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Censorship and Journalist Blogs in China

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Abstract

It is a growing phenomenon that journalists in China are blogging. Some journalists blog within the media outlet's website, while some blogs in the public sites. This paper mainly discusses the limitation of blogs by analyzing the difference between newspaper blogs and writings on public blog platforms. We argue that the content of public blogs is markedly different from those published on newspaper blogs. This is because newspaper blogs are less individualistic and journalistic blogging on newspaper platforms is more strongly influenced by the organization to which they belong.

Introduction

Journalists made up an important part in the first generation of bloggers. Robinson (2006) characterizes journalistic blogs in following ways: a reporter's notebook of news tidbits and incidentals; a straight column of opinion; a question-and-answer format by editors; a readership forum; a confessional diary written by the reporter about his or her beat; a round-up of news summaries that promote the print publication; and a rumor-mill that reporter uses as an off-the-record account. Robinson does not provide quantitative data to support his arguments. The categorization, however, indicates how blogs serve journalism in various ways.

Several studies have focused on how blogs change journalists' life and work practices. Carison (2007) notes that blogging presents journalists an opportunity to make journalism

more transparent. Lowrey and Mackay (2008) pointed out that blogs affect the ways journalists practice their profession, such as reporting, using blogs as news sources and decision making regarding the newsworthiness of events. In the literature, there is much speculation that journalistic blogs may create opportunities to increase reader engagement with mainstream news outlets and heighten community participation in the public discourse. Therefore, we are interested to know if the same process takes place in China. In this study, we explore the journalistic narratives on newspaper blogs and independent public blogs that are advanced in different ways related to their occupations. By discussing these areas, we can develop a better understanding of the evolving landscape of Chinese journalism and how blogging has introduced new elements into journalism.

A growing number of journalists in China are now blogging. Although there has been little research into Chinese journalist bloggers, it appears to be a growing phenomenon. Many traditional media websites in China host blogs, with reporters and editors serving as bloggers. This indicates that journalists use blogs much more extensively than the general public. Journalists are part of the first generation to publicly exchange views with readers and viewers through blogging.

Blogging by journalists in China compares in some ways to the Western countries. For example, blogs are used by Chinese newspapers to maintain or increase readership. Blogs also make journalism more transparent when journalists update news stories. However, except for the similarities, journalism in China differs greatly in terms of social, political, and cultural structures compared to the Western countries. Therefore, we must note that journalistic blogs in China also differ greatly in many aspects with their counterparts.

Media Structure in China

The media structure in China is unique. Since the 1980s, Chinese media have undergone profound reforms. In the old times, Party journalism has dominated Chinese journalism for a long period; journalists acted like semi-government officials, creating the link between the government, the Communist Party, and the people. As a result, journalists became the mouthpiece of the Party and were portrayed as lacking professional controls for a long time. In the absence of a formal professional structure or rigidly enforced codes of ethics in China,

blogs have become increasingly important.

In the US, there exists the *American Journalism Review, Columbia Journalism Review, Broadcast and Cable, and Quill*. Those writing for such trade journals are typically working journalists, media managers from the news industry, and journalism educators and scholars. The journalistic community is constituted through trade publications, with other institutional practices, such as membership of professional associations and awards for excellence. The news industry's trade publications serve as important historical markers of modern journalism's efforts to position itself as a bona fide profession (Parameswaran, 2006). However, in China, there are greater limits on freedom of expression. In the Chinese media context, professional associations, awards for excellence, etc, do not carry the same weight or symbolism to support education in journalism. Under government restrictions, trade publications in China have limited ability to reflect the complexity of newsroom operations. Therefore, blogs become key public forum for journalists to exchange ideas about norms, controversial issues, ethical boundaries and trends in their field. Journalists in China occupy a special place in the blogosphere and its influence is possibly greater than in the Western countries.

