinion has become a competing agenda-setting force in contemporary China.

Keywords: *agenda setting, Internet, online public opinion, China, content analysis*

Introduction

China has the largest Internet population in the world. By the end of 2013, the number of China's Internet users had reached 618 million (CNNIC, 2013). The Internet penetration rate jumped from 4.6% in 2002 to 45.8% in 2013. The Internet not only provides unprecedented opportunities for Chinese "netizens" to access a diverse range of information but, more importantly, it creates a public space for netizens to collectively articulate and amplify their opinions on public matters (Qiang, 2007).

Fearing that free speech, combined with the free flow of information, could destroy its political legitimacy and its control over society, the Chinese government has made great efforts to regulate online content. It routinely blocks the websites deemed subversive and undesirable and uses keyword-filtering technology to censor politically sensitive information on the Net. Despite pervasive government regulations, the ephemeral, anonymous, and networked nature of Internet communication makes total control nearly impossible (Qiang, 2010). Besides using technical means (e.g., proxy servers) to bypass the blocks, Chinese netizens have developed linguistic strategies (e.g., using homonyms to replace sensitive phrases) to circumvent censorship (Thünken, 2008).

Yunjuan Luo: yunjuan.luo@ttu.edu

As netizens become actively involved in the information dissemination and production process, it has fundamentally changed the platform of public communication and challenged the existing institutional power relations (Castells, 1996). In China, the Communist Party holds its tight control over the mass media, which serve as mass mobilization tools to set the public's agenda or "guide public opinion" (*yulun daoxiang*) (Dai, 1999). Agenda-setting theory holds that the mass media play a determinate role in deciding what is believed to be important in the public's mind (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). For decades, the Chinese mass media have served effectively in agenda setting to conduct positive propaganda for Party ideologies and policies (Li, Qin, & Kluver, 2003). However, the rise of the Internet has reduced people's reliance on conventional media for information and therefore has diminished the traditional media and the government's abilities to set the agenda for the public.

The interactive and networked nature of the Internet also creates new ways of grassroots organizing and coalition building (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). When netizens collectively advocate for attention to be given to an issue, a powerful opinion discourse comes into being, which could then force the government to address their concerns and influence the policy decision process. The Sun Zhigang case in 2003 is a good example. On March 17, 2003, Sun Zhigang, a 27-year-old college graduate who worked for a graphic design company in Guangzhou, was detained by police for failing to display his proper identification document and was beaten to death three days after his detention. This incident was first exposed on Internet forums and then picked up by the traditional media. A significant amount of discussion online and follow-up media reports transformed this local accident quickly into a major national issue, placing unprecedented pressure on the government and eventually resulting in the abrogation of the custody and repatriation system in China three months after the incident.

As the number of Internet users is increasing exponentially, the voice of online publics has become too loud to ignore. Internet postings have been taken more and more seriously by the traditional media and the government. Online public opinion originated from Internet-based platforms such as BBSs, chat rooms, Web logs and microblogs, and it has emerged as a competitive, agenda-setting force to make certain social and political issues become more salient, as shown in many high-profile cases such as the Sun Zhigang incident mentioned above. The omnipotence of online public opinion is hailed by Chinese netizens, claiming, "If all netizens yell together, there would be three earthquakes in China" (Ou, 2004, cited in Zhou & Moy, 2007, p. 80). Is online public opinion really that powerful? Does online public opinion exert its influence in pushing its concerns up the media and policy agendas? Within a theoretical framework of agenda setting, this study attempts to investigate the effects of online public opinion on media coverage and government policy in China and, specifically, to examine whether and how online public opinion sets the media and the policy agendas at the national level in the Chinese-specific sociopolitical context.

This study makes contributions to advancing agenda-setting theory by exploring the entire agenda-setting process in the digital age within the context of China. The examination of the agenda-setting role of online public opinion in this study adds new information to the ongoing debates on the application of agenda-setting theory in the digital age. By exploring the interrelationships among the online public agenda, the media agenda, and the policy agenda, it also sheds light on the dynamics of a complete and integrated agenda-setting process within a new media environment. Although agenda-

setting research has been fully explored in Western countries for decades, very few studies in Western literature have focused on agenda-setting effects in China. This study fills this gap by systematically examining the agenda-setting function of online public opinion within the Chinese context.

The Changing Dynamics of Agenda Setting in the Digital Age

Agenda-setting theory, formulated during the time when traditional media had monopoly power over the tools of content creation and distribution (Lippmann, 1922; McCombs, 2004), emphasizes the media's role as a central gatekeeper to construct the social reality in the public's mind. Issues emphasized in the media are perceived to be important by their audiences—that is, the media can transfer the salience of issues on the media agenda to the public agenda (first-level agenda setting). Later studies found that salient attributes of issues/objects can also be transferred from the media agenda to the public agenda (second-level agenda setting). In the agenda-setting process, the relationship between the media agenda and the public agenda was believed to be unidirectional, and the public "formerly known as the audience" (Rosen, 2006) could hardly communicate its interests back to the media.

With the advent of the Internet, the public is provided with a vast amount of information and interactive opportunities to engage in the content-creation process (Kolbitsch & Maurer, 2006). The two-way, interactive communication capacity and decentralized nature of the Internet give more power to people whose agendas would not normally be reported by the major mass media (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). Anyone with access to communication technologies can report an event directly to the Web, thereby bypassing the hierarchical and elite-controlled traditional news media (Bowman & Willis, 2003). In such a fragmented and participatory news media environment, the dynamics of agenda setting are changing. As Chaffee and Metzger noted, "the key problem for agenda-setting theory will change from what issues the media tell people to think about to what issues people tell the media they want to think about" (2001, p. 375).

Through exchange of ideas and opinions, netizens collectively construct their own agenda to determine what issues are important to be included for discussion. Although it is hard to assess the online public agenda in a dynamic online environment, some scholars (e.g., Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002; Lee, Lancendorfer, & Lee, 2005) have measured it by analyzing users' commentary on electronic bulletin boards (EBB) or bulletin boards systems (BBS). In their study investigating the agenda-setting effects of the mainstream media on EBB discussion, Roberts and colleagues (2002) used online commentary as a surrogate for public opinion. They performed a time series analysis, with time lags ranging from one day to seven days. Results showed that the agenda-setting effects of traditional news media on Internet discussion varied across issues. The media showed an almost-immediate agenda-setting effect for the immigration issue after one or two days, but such effect disappeared quickly in the ensuing days. It took several days for the media to have agenda-setting effects on some other issues such as health care and taxes. Only for the issue of abortion did media have no agenda-setting effect on EBB discussion since people hold strong opinions on this controversial issue and would like to discuss it no matter how much media attention it receives.

As both consumers and producers, netizens do not merely react to traditional media coverage, they also have the ability to influence media content. A study by Lee and colleagues (2005) has yielded mixed results regarding the influence of Internet discussion on newspaper coverage of the 2000 general election in South Korea. Results of cross-lagged correlation analyses showed that newspapers influenced Internet bulletin boards at the first level of agenda setting. In other words, the issue salience was transferred from the media agenda to the netizen's agenda, which is consistent with the results of Roberts et al. (2002) that Internet discussion was prompted by media coverage. However, the impact of Internet bulletin boards on newspapers was found at the second level of agenda setting. The depiction of candidates in Internet bulletin boards influenced how newspapers portrayed candidates. Although there was some degree of reciprocity, the researchers argued that netizens' opinions posted on the Internet as a form of public opinion become another source that influences the traditional news media.

