

**The Politics of Information:
A Study of Electronic Newsgroups in Macau**

by

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Abstract

With Habermas' idea as a framework, this thesis is a case study of electronic newsgroups in Macau to examine their potential to be a "public sphere" for people to discuss public issues without government interference. "Macau.forum" was chosen for this study because it received far more messages than other newsgroups, namely, "macau.politics" or "macau.portuguese," which were in nature for discussions of politics or public affairs. A content analysis on the newsgroup messages within three consecutive weeks was made to examine (1) the diversity of the issues, and (2) the "rationality" of the discussions, in comparison with the letters to the editors of the local dominant *Macao Daily News* and the phone calls in a morning current-affair phone-in program *Macao Forum*, gathered in the same period. The key findings showed that there are far more types of topics brought into discussions in the newsgroup, but unlike the newspaper section and the radio programme, the newsgroup had mostly personal issues and emotional discussions.

With the features of anonymity and low accountability on Internet, the behaviours and the thoughts of the participants in newsgroups may reflect the extent to which they feel "empowered." A content analysis on the same group of messages was made to check their behaviours of cross-posting (with more control over the scope of broadcasting the messages) and posting messages containing foul languages, or taboo issues (with more control over their social behaviours in cyberspace). The key findings showed that most of the newsgroup messages did not contain foul languages, or taboo issues, and were not cross-posted.

To examine the participants' thoughts about "empowerment," an online e-mail questionnaire survey on the participants' thoughts about the influence of their speech in the newsgroups was conducted. Despite low response rate from a small sample, the finding told us that the participants were young, with good computer skills and experiences in playing with newsgroups. "Macau.forum" was popular among them. They mostly talked about "small things" or personal issues and were not interested in politics. Most of them reflected the general Macau political culture in which people did not have enough civic knowledge and were not active in social and political participation. The social and political environment made the Chinese feel "isolated" and "powerless" in public affairs; most of them in reality tended to be silent in discussing public affairs. Most of the participants, however, did not feel "empowered" through participation in Macau newsgroups even with the features of anonymity and low accountability on Internet; some commented that the Macau newsgroups were a "small circle" only.

In sum, the Macau newsgroup was not used as a public sphere, and in an "isolated" place with few channels to speak out, most participants did not feel "empowered" through participation in the newsgroups. In the long run, if the Internet becomes popular and civic education is widespread, the Internet newsgroups may become a "public sphere" for the public to discuss public affairs, like the traditional mass media.

摘要

哈巴馬斯 (Habermas) 的“公共領域”概念是指在不受政府勢力干預下，讓人們自由討論公共事務。本論文對澳門電子新聞組作個案分析，從而探討其能成為討論公共事務的“公共領域”潛力。“Macau.forum”用作研究對象，因為其較另外兩個本質上可用作討論政治或公共事務的電子新聞組 (macau.politics和macau.portuguese)受歡迎得多。首先對所選取連續三週的電子新聞組貼文作內容分析，然後與在同樣三週內所得的澳門日報中讀者來函和一個早晨“鋒煙”節目“澳門廣場”的聽眾意見作比較，旨在研究(1)貼文題材的多元性，和(2)在貼文中討論的“理性”程度。主要數據顯示，新聞組貼文討論題材的種類遠比其他兩種媒體的受眾意見多，而且多談及私人事宜，討論起來不理性。

互聯網 (Internet) 具有匿名 (anonymity) 及低問責 (low accountability) 等特性。通過探討電子新聞組的參與者的行為及想法，可以試圖了解他們感到自己獲得影響力 (empowered) 的程度。在同一個內容分析項目中，觀察他們跨新聞組貼文 (cross-posting) 行為 (參與者能控制發放訊息的廣度)，使用粗言穢語及談論一些禁忌 (參與者能掌握在電子空間的社會行為)。主要數據顯示，大多數貼文不含粗言穢語或禁忌話題，又不是跨組貼文。

探討新聞組參與者獲得影響力 (empowerment) 的事宜，對其做了一個線上電郵問卷調查，主要問及他們對其貼文言論影響的看法。調查所得的樣本小，而且回應率低。調查數據顯示，參與者多是年輕人，且具一定電腦知識及玩新聞組的經驗。“Macau.forum”很受他們歡迎。貼文主要談論“小事”或私事；他們不喜歡談政治。大多反映了澳門的政治文化：人們公民知識貧乏，且不甚參與於社會及政治活動。社會及政治環境使生活在澳門的華人甚感“孤離”及感到對社會事務無力；在討論社會事務時多表現沉默。雖然互聯網具有匿名及低問責的特點，大多數電子新聞組的參與者都不覺得從中獲得甚麼影響力。有些人認為澳門新聞組只局限於一個“小圈子”。

簡言之，澳門新聞組並沒有用作公共領域，在一個缺乏公共渠道表達的“孤離”環境下，參與者大多沒有任何獲得影響力的感覺。或者長遠看，假如互聯網和公民教育在澳門普及，電子新聞組或可跟傳統媒體般，成為可以讓大眾議論公共事務的“公共領域”。

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Beijing is said to be stepping up its supervision of Internet users after it was revealed that their number doubled in the second half of last year to more than two million ("Beijing stepping," 1999). A man sent 30,000 e-mail addresses outside China received a two-year sentence ("Chinese court," 1999). Beijing shut down an Internet forum on 5 February 1999. This shows that China wants to stop the Internet from becoming a political instrument against the Party, but it becomes more difficult to censor and control the information flow on Internet.

Public Forums in Macau

Media Channels for the Macau People

Macau is a small place located in the south of the Delta of Pearl River, about forty miles away from Hong Kong. Under the Portuguese administration for more than four centuries, the place is said to be a "meeting point of the Chinese and the European cultures." With the 68.7 per cent of Chinese population¹ and the intervention of the Chinese interests after the "123 Movement"² in 1966, Macau has become a "close system" where a pro-China daily newspaper takes over 50 per cent of the local press market³. Local residents watch more Hong

¹ According to *Macau Report* published by the Gabinete de Comunicação Social de Macau (GCS) (Macau Government Information Services) in 1997, people with Chinese nationality took 68.7 per cent of 454,607 Macau's resident population at the end of 1996, while people with Portuguese nationality took 27.2 per cent. But, interestingly, the figure from the Government Department of Statistics and Census announced in *Macao Daily News* on 4 April 1999, by December 1998, the estimated resident population was 430,549.

² The "123 Movement" in 1966 happened on 3 December 1966 and originated from an incident on 15 November 1966 when Portuguese policemen were dispatched to prevent construction of a new addition to a pro-Communist school on Taipa Island, which had not yet been approved by the Macau government (Shipp, 1997, p.87). The incident caused injuries to both workmen and policemen, but the government ignored the incident. Official Chinese radio from Beijing accused the Portuguese authorities of "premeditated fascist atrocities against Chinese nationals" (Shipp, 1997, p.87). Finally, on 3 December 1966, Portuguese policemen were sent to the school site to stop the construction, and students of the school claimed they had been beaten by the police. In the following days, street demonstrations quickly developed into bloody rioting, which was said to involve at least 63 rioters and 20 policemen. Portuguese military tanks were sent to prevent further bloodshed. Mainland Chinese officials supported the Chinese side in Macau. Groups of militant young Chinese roamed the streets of Macau, and seven Chinese gunboats cruised Macau's harbour areas. In the end, the Macau Governor Brigadier Carvalho agreed to sign a series of pledges based on the demands made by the demonstrators and supported by the Chinese leadership in Beijing (Shipp, 1997, p.89). One of the demands was the permanent suppression of Nationalist Kuomintang influence from the Republic of China in Taiwan.

³ The "Gabinete de Comunicação Social de Macau" (GCS) (Macau Government Information Services) does not have official figures on local newspaper circulation. The figures we get are from the newspapers themselves. As in a seminar about Macau advertising hosted by the Alumni of Macau East Asia Open Institute on 18 April 1999, *Macao Daily News* was said to publish 103,000 copies a day; *Jornal Va Kio* 40,000 copies a day; *Tai Chong Pou* 30,000

Kong television programmes than local television programmes offered by the only station TDM (Teledifusão de Macau)⁴. The dominant voices of the local media are in favour of China, while those Chinese as well as Portuguese dailies and weeklies, which provide alternative voices are minorities.

There are few channels for people in Macau to have their voices heard. Only one Chinese newspaper (*Macao Daily News*) out of eight offers a half-page section called “Ji Shi Ting” (Pavilion for discussions) on Wednesdays to publish letters-to-the-editor⁵ sharing their thoughts. This newspaper takes over 50 per cent of the market. It has most pages among all local Chinese dailies. It publishes at least eight broad sheets⁶ while *Tai Chong Pou* publishes four broad sheets, and *Jornal Va Kio* publishes three broad sheets. Other newspapers publish one broad sheet with four pages.

Radio Macau provides a phone-in programme called “Macau Forum” after the 8:00 a.m. main newscast from Monday to Friday. Two hosts from the News and Public Affairs Department run the program. People phone to share their thoughts about an issue on a first-

copies a day; *Si Man Pou* 6,000 copies a day; *Seng Pou* 3,000 copies a day; *Cheng Pou* 3,000 copies a day; *Today Macau* 2,500 copies a day; *Va Ou* 2,000 copies a day. With these figures, *Macao Daily News* takes 54.35 per cent of local Chinese dailies.

These figures seem not different too much from those published in the 1993 issue of *Revista Macau*, one magazine about Macau published by GCS. It said that *Macao Daily News* published 88,000 copies a day; *Jornal Va Kio* 30,000 copies a day; *Tai Chong Pou* 13,000 copies a day; *Si Man Pou* 8,000 copies a day; *Seng Pou* 5,000 copies a day; *Cheng Pou* 4,000 copies a day; *Today Macau* 4,000 copies a day (p.22). *Macao Daily News* took 57.89 per cent of the market.

⁴ According to a survey done by TDM and the Government Department of Statistics and Census in October 1998 (available in the 17 March 1999 online issue of *Macao Daily News* at www2.macao.ctm.net/modailylog/990317/big/bigm28.htm, using the Chinese BIG5 code), 97 per cent interviewees reported to watch Hong Kong TVB Jade programmes and 83 per cent Hong Kong ATV Home programmes. In the peak time during 7 pm and 11 pm, more than 80 per cent of interviewees reported to watch Jade programmes. People tend to watch more Hong Kong television programmes.

For some background information, TDM was founded on 1 May 1984 (Wang & Wu, 1996, p.422) and began to broadcast on 13 May 1984 (Pinto, 1993, p.20). It was run by the Government until 1992. TDM was privatized in 1992 and the shareholders include: Macau Government (50.5%), STDM (19.5%), Ho Hau-Wah (15%), and Nam Kwong (Group) Company (15%). We can see that “privatization” is a label because the Macau Government is still the big shareholder in the station.

Ho Hau-Wah was elected to be the first Chief Executive of Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) on 15 May 1999, and according to the Basic Law of Macau SAR, he should cut the links from all businesses to avoid conflict of interests. There is no further news who would like to take his 15 per cent of shares in TDM.

TDM provides television and radio channels in both Portuguese and Chinese.

⁵ The section “Ji Shi Ting” serves as the section “Letters to the editor,” as in *South China Morning Post*. Readers write to the section, and the editors are the decision-maker at the top of the newsroom hierarchy, deciding which letter can be published in the section.

⁶ One broad sheet of a local Chinese daily newspaper has four pages. The number of broad sheets is printed in the front page, near the masthead.

come-first-serve basis in the first half-an-hour section. Two guest hosts join the program to comment a hot topic; people are invited to share their view on the topic too.

Official and Civil Channels for the Macau People

As Lo (1995) notes, the Centre for Public Services and Consultation (CPSC) was set up by the Government in 1987 to improve communication between the Authorities and citizens. This Centre acts as a “middleman transferring citizens’ complaints and enquiries to government departments” (p.68). But this Centre received very little attention in its first year of operation. There were 1,712 enquiries in the first year, and 2,100 enquiries from January to March in 1992 (Lo, 1995, p.68). Nobody knows, however, how the enquiries were handled by the corresponding government departments.

Lo (1995) notes that non-governmental channels were also established to bridge the gap between citizens with the Authorities, namely, “Kaifong associations” and legislators’ offices. It is said that “China and the underground Chinese Communist Party can penetrate into Macau’s grassroots level” and “govern the ordinary citizens informally and substantially.” The “Kaifong associations” have the personal network and group base at the grassroots level that the Macau Government lacks.

There is no office shared by all legislators in Macau. Since 1985, some legislators set up district offices, which not only help citizens to “articulate individual interests, but also become a political base acquiring mass support in future elections” (Lo, 1995, p.69). However, in Macau, the members of the Legislative Assembly are not popular amongst citizens (Lo, 1995, p.69).