However, although blogs have enhanced the development of journalism, there are many factors that may limit the degree to which blogging can bring to enhance journalistic autonomy. One of these factors concerns with certain organizational influence and censorship. For example, in a survey of 153 reporters in the U.S., Sheffer & Schultz (2008) found that those that were "other-motivated", including journalists required to blog by management, accounted for 73 percent of respondents, while "self-motivated" blogger reporters made up only 27 percent of those surveyed. This research also suggests that there are high levels of resistance to blogging by journalists, as well as poor management communication strategy from the media company to overcome that resistance. Managers encourage journalists to blog, but fail to take the necessary steps to support successful blogging. Cohen's (2002) study of CNN.com also indicates how blogs sit firmly within the CNN corporate structure. In his study, blogs may have the potential to spur open journalism and greater pluralism, as well as challenge authority, but this does not seem to be the reality

in practice. Singer (2005) noticed that while some journalistic blogs are more opinionated than others, they provide readers with a more personal account of the news and blogs tend to extend traditional norms to an online format rather than representing a radical shift in journalistic practice.

In China, the impact of blogs also meets many barriers. As noted, the Chinese government has developed a range of mechanisms to control media based on its communist press system. A set of practices has long been accepted as journalistic routines. These practices, as Pan (2000) notes, include: the state subsidizes the media; party committees at various levels of the communist hierarchy oversee the media at their respective levels by appointing key personnel, deciding major topics for new coverage, and censoring journalists' work; the party's propaganda ministry controls media content; journalism education trains "party propagandists"; all work units subscribe to party newspapers; and all media reprint the editorials and other important materials from *The People's Daily*, or from the official Xinhua News Agency. Under China's party-press system, the media become an instrument by which the party propagates its policy and ideology. Therefore, based on the large environment, blogging in China is largely compromised by certain organizational factors and hampered by censorship. Chinese media outlets now incorporate blogs in websites as part of their internet content by encouraging journalists to blog; however, these blogs are not motivated by journalists themselves. Instead, blogs are used differently according to outlets but most aim to maintain or increase readership. Most news organizations are not yet ready for the greater range of opinion and stronger criticism that the blogosphere brings. As a result, some press spread blogs more widely, assuming it as the selling points, while some other press have suspended their blogs or shut down comments on blogs. Blogs sometimes are transformed into governable space because censorship exists. This may lead to a more realistic view and somewhat undermines their impact.

Research Questions

In this paper, we tried to contrast journalism on official press platforms with journalism on independent public platforms. Based on literature review, this study raised three research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do blog sites practice censorship in the users' blogs when public blog sites and newspaper blog sites are compared?

RQ2: To what extent do journalists practice self-censorship in their blogs when public blog sites and newspaper blog sites are compared?

RQ3: To what extent are sensitive topics able to survive in blogs when public blog sites and newspaper blog sites are compared?

Methodology

Two different types of blog sites were delineated. One is public blog sites, the other is platform built and guided by existing media outlets. Therefore, two newspaper blog sites, *Xinmin Evening News* and *Shanghai Morning Post*, and two public blogs sites, *SINA* and *SOHU* (the largest Chinese public blog sites), provided data for this study.

Established in 1929, the *Xinmin Evening News* is a typical example of party-led evening newspaper in China. Among top newspapers in China, it is seen as a successful and popular human-interest tabloid, with its "short, shorter and soft, softer" stories. Pan and Chan (2003) conclude that its style of writing emphasizes its service targeting local Shanghai residents and this involves soft news, practical information, using a personable, intimate, short, and highly readable style of writing. At the same time, the paper carefully toes the party line in its content. Its content is "softer" than party organs but "harder" than citizen tabloids (the Party exercises less stringent control over metro papers than flagship Party organs) and it has spawned many imitators to create a different breed of "party papers" without the official designation of "party organs". On the contrary, *Shanghai Morning Post,* founded on Jan 1, 1999, is a widely recognized exemplar of successful service-oriented metropolitan newspapers. Reporters from this outlet are much younger than from other newspapers because the paper is relatively new on the market. Regarding the circulation of the press, *Shanghai Morning Post* and *Xinmin Evening News* are the top two papers in Shanghai in 2005. Together they held about 50 % of Shanghai's metropolitan newspaper market (Martinsen, 2006). This shows that *Shanghai Morning Post* and *Xinmin Evening News* had

strong positions in the retail circulation market for Shanghai's metropolitan newspapers, with intense competition between them.