Agenda Setting in the Chinese Context

Since agenda-setting theory was introduced to mainland China in the early 1980s, it has been received with a great deal of enthusiasm, mainly because this theory fits the Communist perception of the role of the media and its emphasis on the media's influence in guiding public opinion (He, 2009). In China's communication and political systems, the media are used as instruments through which the Party can propagate its ideologies and government policies (Pan, 2000). Therefore, Chinese scholars have easily linked agenda-setting theory to effective propaganda or to the guidance of public opinion.

Unlike Western scholars, who usually use empirical and quantitative approaches to test agenda-setting effects, most agenda-setting research in China is based on impressionistic observations and analytical argumentation due to the non-empirical research tradition and deficiency in methodology (Luo, 2013). The first study testing the Chinese media's agenda-setting function was undertaken in 2001 by a group of scholars at Fudan University in Shanghai. Zhang and colleagues (2001) employed the similar quantitative method as the Chapel Hill study (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) did, combing content analysis of news media and public polls. They found that China's news media did not function well enough in setting the audience agenda because the Chinese media are not operating in complete accordance with the law of communication and also are lacking credibility among the public (Zhang, 2006).

With the rapid development of the Internet in China, there is an increasing concern about the impact of this new medium on agenda-setting research, although very few studies have systematically examined the influence of the Internet on the agenda-setting process in China (Luo, 2013). An earlier study by Li and Qin (2001) did a content analysis of online posts regarding the 1999 US-China aircraft collision incident on the *Qiangguo* Forum (Strong Nation Forum), one of the most popular BBSs in China and sponsored by the *People's Daily*—the official organ of the Chinese Communist Party—and the news coverage of this incident in the print version of the *People's Daily*. Results showed that most of the time, the agendas of Internet discussion were quite different from the agendas of Chinese official media despite the fact that the *Qiangguo* Forum is administrated by and bears the imprint of the *People's Daily* (Li, Qin, & Kluver, 2003). The researchers argued that the Internet forums challenged the traditional role of Chinese official media in setting the public agenda and could "pose a significant threat to the government-

controlled media by revising and reconstructing the agenda set by the Chinese official press" (Li, Qin, & Kluver, 2003, p. 143).

Another study by Zhou and Moy (2007) examined a sociopolitical incident to discuss the interplay between online public opinion and media coverage. They found online public opinion played an important role in transforming a local event into a nationally prominent issue. Initially, the accident only received brief news coverage from the local media. Then netizens' intensive discussion of this event in Internet forums added meaning and news value to the event and turned it into an issue, which consequently made the media come back to report it. The netizens' enthusiasm in discussing the issue, as represented by the number of online posts, was significantly correlated with the intensity of media coverage, as measured by the number of news reports, which suggested that the public and the media interacted in pushing an issue on the daily agenda (Zhou & Moy, 2007). Several case studies on citizen journalism (e.g., Nip, 2009; Xin, 2010) also show the influence of online public opinion on the traditional news media and the government. In the case of the Wenchuan Earthquake, citizen journalists' posts on the Internet forms first reported the quake before official information was released. Citizen-generated content on the Internet became an important news source and was used in the news reports of the professional media, such as the official China Central Television. Some sensitive issues, such as the extensive collapse of local schools, were first raised in online commentaries, which led to the follow-up reports in the traditional news media and pushed the government to be more accountable and transparent (Nip, 2009).

Although the importance of online public opinion in China has attracted increasing scholarly attention, few systematic studies have clarified the role of online public opinion in an entire agenda-setting process—consisting of the online public agenda, the traditional media agenda, and the policy agenda. In addition, existing research focuses on the influence of online public opinion in the development of a specific issue, which in turn provides useful descriptions of a single issue over an extended period of time (McCombs, 2004). However, no studies to date explore how a series of issues competes for attention on different agendas at particular points in time, although it is the original approach and the ultimate goal of agenda-setting theory, which aims to provide "a comprehensive view of mass communication and public opinion in the life of each community and nation" (McCombs, 2004, p. 32). This study fills this gap by investigating whether and how online public opinion influences the entire issue agendas of the traditional media and the government at the national level in China. Three questions were proposed as follows:

RQ1.   *What are the issues emphasized in the online public agenda, the media agenda, and the policy agenda? Are there any differences between these three agendas?*

RQ2.   *How are these three agendas correlated with each other?*

RQ3.   *How is each agenda affected by the other agendas? Does the online public agenda influence the media and policy agendas?*

Method

Construction of Three Agendas

The online public agenda. Previous studies have demonstrated the validity of using bulletin board discussion as a surrogate measure of public opinion (e.g., Lee, Lancendorfer, & Lee, 2005; Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002). In China, bulletin board systems (BBSs) have played a significant role in the life of netizens. They are one of the most popular online spaces for Chinese netizens to express themselves and interact with each other. Two of the most popular bulletin board systems in China—the *Qiangguo* Forum and the *Tianya* Forum—were chosen for this study. The *Qiangguo* Forum is sponsored by the *People's Daily*, China's largest party newspaper and the official organ of the Chinese Communist Party. It was originally set up to protest NATO's bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia in 1999. The name of the forum, *Qiangguo* (Strong Nation), illustrates its nation-building function (Li, Qin, & Kluver, 2003). The *Tianya* Forum, established by Hainan Tianya Online Network Technology Ltd. in 1999, is the largest BBS in China. It is extensively acknowledged as one of the most influential Chinese-language bulletin boards. The inclusion of both government-controlled and commercial-oriented BBS forums in this study to construct the online public agenda provides a comprehensive view of online public opinion based on the assumption that some differences exist between the issue agendas of these two forums, depending on the extent to which they are censored by the government.

The policy agenda. There is little agreement in the literature regarding appropriate measures of the policy agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Some studies in the US used the number of congressional hearings on a certain issue (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), the number of references in the Congressional Record database to a particular policy issue (Trumbo, 1995), or the number of bills introduced dealing with a certain issue (Tan & Weaver, 2009). However, all these measures are not applicable to China because of its different and less-transparent legislative and political systems.

One alternative source of the policy agenda in China is government-controlled official media. Despite the commercialization of Chinese media since economic reforms at the end of the 1970s, Chinese official media still serve as the mouthpiece of the Communist Party, propagating party and state policies. The *People's Daily*, a national newspaper and central party organ, was used in this study as a source of the policy agenda. As the most prominent and authoritative official news source, the *People's Daily* is generally accepted as the voice of the Communist Party (Li, Qin, & Kluver, 2003).

The media agenda. Based on the degree of commercialization, the Chinese media can be broadly categorized into two categories—official media and nonofficial/commercial media (Stockmann, 2010). The government-controlled official media usually receive indirect subsidies through subscription by party and state units whereas the market-oriented nonofficial/commercial media are completely financed through advertising (Stockmann, 2010). Official media are utilized as propaganda organs to push forward the goals and policies of the government so that they can be used as the source of the policy agenda. The nonofficial/commercial media have more freedom and autonomy and are relatively independent from the official policy agendas. Therefore, two leading metropolitan newspapers, *Southern Metropolis Daily* and the *Beijing News*, were selected in this study to provide the media agenda. *Southern Metropolis Daily* is

the largest and most influential Chinese metropolitan newspaper, with a daily circulation of 1.75 million. The *Beijing News* is a commercial daily in the nation's capital. It is the first Chinese newspaper founded by media groups from different regions (north and south) in China and the first mainstream newspaper that adopts shareholding systems. It was acknowledged as "the most pioneering media" and "the most influential political newspaper" （"About us," 2014） in China. Both newspapers have prominent national influence and stick to the principle of independent and investigative reporting.