Newsgroups on Internet as an Alternative Channel for the Public

CTM (Companhia de Telecomunicações de Macau)⁷ is the only licensed provider of telecommunications services in Macau. It owns the fixed network that provides Internet

⁷ CTM was privatized when signing the “Contrato de Concessão do Serviço Público de Telecomunicação de Macau” on 29 September 1981. Now, Cable & Wireless PLC has 51 per cent of shares; a Portuguese company CPR Marconi (in the group of Portugal Telecom International, SGPS, SA) 28 per cent; a Chinese group CITIC Pacific Ltd. 20 per

services. In Macau, in the first few years after the introduction of Internet services in Macau, two more companies Macauweb and UniTEL provided Internet services but they used CTM's facilities⁸. Now only is Macauweb the competitor of CTM. The number of subscribers to the Internet services in Macau increases each year⁹. With the potential of exchanging information freely, the Internet as a new medium may offer an alternative channel of communication for people.

The role of Internet in political communication

With the Internet technologies, expressions like "cyberpolitics," "cyberdemocracy," or "electronic democracy" emerged in political communication. With the "network of networks" without any controlling power to monitor the information flow, the political use of the Internet became a focus. Some believe that participatory democracy could be promoted online, e.g. Rheingold (1993) who suggested that bulletin board systems could promote democracy, or Poster (1995) who suggested that the Internet could become a public sphere for "cyberdemocracy." The Internet in a liberal democratic environment may help in encouraging citizens' participation in discussing public affairs to let their elected representatives know their opinions.

The Internet in a closed communist context may be used to develop "informed citizenship." Fully informed citizenship is a condition of democracy. As Hauben & Hauben

cent; CTT 1 per cent. The information may be found in Pinto (1994), p.24 or in Cable & Wireless' web page available at www.cwplc.com/business/asia/units/ctm.htm as at 12 June 1999

⁸ I was interested in knowing the procedures of applying to be an Internet Service Provider in Macau. A private meeting was arranged on 3 June 1999 with Mr. Lou San, the Coordinator of Public Service of Telecommunications ("Coordenador da Fiscalização do Serviço Público de Telecomunicações" in Portuguese) from the Government Department of Post and Telecommunications (CTT or "Direcção dos Serviços de Correios e Telecomunicações de Macau" in Portuguese).

According to Mr. Lou, two types of temporary licenses are issued by the Department of Radio Communication to Internet Services Providers (with the Operator Temporary License) and Information Providers (with the Information Provider Temporary License) since 1995. In the two licenses, CTM is implied to have exclusive right to run the business of Internet services too, and the temporary licenses are issued in order not to infringe CTM's interests in the area. UniTEL had some internal problems and CTT terminated its temporary license even though the company still has the web page.

⁹ According to the information in the completed questionnaire sent to me by Anita, Ban-ban Che (Manager of CTM Internet Services) on 14 December 1998 for the course COM6510 (Independent Studies in Communication) supervised by Prof. Bryce McIntyre and offered by the Department of Journalism and Communication, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, in December 1997, they had 6,000 Internet service subscribers; in December 1998, 9,300 Internet service subscribers. In the 28 May 1999 issue of *Macau Times*, CTM reported that there were about 15,000 subscribers at the moment. The number of subscribers is now increasing. As Mr. Lou San from CTT mentioned, CTM still dominated the Internet service market in Macau.

(1996) suggested, the Net connected people and made the minorities realize their power. With many different resources like usenet news, freenet, e-mail, FTP sites, multi-user domain/Dungeon (MUD)/MUSH/MOO, Internet Relay Chat and data banks, people who have difficulties in obtaining information could be kept informed (available at http://www.eff.org/pub/Net_culture/netizen.paper as at 30 July 1999). The authoritarian or totalitarian power cannot force the citizens to read their biased messages nor control what they read.

On the other hand, more people, interest groups, pressure groups, or political parties can express their opinions more freely without fearing that the government would condemn their acts or punish them. Internet was said to allow Chinese dissidents to network ("Internet allows," 1998). The Falun Gong incident in China was an example. The Falun Gong organizations could disseminate their thoughts on the Internet, e.g. at www.falundafa.org. Citizens may use the "decentralized technologies" to try to communicate with the authorities and to participate in making policies that affect their lives.

As DeFleur & Dennis (1998) noted, the Internet would be like an electronic meeting town, which connects people anywhere on the globe and allows them to exchange information of common interests (p.227). With newsgroups, listserves, and other "cybersalons," people can connect with each other on various topics and interests; they can vote electronically on political, cultural, social, commercial, and other matters that concern them (DeFleur & Dennis, 1998, p.227). With the conditions of universal services of and access to the Internet, the era of "electronic democracy" is more likely to come. At this stage, however, the ideal situation has not yet come. It is worthy to look at the role of the Internet in facilitating the communications between the government (especially an unrepresentative one) and the citizens.

Characteristics of Electronic Newsgroups

Electronic newsgroups on the Internet, as Bungey (1998) describes, are like "public message or bulletin boards, where someone can leave a message for anyone to read and reply to" ("Internet/Intranet," *Technology Post* in *South China Morning Post*, 2 June 1998). Making use of newsgroups is as simple as sending e-mails. Someone posts a message; another person responds to it. People may choose to respond to the person or message through e-mail rather

than to post their responses in public. The type of “public conversation” is called a “thread” (Bungey, 1998). A thread is a “sequence of articles which share a common subject line” and is created “when other users send in replies to an article” (Kjaer, 1996, p.32).

“Threads,” realized by the “Re:” field of a newsgroup message, are conversations between two people at least. The subject line describes the nature or content of the message (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p.49). In this study, the subject lines are used to identify the types or the themes of the messages. If the subject lines are not well or clearly written to describe the themes, the body message will also be read.

In the body of the messages, there may be a “running script” of the conversation (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p.49), i.e. the lines of text recording the “conversations.” With the “script,” it is possible to study how an opinion is formed out of the discussions among the participants, apart from what individual participants say in the newsgroup.

Newsgroups have the potential to be a public sphere, which allows anybody to exchange ideas about issues of their concerns. This may be a channel to encourage citizens’ participation in public affairs or another channel for people to express their opinions. This paper makes a preliminary study on the potential of newsgroups to encourage citizens’ participation in public affairs.

Reasons for Studying Electronic Newsgroups in Macau

The role or value of the Internet in promoting democracy in open, liberal contexts received a lot of discussions, e.g. Rheingold (1993), Hauben & Hauben (1996), Clift (1997), Norris (1998). But it seems that the discussions on the role of more specific tools on the Internet, e.g. newsgroups, in less democratic contexts are still in the infancy. Macau is not a communist society, and its “*Constitution*” describes the checks-and-balances mechanism in the administration and seven direct-elected seats in the Legislative Assembly, which offers an outline for certain degree of democracy in the region. Chinese interests dominated in many areas in Macau: political, cultural, social, and commercial. Only pro-China voices could be heard in mass media channels. The Portuguese administration did not make the policy making process transparent with language barrier. Most people may fear the consequences of speaking

out or may feel that they have no effective ways to communicate with the authorities. This paper tries to see if the newsgroups in Macau could promote civilian engagement in political activities.

Electronic newsgroups are channels which people can use to give their voices on the net, in addition to individual homepages expressing one's political views, or chat rooms. I choose to study electronic newsgroups in Macau, namely, "macau.forum" and "macau.politics" hosted by CTM and "Macauweb WWW Bulletin Board" run by Macauweb because of the following reasons. First, there are no political parties in Macau, nor web sites for political parties. There is no online channel run by any political parties challenging the viewpoints of the Macau Authorities. There are no common chat rooms for Macau citizens to discuss politics either.

Second, the contents of the web pages of Macau government departments are basically information and the government provides no public channels for discussion on Government policies, except the Law Discussion Forum run by the Macau Government Printing Office¹⁰.

Third, participants of newsgroups are self-selected, in Hill and Hughes (1998)'s words (p.47); only those interested in the issue(s) that the name of the group may imply will join. As Wald (1988) notes, the participants are expected to be committed to the group and behave in ways that demonstrate that commitment (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p.48).

Fourth, newsgroups are public to almost all people, depending on how the ISPs (Internet Services Providers) run the newsgroup service. The CTM Internet service subscribers cannot gain access to the newsgroups that the CTM does not offer. Macauweb runs a WWW newsgroup, which everyone can join. So, both are selected in the study.

¹⁰ It is interesting that the Government Printing Office and the Government Office of Law Translation ("Gabinete de Tradução Judicial" in Portuguese) jointly run the electronic Macau Law Forum and began to operate the Forum since 11 May 1998, according to the welcome message by Eduardo Ribeiro (the Administrator of the Government Printing Office) and Nuno Calado (the Coordinator of the Office of Law Translation). The purpose of the Forum is to offer a place for "jurisnauts" to discuss the "subjects related with the Right, thus allowing a possible debate of ideas in such a way how much widened on legislative politics, positive law, jurisprudence, or others, putting in interaction the most varied sensitivities on the most varied legal subjects" in the two official languages of Chinese and Portuguese, or the third option of English.

People may go to their home page at <http://www.imprensa.macao.gov.mo/forumlaw> and post thoughts about legal issues or respond to existing messages. The government did not make promotion about this channel, and up to this moment, since its operation, there were 172 messages.

Studies in New Media and the Study of Macau Newsgroups

In Dennis McQuail's words, the study of new media is "marginalized" in communication research. Most of the time, researchers focus on the effects of the new media, meaning that on the audience side (for instance, the study of the use of the Internet with the uses and gratification approach), while the questions of how messages would reflect the values, assumptions, and expectations of the sources receive less attention. This study uses Macau electronic newsgroups to explore the possibility of forming a public sphere as an alternative channel of communication to existing mass media. In terms of frequency of posting messages, CTM's "macau.forum" and "macau.politics," and Macauweb's WWW Bulletin Board are most popular. Newsgroup readers or browsers of these forums need Chinese software support.

Macau.forum/.politics allows access only to CTM's Internet subscribers, and Macauweb WWW Bulletin Board allows access by anyone who has access to the Internet. The subscribers may enter "macau.forum" from CTM's Internet services homepage at <http://www2.macau.ctm.net> or through users' newsgroup application to contact their news server "news.macau.ctm.net." People can enter Macauweb's Bulletin Board (at <http://www.macauweb.com/MacauWeb/wwwboard.html>) with a browser and post messages with any names. In terms of "publicness" (i.e. the extent to which anyone can join), Macauweb's Bulletin Board tends to have higher "publicness."

Jürgen Habermas' notion of "public sphere" and the idea of "empowerment" are used as the theoretical groundwork in the analysis. With the potential of forming opinion through open critical debate or discussions, the newsgroups can be studied with Habermas' notion of "public sphere" which stipulates similar characteristics. The first characteristic is that a public sphere is free from government's interference. Electronic newsgroups, in theory, do not have a centralized power controlling or censoring speech in the discussion. The second characteristic is that people of any kinds can express their opinions in the public sphere, regardless of, say, the age, gender, social status, or educational status.

I do not study the newsgroups to see if they can be communities because there are more than one community, either established for short- or long-term, in the newsgroups of general

interests like “macau.forum.” There may be more than one community in the newsgroups of specific interests since people may be grouped temporarily with opinions.

Because of the characteristics mentioned above, it seems possible to treat newsgroups as another open, free marketplace of ideas, and the notion of “empowerment” will be used to see if the messages in the newsgroups may provide alternative interpretations of events in their communities.

In a small place like Macau, people seem to prefer making friends with others and avoiding any confrontation. Even though they may have many ideas, people seem to hesitate to express themselves. Newsgroups in Macau may be an ideal channel for people to express themselves, with the features of anonymity and low accountability. People have fewer worries about the result of talking up any issues. They can talk about what they may not be willing to talk about in public in daily lives. The newsgroups seem to have the potential to become a “public sphere” for freely exchanging ideas.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

NEW MEDIA AND THE RESEARCH IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES

The term “new media” may include “personal computers, videotext and teletext, interactive cable, videodiscs, electronic mail and computer conferencing, communication satellites, office information systems, and the like” (McQuail, 1994, p.16). The concept changes as time goes. It may be used to refer to a “broad class of recently available communication technologies” (McQuail, 1994, p.20). The emergence of radio as a mass medium was new and offered an alternative to reading. The golden age of television in the 1960s made the box the center of family life and entertainment in the U.S., and the American families listened less radio broadcasts. Today, media convergence occurs due to the development of new technologies in information production, processing, and storage with advanced data compression algorithms as well as digitalization.

In Taiwan, magazines in the form of CDs can be bought. In the U.K., there are “audio books.” Using the advanced transmission infrastructure such as fibre optics or cable media, one can send signals over long distance with less time. The Internet connects many points of the world. Information can be exchanged freely from one point to another over this giant transnational “network.” The “network” provides an alternative medium to the existing mass media, for example, in the forms of newsgroups (where people may post or exchange their ideas or opinions freely), or serves as an additional another channel for existing media, such as RTHK online which extends their “scope of broadcast” to Chinese communities outside Hong Kong.