The best known public blog sites are *SINA* and *SOHU*. They are the main "web portals" in China. In the early days, they tried to integrate all possible functions on a single site. This involved free e-mail, chat rooms and news. Later, these services expanded to include online auctions, shopping, free homepages, financial information and transactions. These web portals act like large "supermarkets" providing access to a vast array of services, aiming to attract more eyeballs on their advertisements. *SINA* and *SOHU* were the first to develop blogs. Although they were behind the professional blog service sites like blogchina and blogcn, *SINA* and *SOHU* recruited Chinese celebrities to blog for them. The celebrity strategies made them the most popular blog sites in China. Many famous journalists were also invited to blog on them.

In this study, fifty journalistic blogs were selected on four blog sites. The sitemap of both public and newspaper blog sites links various content categories, such as "entertainment blogs", "teen blogs" and "journalistic blogs". This directory allows us to track favorite journalists' blogs. Therefore, all the blogs used in this study were chosen from the directory of journalistic blogs on the websites balancing gender, age, and professional level of the journalists concerned. In this study, age of the bloggers ranges from 20 to 48, according to the websites. Male journalistic bloggers make up 56% of the survey while females make up 44%. Twenty-five reporters surveyed used the public service, and we selected twenty-five blogs on media outlets to compare the level of censorship between two platforms.

The interview method was also used to supplement our findings, and to gather first-hand data from our subjects. Based on the analysis of fifty blogs, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten journalists at 2008. Of these ten participants, five maintained blogs on the public blog sites and five blogs on newspaper blog sites. Five of the ten interviewees were male, the other five were female. They all attended college and received university degrees. Two of them had master's degree or above. All of them had maintained blogs for more than three years. Among those with their own blogs, two claimed that they would usually update their blogs every one to three days; two updated every four to seven days; three updated every

week to a month; three updated less than once a month. As we are both fluent speakers of both English and Chinese, we first conducted the interviews in Chinese and then we translated them into English.

Analysis and Results

In this section, we will present the research results as well as a sketch of journalist bloggers in China. The overall findings are divided into three parts: the first part is concerned with the organizational structure which influences journalists' blogging in newspaper blog platform, while the other two deal with the different characteristics of newspaper blogs sites and public blog sites.

Xinmin Evening News was the earliest newspaper adopter of the internet in China. It created its blogging platform on May 7, 2005. At the beginning, there were no requirements that members in the newspaper must blog. Reporters were given a password and user account and blogging was on a voluntary basis. Six months after *Xinmin* started its blogging service, *Shanghai Morning Post* launched journalistic blogs on its online platform, highai.com. Unlike its rival, *Shanghai Morning Post* **launched an aggressive advertisement campaign.** A program named "A hundred reporters' blog show" (*baiming jizhe boke xiu*) was launched in August 2006, featuring selected blog entries reproduced in the newspaper every Tuesday and Thursday. Therefore, unlike *Xinmin News*, blogging on the platform of the *Morning Post* is not entirely individualistic work but actually organized by the press as a group activity.

As both *Xinmin* and *Shanghai Morning Post* are leading metropolitan newspapers in Shanghai, there is intense competition between two newspapers. The blog site of *Shanghai Morning Post* was launched to compete with *Xinmin*. Responding to the *Morning Post*, *Xinmin* once published an article insinuating that aggressive blogging at the *Shanghai Morning Post* betrayed news principles.