Time Frame

One major consideration in testing agenda-setting effects is the time frame chosen by the researchers in their studies (Wanta & Hu, 1994). Winter and Eyal (1981) suggested that the optimal effect span is between four and six weeks. Roberts and colleagues (2002) found in their study that the time lag for traditional news media to affect online discussion should be relatively short, ranging from one day to one week.

Although there are some disagreements on the time frame for the occurrence of agenda-setting effects, the range of four to eight weeks is typically found in the agenda-setting research (McCombs, 2004). A two-month period surrounding the 2010 annual "two sessions" was chosen as the time frame for this study. Every March, the National People's Congress Conference is held along with the People's Political Consultative Conference, collectively called "two sessions" (*liang hui*). They are the most important annual political meetings in China, mapping out major national policies. If online public opinion can have an agenda-setting impact during this politically sensitive time, it can be inferred that it will do so in more relaxed times as well (Hung, 2005).

The time frame was from February 1 to April 14, 2010, which was further divided into three periods: Time 1 (February 1–March 2, 2010), 30 days prior to the "two sessions"; Time 2 (March 3–14, 2010), a synchronous period of the "two sessions"; and Time 3 (March 15–April 13, 2010), 30 days after the "two sessions." A sampled week was then constructed for each period.

Data Collection and Sampling

The samples of all three newspapers were collected from their electronic versions online. Considering placement as an important factor to determine issue salience, the first five or six pages of the *People's Daily*, called "important news sections," were selected to construct the policy agenda. The first and second pages of the two metropolitan newspapers, together with their national news sections, were chosen to construct the issue agenda of the traditional media. This study mainly concerns people's engagement in domestic social and public policy issues; therefore, the newspaper coverage of international issues (e.g., foreign policies, foreign relations), entertainment, and sports was excluded for analysis. A total of 1,263 newspaper articles were collected, 531 from the *People's Daily* and 755 from two metropolitan newspapers (*Southern Metropolis Daily*: 342; the *Beijing News*: 413).

The online posts were downloaded from the *Qiangguo* Forum and the *Tianya* Forum to construct the online public agenda. BBS participants can post their responses to the messages of another "poster,"

thereby creating threads or conversation (Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002, p. 456). Under the same thread, the issue topic is always the same. Therefore, the responses were not included in the analysis. Messages about international affairs, entertainment, sports, and gossip (e.g., personal relationships, love affairs) were also excluded. Some very short messages without any substantial meaning, as well as repetitive messages, were not included.

Each forum has different sections/channels devoted to general or specific subjects. The main section of the *Qiangguo* Forum, also called "*Qiangguo* Forum," was selected because it is the most popular section within the forum, covering diverse issue topics devoted to public affairs. The second-most-popular discussion section of the *Tianya* Forum, called "*Tianya* Miscellaneous Chat" (*Tianya Zatan*), was chosen for analysis also because of its popularity and its broad range of issue topics about public affairs. After two sections were chosen, systematic random sampling was used to examine the posts. If the sampled post needed to be excluded based on the criteria discussed above, it was replaced by the next post that met the standards. For the *Tianya* Forum, every 10th post was chosen from the "*Tianya* Miscellaneous Chat" section; a total of 1,066 posts were collected. Because the data archive of the *Qiangguo* Forum mixed original posts with responding messages, resulting in more than 10,000 posts per day, every 200th post was selected from the main section of the *Qiangguo* Forum, making the sample size reduce to 1,094. Altogether, a total of 2,160 forum posts were included for analysis.

Issue Categories

Several sources were used to aid the construction of issue categories at the national level. One or two months before the 2010 "two sessions," some mainstream media organizations, such as the *People's Daily* and Xinhua News Agency, and online news portals such as Sina.com and qq.com, conducted online public opinion polls to ask netizens what they thought were the important issues during the period of "two sessions." Another source was the 2010 government work report delivered by the prime minister in the National People's Congress Conference, which is similar to the U.S. president's State of the Union address and reflects the government's issue priorities. The poll results, together with the 2010 government work report, were used to identify possible issue terms for content analysis in the Chinese context. Building upon this preliminary issue list, the researcher reviewed hundreds of newspaper articles and online posts to revise and add new issue terms until the issue list became exhaustive. Based on the previous research (e.g., McCombs & Zhu, 1995; Tan, 2008; Zhang, Li, & Li, 2001) and the sources mentioned above, issue terms were grouped into some subcategories and then combined into 11 broad categories: (1) politics, (2) economy, (3) culture and ethics, (4) social issues, (5) law and order, (6) environment and technology, (7) disasters and accidents, (8) ethnicity and religion, (9) public administration, (10) military and defense, and (11) other. For example, the broad category of "social issues" was composed of seven subcategories, including education, health, employment, social security, housing, food safety, and income distribution. The "other" issue was later excluded for data analysis because a very small number of news articles and online posts fell into this category.

Coding Procedure

The coding process was conducted by two journalism majors who are fluent in both Chinese and English. The unit of analysis for newspaper coverage was each individual news article. Only the main issue in each news article was coded. The issue receiving the most coverage in a news article was considered as the main issue. For online forums, the unit of analysis was each posted message. The issue receiving the most coverage in each posted message was identified as the main issue. In the analysis, coverage was measured by the number of words given to a certain issue. Each agenda was compiled by making a list of issues in order of their salience and measured by the frequency of issues mentioned in newspapers or online forums. The intercoder reliability was established by randomly selecting 10% of the sample from newspaper articles and online posts for every coder to analyze. The intercoder reliability test using Scott's pi yielded satisfactory results. Since newspaper articles normally have more contextual information than online posts, the intercoder reliability of "issue category" was higher for newspaper articles (0.91) than for online posts (0.83).

Results

Issue Agendas

Research Question 1 seeks to investigate which issues were emphasized in the three agendas. Table 1 shows the online public agenda, respectively represented by the frequency and rank order of the issues in the *Qiangguo* Forum and the *Tianya* Forum. In the *Qiangguo* Forum, the top five issues were "politics," "social issues," "culture and ethics," "economy," and "law and order." "Politics" was a dominant issue in the *Qiangguo* Forum, and it remained as the most salient issue across time. "Social issues" as the second-most-important issue over time also received significant attention. "Culture and ethics" ranked around third across time. Two issues, "ethnicity and religion" and "military and defense," received the least attention in the *Qiangguo* Forum.

In the *Tianya* Forum, the top five issues were the same as those in the *Qiangguo* Forum, but the rank orders of these issues were different. "Social issues" instead of "politics" was dominant in the *Tianya* Forum, remaining as the most salient issue over time. The next prominent issue in the *Tianya* Forum was "culture and ethics." The rank order of "law and order" in both the *Qiangguo* Forum and *Tianya* Forum were the same at Time 1 and Time 2, but it got much more attention in the *Tianya* Forum at Time 3. "Politics" got significantly less attention in the *Tianya* Forum than in the *Qiangguo* Forum. As in the *Qiangguo* Forum, "ethnicity and religion" and "military and defense" got the least attention in the *Tianya* Forum.