The Internet has received much more attention since the early 1990s. People saw the Internet as if it were a “single, unified system of computers and cultural framework”; at present, there are multiple systems and purposes within the rubric of internetworking.” The term “Matrix” is used to describe the situation even though the term “Internet” still is the most popular (Surratt, 1998, p.xi). Whatever terms are used, the Internet is considered to be

controlled by nobody or hosted by no single computer or network. I take this as our basic assumption even though in reality, governments grant licenses to the Internet Services Providers (ISPs), which are supposed to provide the cyber forum without any interference to the users, providing that the terms and conditions are well observed by the subscribers.

As Surratt (1998) suggests, the computer Matrix serves two distinct purposes and uses several formats for accomplishing those purposes (p.xi):

“The first purpose is information gathering and/or providing, which can be accomplished through Gopher, FTP (file transfer protocol) or HTTP (hypertext transfer protocol), also known as WWW (World Wide Web, or simply The Web). The second purpose is human-to-human communication, (computer-mediated communication, CMC), which can be accomplished, in general, through Email (electronic mail), IRC (Internet Relay Chat), Usenet, Fidonet, and MUDs (multi-user dungeons, also referred to as MOOs—Muds, ObjectOriented and sometimes Tiny-or-TeenyMUD).”

Rice (1984) said that early interests of studying new media outside the communication field were on the computers as an “information processor, computational device, and simulator of human mental functions” rather than a “communication medium” (p.23). Communication research of the new media is not new; Edwin Parker, aware of Innis and McLuhan’s writings, was one among those firstly put the new media on the agenda of communication research since the 1960s. The new media may be studied in terms of the “adoption, use and impacts of new media” (Rice, 1984, p.68) or may be put into the context of communication behaviour and social contexts. Rogers (1962) diffusion studies are classic in the study of adoption of new media in the communication field.

With the capability of interaction among people on the net, researches hold different ideas about the roles and impacts of the Internet:

“Recent debate about the meaning and impact of interaction through the computer Matrix, whether such interactions constitute real and meaningful behaviour and can lead to the establishment of real communities, is the logical extension of the decades-long argument over the roles and impacts of other mass, electronically mediated communications” (Surratt, 1998, p.1).

Previously, people like van der Haag (1968) saw the communication of mass media as a social problem:

“All mass media in the end alienate people from personal experience and, though appearing to offset it, intensify their moral isolation from each other, from reality and

from themselves. One may turn to mass media when lonely or bored. But mass media, once they become a habit, impair the capacity for meaningful experience" (p.5).

In McLuhan's words, mass media make the world a global village. The US Vice-President Al-Gore's idea of information superhighway is a dream of using new technologies to spread out democracy by connecting the whole world:

"The Global Information Infrastructure... will circle the globe with information superhighways on which all people can travel. These highways... will allow us to share information, to connect, and to communicate as a global community

"From these connections we will derive robust and sustainable economic progress, strong democracies, better solutions to global and local environmental challenges, improved health care, and —ultimately — a great sense of shared stewardship of our small planet.

"The GII [Global Information Infrastructure] will spread participatory democracy. In a sense, the GII will be a metaphor for democracy itself" (as cited in Thornton, 1997)

Communication mediated through computer technology, however, has received the following critiques: (1) anonymity – unlike real social interaction, people on the net do not show their real identities; (2) low accountability – nobody can be held accountable for the statements they make; (3) "anarchy" – no government governs the net; (4) with the above factors, the Internet does not constitute a real community (Surratt, 1998:2). Ellul (1991) even argues that the Internet is held by the minorities of professionals who know how to use the new technologies:

"Those who use the mass media are technicians, as aristocratic as other, great technicians; it is out of the question to penetrate their domain. The amateur has only his hobby. He is more eager to accept the information, because he feels he is taking part in the big game. ...

"The belief that anyone can send information is only a wish and a myth; not reality. ... the proliferation of media seems to be fundamentally anti-democratic" (p.353).

Another problem with anonymity and low accountability is that it is too easy to "flame" people and on-line discussions too often break down into name-calling that would not be tolerated in a real-life meeting or social setting. As Walter Mossberg (1995) notes, "[t]he on-line community is not a digital democracy because discussion occurs in a climate where people hide behind assumed names and can smear others with impunity and censor those they don't like" (Surratt, 1998, p.3).

Censorship and intimidation are also seen as problems; “any participant may attempt to scare or gag people with whom he or she disagrees. In this regard, the Internet has been likened to talk radio; participants make subversive, anonymous arguments, the accuracy of which is hard to verify” (Surratt, 1998, p.4). It seems that the “civil society” would not be public but private for those with technical expertise and skills of new technologies. The act that the ISPs (Internet Services Providers) filter out the pornography, violence, or any illegal contents is a kind of censorship, and this offers a chance of blocking the information that the power center may not welcome.

In a strict sense, electronic newsgroups are not synonymous with the Internet, which is a group of multiple systems. On the other hand, Usenet (or users’ networks) is a collection of newsgroups, each of them devotes to a particular topic of discussion. Newsgroups look like different communities with the following assumptions: (1) newsgroups are formed on the basis of shared themes; (2) decentralization exists in newsgroups, yet (3) participants need to observe the rules or the “norms” arising from continuous dialogues among the participants.

A common question is whether newsgroup is a “virtual community” or, in Habermas’ notion, a “public sphere” where information can be freely exchanged, and where everyone has equal status, free from governmental and commercial interference. Another question is whether newsgroup can be complemented by the existing mass media in providing an alternative “marketplace of ideas.”

In the following sections, the idea of “public sphere” will be reviewed and the relationship between the media and public sphere will be examined.

PUBLIC SPHERE AND ELECTRONIC NEWSGROUPS

Jürgen Habermas did not invent the idea of “public sphere.” Under the influence of the Greek definitions of “public” and “private,” he was among those studying the development of public sphere. *The structural transformation of the public sphere* studies the patterns of public sphere in liberal society. He analyzes the emergence and transformation of the sphere in order to understand the development of “democracy” in society.

The Development of New Media and the Concept of “Publicness”

New media changed the ways people exchange information and widened the meaning of “public.” As Thompson (1995) notes, before the media were developed, the “publicness” of individuals or events, e.g. a show or a public execution, was linked to the “sharing of a common locale.” This traditional kind of “publicness” drew on the “richness of symbolic cues characteristic of face-to-face interaction.” It was related to time and space in this sense. The term “community” in this time referred to a “group of individuals who interact with one another in face-to-face encounters.”

With the development of media, the “publicness” of individuals is no longer linked to the sharing of a common locale, or even time. For example, a “reading public” formed with the invention of printing was not localized in space and time and was not a “community” in the sense that “its members had access to the kind of publicness made possible by the printed word.” The mediated publicness of television is different from that of the print in the sense that people can see and hear in the reception of the visual symbolic cues, and the publicness of individuals, actions, and events is reconnected with the capacity for them to be seen and heard by others (Thompson, 1995, pp.125-129). The concept of “publicness” refers to the extent to which an event may be seen by individuals, who may be from different parts of the world, without the constraint of locale.

Public Sphere and Citizens’ Discussions

Mass media expanded the space for public discussions without time and space constraints but gradually lost their original role as a “public sphere.” To Habermas, the public

sphere is a “realm in which individuals gather to participate in open discussions. Potentially everyone has access to it; no one enters into discourse in the public sphere with an advantage over another.” Habermas (1989) suggested that the literary public sphere had potential to become a political public sphere, with institutions of the public and with forums for discussing public authority (pp.51-56). This is the result of the ascending bourgeois classes in Western Europe, in struggling against the powers of the absolutist state, who managed to generate a “new social space or field between the state and civil society” (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991, p.3). The “public” means that “private people using their own critical reason came together to create a public” (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991, p.3).

The press of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became another “space” independent from the state, holding a wide spread of opinion concerning parliamentary matters. The competition of arguments and debate were stimulated and what Habermas terms “rational-acceptable policies” could be developed. Like the “world of letters” – theatre, arts, or coffee houses – public opinion in the “bourgeois public sphere” by the mid-nineteenth century was formed with the “open debate, critical scrutiny, full reportage, increased accessibility, and independence of actors from crude economic interest as well as from state control” (Webster, 1995, p.103). The essential constituent of the “bourgeois public sphere” was the “fight for independence from the state,” in Habermas’ words. The result was to struggle for a free press, for political reform, and for greater representation (Webster, 1995, p.103).

The decline of the bourgeois public sphere or the transformation of the public sphere occurs and the emergence of “refeudalisation,” as the historical analysis proceeds, because of the “intervention of the state into private affairs and the penetration of society into the state” (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991, p.4):

“In the latter half of the nineteenth century, industrialization, urbanization, the growth of literacy and the popular press, and not least the rise of the administrative and interventionist state all contributed in various ways to its decline. The consequences of these developments included a blurring of the distinctions between public and private in political and economic affairs, a rationalization and shrinking of the private intimate sphere (family life) and the gradual shift from an (albeit limited) public of political and cultural debaters to a mass public of consumers.

“With the emergence of the welfare state in the twentieth century Habermas notes the further transformation of the public sphere. ... Public opinion is no longer a process of rational discourse but the result of publicity and social engineering in the media.”

In short, Habermas thinks that the “bourgeois public sphere” emerged because of the expanding capitalist society in the eighteenth century in Britain, and there was no longer the formerly public life, which was dominated by the feudal power of the clergy and the court. The arts and the coffee houses became a public space of critiques which was separated from the traditional powers. In Habermas (1989)’s words, their conversations were turned into criticism and “bons mots” into arguments (p.31). But as capitalism continued to expand, media were in the hands of those with money and power, and the commercial interests dominated people’s daily activities. The public sphere was gradually narrowed down or the “refeudalisation” process began:

“The result of the MPs’ [Members of Parliament] private directorships, of business financing of political parties and think tanks, and of the systematic lobbying of Parliament and public opinion by organized interests has been a reduction in the autonomy of the public sphere” (Webster, 1995, p.103).

During the twentieth century, “what public relations does, in entering public debate, is to disguise the interests it represents (cloaking them in appeals such as ‘public welfare’ and the ‘national interest’), thus making contemporary debate a ‘faked version’ of a genuine public sphere” (Webster, 1995, p.103). Garnham (1990) suggested that the rise of advertising and public relations has exemplified the trends that an “uneven distribution of wealth,” “rising entry costs to the public sphere” and “unequal access to and control over that sphere” because they “represent the direct control by private interests or State interests of the flow of public information in the interest, not of rational discourse, but of manipulation” (pp.16-17).

In addition, the media were developed into “monopoly capitalist organizations”; their key contribution as reliable disseminators of information about the public sphere is diminished, and their function was shifted towards a role of public opinion former and away from that of information provider (Webster, 1995, p.104). As Thornton (1997) notes, under the liberal model of the public sphere, institutions of public rational-critical debate were protected from interference by public authorities because they were in the hands of private people. But as the media became commercialized and concentrated economically, technologically and organizationally, the commercial media dominated the public sphere and limited the focus of

discussion for competing claims to power over market share, political loyalty, votes, etc, as Peters (1993) described. The media became commercialized and dominated the public sphere and would limit the focuses of discussion since their main concerns would be (1) to take more market share from the hands of their competitors to earn more money (e.g. *Apple Daily News*, *Oriental Daily*), (2) to try to influence other people's belief, attitudes, or action to gain political loyalty or votes (e.g. Macau Political Studies which is said to aim at selling ideas to people at upper class to gain political benefits).

Electronic Newsgroups and Public Sphere

Habermas "wishes to distinguish between the set of principles upon which the bourgeois sphere was based... and the set of institutions which embodied those principles..." (Garnham, 1990, p.108). The principles refer to "general accessibility, especially to information, the elimination of privilege and the search for general norms and their rational legitimation" (Garnham, 1990, p.108). The set of concrete institutions within which public opinion is formed refers to "the media of public communication, elections, publicly accessible courts, and so on" and is distinguished from the state (Garnham, 1990, p.108).

The newsgroups have potential to be among what Habermas calls the "set of concrete institutions within which public opinion is formed," depending on how "public" is interpreted. The groups have netiquette¹¹ and emoticons¹², and the "netizens" (a short form for "net citizens") can make new symbols in the newsgroups as long as others understand. The netizens can be anybody who can gain access to the newsgroups, depending on the types of participants the ISPs may set (e.g. Macauweb WWW Bulletin Board is open for those who are connected to the net, and "macau.forum" is reserved for the CTM's subscribers).