> "*One press [Morning Post] uses a full-page advertisement to promote their journalistic blogs. A female reporter at this press writes posts discussing who will accompany her to sleep at night in vague language. Does that press want to build an image through this kind of blog, or is it simply to attract eyeballs?*" (Sun, Y., Sept. 12, 2006)

In response, many reporters at *Shanghai Morning Post*, criticized *Xinmin News* for quoting words out of context and misleading people. Therefore, we can see that competition between the rival newspapers is fierce extending onto the blogosphere and the internet.

There are some similarities between the two newspaper blog sites. For example, the relationship between journalist bloggers and readers is limited by many external factors. Both official press platforms adopt the real-name system. Current reporters can register with their real name and work ID to write blogs. Journalistic blogs are the domain of verified journalists. Other netizens can still register but cannot write columns.

The page layout of both the websites was also revised for many times. Taking *Xinmin Evening News* as an example. Previously, readers could "send flowers" or "toss stones" to express their opinions. The greater the number of flowers, the more popular the blog posting was deemed and vice versa. However, this feature was finally suspended in the mid of 2007 and some restrictions were put on comments. Till now, comments on *Xinmin* blogs are not strongly mediated; readers can only leave comments if they register with the site. This indicates that newspaper websites are more willing to maintain administrative control over postings than to allow participants to get involved in judging the merits of messages. Both *Xinmin* and *Shanghai Morning Post* blogs are institutionalized products and constrained by journalistic conventions. They are not typically democratized blog systems. Without an account, there are few opportunities to participate. These platforms offer interactivity limited in scope and there is careful control of blogging and commenting.

However, it is important to note, compared with Chinese political structure, that the level of censorship is actually low in newspaper blogs because most of them are currently organized by the technical staff who know little about journalism. This is a widely spread phenomenon. In some small newspapers, only two or three people are assigned to work on online editions, whereas some large newspapers employ up to 40 people on the online edition (He and Zhu, 2002). In Shanghai, 150 print media sources have formed an alliance, including some large state-owned media enterprises. However, the online department of this big company is only maintained on a very small scale, with only 16 full-time editors and 50 part-time reporters employed in its first year (Xie, 2000). Although senior staff of the online operation is made up

of former news reporters who perform managerial or editorial duties, the site is actually managed by the technical staff who know little about journalism.

In our study, both newspaper blog sites are attached to the newspaper's information centre, but the person in charge of the paper's online version does not hold a position and has no formal, signed contract with the newspaper. The editing department and the online news department have been divided and are governed separately. The editing department seldom directly overrules the online news department. It publishes most of the editorial content of the print edition online, and the online version has no unique content. Therefore, the online operation does not need to recruit journalists but does hire technicians. To most of the management, the online site is only part of efforts to computerize the press. Their motivation may be keeping up with competitors to avoid being left behind.

Another example is from *Beijing Youth Daily*, which set up its new online version on June 28, 2000. The newspaper also launched a new website address at www.ynet.com and transferred its operations from the editing department to the Beijing Youth Internet Communication Company. In an interview for this study, Shanshan (from *Beijing Youth Daily*) described the lack of relationship between the web site and newspaper itself.

> "*I only know they are not recruited by the press. I don't know who they are, or how much they earn per month. By the way, I do not care about it. We do not distinguish newspaper sites from any other internet services, like China.com and sohu.com. The only similarity is that we both belong to the Beijing Newspaper Group. Apart from this, there is no cooperation between the two departments.*" (Shanshan, December 17, 2008, interview)

In Shan's eyes, online newspapers are not assumed to be news organizations. Instead, they are simply firms selling products in the market.