Although each forum paid much attention to some similar issues and there was a significant overlap between the agendas of both BBS forums in terms of what issues were perceived to be the least important, there were some notable differences between these two agendas. The biggest difference is that the *Qiangguo* Forum concentrated on "politics" while the *Tianya* Forum was flooded with posts about social issues and paid much less attention to politics. Another important difference between these two forums lays in their changing attention to the issue of "law and order." In both forums, "law and order" ranked

third at Time 1 and then dropped to fifth at Time 2. Although this issue continued to decline in the *Qiangguo* Forum, it suddenly increased to second at Time 3 in the *Tianya* Forum, which made it become the third-most-important issue in the overall agenda of the *Tianya* Forum. Because of the genuine differences between the *Qiangguo* Forum and the *Tianya* Forum, the following analysis compared each forum's agenda with the media agenda and the policy agenda.

Table 2 shows the media agenda and the policy agenda, respectively measured by the issue salience in the metropolitan newspapers and the *People's Daily*. For the media agenda, the top five issues in the metropolitan newspapers were "social issues," "law and order," "politics," "culture and ethics," and "disaster and accidents." "Social issues" received the most coverage in the metropolitan papers. "Law and order" also received a great deal of coverage in the metropolitan papers. The rank order of "politics" in the metropolitan papers fluctuated much. The coverage of "politics" at Time 2 was almost twice as much as that at Time 1, which made "politics" replace "social issues" as the most important issue at Time 2. After that, the attention to "politics" suddenly decreased to fourth at Time 3. As in both BBS forums, metropolitan papers paid the least attention to "ethnicity and religion" and "military and defense.

Table 1. The Online Public Agenda.

	The *Qiangguo* Forum				The *Tianya* Forum			
	Time1 (%/R)	Time 2 (%/R)	Time3 (%/R)	Total (%/R)	Time1 (%/R)	Time 2 (%/R)	Time 3 (%/R)	Total (%/R)
Politics	41.0(*1*)	41.9(*1*)	37.3(*1*)	40.0(*1*)	9.5(*6*)	10.9(*4*)	8.8(*5*)	9.7(*5*)
Economy	8.2(*5*)	11(*4*)	10.6(*3.5*)	9.8(*4*)	10.9(*5*)	12.0(*3*)	13.4(*4*)	12.2(*4*)
Culture & ethics	10.4(*4*)	14(*3*)	10.6(*3.5*)	11.5(*3*)	15.5(*2*)	15.4(*2*)	13.9(*3*)	14.9(*2*)
Social issues	22.4(*2*)	18.8(*2*)	19(*2*)	20.3(*2*)	35.9(*1*)	38.0(*1*)	33.1(*1*)	35.5(*1*)
Law & order	12.5(*3*)	7.1(*5*)	7.3(*6*)	9.3(*5*)	12.2(*3*)	9.7(*5*)	15.2(*2*)	12.5(*3*)
Environment & tech	1.2(*7.5*)	1.6(*8*)	3.4(*7*)	2.0(*7*)	1.6(*7*)	2.9(*7*)	3.3(*8*)	2.7(*8*)
Disasters & accidents	1.2(*7.5*)	0.3(*10*)	7.8(*5*)	3.1(*6*)	1.0(*8*)	1.7(*8*)	5.8(*6*)	3(*7*)
Ethnicity & religion	0.7(*9*)	2.3(*6*)	0.6(*9*)	1.1(*9*)	0.7(*9*)	0.9(*9*)	0.8(*9*)	0.8(*9*)
Public admin.	1.9(*6*)	1.9(*7*)	2(*8*)	1.9(*8*)	12.8(*4*)	8.0(*6*)	5.6(*7*)	8.5(*6*)
Military & defense	0.5(*10*)	1.0(*9*)	0.5(*10*)	0.9(*10*)	0(*10*)	0.6(*10*)	0.3(*10*)	0.3(*10*)
N(posts)	415	308	357	1080	304	350	396	1050

Table 2. The Media and Policy Agendas.

	Metropolitan Newspapers				The *People's Daily*			
	Time1 (%/R)	Time 2 (%/R)	Time3 (%/R)	Total (%/R)	Time1 (%/R)	Time 2 (%/R)	Time 3 (%/R)	Total (%/R)
Politics	12.6(*3.5*)	24.9(*1*)	10.3(*4*)	15.2(*3*)	18.6(*1*)	27.3(*1*)	19.6(*2*)	21.0(*1*)
Economy	4(*7*)	5.9(*6.5*)	5.7(*8*)	5.1(*7*)	16.7(*2*)	22.3(*2*)	16.5(*3*)	17.9(*2*)
Culture & ethics	9.4(*5*)	12.2(*3*)	9.9(*5*)	10.3(*4*)	13.2(*4*)	15.7(*3*)	15.5(*4*)	14.6(*3*)
Social issues	27.4(*1*)	23.4(*2*)	22.9(*1*)	24.7(*1*)	14.2(*3*)	9.9(*4*)	9.8(*5*)	11.6(*5*)
Law & order	24.5(*2*)	10.7(*4*)	21.8(*2*)	19.8(*2*)	2.9(*10*)	4.1(*7.5*)	3.1(*8*)	3.3(*10*)
Environment & tech	2.2(*8*)	3.4(*8*)	7.6(*6*)	4.4(*8*)	8.3(*6*)	5.8(*6*)	6.7(*6*)	7.1(*6*)
Disasters & accidents	5.1(*6*)	9.8(*5*)	13.0(*3*)	9.1(*5*)	9.3(*5*)	6.6(*5*)	20.6(*1*)	12.9(*4*)
Ethnicity & religion	1.1(*9.5*)	2.4(*9*)	1.5(*9*)	1.6(*9*)	4.4(*9*)	2.5(*9*)	5.7(*7*)	4.4(*7*)
Public admin.	12.6(*3.5*)	5.9(*6.5*)	6.5(*7*)	8.6(*6*)	7.4(*7*)	1.7(*10*)	1.0(*10*)	3.7(*8*)
Military & defense	1.1(*9.5*)	1.5(*10*)	0.8(*10*)	1.1(*10*)	4.9(*8*)	4.1(*7.5*)	1.5(*9*)	3.5(*9*)
N(articles)	277	205	396	744	204	121	194	514

For the policy agenda, the issues that got the most attention in the *People's Daily* were "politics," followed by "economy," "culture and ethics," "disasters and accidents," and "social issues." "Politics" was the dominant issue in the *People's Daily* at Time 1 and Time 2 but slipped to the second place at Time 3. "Economy" was the second-most-important issue in the first two periods but dropped to third at Time 3. "Disasters and accidents" ranked fifth during the first two periods but received significantly more attention at Time 3 in response to a major mining accident in Shangxi Province on March 28, 2010. The issues that received the least coverage in the *People's Daily* were "military and defense" and "law and order."

Rank-order Correlations Between Agendas

Research Question 2 seeks to explore the correlations among the online public agenda, the media agenda, and the policy agenda. As shown in Table 3, there was a significant, high correlation between the agendas of two BBS forums (r = .83. p < .01), which suggests that both forums concentrated on similar issues despite some differences discussed above. In addition, both forum agendas were significantly and highly correlated with the media agenda, although the correlation coefficient between the *Tianya* Forum's agenda and the media agenda (r = .87, p < .01) is slightly higher than that between the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda and the media agenda (r = .82, p < .01), which implies that the issue agendas of the *Tianya* Forum and the media had slightly more in common.

The *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda was found to be significantly and highly correlated with the policy agenda; however, there was no significant relationship between the *Tianya* Forum's agenda and the policy agenda (r = .35), suggesting that they had different issue concerns. Although both online forums were significantly correlated, a striking difference between them is that the government-controlled *Qiangguo* Forum corresponded to the policy agenda whereas the commercial-oriented *Tianya* Forum did not. The weakest relationship was shown between the media agenda and the policy agenda (r = .25), indicating that these two agendas were divergent and had little in common.