In fact, newsgroups have the feature of interpersonal communication, in the sense that people may respond to the existing messages in the form of "thread"; messages of this kind have the intention of inviting dialogues. Here I would like to study if the newsgroups can be

¹¹ "Netiquettes" are the etiquette guidelines the participants need to conform to, i.e. the expected behaviours or the proper way to behave like to avoid use the usenet as a resource for homework assignment, as an advertising medium or to avoid posting to multiple newsgroups [for more, please read "news.announce.newusers"]

used to develop the “direct, participatory democracy,” of which the characteristics may be applied in the study: (1) a shared spatial-temporal locale in which individuals can come together to discuss issues of common concern; (2) a certain equality of status among the participants; (3) a process of dialogue through which individuals are able to express their views, question the views of others, engage in argument and debate, and thereby arrive at a discursively formed judgement (Thompson, 1995, p.254).

ELECTRONIC NEWSGROUPS AND EMPOWERMENT

One reason for the increasing popularity of the Internet is “empowerment,” as Howard (1997) notes. In cyberspace, people can say what they may not say in public; for example, in the newsgroup “hk.politics,” people may say that “Hong Kong is ruined by the people of Hong Kong, not Beijing's government nor the communists” while they may not dare to say it on the street. This is one aspect of newsgroups, which carries the attribute of a public sphere – people have equal chances to express their own ideas without interference from the government.

“Alienation” and “Empowerment” in Newsgroups

The concept of “alienation” may be used to explain how Internet may “empower” people. In the following, I discuss what “alienation” is, “empowerment” means and the types of “power” the participants may have in newsgroups.

Alienation refers to the “sense of personal isolation” (Hardt, 1998, p.132). Karl Marx provided a “classic observation” of the “estrangement of workers and of their production,” i.e. the sense of personal isolation in the “relation of the worker to the product of labour as an alien object exercising power over him,” in the “relation of labour to the act of production within the labour process,” (Sayer, 1989, p.183) in the relation of the works to themselves, and in the relation of workers to the capitalists. The process of alienation accompanies the process of urbanization and industrialization (Hardt, 1998, p.132). The idea of work causes people “psychological discomfort and sickness” (Hardt, 1998, p.133). In industrialized societies, an

¹² Since the nonverbal cues like facial expressions are lost in computer-mediated communications, people invent some symbols for the purposes which are called “smileys” or “emoticons,” e.g. “:-)” for “happy” or “:-(” for “sad.”

individual's sense of self, according to Fromm (1955), "does not stem from his activity as a loving or thinking individual, but from his socio-economic life" (p.142). And a person's "sense of value depends on his success: on whether he can sell himself favourably, whether he can make more of himself than he started out with, whether he is a success" (Hardt, 1998, p.133).

In the capitalist societies, mass production became the main concern and this "threatened the satisfaction of persisting aspirations for individual success and freedom" (Hardt, 1998, p.132). People got fed up or fatigued, and individuals were buried in commerce and industry. The advancement of technology made labour excessive, meaning that the machines replace labour in mass production. With a changing work attitude and the development of new labour-saving technologies, individuals were encouraged to "access media for purposes of information and education as well as distraction, play, and recreation" (Hardt, 1998, p.134). The result of alienation made people want to restore their status and personal existence as well as power.

People may use the newsgroups to talk or to exchange information or ideas freely. In the context where only a few channels to express ideas are available, people may use more frequently the newsgroups to meet their needs. In this way, they may feel "empowered" in the sense that they think they have more control over the channels that they can use to speak out.

"Alienation" in Macau's Context

The sense of isolation resulting from "alienation" implies that people may be motivated to escape from "reality," in which they feel "powerless." The environment in which the participants are living needs to be considered. The Chinese take up the majority of the Macau population; most of them cannot read or speak Portuguese. The translation of the *Official Bulletin* from Portuguese to Chinese began in late 1980s; most Chinese do not have good channels to understand the policies of the Portuguese Administration and respond promptly. Most Chinese people in Macau hold the stereotype that the Portuguese Administration do not care about the interests of the Chinese community. Most people think that the Portuguese do not listen to them. Now, with newsgroups, some people may have a chance to vent their personal feelings.

Another reason of bad communication between the Portuguese Authorities and the Chinese community is insufficient civic education in local schools. In Portuguese schools, students have chances to understand the political structures of Portugal and Macau, and their relationships. No knowledge of Macau history or political systems is covered in the curriculum of local Chinese schools; we may infer that the majority of people educated in Chinese schools do not understand how their society works or what basic rights or obligations they have. In case the Portuguese authorities do something wrong for the community, people may not know how to complain in a way that the Portuguese could accept. Their assumption is that how hard they try, the officials will not hear them, and they do not have power to change the “reality.” The emergence of the newsgroup gives some people a chance to express their own feelings.

Complaints against individuals hardly appear in Macau, since people avoid face-to-face conflicts. Writing a letter to newspapers however may get more people to learn about the situation; phoning to “Macau Forum” may have the complaints “broadcast” in seconds. If people want their voices heard or broadcast, they have to meet certain requirements. First, they should not use any foul language. Second, they should not libel or slander. But newsgroups allow people to use any language to express themselves; they may even make libellous comments.

“Empowerment” and Newsgroup Participation

This process of escaping from the control of authority is “empowerment,” which is a major theme of “transformational politics” (Schwerin, 1995, p.xi) and a core concept in many different fields and disciplines like education, business, political and economic development, democratic theory, or feminist politics (Schwerin, 1995, p.55). The literal meaning of “empowerment” is the “process of the dominant power or legal authority permitting or *giving* power or abilities to another individual or a group having less power, or as gaining power *over* another person” (Schwerin, 1995, p.58). But the social science views emphasize the “role of *supporting or facilitating* others in becoming empowered” and “link to other concepts that constitute a semantic field for empowerment” (Schwerin, 1995, p.59). The arguments are whether “empowerment” refers to the process in which one gives power to another while one

does not necessarily lose one's power or refers to the process in which one gains power from another and another may lose some degree of power.

In Schwerin (1995)'s empowerment theory, people who consider themselves as knowing more about society or politics or as having higher self-esteem and self-efficacy will join more social or political activities. They also understand more what political rights they may enjoy and what responsibilities they should take.

"Self-efficacy" means the "experience of one's self as a cause agent." "Self-esteem" means the "attitude toward oneself and one's behaviour." Self-esteem is the "evaluation of one's self-worth," while self-efficacy is a "judgement about one's personal capabilities" (Schwerin, 1995, p.62).

In American culture, "empowerment" is positive in that people can be autonomous and gain greater control over their lives while "power" carries a negative sense and usually is related to "domination, coercion, authority, and dependency on others" (Schwerin, 1995, p.71). Empowerment is about power; politics is the study of power, and power is not static. Robert Dahl (1957)'s definition of power is considered classic and says, "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that he otherwise would not do."

In the newsgroups, the participants have their own right to speak and accept the idea that each of them is an autonomous entity. There is no power relationship formed by threats or pressure. It is also possible that a participant can convince others that s/he is an authority for one field. With the features of "anonymity" and "low accountability," it is hard to prove the participant's identity in the digital space. People tend to speak out more in the newsgroups.

Empowerment is a state or perception that one gains control over one's life. When people perceive that the channels of "Ji Shi Ting" in *Macao Daily News* and the phone-in programme "Macau Forum" are inadequate for them to speak out, newsgroups will become a better channel for them to speak freely, without limitation of time, space, topics, and ways of expression. When the participants feel that they cannot influence current policies that influence their lives and feel that they do not have enough channels to show their grievances, newsgroups can become a place where people share what they think or perceive.

The idea of “alienation” gives another explanation for the use of newsgroups on Internet. The process of alienation makes people feel isolated from the “majority.” This is not limited to political issues; those who disagree with the mainstream social norm, for example, sex should not be discussed in public, may feel isolated in society. The result of alienation makes the “minority” want their status to be recognized. Anything that can help meet their needs of restoring their status, existence, and sense of power will help empower them.

The participants who post messages frequently to newsgroups may then have two main features. The first group of active participants may have political awareness and knowledge of high technologies. They may conceive newsgroups as an alternative channel to express their opinions about issues of public interests. Their use of newsgroups can be seen as an act of empowerment in the sense that they have control over a public place for exchanging ideas.

The second group of active participants, on the other hand, may feel powerless with limited channels for expression. Their participation in the discussion of public issues is not intended to change the decisions or policies made by a few powerful people. With possible linguistic barriers, the turning point of “123 Movement,” and almost absence of civic education, the Chinese community may hold the belief that the Portuguese Administration would do only bad to them. This group of people conceives newsgroups simply as a place to express their grievances.

In reality, newsgroups may not be a truly “public sphere” where any people can have equal chances to discuss any topics about their lives. First, only those who have computers, modems, and subscribe to an ISP have access to newsgroups. Second, it is the ISP that selects newsgroups, meaning that the number of and types of newsgroups in one ISP may be different from those in another. Third, “public” means a certain group of people who use their own language to discuss the issues in their community. Most of the messages in the newsgroups in Macau are in Cantonese with some English; those who do not understand the language cannot join the discussion.

Hypotheses for the Study

The newsgroup “macau.forum” is most popular among “macau.politics” and Macauweb’s WWW Bulletin Board. “Macau.forum” is selected to study.

Based on above discussions, two big areas will be examined: (1) public sphere, and (2) empowerment. In a public sphere, with equal status and chances, people can have rational discussions about public issues. Newsgroups allow anybody to talk about any issues of their concerns freely. I expect that “macau.forum” would have more diverse topics in the messages than the phone-in programme and the newspaper section, and the following hypothesis is formulated:

1. The number of topics discussed in “macau.forum” tends to be greater than the number brought up in the phone-in programme “Macau Forum” and the newspaper section “Ji Shi Ting.”

Due to limited media space and time, audience may not have room for their discussions on public affairs. On the other hand, people may fear that their speech about government may bring troubles to them. With empowerment, newsgroups on Internet are similar to a public sphere, though imperfect, for discussing public affairs that directly affect their lives. I expect that “macau.forum” would have more public issues in messages than the phone-in programme and the newspaper section. The following hypothesis is formulated:

2. “Macau.forum” is likely to have more messages about public issues than the phone-in programme “Macau Forum” and the newspaper section “Ji Shi Ting.”

In a public sphere, people do not need to fear the interference from the government and more rational discussions are possible; through rational dialogues, consensus can be made. Newsgroups are similar to a public sphere, and I expect that more reasoned discussions could be found in “macau.forum” than in the radio phone-in programme and the newspaper section. The following hypothesis is formulated:

3. The electronic newsgroup “macau.forum” is likely to have more reasoned discussions than the phone-in programme “Macau Forum” and the newspaper section “Ji Shi Ting.”

No power centre controls the Internet. In comparison to other media, people in newsgroups may feel that fewer constraints on their behaviours (e.g. the manner they talk) are imposed.

They may feel that they have more control or are “empowered.” In terms of empowerment, the following hypothesis is formulated:

4. The active participants in “macau.forum” feel more empowered in sharing their viewpoints on Internet than in the phone-in programme “Macau Forum” and the newspaper section “Ji Shi Ting.”

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Content Analysis of Newsgroup Messages

I examined the messages in the newsgroup “macau.forum” from 19 February 1999 to 12 March 1999 to find out how diverse they can be, and compared them with the types of issues discussed in *Macao Daily News*’ “Ji Shi Ting” and the phone-in programme “Macau Forum.” The three consecutive weeks from 19 February to 12 March were chosen because this was after the long holiday of Chinese New Year, but before two “big events” happened: (1) the establishment of the Selection Committee for the Chief Executive of Macau Special Administrative Region (Macau SAR) and (2) the election for the first Chief Executive of Macau SAR due to happen in April and May.

A sample from the newsgroup “macau.forum” was selected in the following steps. The second hand of my watch pointed to “45,” and I then used these two digits as the bases of sampling. I took “four” as the starting point, and “five” as the interval value. On each day, I counted the fourth message to be the first message I included for that day and take the fifth message after that as the second message I included for that day, so on and so forth. If there were fewer than 10 messages, I took all messages in the sample. I repeated this procedure until I collected the messages on 12 March 1999.

For each downloaded message, the subject line and the body were recorded. I would like to test how “public” or “open” the newsgroup could be (meaning to what extent people can raise any kinds of issues, including sensitive political, social, or cultural issues). In Hill and Hughes (1998)’s analogy, newsgroups are like informal parties or gatherings. People with similar issues of concern may come together and have a free chat, exchanging ideas or information. The topics are not necessarily of public interests. I took threads of messages as

the unit of analysis rather than each single message because I want to know in what topics they are interested most¹³.

For articles in “Ji Shi Ting” of the *Macao Daily News*, I counted how many issues people write about; similarly, any articles responding to past articles will not be counted because they talk about the same issue. Our interest at this point is to understand the types of issues in discussions. I look for the types of issues discussed in the phone-in programme “Macau Forum” with the same method.