Partly because of a lack of staff in the editing department, censorship is relatively weak at newspaper blogs. An analysis of *SINA*, *SOHU*, *Xinmin*, and *Shanghai Morning Post* blogs reveals the existence of a combination of automated and manual censorship. On independent public blogs, users are automatically prevented from posting politically sensitive words such

as "Falun Gong", "Tibetan independence" (*zangdu*). Efforts to post such messages result in the error message: "This item contains forbidden vocabulary. Please remove them from your blog". However, on newspaper blogs such as *Xinmin* and *Shanghai Morning Post*, these sensitive words can still be posted. Sensitive phrases, such as, "June 4" and "Falun Gong" remained on the system. Therefore, censorship on newspaper blogs is weaker than that used on independent public blogs.

The newspapers want to use blogs to attract eyeballs. However, not all reporters are enthusiastic about newspaper blogs. To date, there are 325 reporters and editors registered on the *Xinmin* web. Of the 325 blogs, only 30 have been used at least one time; the other 295 blogs are all in empty. Among the 30 active blogs, only nine have been updated in the previous six months; the others were inactive. The active bloggers and their identities are as follows:

Table 1: Journalists' blogs on the *Xinmin* newspaper platform (Dec. 31, 2008)

Name	Blog link	No. of articles	Page View	Position in the Press
Li ranran	http://spaces.xinmin.cn/liranran	50	70,152	Junior reporter
He Xin	http://spaces.xinmin.cn/hexin	322	158,437	Press photographers
Zhao Hongling	http://spaces.xinmin.cn/zhaohongling	53	36,985	Senior reporter
Zhu Guang	http://spaces.xinmin.cn/zhuguang	62	32,490	Senior reporter
Wu Qiang	http://spaces.xinmin.cn/wuqiang	98	62,511	Vice director, the complaint against newspaper office
Gaoxing	http://spaces.xinmin.cn/gaoxing	249	116,369	Vice director, a supplementary section in *Xinmin*
Shaoning	http://spaces.xinmin.cn/shaoning	86	49,577	Vice director, national procuratorial and judicial news department
Jiying	http://spaces.xinmin.cn/jiying	39	27,106	Vice director, national procuratorial and judicial news department
Zhu dajian	http://spaces.xinmin.cn/zhudajian	139	118,577	Vice chief editor, *Xinmin Evening News*

In this case, it is found that five active bloggers are administrators of high rank in the organization and only four bloggers are ordinary reporters. The frequency of blog updates and the number of page views are almost the same between the two groups. Ordinary reporters updated their diaries with an average 3.92 posts per month; the management cadres updated their blogs with an average 3.94 posts per month. Average total page views for reporter blogs was 74,516, compared to an average 74.828 page views for management cadres' blogs.

Let us visit the newspaper site. In the *Shanghai Morning Post* website, a total of 210 reporters registered as featured bloggers. Three years later, 91 of them were still active bloggers who had updated their blogs in the last six months. The survival rate of blogs (43%) is much larger than that of *Xinmin* (2%). However, evidence suggests a complex picture. Regarding *Shanghai Morning Post*, it indicated that the plan to attract more readers had also ended in failure. Page views at *Shanghai Morning Post* have declined over the last two years. Xie Zhengyi, a young female reporter at the *Morning Post* has the highest number of page views for her blog (320,000). However, Xu Xiang, the third highest one, garners only 90,034. Most blogs on the site have only 20,000 to 50,000 views, indicating a stagnant readership. More importantly, most blogs in the *Morning Post* site are about the inner monologues, emotions of reporters, narrations of daily life, and personal interests like stock price and photography. Articles containing criticism of newspapers and politics-related content are difficult to find.

While many bloggers vent their anger directed at newspapers on independent public blogs, we found nothing like that on newspaper blogs. A reporter said in his private blog, "starting a blog in obedience to the command contradicts the original freedom spirit of blog. Besides, there are gatekeepers from our press on the content." (Li, January 1, 2007)

Although blogs are getting increasingly popular as a way to involve readers with the newspaper, the implementation of newspaper blogs can often be challenging. In our interviews, Wu Qiang, from *Xinmin*, told us that at least 10 percent of press reporters had set up blogs on public platforms. The number of reporters blogging on newspaper sites thus is only a tiny section of the whole population. Hexin, also from *Xinmin*, told us that most reporters in his department would blog at *MSN* space instead of the newspaper site because "the press blog cannot be individualized. It is an official platform." Hexin prefers to see himself

as different with other journalist bloggers because he is a photographer.