Table 3. Issue Agendas Correlation Matrix.

	Qiangguo Forum	*Tianya* Forum	Media	Policy
Qiangguo Forum	1.00	.83**	.82**	.71*
Tianya Forum		1.00	.87**	.35
Media			1.00	.25
Policy				1.00

Note: *p < .05; **p < .01.

Cross-lagged Correlations Between Agendas

Research Question 3 aims to examine the agenda-setting effect of one agenda on the other. To assess the causal relationships among the online public agenda, the media agenda, and the policy agenda, Rozelle-Campbell baseline cross-lagged correlations (e.g., Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Roberts & McCombs, 1994) were calculated between a pair of agendas at two points in time.

As shown in Figure 1, the correlation coefficient between the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda at Time 1 and the *Tianya* Forum's agenda at Time 2 was significant ($r = .86$, $p < .01$) and above the baseline of .69. Therefore, the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda at Time 1 was more likely to have an agenda-setting effect on the *Tianya* Forum's agenda at Time 2 than the reverse. There was some degree of reciprocal influence between the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda and the *Tianya* Forum's agenda from Time 2 to Time 3 because both correlation coefficients between those agendas were significant and exceeded the baseline of .65. The *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda at Time 1 was also found to influence the *Tianya* Forum's agenda at Time 3. Overall, the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda at earlier time had a stronger agenda-setting impact on the *Tianya* Forum's agenda at later time than the reverse.

The cross-lagged correlation results also suggest a bidirectional agenda-setting influence between the *Qiangguo* Forum and the media. The *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda at Time 1 influenced the media agenda at Time 2, and then, in reverse, the media agenda at Time 2 influenced the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda at Time 3. For the whole period, the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda at Time 1 showed some agenda-setting influence on the media agenda at Time 3.

No significant relationships were found between the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda and the policy agenda from Time 1 to Time 2, although both correlation coefficients exceeded the baseline of .51. The correlation ($r = . 90$, $p < . 01$) between the policy agenda at Time 2 and the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda at Time 3 was higher than the baseline of .53, suggesting that the policy agenda at Time 2 had an agenda-setting impact on the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda at Time 3. Due to the great influence of the policy agenda at Time 2, the policy agenda at Time 1 also showed an agenda-setting influence on the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda at Time 3. Therefore, evidence suggests that the policy agenda influenced the *Qiangguo* Forum's agenda.
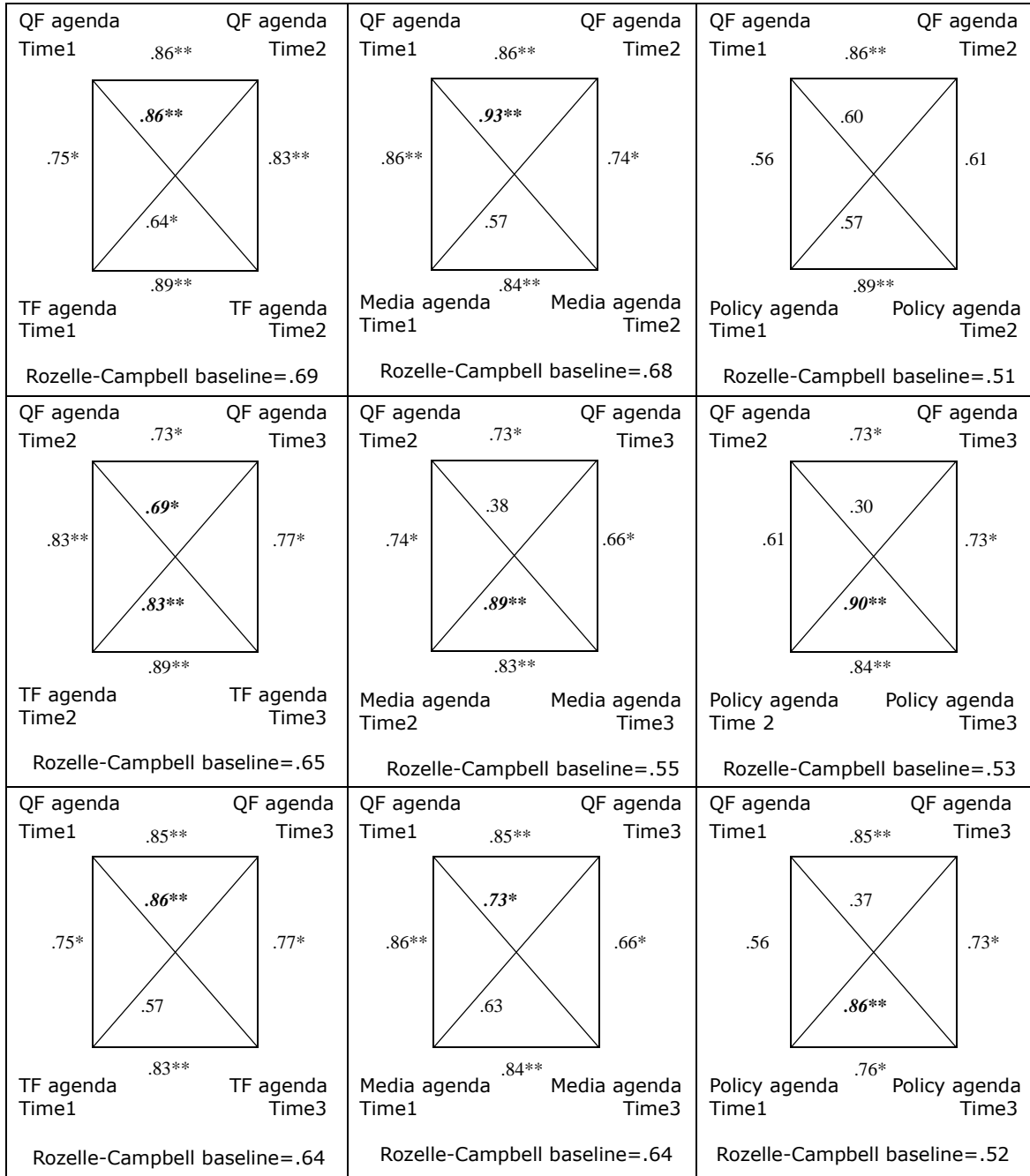
As shown in Figure 2, the correlation coefficient ($r = .72$, $p < .05$) between the media agenda at Time 1 and the *Tianya* Forum's agenda at Time 2 was larger than the baseline of .70, so the media agenda at Time 1 influenced the *Tianya* Forum's agenda at Time 2. The correlation ($r = .83$, $p < .01$) between the media agenda at Time 2 and the *Tianya* Forum's agenda at Time 3 was above the baseline of .68. Thus, the media agenda at Time 2 had an agenda-setting influence on the *Tianya* Forum's agenda at Time 3. The media agenda at Time 1 was also found to influence the *Tianya* Forum's agenda at Time 3. To sum up, the media had an agenda-setting impact on the *Tianya* Forum across different time periods.

Regarding the causal relationship between the *Tianya* Forum's agenda and the policy agenda, the correlation coefficient ($r = .65$, $p < .05$) between the policy agenda at Time 1 and the *Tianya* Forum's agenda at Time 2 exceeded the baseline of .44, which suggests that the policy agenda at Time 1 had an

agenda-setting impact on the *Tianya* Forum's agenda at Time 2. No other significant cross-lagged correlations were found between the *Tianya* forum's agenda and the policy agenda. The results indicate that *Tianya* Forum did not have an agenda-setting influence on the policy agenda, and the policy agenda only showed an agenda-setting impact on the *Tianya* Forum from Time 1 to Time 2.