By the issues of “public interest,” I mean (1) any plans made or activities by the Macau Authorities, any government departments, the Macau Municipals (equivalent to formerly Hong Kong Urban Councils), the Macau Legislative Assembly, or the Macau Courts, (2) any behaviour or performance of civil servants, (3) any activities of the concession businesses in Macau, namely, electricity, water, telecommunications, cleaning, and gambling. Any decisions made by the mentioned administrative, legislative, and judicial institutions may affect the lives of people in Macau. Similarly, the behaviour or performance of civil servants may affect the efficiency of the departments or communications between citizens and the departments. The citizens pay taxes and the civil servants are supposed to work for the people. Their quality is an issue of public interests. Concession businesses mean monopoly, and citizens pay them for services too; their decisions, behaviour, or performance affect people’s lives.

Besides calculating the proportion of opinions in the messages in “macau.forum,” the letters writing to *Macao Daily News* in “Ji Shi Ting,” and phone calls in “Macau Forum,” I examined to what extent the discussions in “macau.forum,” “Ji Shi Ting,” and “Macau Forum” were “rational.” By “rational,” I mean those arguments with reasons (to try to answer the question of “why”) or explanations (to try to answer the question of “how”), i.e. “reasoned arguments.” I calculated how many opinionated messages in “macau.forum” were backed by reasons, explanations, or “verifiable source of information” (i.e. any kind of citation which shows where the piece of information comes from) in the body of the messages. The number of letters carrying opinions in “Ji Shi Ting” was examined to see if any reasons or explanations

¹³ In newsgroup reader programs like Internet Explorer 4.01, messages are grouped in threads, with the option “View\Sort by\Group messages by thread” checked.

were used to support their ideas; the same procedure was applied to the phone calls in “Macau Forum.” I compared the three results to check if the participants in the newsgroup made reasoned comments on issues of their concern.

People need to observe a set of pre-defined rules when they write to the newspaper or phone to the program to air their voices. For instance, editors may not publish articles full of libel or comments made not based on facts due to the legal responsibility that the local newspapers need to bear. The hosts in the phone-in programme do not allow any comments with slander or containing foul language or vulgar vocabulary or expressions with sex or violence. The anonymity and low accountability in newsgroup discussions may imply that the participants are more empowered in the sense that they can raise sensitive issues of politics, sex, or social taboos, and no power center will constrain their behaviour.

“Empowerment” implies that people can have more control over their behaviours or lives. The messages in “macau.forum” are likely to have more “flaming,” that is, criticisms (or judgements) without reasons or explanations since people need not worry about revenges or situations where “someone lashes out rudely during a discussion” (Hoffman, 1995, p.99).

Another consequence I expect of “empowerment” is that participants can cross-post their messages to other newsgroups outside Macau, which their ISP offers. They cross-post their messages to let others learn about their opinions. The “reception” of the section “Ji Shi Ting” is however limited by circulation, readership, and publication date; that of the phone-in programme “Macau Forum” is limited by the scope of broadcast, type of audience, and time. In the newsgroup “macau.forum,” the participants can express their viewpoints in any way they like, anywhere, and any time.

The following indicators of “empowerment”¹⁴ in terms of behaviour may be used: “taboos” (i.e. those topics that most of people would not talk about in public, e.g. love, or sex), “foul language” (i.e. those languages that most of people agree to be impolite or rude), or

¹⁴ In the traditional media, the ways of expression and the topics in discussions are constrained by laws, social norms, and media editorial policy. The laws do not allow Macau people to use any means of mass communications to make seditious messages to try to destroy public order or security, as stated in *Macau Criminal Code*. Social norms do not accept using foul languages or discussing sex in public. The newsgroups provide the conditions to break the constraints, and the participants may use foul language or talk about taboo issues in newsgroups. To study the behavioural aspect of “empowerment,” we choose foul language and taboo issues, as well as cross-posting as indicators.

“cross-postings” (i.e. the act of posting messages to more than one newsgroup to widely spread one’s messages). In order to understand how they feel visiting or posting messages to “macau.forum,” I make an online survey. This is a direct way to learn about the participants’ thoughts.

Online Survey on Empowerment

An online survey was done to try to answer the fourth hypothesis to see if the active participants in “macau.forum” would feel more empowered in sharing viewpoints on Internet than in other forms of media. So, another month of messages were chosen randomly, from 26 March to 24 April 1999; I wanted to “interview” the participants who were still active.

The Issues of Online Survey Design

Online questionnaires were sent to all e-mail addresses found in the newsgroup; those addresses not listed in the “error delivery messages” were considered correct. As Comber (1997) notes, it is not enough to wait for responses and we should be more aggressive in soliciting responses. After e-mailing the questionnaires, I waited for two days and sent individual questionnaires again. This helped to increase the response rate.

The response rate of online surveys is usually low. The questionnaires should not be too long, and the language should be plain, without any jargon. For instance, instead of saying “to visit and to post messages to newsgroups,” in their language, it may become: “to play with newsgroups.” To read the messages they post for a couple of weeks, I may get a sense of their use of language.

To make the questionnaire short, open-end questions may be better than close-end questions because several options may make the questionnaire look quite long and may scare the interviewees. Close-end questions may help the interviewees finish in seconds but open-end questions may not limit the interviewees’ answers. The questions you want the answer to should be put right after a few warming up questions; even the interviewees stop answering the questions, the “main questions” may still receive answers. If the interviewees select questions to answer, this may not help too much. So the questions should not be in too many words.

So, the questions asking them about their experience of playing with newsgroups are included in the first part of the questionnaire as some warming-up questions to give the participants a sense that they are talking to somebody rather than they are asked questions.

Another difficulty is that people may refuse to answer your questions when they think that you are playing around. In the first part of the questionnaire, my full name is written with e-mail address; the name and the e-mail address of my supervisor are also provided for people to verify my identity. To make people willing to help you, disclosure of your identity to show your sincerity may help.

In sending out the questionnaire, I pay attention to the privacy issue as well. The whole list of e-mail address should not be disclosed to any recipient. There are two ways to achieve the purpose. One way is to compose individual e-mail messages. But it may be time-consuming if there are thousands messages to be composed and sent. Another way is to put the whole list in the "bcc:" field, and each recipient cannot see others' e-mail addresses.

Question Design of the Questionnaire

In Schwerin (1995)'s empowerment theory, there are several main prerequisites for empowerment: self-image, knowledge, and competence. To check if the newsgroup participants feel more "empowered" in the place, I need to check if they would consider themselves to be higher level of computer users, with more knowledge about the place they are living, at a position where others can hardly interfere the participants' activities.

In the online questionnaire (as shown in the Appendix), I developed five areas: (1) their habits of using newsgroups; (2) the topics they usually post to newsgroups, and their feelings towards posting messages; (3) the ways of expressing themselves in case of unpleasant experiences in an alienated environment; (4) social participation, and political participation; and (5) political knowledge.

With the background information and the first and the second areas, I may have a profile of the interviewees, e.g. their computer literacy, the number of e-mail accounts they have, educational level, and profession. In terms of newsgroup experience and habits, I want to

know how many years they have been exposed to newsgroups and how many hours a day they spend in newsgroups.

With the third area, I may have a general picture about the ways of expressing unpleasant experiences in the interviewees' real life. Most of the Chinese feel "isolated" and "powerless" in influencing government's policies. In this "alienated" environment lack of expression channels, most people may prefer to be silent even though they wanted to speak because speaking out may be "useless." "Unpleasant experiences" may be something that people want to talk about, and I would like to see if the interviewees would use newsgroups to express their unhappy stories in real life and if they could feel "empowered" in doing so.

Habits of Using Newsgroups and Attitudes towards "Empowerment" in Newsgroups

For their habits of using newsgroups, I asked (a) for how long they have had access to local newsgroups (i.e. those newsgroups being hosted by local ISPs), (b) how many hours a day they use newsgroups, and (c) which newsgroup(s) they visit or post messages to the most. With the information gathered from these questions, I could have a general picture about the interviewees' experience in visiting newsgroups and their preferences of types of newsgroups.

With the second area of their topics posted to newsgroups and their feelings, I focus on the following items: (a) the topics the interviewees would post the most to the favourite newsgroups, (b) the main reason(s) that the interviewees would choose local newsgroups, (c) their attitude towards the view that people posting messages to newsgroups tend to feel "empowered," and (d) their attitude towards the view that people posting messages to newsgroups are those feel frustrated in changing the reality. If the interviewees think that they can use the newsgroups to express freely their viewpoints, they may feel more powerful. This area mainly tests if posting messages would be the result of feeling powerless in changing the reality, or if posting messages would be the result of feeling more powerful.

Ways of Expressing Unpleasant Experiences in Real Life

When the interviewees see something unpleasant or unfair in their daily lives, what do they do? This is the third area I included in our online questionnaire. They were also asked

about the ways they used to express their thoughts on unfair things they saw. As mentioned before, most Chinese people in Macau tend not to be silent in public. I would like to know how the interviewees in the newsgroups would express themselves in real life. The results will be compared to their thoughts of empowerment to see if newsgroups are an alternative to express opinions for those who are silent in real life.

Political Knowledge

The better the interviewees can understand the place they live, the more likely they can comment on current events happening in that place. There are two basic questions about their political knowledge: “who is the President of Macau’s Legislative Assembly?” and “when will the first Chief Executive of Macau Special Administrative Region be elected?” Those who could answer these two questions are more likely to care about Macau and its affairs than those who could not answer.

Social and Political Participation

I also included the questions like “do you form civic associations?” “did you register to be a voter?” “when did you vote last time?” in the questionnaire to check the extent to which they have active social and political participation. Forming civil associations is more active than simply participating in civic associations or enjoying the benefits derived from being a member of an association; those who vote are more active than those who do not care about voting. Active participation was examined because I studied a group of active Internet users, who have potential to post messages to newsgroups to express their views about political or social issues. They may have participated in forming civic organizations. When studying the demographics of Internet users, Hill and Hughes (1998) divide people into three groups of people: the general public, non-political Internet users, and “Internet activists” who engage in some political activity using the Internet (p.28)¹⁵. Hill and Hughes (1998) found that the

¹⁵ In their footnote commenting “non-political Internet activists,” Hill and Hughes (1998) say that they may vote or have partisan orientations in their real lives. The label “non-political” is assigned to show that those Internet users are not politically active on the Internet.

“Internet Activists” who engaged in some political activity using the Internet were more politically active; they voted more regularly than did the general public (pp.42-43).

In summary, with the content analysis of the newsgroup messages, the phone calls gathered from “Macau Forum,” and the letters written to *Macao Daily News*’ “Ji Shi Ting,” I may understand how diverse the topics in various media could be. Since the idea of public sphere is that anyone has equal right to express their views in the place, the Internet newsgroup “macau.forum” seems to have the potential to be a “public sphere” if many different types of topics could be found in the newsgroup, as compared to the other channels “Macau Forum” and “Ji Shi Ting.”

To study if the participants who post messages to “macau.forum” are likely to feel “empowered,” I did an online survey. From the two key questions about their attitudes towards how people would use local newsgroups, I could understand how they feel about the function of the newsgroups. From the question about the topics they talk in the newsgroups, I may also understand what the interviewees use the newsgroups for.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSES AND DISCUSSIONS

Public Sphere and the Three Media

In the three weeks from 19 February 1999 to 12 March 1999, 187 messages in total were drawn from “macau.forum” to form the sample. Sixty-six calls were aired in the first part of “Macau Forum” from Mondays to Fridays during the said period. Eighteen letters were published in the section “Ji Shi Ting” of *Macao Daily News* in the three Wednesdays.

A public sphere has two basic characteristics: (1) diversity of issues for discussions, and (2) reasoned discussions of public issues. People in a public sphere have equal right to express their views of any issues of their concerns; a great variety of issues are expected in the place. Although people talk about any issues, they tend to talk more about public issues, and their discussions tend to be reasoned.

Diversity of Issues for Discussions

First, I compared how diverse the issues people raised in newsgroup “macau.forum,” in *Macao Daily News* (MDN)’s “Ji Shi Ting,” and in the phone-in programme “Macau Forum.” Table 1 shows that the participants in the newsgroup had a great variety of issues for discussion (taking 53.5% of the total). Some preferred to use “macau.forum” as a chat room, using “to [someone]” in the subject line. The concerns are however quite soft: Bible, film, music, games, etc.

The list in Appendix I (The other 100 issues discussed in macau.forum) shows us a lot of topics discussed in the newsgroup. For instance, they talked a lot about music such as Faye Wong’s songs or MP3 music. They talked about the experience of first kiss or love. ICQ, computer programs, or game seemed popular. These topics could not be found in “Macau Forum” or “Ji Shi Ting.” This supports the first hypothesis, saying that the topics discussed in “macau.forum” tends to be greater than the number brought up in the phone-in programme “Macau Forum” and the newspaper section “Ji Shi Ting.”