> "*They [other reporters] are worried about causing offence to press leaders. They tried to avoid unwanted consequences of blogging such as firing extreme public enthusiasm. It makes blogging difficult. Meanwhile, blogging is not integral to performance evaluations. There is no pay even you spent a lot of time blogging. Thus, most reporters give up blogging*"
> (Hexin, December 11, 2008, interview)

These views are widespread. "The blog may be censored by your media organization". One female reporter complained on her blog,

> "*As a journalist for an official media, I have to keep those forbidden zones in mind whenever I want to say something publically. Blogging becomes part of work Once I am asked by my superior to blog. It feels like being watched, peeped, or even raped.*" (You, April 9, 2008).

Unlike mainstream media products, which are subject to extensive editorial review and external political monitoring, bloggers have more autonomy to decide content and there is free expression. However, in reality, a certain degree of self-censorship works here because people have information which they are unwilling to reveal on the public web. Some journalists may only give their blog address to a few friends, family members and colleagues, but there is always a danger that others may accidentally stumble across it. Those wishing to publish something sensitive usually do not disclose their personal identity.

Digging deeper, we find that the performance of reporters is influenced by many other factors. Logically, management prefers employees to follow guidance to perform and want the public to accept an image established through their work. This also reflects the fact that the media wants to project a particular positive public image to readers. To accomplish this target, media outlets build their own websites to attract reporters to transfer their blogs from public space. With this particular motivation, press websites are distinct from other public blogs and may not be as democratic as blogging on independent public platforms.

The present study focuses on *Xinmin Evening News* and the *Shanghai Morning Post*: how two newspapers websites provide a picture of the ongoing tensions between blogging and

self-censorship in China over recent years. These two blog sites epitomize the situation throughout China. The findings indicate that the development of newspaper blogs has been hampered by many factors. For the print edition, reporters operate within the constraints of communication routines and do things in a given way. All of their work must fall within the framework of the organization. For the online section, even though control imposed by the press is loosened, self-censorship and other similar constraining factors hamper the development of newspaper blogs and make it currently at a stage of low communication: there is insufficient interactivity, low response rates and low overall usage. Although censorship on newspaper blogs is weaker, self-censorship persists, becoming the main mechanism controlling blog content. Journalists in independent public blogs may be more willing to blog because it provides them a way to express additional meanings above and beyond career considerations, and they feel less confined. By contrast, bloggers at newspaper sites seem less enthusiastic, particular as blogging relates to career.

Blogging on public blog sites

SINA and *SOHU* are the most popular blog sites in China. In 2005, both websites began to invite famous reporters and chief-editors from newspapers, TV stations, and journals to start blogging on their sites. For example, two Shanghai journalists were invited to blog at *SINA* after they became involved in a defamation case brought by Taiwan-funded firm Foxconn. They are famous because it is the first time when reporters were sued by one company in China. Their blog attracts millions of readers.

However, even though *SINA* and *SOHU* have gained popularity through blogging services over the past years, both are often accused by netizens of deleting articles which contain "sensitive words". Of ten journalists interviewed, half of them reported that their posts along with comments by visitors had been deleted without notice. Liu Qili, from *China Times*, found that the blog she maintained at *SOHU* had been taken down after she revealed plagiarism in the press. Liu insisted that the censored posts had not contained material that violated any law or regulation and that *SOHU* was therefore violating her user agreement. Apart from at *SINA* and *SOHU*, many reporters have also encountered different censorship criteria at

various blog hosting services. A post entitled, "Why I will not build my blog on *SINA*", wrote,