Lastly, the cross-lagged correlations between the media agenda and the policy agenda did not achieve any statistical significance at any time point, suggesting that the media agenda and the policy agenda did not correspond much to each other and no agenda-setting influence existed between these two agendas.

Figure 1. Results of Cross-lagged Correlations (Part I).

QF agenda Time1 — .86** — QF agenda Time2	QF agenda Time1 — .86** — QF agenda Time2	QF agenda Time1 — .86** — QF agenda Time2
.86** / .75* / .83** / .64* / .89** TF agenda Time1 — TF agenda Time2	**.93**** / .86** / .74* / .57 / .84** Media agenda Time1 — Media agenda Time2	.60 / .56 / .61 / .57 / .89** Policy agenda Time1 — Policy agenda Time2
Rozelle-Campbell baseline=.69	Rozelle-Campbell baseline=.68	Rozelle-Campbell baseline=.51
QF agenda Time2 — .73* — QF agenda Time3	QF agenda Time2 — .73* — QF agenda Time3	QF agenda Time2 — .73* — QF agenda Time3
.69* / .83** / .77* / **.83**** / .89** TF agenda Time2 — TF agenda Time3	.38 / .74* / .66* / **.89**** / .83** Media agenda Time2 — Media agenda Time3	.30 / .61 / .73* / **.90**** / .84** Policy agenda Time 2 — Policy agenda Time3
Rozelle-Campbell baseline=.65	Rozelle-Campbell baseline=.55	Rozelle-Campbell baseline=.53
QF agenda Time1 — .85** — QF agenda Time3	QF agenda Time1 — .85** — QF agenda Time3	QF agenda Time1 — .85** — QF agenda Time3
.86** / .75* / .77* / .57 / .83** TF agenda Time1 — TF agenda Time3	**.73*** / .86** / .66* / .63 / .84** Media agenda Time1 — Media agenda Time3	.37 / .56 / .73* / **.86**** / .76* Policy agenda Time1 — Policy agenda Time3
Rozelle-Campbell baseline=.64	Rozelle-Campbell baseline=.64	Rozelle-Campbell baseline=.52

Note: *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$. The bold and italicized correlation coefficients indicate the occurrence of agenda-setting effects.

Figure 2. Results of Cross-lagged Correlations (Part II).
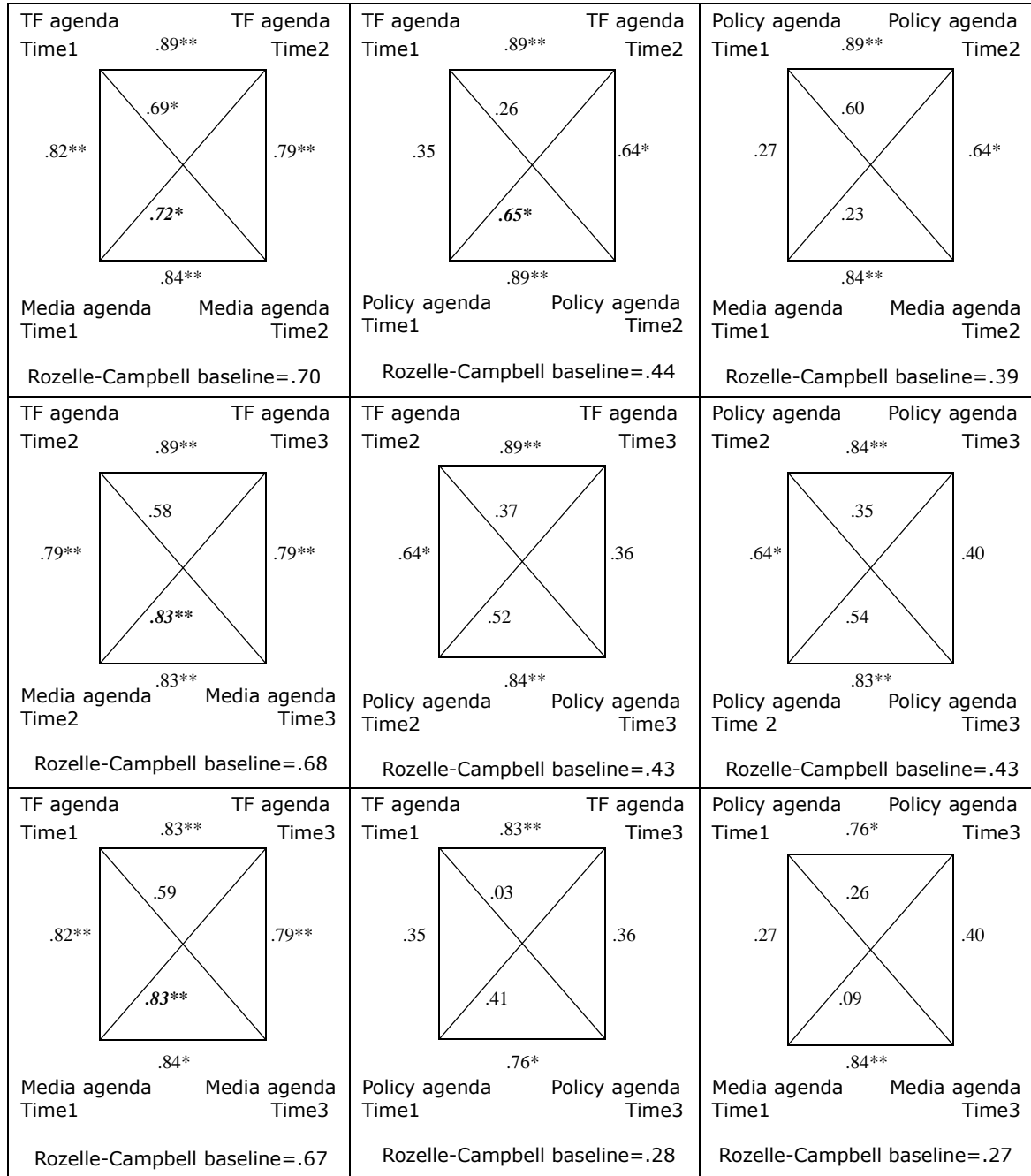
Note: *p<.05, **p<.01. The bold and italicized correlation coefficients indicate the occurrence of agenda-setting effects.

Discussion

For decades, the Chinese authorities used the government-controlled media to set the public agenda, thereby determining what the public should think about and imparting a dominant ideology in order to maintain the status quo. The emergence of the Internet provides an alternative information channel and enables millions of netizens to engage in public affairs and express their opinions, thus posing a great challenge to the agenda-setting power of the traditional media and the government. Through the content analysis of newspaper articles and online forum posts, this study examined the influence of online public opinion on the media and government agendas at the national level in the Chinese-specific sociopolitical context.

The findings show that the agenda of the government-controlled online forum was corresponding to the policy agenda mirrored in the party press. Administered by the *People's Daily*, the *Qiangguo* Forum practices more censorship than other bulletin boards. It represents the most heavily guarded sphere of online discussion in China (Li, Qin, & Kluver, 2003). Forum bears the imprint of its host newspaper and follows some official guides to select the topics of discussion. In both the *Qiangguo* Forum and the *People's Daily*, "politics" was the dominant issue. The *People's Daily* stood out as the one that paid significantly more attention to "economy," which also received increasing attention in the *Qiangguo* Forum. The results reflect the two biggest concerns of the government—how to consolidate the CCP's ruling power and how to enhance economic development.