Table 1. Topics discussed in “macau.forum,” “Macau Forum,” and “Ji Shi Ting.”

| | macau. forum (N=187) | Macau Forum (N=66) | Ji Shi Ting (N=18) |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Public-interest issues | | | |
| Macau/Macau SAR | 3 (1.6%) | 11 (16.7%) | 1 (5.6%) |
| Macau Authorities | | | 5 (27.8%) |
| Government departments | 2 (1.1%) | 16 (24.2%) | 4 (22.2%) |
| Leal Senado | 1 (0.5%) | 5 (7.6%) | 2 (3.0%) |
| Civil servants | | | 1 (5.6%) |
| Monopoly businesses | 17 (9.1%) | 17 (25.8%) | 3 (16.7%) |
| Profit-making businesses | 5 (2.7%) | 3 (4.5%) | 1 (1.5%) |
| Civil organizations | | 7 (10.6%) | |
| Public services, e.g. bus | | | |
| Non-public-interest issues | | | |
| Personal issues | 59 (31.6%) | 2 (3.0%) | 4 (22.2%) |
| Other issues | 100 (53.5%) | 2 (3.0%) | |
| TOTAL | 187 (100.1%*) | 66 (99.9%*) | 18 (100.1%*) |

* Inaccuracy due to rounding error

Personal Issues in the Media

Compared to the phone-in programme and the newspaper section, the newsgroup had the largest proportion of personal-issue messages (59/187 = 31.6%), while the newspaper section had 22.2% (4 out of 18) and the phone-in programme 3.0% (2 out of 66) respectively. For example, for personal issues, one phoned to the program to talk about illegal parking inside his building, while another talked about the possibility of using of an open area of her building as a recreational area for the children living there. Although people talked about personal issues in the mass media, they rarely used the channels to talk about their personal feelings towards love, first kiss, or songs.

On the other hand, the participants I observed in the newsgroup “macau.forum” were more likely to tell others what they felt or thought. This shows empowerment to some extent; the participants in “macau.forum” felt freer to post messages talking about their own thoughts on Internet. Basically, the audience who phoned Radio Macau shared concerns of public issues. I found similar situation for “Ji Shi Ting.” An obvious reason is that both media have their own policy in defining what kind of messages could go to their space or time.

Public Issues in the Media

There were 28 messages (15.0%) of public-interest in “macau.forum”; 52 (78.8%) in Radio Macau; 14 (77.8%) in “Ji Shi Ting.” Among the public-interest issues in radio and newspaper, issues about Government departments and monopoly businesses were the majority. In the phone-in programme “Macau Forum,” 25.8 per cent talked about monopoly business. Among the 17 phone calls about monopoly businesses, 13 were about CTM (the only licensed provider of telecommunications in Macau), and 4 were about SAAM (the water supply company in Macau). All four calls about SAAM complained that the company charged unreasonably.

The majority of calls about monopoly businesses were about CTM probably because the negotiations were being undertaken between CTT (the Government PTT, “Correios e Telecomunicações de Macau” in Portuguese [Post and Telecommunications of Macau]) and CTM. The new tariff plan of price-cut in telecommunications suggested by CTM was approved by CTT, but it did not receive good feedback from people in Macau. A lot of discussions about the new tariff plan were raised. In the 13 calls, 6 of them disagreed with the new plan. Three of them thought that the Government should not allow CTM to monopolize all kinds of telecommunications services, and its monopoly protocol signed in September 1981 did not include services like mobile phone or Internet. Three of them shared their bad experiences about CTM’s services in handling customers’ requests and billing. One thought that the mobile cost was high.

In the newspaper section “Ji Shi Ting,” among those 18 public-interest messages, five talked about Government departments which accounted for the largest single category (27.8%). One complained about the bureaucratic red-tapes. Three complained about the bad efficiency of handling damaged pedestrian, deserted houses, and a dike. Four out of 18 letters were about Leal Senado, which is equivalent to Hong Kong SAR’s Provisional Urban Council. Three of them complained about the facilities in a garden, while another complained about the stone-steps leading to Guia; the size of each step was not the same, and this may hurt the old people who used them everyday to go to Guia to exercise.

In the newsgroup, most public-interest messages were concerned with monopoly businesses (9.1%). Among 17 such messages, 6 scolded CTM and 4 thought CTM charged too much on their Internet services. Another five messages talked about the newsgroups that CTM operated, the remaining two complained about low online speed and just asked information about BBS services.

Five out of 28 public-interest messages ($5/28 \times 100\% = 17.9\%$) in the newsgroup talked about profit-making businesses. Two talked about food problems and the cost of restaurants; one talked about bad computer shops in Macau. Another talked about Hutchison which dismissed some of their employees. One asked about opening businesses in Macau.

From the above data, personal issues dominated the newsgroup "macau.forum," while public issues dominated "Macau Forum" and "Ji Shi Ting." The second hypothesis is not supported, meaning that despite empowerment potential, the newsgroup "macau.forum" does not serve as a public sphere in which public affairs that directly affect their lives are discussed.

"Rationality" in Discussions in the Three Channels

The third hypothesis is that the electronic newsgroup "macau.forum" is likely to have more reasoned discussions than the phone-in programme "Macau Forum" and the newspaper section "Ji Shi Ting." An ideal public sphere should be a place where people have equal rights to discuss public affairs rationally without any forms of government interference. To further examine the potential of the newsgroup "macau.forum" to be a public sphere, it is necessary to study the "rationality" of the newsgroup.

Discussions may be reasoned or unreasoned; by "reasoned," I mean discussions or expression of opinions with reasons or explanations. By "unreasoned," I mean that people express their viewpoints without support of reasons. "Rationality" refers to the extent to which the messages are "reasoned."

If the newsgroup was full of opinions without reasons or explanations supporting their views, the place could not become a true public sphere where ideas are discussed rationally. In the following, I discuss the aspect of "rationality" in each channel and compare one another.

Opinions and Rationality in the Newsgroup

Table 2a. “Rationality” in discussions in “macau.forum.”

| | Non-opinions | Opinions | | Total |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-------|
| | | No reason | With reasons | |
| Public-interest issues | | | | |
| Macau/Macau SAR | | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Government departments | | 2 | | 2 |
| Leal Senado | 1 | | | 1 |
| Monopoly businesses | 10 | 6 | 1 | 17 |
| Profit-making businesses | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Non-public-interest issues | | | | |
| Personal issues | 43 | 16 | | 59 |
| Other issues | 79 | 14 | 7 | 100 |
| TOTAL | 136 | 41 | 10 | 187 |

The above table shows that among the 187 messages, 136 (72.7%) were not opinions; some of them were questions, e.g. “Does anyone play BBS?”, wishes like “I hope I could take the new driving license test soon,” or requests like “Please do not make this newsgroup a chat room.”

The one non-opinion message related to Leal Senado was the wish to take the new driving license test. Among the ten non-opinion messages related to monopoly businesses, all were about the CTM, newsgroup, or BBS. For the CTM, some asked when CTM would reduce the Internet fee; some asked about online speed; some requested others to respect the freedom of expression in the newsgroup.

In “macau.forum,” among the 187 messages, 51 messages (27.3%) showed the participants’ opinions. Forty-one out of 51 participants (80.4%) expressed their opinions without explanations, while other 10 messages (19.6%) had given reasons to support their opinions. In other words, most opinions were likely to be expressed in the newsgroup “macau.forum” without giving reasons; that is, the discussions tended to be unreasoned.

Table 2a shows that 41 out of 51 opinion-messages did not provide reasons. The data do not support the third hypothesis that the electronic newsgroup “macau.forum” is likely to have more reasoned discussions than the phone-in programme “Macau Forum” and the newspaper section “Ji Shi Ting.”

Opinions and Rationality in the Radio Phone-in Programme

Table 2b. “Rationality” in discussions in “Macau Forum.”

| | Non-opinions | Opinions | | Total |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|----------|
| | | No reason | With reasons | |
| Public-interest issues | | | | |
| Macau/Macau SAR | | 5 | 6 | 11 |
| Government departments | | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| Leal Senado | | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Civil servants | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Monopoly businesses | | 3 | 14 | 17 |
| Profit-making businesses | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Public services, e.g. bus | | 2 | 5 | 7 |
| Civil organizations | | | 1 | 1 |
| Non-public-interest issues | | | | |
| Personal issues | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Other issues | | <u>1</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>2</u> |
| TOTAL | | 25 | 41 | 66 |

In the phone-in programme “Macau Forum,” all 66 calls collected during the research period were opinions. This shows that the programme was a place where people expressed their views.

As shown in Table 2b, 25 out of 66 calls (37.9%) did not provide further explanations about their opinions, while 41 calls (62.1%) explained the opinions they expressed in the phone-in programme. This shows that the audience tended to be “more rational” in presenting their thoughts in this channel.

In addition, only two calls (3.0%) were related to personal matters. And the majority (62 calls in 93.9%) were related to public issues. In other words, the radio channel tended to be a place where people expressed their views about public issues in a rational manner. This phone-in programme was more likely to be a public sphere than the newsgroup.

Opinions and Rationality in the Newspaper Section

Table 2c. “Rationality” in discussions in “Ji Shi Ting.”

| | Non-opinions | Opinions | | Total |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-------|
| | | No reason | With reasons | |
| Public-interest issues | | | | |
| Macau Authorities | | | 1 | 1 |
| Government departments | | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Leal Senado | | | 4 | 4 |
| Monopoly businesses | | | 1 | 1 |
| Profit-making businesses | | | 3 | 3 |
| Non-public-interest issues | | | | |
| Personal issues | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Other issues | | | | |
| TOTAL | 1 | 2 | 15 | 18 |

One reader wrote to *Macao Daily News* to praise a foreign lady to rescue her daughter choking on bus one day; this was the one non-opinion letter, as shown in Table 2c. Other letters written to the newspaper (94.4%) expressed the readers’ opinions. This shows that the newspaper section was also a place where people expressed their views.

For the aspect of “rationality” in discussions, among the 17 letters, 15 (88.2%) provided reasons explaining their opinions or thoughts, while the other two (11.8%) did not give explanations for their thoughts. This shows that newsgroup readers were “more rational” or “more reasoned” in talking about their concerns. Moreover, 14 out of 18 letters were related to public issues.

Compared to the phone-in programme and the newspaper section, the Internet newsgroup was a place where people talk more about their personal concerns. Newsgroup was not used as a site to exchange opinions about public issues. This is probably due to higher credibility of mass media in people’s minds. On the other hand, newsgroup is seen as a “high-tech” medium for a small circle of people, who need to have computer literacy.

In terms of “rationality,” the discussions in the newsgroup was less reasoned, while those in the phone-in programme and in the newspaper section were more reasoned. This may be due to the features of low accountability and anonymity in the newsgroup. With low accountability and anonymity in the newsgroup, people can be more emotional in expressing their views. In newspaper and radio, the audience need to present their ideas logically, with good explanations or supporting materials. Otherwise, the phone-in programme hosts or newspaper editors may not allow them to express their opinions due to limited time and space.

Another explanation may be the number of audience. The active participants in the newsgroup "macau.forum" were fewer than the readers of newspaper or the audience of radio. The participants may feel "useless" to explain so much to only a small group of audience, and their speech did not have "influence." But the voices in newspaper or radio can be received by many people in Macau. The audience was more likely to use the traditional mass media to discuss public issues with reasons and to try to let the officials hear their opinions.

In summary, the data tell us that the Internet newsgroup "macau.forum" had a great variety of topics for discussions. But most of the topics were not public issues, and the discussions were mostly unreasoned. In other words, the newsgroup may not become a public sphere where people could discuss public issues in a "rational" manner.

Empowerment and Using the Three Channels

With anonymity, low accountability and the absence of a centralized force to control the cyberspace, the participants of newsgroups tend to have more control on what they do in the cyberspace. "Empowerment" may be reflected by the participants' message-posting behaviour and their perception about newsgroups. When people conceive themselves as having more power in newsgroup, they may do something that they may not do in real life, e.g., using foul language, raising taboo issues for discussions, or cross-posting to broadcast their voices to other newsgroups so as to have their voices heard by more people.

To answer the fourth hypothesis that the active participants in "macau.forum" feel more empowered in sharing their viewpoints on Internet than in the phone-in programme "Macau Forum" and the newspaper section "Ji Shi Ting," I examined two aspects: (1) their behaviour of posting messages, and (2) the factors influencing the "empowerment" of the participants.

Posting-Message Behaviour and Empowerment

First, to examine how they may be empowered in the newsgroup “macau.forum,” I counted the frequency of (1) cross-posting, (2) foul language used in the messages, and (3) taboo issues they raised in their discussions.

