

Social media in china essay



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To perform in an investigative manner, the journalist is in the 'role' of a watchdog. 'Watchdog journalism is a state of mind for the whole newspaper: Journalism that gives power to the people.' Hall (2011). For maintain the leadership and reputation of the government, the 'safety of the contry' will be an excuse when government tries to hide the truth and informations. In these situations, the funtion of watchdog in media can express in a right way. Such as the famous event, Watergate, which had forced the Nixon out of office in 1974, is a good example for the media as a role of the government's watchdog.

In a country that guarantees freedom of the press, watchdog journalism can be 'a highly effective mechanism of external control on corruption' (Brunetti, Weder 2003, p. 1804). But the situation in China will be more complicated. For now, the ownership of media still belongs to the Chinese Communist Party. For instance, concerning daily operations, broadcasters are under the jurisdiction of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) within the State Council (national government), while print media organizations come under the jurisdiction of the General Administration of Press and Publication.

At one time, People's Daily, the New China News Agency, and CCTV, the most significant and influential media, they were under control of the Chinese authorities and received government funds and issued reports as instructed(Ken'ichi, 2010). The China government remains an immediate supervision body to keep a tight rein on media. A recent survey from a NGO, the freedom house, by analyzed the data from 197 countries on the status of 'freedom of the press', China was at the bottom place and the status was

identified 'not free'. [1] Compared to Hong Kong, mainland China may have more restrictions on the freedom of the press.

As the development of technology, the low cost of entry online would ensure that everyone would have the opportunity to speak and be heard. The new forms of journalism emerge in the background of the development of network. The traditional media is facing the crisis that because the new form of media is rapidly grown. The way to represent the news not only on traditional media, but also on the internet and the news are not only reported by professional journalist but also ordinary people. Since the social media had been introducing in people's daily life, users can learn about fast breaking news all over the world from it.

The social media is not just a technology tool that enable people to communicate more easily but a place for individuals to express their personal commentaries and share information. Through the Internet and modern communication tools, people can not only get in touch with the outside world, selectively read a large number of network media and information can also be used, such as SMS text messages, tweets network, blog, micro-blog and pass the information to the outside world, upload and download sound and image. Some of the information induce the public effect because the authenticity and timeliness.

Such as the earthquake happened China's Sichuan Province, in 2008, the local residents use the text message and the internet to communicate with their friend and family, and circular the actual situation to outside world Which let the outside people know the real disaster. It is even faster than the

mainstream media in China. Virtually, ordinary people can use the internet to be a reporter, and play the role of the traditional media reporter. Therefore, the citizen journalists and citizen reporter has become more and more acceptable to the public.

In countries where the freedom of expression is limited, the significance of media is completely different from firmly established democracies. " Citizen Journalists" play an increasingly important role, as they often adopt a different perspective from media professionals. The Internet provides ample opportunities. (Bothmer, 2010) The power of the social media and the growth of citizen journalists may bring a change to the society, but the leadership of China, the China Communist Party (CCP), has their own concerned.

Different from the Internet, information can be updated in a second. Traditional media, such as television, newspaper, radio, before the information public to the audience it will be a process on selecting information, which means it can be controlled easily. The introduction of internet did bring a great change to China, most obvious in the economic. However, it not only gains a good opportunity of development, but also a severe test. As the growth of social media in recent years, users can learn about fast breaking news all over the world from it.

The social media is not just a technology tool that enable people to communicate more easily but a place for individuals to express their personal commentaries and share information. Some critical opinions to CCP spread quickly on different social media, even though the government tries

their best to regulate the environment of internet. China owns the world's largest internet users, and the government has developed the most advanced censorship and observation system for Internet which intends to monitor their activities (Rohde, 2011).

The Sina Weibo as a representative, launched by Sina Company on 2009, is regarded as a major source of debate and news. This popular Chinese social network, which is similar to Facebook and Twitter, is a tool for people to express their voice. According to iResearch's report on 30 March 2011, Sina Weibo had 56.5% of China's microblogging market based on active users and 86.6% based on browsing time over competitors such as Tencent Weibo and Baidu's services. [1] The top 100 users had over 485 million followers combined.