Unlike the *Qiangguo* Forum, the commercial-oriented *Tianya* Forum did not correspond to the policy agenda but rather shared similar issue agendas with the metropolitan newspapers. Like the *Tianya* Forum, the metropolitan papers paid the greatest attention to "social issues." "Law and order," as another important issue in the metropolitan papers, also gained much attention in the *Tianya* Forum. Issues emphasized by the *Tianya* Forum and the metropolitan papers are related to people's well-being and reflect social conflicts and problems, which can easily touch the sensitive nerves of ordinary people.

"Social issues" as a prominent issue in both online forums and the metropolitan newspapers did not get substantial coverage in the *People's Daily*, although the government has begun to emphasize social issues, which have caused a lot of public discontent and threatened social and political stability. The *People's Daily* and the metropolitan papers emphasized different issues. The most significant difference was shown in the issue of "law and order," which often reveals the dark side of society. Although it was the second-most-important issue in the metropolitan papers, it received the least attention in the *People's Daily*.

The results of cross-lagged correlation analyses in this study indicate that the online public agendas in both Internet forums were not likely to influence the policy agenda at the national level. Although online public opinion has become a barometer for the government to sense the public mood, its impact on national policymaking is still limited even though it can place great pressure on the government when dealing with some specific incidents or issues. On the contrary, the policy agenda exerted an agenda-setting influence on the online public agenda and showed a greater agenda-setting influence on the government-controlled online forum rather than the commercial-oriented online forum. Facing the rise

of online public opinion, the government has adopted some new strategies to control the online public discourse by setting the agenda of the government-controlled Internet discussion platform. It has supported establishing a couple of central news web sites, including *People's Daily Online* and Xinhua.net, to increase the influence of the official media in guiding online public opinion.

Previous studies (e.g., Lee, Lancendorfer, & Lee, 2005) provide some evidence that there are bidirectional influences between the online public agenda and the media agenda. Such reciprocal influences were also found in the Chinese context. Instead of being passive consumers of media content, Chinese netizens are actively participating in content production and information distribution. In the era of "We media" (Bowman & Willis, 2003), Chinese netizens are able to introduce and discuss the issues that are not often covered by the mainstream media. Nowadays, news routinely bubbles up through the Web and makes its way into print and broadcast media (Gang & Bandurski, 2010). According to the Online Public Opinion Monitoring Division of *People's Daily* Online (Zhu, Shan, & Hu, 2010), about one third (23 out of 77) of the influential social news stories during 2009 were broken by netizens.

The Internet has also changed the ways that Chinese journalists do their work. They pay close attention to online public opinion in order to get information sources and gain insight into the tone of online discussion of an issue. Driven by market pressure, the media are eager to pick up the issues that are heatedly discussed by netizens. Some metropolitan newspapers, including *New Express* and *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, publish editorial sections to report the incidents/issues discussed on the Internet. Even the central party organ, Xinhua News Agency, launched a column called "China's Internet event" (*zhongguo wangshi*) to focus on the news that first becomes known on the Internet. Furthermore, online discussion can provide a legitimate reason for the media to do follow-up reports on some sensitive issues that are originally suppressed by the authorities (Qiang, 2010). Interestingly, it is the government-controlled online forum rather than the commercial-oriented online forum that seems to have more influence on the issue agenda of the media, thus suggesting the prestigious role of government-controlled online forum in the setting of other agendas.

However, the media do not just passively follow Internet discussions but rather play an active role in setting the online public agenda, especially the agenda of the commercial-oriented online forum. The media remain the major information source and provide netizens with information to use in their online discussions (Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002). In addition, media coverage can bestow prestige or importance on issues, which are perceived as important by netizens. Therefore, the traditional agenda-setting function of the media in shaping the public agenda can also be applied to the online environment.

It is notable that no agenda-setting influences were found between the policy agenda and the media agenda in this study, which suggests that the Chinese government no longer exerts absolute control over all of the news media in China. Deviating from the policy agenda and focusing on "politics" and "economy," the media agenda paid much more attention to "social issues" and "law and order." The striking difference between the media agenda and policy agenda demonstrates the changing media environment in China. Unlike the official media, which still serves as propaganda tools to advocate party ideologies and state policies, the commercial media are granted more freedom to reform media practice and to meet the public demands. Human interest stories and social events are emphasized over political

news in the commercial media for the purpose of catering to the tastes of audience (Tai, 2006) and deliberately staying away from controversial political issues.

Although the increasing autonomy of online public opinion and the media has undermined the government's monopoly control of information, this study shows that the government is still the major agenda setter in China. The government has tried to "swim with the tide of online public opinion" (Tai, 2006, p. 205) and continue its exercise of control and agenda setting. Although the government did not show an agenda-setting influence on the media, it might indirectly influence the media agenda since the government-controlled Internet forum exerted a great agenda-setting influence on the media. It is also notable that neither online public opinion nor the media could influence the entire policy agenda at the national level, suggesting that the bottom-up communication has a limited role in the process of national policymaking in China.

Although the agenda-setting influence of online public opinion in setting the policy agenda was not found in this study, the evidence shows that it is playing a more and more important role in the agenda-setting process in a new media environment. Despite the fact that online expression is still vigilantly regulated and monitored, the Chinese government has started to lose its monopoly control over the provision of information and communications, and it can no longer completely manipulate and direct public opinion as it is accustomed to doing (Hung, 2005). Empowered with new technologies, netizens are more capable of pushing their concerns up the media and policy agendas and, therefore, online public opinion has become a competing agenda-setting force that can transform Chinese society.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations. Due to the vast volume of online content, it is hard to construct an overall online public agenda. As one of China's most popular online spaces, BBS forums were selected in this study to provide the online public agenda. Although the issue agendas of different Internet platforms could be highly correlated, it would be better if other popular online forums, such as blogs and microblogs, could be included for creating the online public agenda. Another concern is the ever-changing nature of online forums. Since the data collection occurred after the sampled time period, it is hard to track and restore those posts either deleted by the censors or by the authors themselves. In this study, the researcher justified the use of two metropolitan newspapers and the *People's Daily* to reconstruct the media agenda and the policy agenda; however, the inclusion of other traditional media (e.g., television and magazines) and direct measures of the policy agenda (e.g., hearings and bills) would increase the validity of the measurements.

The time frame chosen for the content analysis may be too short to detect the long-term effect of online public opinion on the policy agenda. Besides, during a politically sensitive period, the government could strengthen its control of cyberspace. A longitudinal study design would be helpful for observing the long-term impact of online public opinion. This study performed a cross-lagged correlation analysis to examine the causal relationships among the online public agenda, the media agenda, and the policy agenda. Although it is commonly used in the agenda-setting research, scholars do not agree as to whether or not a directional correlation over time can be used to make statements about causality (Rosenthal &

Rosnow, 2008). Therefore, one should be cautious in interpreting the results since there may be some other causes that explain the identified relationships (Kushin, 2010).