From the following table, most messages did not contain bad languages (181/187 = 96.8%), did not carry taboo issues (99.5%), and were not cross-posted (180/187 = 96.3%); that is, most people posted messages to “macau.forum” only. On 2 January 1999, a user called “CTM” suggested eight things that people should not do in Macau newsgroups¹⁶. Using foul language and cross-posting messages were included in the list. And in the following months in the newsgroup, from time to time, people complained some participants for using foul language. It seemed that in general, foul language or taboo issues were unacceptable in newsgroup messages. The participants in “macau.forum” tend to show their “empowerment” in talking about “small things” that may not be discussed in newspaper or radio rather than in using foul languages or talking about taboo issues that newspaper or radio do not allow.

Table 3. Foul language, taboo, and cross-posting in “macau.forum” (N=187).

| | Foul Language | Taboo | Cross- posting |
|------------|------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Occurrence | 6 (3.2%) | 1 (0.5%) | 7 (3.7%) |

Online Questionnaire Survey on Empowerment with Newsgroup Participants

Among the 264 possible e-mail addresses of the newsgroup participants gathered from the mentioned period, some e-mail addresses were incorrect. I finally identified 242 possible e-

¹⁶ The eight things that the user “CTM” suggested the participants not to do in the newsgroups were: (1) cross-post; (2) foul language, libel, or flaming; (3) attachment of photos or files of documents; (4) any messages with a body that does not match the subject shown in the subject line; (5) testing messages; (6) messages with MP3 files or links; (7) messages in HTML format; (8) messages in Chinese codes other than BIG5.

Interestingly, even though the name was “CTM,” the message was not from the company CTM according to their habit to communicate with their Internet clients through e-mail. They use the name “CTM Help Desk” and the e-mail address “help-desk@macau.ctm.net” to write to their clients, as shown in Appendix IV, which shows a message from their Service Manager. And the convention of using “CTM Help Desk” as the name in their official e-mail message did not change.

mail addresses¹⁷. The online survey questionnaires were successfully sent to 201 e-mail addresses, taking 83.1% of the 242 possible e-mail address. This shows that most of the e-mail addresses in newsgroup messages were correct and active. Thirteen people sent back their completed questionnaires, and the response rate was 6.5%. Among the interviewees, two replies were from the same person; she replied me, with one identity of one company and another of a user. So the two replies were counted as one. This shows that people may own more than one e-mail account and shows the feature of anonymity in the cyberspace.

In the following, I first give out the profile of the interviewees, including their computer literacy, educational background, and their newsgroup experience. In Schwerin (1995)'s empowerment theory, people who think they have more ability and knowledge in certain area will conceive themselves to be more powerful. The requisites of gaining access to newsgroups are computer knowledge and skills; the requisite of discussing public issues is a basic understanding about society. These aspects were examined in the survey.

A Profile of Newsgroup Participants

Background. For computer literacy, most of the interviewees graded themselves to be above average. Five interviewees (38.5%) said that they had average computer literacy, while other five (38.5%) evaluated themselves to be good. Two (7.7%) claimed that they were computer professionals.

Four interviewees (30.8%) reported to have two active e-mail accounts (i.e. those e-mail accounts they are now using). Three (23.1%) reported to have one, two (15.4%) reported to have three, and another two (15.4%) reported to have four. On average, this group had 2.2 active e-mail accounts ($28.5/13=2.2$). This group of people were active on Internet.

For educational level, most of them said that they were at the secondary level, with seven counts (53.8%). Four (30.8%) said that they were at the university level. Other two

¹⁷ In the messages, the e-mail addresses with Chinese characters or those with obvious incorrect format like "123@123.456" were incorrect. After filtering out these obvious incorrect e-mail addresses from the 264 addresses, we had 242 possible addresses. Then, we used those addresses to send our online questionnaires; those requests without error messages bound back were considered correct.

(15.4%) said that they were studying at the polytechnic school. The majority in the group were young people.

Most of them said that they were students; five interviewees (38.5%) said that they were students; two (15.4%) in the computer field; two (15.4%) civil servants. One reported to work in the design field; one sales representative; one as accountant; one in the services industry.

In short, the interviewees were active on Internet, young, with good knowledge of computer skills.

Newsgroup Experiences and Habits. From the survey, the first question asked them how long they have been “playing with the Macau newsgroups¹⁸”. Some answer “3-4 years” and I took the average, i.e. 3.5 years $[(3+4)/2=3.5]$. On average, the interviewees had been joining the Macau newsgroups, mostly “macau.forum,” for 2.4 years.

The interviewees on average spent 1.61 hours per day on the Macau newsgroups. The newsgroup “macau.forum” was likely to receive more visits, with 12 counts (52.2%) among 23 for the question of “which newsgroup do you play with the most?”¹⁹ Four (17.4%) reported to play with the newsgroups in Hong Kong, e.g. hk.comp.pc, or hk.comp.hacker. Two (8.7%) reported to play with the newsgroups in Taiwan. This implies that interviewees visited “macau.forum” more.

When asked the reasons for playing with the Macau newsgroups, five people (38.5%) said that the newsgroups were sited at their places, and people were more familiar with the topics in the groups. Their ideas were also easier to be communicated to the audience. They also mentioned the satisfaction obtained from the feedback to their messages; four people (30.8%) suggested that feedbacks from others meant satisfaction.

Most of the interviewees talked about general things in newsgroups; four people (30.8%) said that they talked about anything they liked. Three people (23.1%) mentioned that

¹⁸ The participants understand the expression “to play a newsgroup” better than the expression “to visit a newsgroup” or “to post messages to a newsgroup.” “To play (with) a newsgroup” implies “to visit and to post messages to a newsgroup” and is more “colloquial” and “familiar” to the participants.

they mainly talked about small things in their daily lives; one highlighted that he seldom talked about politics. One mentioned that she mainly talked about things between boys and girls, which people may feel embarrassed to talk in public.

Social Participation of the Newsgroup Participants

To examine social participation, I asked if they formed organizations or associations in Macau. One mentioned that she did not belong to any political party. This may show that some people think that forming organizations is related to political activities. Nine people (69.2%) said they did not form any organizations or associations. Only one said he did; one said “seldom”; one mentioned “sometimes.” In joining newsgroups, the interviewees seemed to be socially active, but in reality, they are not that active.

Political Knowledge and Political Participation of the Newsgroup Participants

To examine the extent to which the interviewees understand Macau’s politics, I used two questions: “Who is the President of Macau Legislative Assembly?” and “When will the first Chief Executive of Macau SAR be elected?” Only one could give correct answer to the first question: “Anabela Ritchie,” while ten (76.9%) said that they did not know. Four (30.8%) of the interviewees said that they did not know when the first Chief Executive would be elected. Among the eight answers, only one gave the correct answer: “15 May.” In other words, they basically did not have much knowledge about Macau politics.

I further asked if the interviewees had already registered to vote and when was the last election. Among the seven people out of 13 (53.8%) who said that they did not register to be voters, two told us that they were not qualified to register due to their age. One said that the voting mechanism in Macau did not help elect someone who could represent the people. One said that no deputy [in the Legislative Assembly] was good.

Among the four interviewees who said that they registered to be voters, two told us that they registered to be voters because they thought this was one of their citizen rights. In other

¹⁹ See note 18 for the explanation of “to play (with) a newsgroup.”

words, most of people did not register to be voters and not care too much about their political rights or obligations.

Among the four (30.8%) who said they registered to be voters already, three (75.0%) answered the time of last election correctly: the year of 1996.

Hill and Hughes (1998) in their study showed that the active users using Internet for political activities were more likely to be politically active. Our study showed that most people used the Internet to talk about small things and little political activities were involved. Most of the interviewees did not have active social and political participation.

As Lo (1995) comments on the political culture of the Macau people, most of them “know politics and yet do not actively participate in politics” (p.72). Lo (1995) suggests the reasons of the “refugee mentality and the political orientation of mainland Chinese immigrants, who experienced the political turbulence in China and who must understand the complexities of politics and the potential danger of political participation” (p.72). Moreover, very few Macau people seem to “believe that elections and the checks and balances between the three branches of the government are indispensable elements in democracy” (Lo, 1995, p.72). Non-business groups tend to be “powerless” in a traditionally top-down policy-making process (Lo, 1995, p.73). Most people think that they cannot influence any important changes in society.

Feeling of “Empowerment” in Macau Newsgroups

In the traditional social and political context, most of Macau people feel “isolated” and “powerless” in their real life. Then, people tend to feel uncomfortable or unsatisfied with the current situation. I included a set of questions about unpleasant experiences (e.g. unsatisfied, unfair, or unhappy) which were more likely to allow people to speak out. Only one interviewee said that he did not have such unpleasant experiences. Among those 12 claiming to have unpleasant experiences, seven felt uncomfortable with interpersonal relationships in their real life; two felt unsatisfied with public organizations (namely, CTM and government); two felt upset about bad behaviours in newsgroups. It showed that issues about human relationships seemed to bother most of them.

Ten out of twelve (83.3%) having unpleasant experiences to express themselves said that they would express their opinions about the experiences, and among the ten, four (40.0%) said that they would use newsgroups to express themselves, including the two who felt upset about the performance of public organizations, and one said she would use mass media if they were public affairs. One said she would share with her family members, and one said that she would share with her friends. Other three did not give answers. It showed that most of the interviewees were not silent and some used newsgroups to express themselves. But I may not know if they felt “empowered” in using the newsgroups to express themselves.

To examine the issue of “empowerment” in the newsgroup, two questions were asked: (1) Some people say: “posting messages to the Macau newsgroups may give you a sense of more power. One’s influence seems to be greater.” What do you think? (2) Some say: “I feel frustrated and could not change the reality. Posting messages may help me vent out my feelings, or I just chat in the newsgroups to kill leisure time.” What do you think?

With the first question, among the twelve replies, two people (16.7%) said that they did not think they could gain more (influence) power through participation in the newsgroup. Five simply said (41.7%) that they did not have such feeling. In general, seven people (58.3%) did not feel empowered through participation in the newsgroups. The remaining five people (42%) had the following views.

One said that in the past, people may not comment on something unfair to them; with the Internet newsgroup, people could have one more channel to express their opinions on unfair matters. But the influence may not be known. Two agreed that people may gain power through participation in the newsgroup but this was only limited to “small circle.” One said that the newsgroup may train people’s thinking skills in arguments or may give those shy people to discuss things freely that they did not talk about in public. One did not express his thought and said that the participants in the newsgroup are a few. In other words, most interviewees thought that they did not feel more powerful in participating in the newsgroups.

Interestingly, I also found that the four interviewees, as mentioned above, who told us that they would use newsgroups to express their unpleasant experiences, did not feel empowered or “powerful” through participation in newsgroups.

For the second question, eight interviewees (61.5%) agreed that the newsgroup was mainly used as another channel to vent out their own feelings. Among the eight people, one said the newsgroup may be used for exchanging ideas, and one commented that the newsgroup may be used to gain supports for his thoughts. Another stressed that the “dark force” of society spreads to the political field, the press and the business in Macau, the newsgroups became a good place for people to vent out their feelings. In other words, many interviewees agreed that the newsgroups could be used as a channel to vent out their feelings only, rather than to influence others by their messages.

The interviewees seldom talked about politics in the newsgroups. Even though there were inadequate channels for people to express themselves, people did not see the newsgroups as an alternative for discussing public issues. Instead, they thought that newsgroups were a good place for talking about small things in people’s daily lives. Macau people did not think that discussions of politics could help change the reality. Although they could talk anything they liked in the newsgroups, they did not see themselves to be influential.

The Survey Data and the Hypothesis about Empowerment in Newsgroups

The data do not support the fourth hypothesis that the active participants in “macau.forum” feel more empowered in sharing their viewpoints on Internet than in the phone-in programme “Macau Forum” and the newspaper section “Ji Shi Ting.” From the survey, I can see that the newsgroup was not used as an alternative to exchange ideas about public issues. They preferred to use “macau.forum” to talk about “small things” related to their daily lives. Most of the interviewees showed that they did not feel “empowered” in the newsgroup.

This group of interviewees was inactive in reality; most of them did not register to be voters, nor organize civic associations. This group did not know very well about Macau (Special Administrative Region); the majority of them could not answer correctly the name of the President of the Legislative Assembly, nor the date when the first Chief Executive of Macau Special Administrative Region was elected.

In this study, most of the interviewees did not care about politics, probably because, as one suggested in his response, “politics is dirty.” Or as another suggested, people in Macau

did not have enough civic education. The cultural aspect may also partially explain people's silence in this small community. The Chinese culture teaches people to live in harmony; conflicts that may damage existing social relationship should be reduced or avoided. Silence is a strategy to maintain human or social relationships.

The newsgroup "macau.forum" may not have higher credibility than other media like newspapers or radio. People may feel more influential in giving out their opinions in newspapers or radio which have larger audiences. On Internet, they may not feel influential to make policy makers take them seriously. After all, among the 15,000 Internet subscribers²⁰, only 201 e-mail addresses (1.3%) can be found usable in the newsgroup. "Macau.forum" has only a small audience. The sample may not feel "powerful" enough to discuss public issues on Internet.