Furthermore, Sina said that more than 5,000 companies and 2,700 media organizations in China uses Sina Weibo. The site is maintained by a growing microblogging department of 200 employees responsible for technology, design, operations, and marketing. [2] In cooperation with internet censorship in China, Sina sets strict controls over the posts on its services. 'The company has almost 100 employees working 24 hours a day to track and block users' content, in order to avoid running afoul of the government', said by Charles Chao, the CEO of Sina Weibo, in the interview by Forbes Asia(2011).

Some negative post will not be posted or will be deleted immediately, it is inevitable that some of this will slip through the cracks. The watchdog role of traditional media may take place by citizen journalists in China. 24 years

ago, the Tiananmen Square incident was the result of the time due to public dissatisfaction with government corruption, and today, people still have a high concern towards rampant corruption and injustices. Such objectives have been enhanced by collective efforts to expose corruption through what is known as ' human flesh search engines. [2] Weibo users recently posted a search about a 20-year old woman who posted pictures in the Sina Weibo website flaunting her riches[3], the woman take the photo with expensive handbags and high-end cars, and adding that these are her birthday gift. The introduction for herself is the General Manager of the Red Cross Chamber of Commerce, an apparent subsidiary to the RedCross Society of China, the nation's largest charity. The charity denied having such a subsidiary but did not convince the public. Later, the RedCross were forced to report the case to the police, however the late respond did not satisfy by most of people.

The woman in question turned out to be the girlfriend of a high level executive of an organization linked to the charity. [4] In the public scrutiny the Red Cross Society of China revealed misusing public funds. Due to the social media triggered-scandal donations to charitable organizations dropped nearly 90 percent compared to three months earlier. [5] In recent years, for own interes concernd, some people use the social media as a tool to draw attention from the government. People learn to use the Sina Weibo to fight for their right.

Also, the extreme voice from Internet more and more concerned by the government much than before, and the social media has become a tool for communication between people and government. A protest which happened on 22th October in Zhenhai town, Ningbo province is a good example. The

residents in Zhenhai town believe that the newly plan of building a factory which will bring a great interest of the local economic, would in fact be producing PX, a chemical element used to make plastic bottles and polyester and believed by many to be harmful to humans' health[6].

But the project is going to star without to seek the permission and the consent of the majority of residents. The local people tried to against the plan by protest on the street, but it was controlled by local government. Some people who were participating in the protest had sent some pictures on the Sina Weibo about the protest to draw attention from outside the Ningbo province. Some posts which were deleted were reposted by many famous people, of which some pictures about the local policemen arresting people gained attention from most of the user.

Later, more and more photos were uploading on the internet; most of them are about the confilitc between the government and people, which make most of people who saw it on internet feel antipathy. And it stimulate more people go on the street to take part in the protest. On 23th October, in Ningbo the cell phone signal was blocked by the local government, people could not call out from Ningbo. And it is a usual way that the government to control the mass incidents. Also Ningbo residents could not use their Sina Weibo account to post pictures. On Sina Weibo, the posts to support the event in Ningbo were growth rapidly.

People who lived outside the Ningbo keep posted their comment and pictures, and many people participated in the protest later. Finally on 28th October, the local government made an announcement on media that the PX

project will stop in a while, and the local residents can propose their opinions to the government. This announcement also posted on the Ningbo official Weibo account. In China, the information which may affect the reputation of CCP will consider as the secret of the party. Such as the number of non-normal deaths in disaster, which the government should respond for it, it will normally not be reported by the media.

Actually it has been a long time that the Chinese government has covered the number of death in many reported cases. For example, the Great Leap Forward in the Mao era, an economic and social campaign led by the China Communist Party from 1958 to 1961, the number of non-normal deaths still remains a controversy. According to the ' History of the Chinese Communist Party Volume II'(2011), which was published by the Chinese government, the number of non-normal deaths is more than 10 million. However, after the analysis of more data and researches, many experts believe that it is much more than 10 million.