The findings of this study may be unique to the political and social context of China. Future studies can compare the Chinese experience with established democracies and other authoritarian states. In addition, microblogs are now rapidly replacing online forums and blogs in Chinese people's daily lives. The year 2010, which witnessed an explosion of microblogging, was acclaimed as the inaugural year for China's microblogging (Yuan, 2011). By the end of 2013, almost half of the entire Chinese Internet population was using microblogs (CNNIC, 2013). The 2010 China Microblog annual report, published by Shanghai Jiao Tong University, found that microblogging has become the most popular way in which netizens disclose information (Qin, 2010). In 2010, 11 of the top 50 significant events in China, such as the Yihuang self-immolation incident and the "Li Gang is my father" incident, were originally reported on microblogs (Qin, 2010). Due to its explosive development and huge impact, the agenda-setting role of this new communication tool needs to be addressed in future studies.

References

About us. (2014*). Beijing News*. Retrieved from http://i.bjnews.com.cn/gywm.html

Baumgartner, F. R., & Jones, B. D. (1993). *Agendas and instability in American politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Bowman, S., & Willis, C. (2003). *We media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information*. Retrieved from http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/download/ we_media.pdf

Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell,

Chaffee, S. H., & Metzger, M. J. (2001). The end of mass communication. *Mass Communication & Society, 4*(4), 365–379.

CNNIC (2013). *The 33rd statistical report on Internet development in China* [in Chinese]. Retrieved from http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201401/ t20140116_43820.htm

Dai, Q. (1999). Guiding public opinion. *Media Studies Journal, 13*(1), 78–81.

Dearing, J. W., & Rogers, E. M. (1996). *Agenda-setting*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Gang, Q., & Bandurski, D. (2010). China's emerging public sphere: The impact of media commercialization, professionalism, and the Internet in an era of transition. In S. L. Shirk (Ed.), *Changing media, changing China* (pp. 38–76). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

He, Z. (2009). Political communication in dual discourse universes: The Chinese experience. In L. Willnat & A. Aw (Eds.), *Political communication in Asia* (pp. 43–71). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hung, C. (2005). Politics and public opinion in China: The impact of the Internet, 1993–2003 (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Warwick.

Kolbitsch, J., & Maurer, H. (2006). The transformation of the web: How emerging communities shape the information we consume. *Journal of Universal Computer science, 12*(2), 187–213.

Kushin, M. J. (2010). Tweeting the issues in the age of social media? Intermedia agenda setting between the New York Times and Twitter (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Washington State University.

Lee, B., Lancendorfer, M. K., & Lee, J. K. (2005). Agenda-setting and the Internet: The intermedia influence of Internet bulletin boards on newspaper coverage of the 2000 general election in South Korea*. Asian Journal of Communication, 15*(1), 57–71.

Li, X., & Qin, X. (2001). Who is setting the Chinese agenda? The impact of BBS forums on the agenda of party press in prominent news events. *Journalism & Communication, 3*, 55–62 [in Chinese].

Li, X., Qin, X., & Kluver, R. (2003). Who is setting the Chinese agenda? The impact of online chatrooms on Party press. In K. C. Ho, R. Klwer, & C. C. Yang (Eds.), *Asian.Com: Asian encounters the Internet* (pp. 143–158). London, UK: Routledge.

Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public opinion*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Lopez-Escobar, E., Llamas, J. P., McCombs, M., & Lennon, F. R. (1998). Two levels of agenda setting among advertising and news in the 1995 Spanish election. *Political Communication, 15*, 225–238.

Luo, Y. (2013). Mapping agenda-setting research in China: A meta-analysis study. *Chinese Journal of Communication, 6*(3), 269-285.

McCombs, M. E. (2004). *Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion*. Cambridge, UK: Blackwell Polity Press.

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36*, 176–187.

McCombs, M., & Zhu, J. (1995). Capacity, diversity, and volatility of the public agenda: Trends from 1954 to 1994. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 59*(4), 495–525.

Nip, J. (2009). Citizen journalism in the global news arena: China's new media critics. In S. Allan & E. Thorsen (Eds.), *Citizen journalism: Global perspectives* (pp. 95–106). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Ou, W. (2004). *The Internet is changing Chinese journalism*. Retrieved from http://www.cddc.net/shownew.asp?newsid=5667

Pan, Z. (2000). Improving reform activities: The changing reality of journalistic practice in China. In C. C. Lee (Ed.), *Power, money, and media: Communication patterns and bureaucratic control in cultural China* (pp. 68–111). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Qiang, X. (2007). The Internet: A force to transform Chinese society? In L. M. Jensen & T. B. Weston (Eds.), *China's transformations: The stories beyond the headlines* (pp. 129–143). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Qiang, X. (2010). The rise of online public opinion and its political impact. In S. L. Shirk (Ed.), *Changing media, changing China* (pp. 202–224). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Qin, P. (2010, December 29). Micro-blogging increasing rapidly in China. *Global Times*. Retrieved from http://www.globaltimes.cn/china/society/2010-12/606969.html

Roberts, M., & McCombs, M. E. (1994). Agenda setting and political advertising: Origins of the news agenda. *Political Communication, 11*, 249–262.

Roberts, M., Wanta, W., & Dzwo, T. (2002). Agenda setting and issue salience online. *Communication Research, 29*, 452–465.

Rosen, J. (2006, June 27). The people formally known as the audience. *Presslink*. Retrieved from http://www.archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

Rosenthal, R., & Rosnow, R. L. (2008). *Essentials of behavioral research: Methods and data analysis*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.

Stockmann, D. (2010). What kind of information does the public demand? Getting the news during the 2005 anti-Japanese protests. In S. L. Shirk (Ed.), *Changing media, changing China* (pp. 175–201). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Tai, Z. (2006). *The Internet in China: Cyberspace and civil society*. New York and London: Routledge.

Tan, Y. (2008). Agenda-setting effects among newspaper coverage, public opinion and legislative policies (Unpublished dissertation). Indiana University.

Tan, Y., & Weaver, D. H. (2009). Local media, public opinion, and state legislative policies: Agenda setting at the state level. *International Journal of Press/Politics, 14*(4), 454–476.

Thünken, F. (2008). Internet censorship in China: Recent developments and perception of Internet censorship by Chinese Internet users. (Unpublished thesis.) Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg.

Trumbo, C. W. (1995). Longitudinal modeling of public issues: An application of the agenda-setting process to the issue of global warming. *Journalism and Mass Communication Monographs, 152*, 1–57.

Wanta, W., & Hu, Y. (1994). Time-lag differences in the agenda setting process: An examination of five news media. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 6*, 225–240.

Winter, J., & Eyal, C. (1981). Agenda setting for the civil rights issue. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 45*, 376–383.

Xin, X. (2010). The impact of "citizen journalism" on Chinese media and society. *Journalism Practice*, *4*(3), 2010.

Yuan, Y. (2011, January 27). Micro-blogs fire up the net: Broadcasting short items on the Internet is emerging as a phenomenal trend. *Beijing Review*. Retrieved from http://www.bjreview.com.cn/print/txt/2011-01/23/content_327820.htm

Zhang, G. (2006). The rise, development and trends of the Chinese communication studies. *China Media Research, 2*(2), 103–111.

Zhang, G., Li, B., & Li, M. (2001). An analysis of the "agenda setting function" of the Chinese media. *The Journalist Monthly, 6*, 3–6 [in Chinese].

Zhou, Y., & Moy, P. (2007). Parsing framing processes: The Interplay between online public opinion and media coverage. *Journal of Communication, 57*, 79–98.

Zhu, H., Shan, X., & Hu, J. (2010). *The 2010 analysis report on China's online public opinion* [in Chinese]. Retrieved from http://yq.people.com.cn/htmlArt/Art843.htm