Conclusion

Newsgroup Not a True Public Sphere

The Internet seems to have the characteristics of public sphere. This study examined the role of Macau newsgroups in helping citizens to express their viewpoints on public issues.

The result showed that in the Internet newsgroup "macau.forum," the majority issues (53.5%) were not public-interest related. Among those non-public-interest issues, 37.1% were personal issues. In the phone-in programme and in the newspaper section, on the other hand, discussions about public issues like government performance and monopoly businesses dominated, with 25.8% for monopoly business in the radio phone-in programme "Macau Forum" and 27.8% for government performance in the newspaper section.

The Internet newsgroups have the potential to be a "public sphere." But the finding showed that "macau.forum" was not a true "public sphere." Most messages in the newsgroup were about personal issues or small things; the discussions were mostly not rational. Most interviewees in the survey seemed not to be interested in talking about public issues or politics.

²⁰ According to the figures provided by CTM shown in the 28 May 1999 issue of *Macau Times*, a new Chinese weekly, Internet service subscribers were about 15,000, which accounted to be 3.5% of the whole population. Most

The participants of the Internet newsgroups were far fewer than the readers of *Macao Daily News* or the audience of Radio Macau. People may feel “useless” to post messages about public affairs to share with only a small group of people. This can explain why their discussions were mostly unreasoned; they could not ensure that the decision makers of particular issues could see their messages.

One may also argue that by nature, “macau.forum” was not a place to discuss politics or public issues. But another newsgroup “macau.politics” (which is supposed to be a place for people to talk about politics) received only a few messages a day. The Law Discussion Forum (an electronic bulletin board) hosted by the Government Printing Office and the Office of Law Translation received only 172 messages since May 1998. This shows that people tended not to discuss about politics online.

The survey findings show that most of the interviewees are young people. They knew little about society and had low social and political participation. They were not interested in politics. Although “macau.forum” provided the participants the conditions to talk about public issues freely, the participants did not make use of it. In the long run, if people receive more civic education and know better about society, they may be more willing to discuss public issues. Also, if the Internet becomes more popular in Macau and the audience becomes larger, people may use it to talk about public affairs more often, as their voices can be heard by more people.

Participants Not Empowered in the Newsgroup

For empowerment, the interviewees in the survey felt themselves powerless in influencing government decisions. They used the newsgroups as an “entertainment playground,” on which they share their feelings, ideas, or opinions for “small things” only.

The “alienation” in Macau made most Macau people think that the Portuguese administration would not listen to their voices; they may feel isolated and “powerless.” The Internet newsgroup “macau.forum” has the potential for people, especially those who feel

“powerless” or “isolated,” to talk about public issues without limitations of time and space, or fear of government intervention. But the findings show that “macau.forum” did not empower the interviewees. If the Internet newsgroup becomes more popular in Macau in the future, this channel may receive more attention. The participants may then feel more “empowered” in the sense that more people could hear their voices.

Most discussions in the newsgroup were not “reasoned.” As discussed before, the traditional media like newspaper or radio have editors as gatekeepers. They ensure that the discussions in the letters to the editors or in the phone-in programme are based on facts. Any unreasoned discussions in the media may run at the risk of libel or unfair comments. That explains why messages on mass media are more reasoned.

In sum, despite its potential to be a “public sphere,” “macau.forum” was not popular; the interviewees did not see themselves as gaining more influence through participation in the newsgroup. The interviewees in the Internet newsgroup were young people with limited knowledge about society. They were not interested in talking about politics or public issues about Macau. At present, the newsgroup could not realize its potential to be a “public sphere.”

Implications of the Study

The US Vice-President Al Gore thought the information superhighway could promote democracy. Some suggested that the disintegration of the Eastern Europe and the fall of Berlin Wall showed the “democratization” role of the Internet (retrieved on 15 July 1999 in Chapter 2 from Michael Hauben’s *Netizens: An anthology* at <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x02>). But my study showed that it was not easy to conclude the role of high technologies in democratizing closed countries.

The findings showed that more discussions about “small” or personal things were made in an unreasoned manner in the newsgroup. The newsgroup did not make most interviewees feel “empowered” partly because of the limited audience, and partly because the participants believed that the Portuguese Administration did not care about their opinions.

“Democracy” may be simply defined as “rule by the people.” If people cannot participant in the policy making process, democracy in the place is not real. The Macau

Governor is appointed by the Portugal President; there are only seven directly elected seats (out of 23) in the Macau Legislative Assembly. In the *Constitution of Portugal Republic*, freedom of association and speech is guaranteed. Under the Portuguese administration, Macau has certain degree of “democracy.” However, the citizens have few channels to express opinions. Most citizens do not know too much about Macau, do not have civic education, and are not interested in politics. They do not use newsgroups to talk about politics even though the participants can share anything without fear of Government interference.

Two basic elements are suggested to realize the role of the Internet (newsgroups) in democratization: (1) penetration of the Internet, and (2) people’s consciousness in using high technologies. The Internet is not popular in Macau. If more people used the Internet and were active in newsgroups, the participants may feel that their messages are more “influential.” Universal service of and access to the Internet may be the conditions for “cyberdemocracy.” As long as the Macau authorities do not take Internet (newsgroups) as a channel to communicate with the citizens, Internet cannot carry the democratizing effect.

If participants in newsgroups did not talk about public affairs, the newsgroups would still be a place for gossips. If the citizens and the Government did not want to establish mutual understandings, no channels could help the citizens to participate in policy making.

Macau may be unique but the findings in the study may be applicable to many places. Hauben’s work *Netizens* quoted one Japanese, saying that gaining access to newsgroups was not easy in “Japan, the ‘leader’ of technology”; the cost of gaining access to the Internet services in France is also high (at <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x02>). If I have the opportunities to study the newsgroups in Japan and France, people there may not feel “empowered” either although the high technologies were “available.”

With similar colonial background, Hong Kong SAR continues to enjoy freedom of expression and have more public channels. The proportion of Internet service subscribers is greater than that in Macau. The newsgroups in Hong Kong SAR may be studied to see if people there feel more “empowered” in using newsgroups and whether the Internet is a public sphere to discuss public issues.

In sum, the Internet newsgroups (or the Internet) have the potential to become a mass medium if more people use it. Citizens’ social awareness is also important. Democracy cannot

be realized without constant dialogues between Government and people. Internet's potential in serving as a public sphere is to be realized.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX I. THE OTHER 100 ISSUES DISCUSSED IN MACAU.FORUM (Frequency)

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Ancient civilization | 1 |
| Bible | 3 |
| Birthday for girls | 1 |
| Blue jokes | 1 |
| Custom/Culture | 1 |
| Death of Bing Xin | 1 |
| Democracy and dictatorship | 1 |
| Dream interpretation | 1 |
| Escaping from classes | 1 |
| Exposition | 2 |
| Film | 4 |
| First kiss | 4 |
| Freight time table | 1 |
| Game | |
| FF8 (a computer game) | 4 |
| Game cracker | 1 |
| Game | 1 |
| Greetings: Saying hello | 6 |
| Hotmail | 1 |
| ICQ | 4 |
| Love | 4 |
| Medicine for cough | 1 |
| Meetings | |
| Meeting | 1 |
| Place for meeting | 1 |
| Music | 13 |
| Non-stop-phone talkers | 1 |
| Program (computer) | 5 |
| Sir Ma | 1 |
| Star/Celebrity | 1 |
| Taiwan newsgroup | 1 |
| Testing messages | 7 |
| To someone | 18 |
| TV program | 1 |
| Websites | 4 |
| Windows shortcut key | 1 |
| Zen | <u>1</u> |
| TOTAL | <u>100</u> |

APPENDIX II. ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE – A translation into English of the original questionnaire in Chinese (Cantonese) that follows this version

1. For how long have you been playing with Macau newsgroups?

How many hours a day do you at least spend on playing with Macau newsgroups?

Which newsgroup do you play with the most?

2. What do you talk about the most in the newsgroups? Please use concrete examples to illustrate.

3. Why do you prefer to post messages to Macau newsgroups? In which way do you think the newsgroups could satisfy you?

Some people say: “posting messages to the Macau newsgroups may give you a sense of more power. One’s influence seems to be greater.” What do you think?

Some say: “I feel frustrated and could not change the reality. Posting messages may help me vent my feelings, or I just chat in the newsgroups to kill leisure time.” What do you think?

4. Did you ever have some experience that made you feel unpleasant?

5. What were the things that made you feel unpleasant?

6. Will you express your opinions about the issues that make you feel unpleasant? If so, what methods have you used?

Will you use the same method for all kinds of things that make you feel unpleasant?

7. Do you form any civil associations or organizations?

If so, what are the associations or organizations?

8. Who is the President of Macau Legislative Assembly?

9. When will the first Chief Executive of Macau Special Administrative Region be elected?

10. Did you register to be a voter? Why?

When did you vote last time?

11. Background information

Computer literacy: [] professional; [] good; [] okay;
[] naïve; [] idiot

Educational level: [] primary; [] secondary; [] university;
[] polytechnic or technical schools;
[] master degree; [] doctorate

How many active e-mail accounts do you have?

What is your profession or occupation?

11. 背景資料

電腦掌握程度: [] 高手; [] 好; [] 一般; [] 入門;
[] 電腦盲

教育程度: [] 小學; [] 中學; [] 大學; [] 理工專科;
[] 碩士; [] 博士

你手頭上有幾多個 e-mail account 用緊呢? []

你現在做咩職業架? []

真係好多謝你嘅幫忙呢! 畢到業嘅話, e-mail 張四方帽相你睇呀 ^^

APPENDIX III. A MESSAGE SHOWING THE RULES FROM A USER "CTM"

Subject: 本版規則

Date: Sat, 02 Jan 1999 01:50:05 +0800

From: CTM <webmaster@macau.ctm.net>

Organization: CTM Internet Services

To: andykuan@macau.ctm.net

Newsgroups: macau.comp,macau.forum,macau.politics,macau.buysell,macau.games,macau.portguese

== 請勿違反下列規則 : ==

- 01) Cross-post
- 02) 粗言穢語、人身攻擊、罵戰
- 03) 附加任何相片或檔案之文章
- 04) 離題
- 05) 測試文章
- 06) 提供任何 MP3 之檔案及連結
- 07) 使用 "HTML" 格式貼文
- 08) 非 BIG5 編碼之中文貼文

版主會考慮將違規之文章刪除,不作另行通知;

如對版規有任何問題或意見,可正接 E-Mail 給版主,

(webmaster@macau.ctm.net), 請勿在版內討論!!!

APPENDIX IV. A LETTER FROM THE SERVICE MANAGER FROM CTM

Subject: < 服務第一 國際聯網 到府支援 >

Date: Thu, 29 Oct 1998 10:23:23 GMT

From: helpdesk@macau.ctm.net (CTM Internet Helpdesk)

Organization: CTM

Newsgroups: macau.forum

親愛的 國際聯網 用戶，

近日從討論區得悉，有個別網友在上網時遇到困難，
例如斷線等等，令我們十分關注。

自七月份開始，我們已經為有需要的網友提供：

< 服務第一 國際聯網 到府支援 >

希望主動地為各網友提供積極而有效的協助。

其實，上唔到網的原因有很多，例如：Modem設定等等。

以下列出一些要點，可以給大家一些參考：

1) 撥號設定

a) Modem沒有反應：

- i) 電話線須插在Modem的Line插口
- ii) Modem在電腦正確的Com port上

b) 所撥之號碼：

- 33.6K用戶 ----- 8989828
56K用戶 ----- 8989898 (X.2), 8989899 (K56/flex),
8989888 (V.90)

c) 密碼不符：

- i) 檢查username及password是否輸入錯誤
- ii) password 應該是小楷的
- iii) 33.6K用戶須選擇"撥號後才帶出終端機視窗"
於"撥號網絡"
56K用戶則不須選擇

2) 電子郵件軟件之設定

SMTP : macau.ctm.net

POP3 : macau.ctm.net

E-mail address : username@macau.ctm.net

3) 新聞組軟件之設定

News Server : news.macau.ctm.net

如果各位網友在上網時有技術上需要，請填妥以下之表格，
我們的 < 服務第一 國際聯網 到府支援 >，必定衷誠為您效勞。
如有任何有關上網的意見，亦歡迎直接致電本人891-5255。

有了您的支持，我們堅持做到最好，
為您服務第一，我們做得到。

吳漢文

澳門電訊 國際聯網
客戶服務經理

=====

服務第一 國際聯網 到府支援

致：澳門電訊 國際聯網
客戶服務經理 吳漢文 helpdesk@macau.ctm.net

用戶代號：_____ 姓 名：_____

聯絡電話：_____

最方便聯絡之時間：由_____ 至 _____

地 址：_____

請描述所遇到的問題：

連線困難

不能收 / 發郵件

不能閱讀新聞組

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連線斷線

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