In addition, the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, the number of deaths are still a mystery and the detail of the event were forbidden to interview or report during nowadays. However, the crash down which happened 23years ago still remains in mind of mid-age generation in China. Technology helps to dig out the secret and spread out. After half a century being force-fed CCP propaganda and starved of real information about domestic and international events, the Chinese public has a voracious appetite for news. (Susan, L, 2011). Sina Weibo became a platform for people to vent their thirst for knowledge.

In Hong Kong, in June 4th for every year, hundreds of thousands of people gathers together at the Victoria Park to participate in a candlelight vigil which is to memorize June Fourth Incident, and the number of people is increasing year by year[7]. To be sure that the protest will not be reported on media of mainland China. In China, the Tiananmen Square event still is a very sensitive topic on media. In the past two years, on the day of 4th June, many people post their opinions on the Sina Weibo in memory of the protesters in Tiananmen Square, which has bring back the history to the public. And in recent year, many people from mainland China will go to Hongkong on the date of the crash down, and participated in the candlelight vigil. The watchdog role of new media may effected by the tight control from the government. It is not easy that people can express their voice, not mention the journalists in tradition media. According to Qinglian He (2004), as an investigation reported by the New York-based Committee, during the year between in 1998 to 2002, 38 Chinese journalists were in charge, and 32 of them were incarcerated.

In some cases, the government try to hide the truth is because it may affect the interest of some people or groups. Especially in reporting some serious accidents, the media must get approval from the government before they get involved in reporting them. In April 2012, Zhao Pu, a famous CCTV presenter, he has posted a post on Sina Weibo to convince people not eating yogurt: ' Text message from an investigative reporter: Do not eat yoghurt (the thick kind) or jelly, especially children. Their contents are truly frightening.

I won't speak about it in detail. ' [8] His post aroused a great concern and debate on Weibo. Later, the media had a wide-range report the truth and secret behind yogurt, and found out that the material to make yogurt is extracted from leather shoes. Sooner the government and the companies respond on the case and clarify that the safety of the yogurt. Although Zhao deleted the post in the next day, he ceased to host the show not as usual and some people believed that he was be fired. Not until eight months later, Zhao returned to the show.

At the interview by Chengdu Business Daily, Zhao admitted that disappearing from the TV show was a decision after he discussed with leader of CCTV. The interest group behind gave pressure to the CCTV, said by Zhao. ' Many people think that I was disciplined by CCTV, in fact it is not. '[9] The interest group was related to government, and the industry was supported by local government, it will affect the economics of town or area if the truth were exposed, the local government will be reposed for the case and the leader will be punished in some way.

In order to control the negative information not to be spread around, the government uses all means to control the source of the information.

According to a report in BBC (Hays, 2008), in Beijing, the capital, the user of Sina Weibo has to register their real identities to post their opinion. The authorities try to prevent the inveracity information spread around. Once the user was caught by posted the ' unfounded' rumors which the government called, the Sina Weibo will forbid the user in further use, or even cancel this account.

It can be seen that the government is indeed attaches great importance to network monitoring. On one hand the government combats the spread of negative news, on the other hand, the government asserts that to lift the ban of the news reports, it may be considered as maintain the credibility of the CCP and the government for their own political survival. On 20th June 2008, the former president of China Hu Jintao paid a visit to People's Daily and chatted with netizens, and he gave a official speech to direct the state media in reporting breaking news. We must perfect our system of news release, and improve our system for news reports on sudden-breaking public events, releasing authoritative information at the earliest moment, raising timeliness, increasing transparency, and firmly grasping the initiative in news propaganda work. '[10] After four years, a school shooting happened in America on 15th December, the China media ran after the news, for most of newspaper this piece of news was put on their front page. However, at the same day, another tragedy happened in China had few report on media.

In Henan province, a man wielding a knife attacked students, 22 students and one adult injured. This news first to be known was on Sina Weibo, but it was barely reported on state TV and newspaper. Murong (2012), a well-know blogger, speculated that the information about the case was blocked by the government, so people could not reach the information from media. Some people feel disappointed for the attitude of media in these two tragedies. A user of Sina Weibo said that he could not reach any information about Henan attack from the CCTV but it reported the America gunshot for whole night.

In this case, the response from the government is not satisfied by some people. Though the report was followed up later the day,

the length of the article and the degree of report was not as much as the gunshot in America. Some people agree that the government try to downplay the attack in Henan. Sometime Chinese people may be more confused than the people live outside China in some cases which are happening in China, such as the murder case of Gu kailai and her husband, the former secretary of Chongqing province, Bo xilai.

People may be able to know only the result of the case, but the process and details were unable to known by the public from media. Deprived of knowledge about activities happening in China still continue in today. The leader of CCP worries about the more negative or dark side from government that the people know, the more threat to the leadership of CCP. ' It could seriously lengthen the life of China's one-party state. In much the same way that the market has saved the country's Communist Party, China's state-controlled Internet could save its leadership. ' said by Mark Leonard(2011), a British political author.

When people were mobilized, the crash down in 1989 may be repeated. The CCP uses the way to response on negative accident, which is not enough transparency and not satisfied by some people. To the extent that in some accident were accord and some people will have an opinion that the government did hide the truth. A research by Daniel Stockman(2010) shows new data about how Chinese people choose news sources in different kind of style. Because of the different style in publish, Chinese people are tend to believe the commercial media then the official media.

Also from the study by Gang and Bandurski (2011) points out that reader are abandoning the official media, and their preference is heightened during crises that arouse their interest and motivate them to search for reliable information . after they compare the style in reporting stories in different kinds of newspaper, it shows that commercial newspapers' reports are including more information and more reliable than the official newspapers. The consequence of the media control may cause the result of distrust from people to the government.

From the RedCross case or the recent floods in Beijing, the target of these case are not only the case itself but the attitude of the government. At the very beginning, Chinese officials announced that the number of deaths is 37, and people had a fierce debate on Sina Weibo, surrounding the truth and fallacy of this data. Most people thought that it was not the real number, and more people feel disappointed to the official. Then some people found out more evidence to prove that there have been more people dying from in this disease. Finally the official reported that it was 77 people dead in the floods.

11] The reason that the China government hides the statistics probably because this data will reflect the dark side of the local government management and it may cause some negative influence to Chinese reputation. Consequently the government concerned that the public voice was also needed to control in order to consolidate the political power. The government always believes that their people will be out of control when they know the truth. Ramzy (2012) points out that though the government pledges to openness, but many information still be covered by the authorities and has no explanation as usual.

The consequent of the non-disclosure information to public is making people confuse, and they eventually realize that both of the media and the government are unreliable. Conclusion: Though the technology and the new social media did bring a great change in getting resource of public, the citizen journalist may take the watchdog role for traditional media. Especially the traditional media have to chase the sale. For most of the commercial media, the main revenue source is advertising, and it In order to boost the quantity of sales, the information have to be more entertainment and more attractive.

In the situation that the media have to maintain the status in the competition with new media, the watchdog role had been faded from media. However, the China government shows the power in media control, the space for citizen journalist may be narrowed down. The social media as a tool to be used in spreading information but at the same time the credibility of the source and the professional degree of citizen journalists is not as well as traditional media. On the Sina Weibo, the word number of a post is limited in 140 Chinese characters. To clarify the facts in 140 words may not enough, but only the main idea of the case.

Normally, people will be attracted by the first post of a case, but the upcoming post will be less attracted than the first one. It means that people can not receive the entire information, but a piece of it. What is more, it is not only the truth will be post on Sina Weibo, but also rumors. The reliability of Sina Weibo still needs to be discusses. ' While it may be easy for citizen journalists to post content via their cell phones to social media, such as

Twitter, the lack of verification of the story and the ways in which the content is interpreted can turn into a giant game of Chinese Whispers.

A story has the potential to be twisted and manipulated over time, which may result in losing the intended message or the meaning. There is a much lower risk of this for professional content. The context of a story can be articulated and is not necessarily limited to only 140 characters. ' (McDonald, 2012). Nevertheless, the public opinion environment is changing quietly, the 3-year-old called Sina Weibo is making it ever harder for the government to ignore those voices. Note: 1. Sina Commands 56% of China's Microblog Market'. Kyle. iResearch. 30 March 2011.

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