> "*If we accept that there must be some controls on internet content, why can't the government make the list of sensitive words public so that everyone knows what to look out for when they blog? I think these lists would be very funny, but no blog host is willing to make their list public. If they don't publish the lists, it is too troublesome to write because you never know which words will be considered sensitive.*" (Wang, as cited in Goldkorn, 2005)

As noted, political stability is paramount to the Chinese government, and the government exercises control over the internet for fear that the internet will be used as a tool to undermine the Chinese Communist Party. According to the Ministry of Public Security, the goal of internet control is "to strengthen the security and the protection of computer information networks and of the internet, and to preserve social order and social stability". Therefore, the government has issued a series of comprehensive regulations governing internet use, such as the Interim Provisions on the Administration of Internet Culture (2003), Provisions for the Administration of Internet News Information Services (2005), and so on.

Although no details about censorship were exposed, the following is widely accepted as absolutely banned content on blogs: (1) instigating resistance to and impeding the enforcement of the Constitution, laws and administrative regulations; (2) promoting subversion and the overthrow of the communist system; (3) advocating separatism and secession from the state; (4) promoting racial hatred and discrimination; (5) disrupting social order through fabrication and spreading rumors; (6) promoting superstition, indecency, pornography, gambling, violence and terrorism, etc.; (7) insulting or defaming others; (8) undermining the credibility of state organs; and (9) violating the Constitution, laws and regulations. By using auto-test software, text containing certain keywords is prevented from being posted, or the administrator will be notified when sensitive subjects are discussed. As a result, journalists know that the stories need to be very carefully constructed as they are held responsible for what they publish. So, most reporters will not express political sensitive opinions on their blogs.

However, even though censorship of blog sites is believed to be tougher than that of the print media websites, reporters are relatively tolerant towards external censorship. In the real world, there are three ways journalists can resist power: 1. they can fight; 2. they can give in by "altering the news to placate the exerters of pressure"; 3. they can "give in sufficiently and in advance to avoid being pressured." (Gans, 1979, p. 249) But in the virtual space, journalists have more opportunities to deal with censorship and may be less worried about it. Many bloggers hold the view that even though censorship is an issue, the Chinese blogosphere is slowly pushing back the boundaries of what defines *sensitive* because bloggers can use a number of strategies to deal with censorship. Journalists addressing sensitive subjects usually exercise caution and carefully choose their words. Therefore, they can be less affected by pressures related to censorship.

For example, most journalists have adopted more factual narrative forms in their posts. Reporters are less worried if posts on blogs reflect the truth and no false content. Fu Jianfeng, a reporter for *Southern Weekender*, wrote a post entitled "My Professional Attitude under Pressure":

> "*In my opinion, a good investigative reporter should know how to use professional activities to protect himself. He has to employ appropriate tactics to eliminate the risks, using wile and bravery…If you follow professional rules of conduct, it will often be your best guarantee against the risks. For example, professionalism requires you to seek multiple confirmations for each piece of information and rely as little as possible on single-sourced information; this practice will increase the authenticity of the investigation…When I handle certain cases involving legal and political risks, I usually undertake a large amount of investigative work. In the published report, I only mention 30% of what I know and I hold the other 70% back. That 70% will come in very useful when someone complains. Once they see the other 70% I held back, they usually give up quickly.*" (Fu, October 8, 2006)

There are other ways to resist censorship. Journalists can make some articles invisible to

strangers. Shanshan, a reporter for *Beijing Youth Daily*, began blogging in July 2005 and posted 458 articles to date. However, only 110 of them are visible to the general readership. The other 348 articles are password protected. The password protected posts are intended only for an audience of trusted friends or confidants. Some journalists have also tried to use different blog hosts because maintaining multiple blogs is a way to keep their writings alive on the web. Some interviewees in our study frequently move blogs, leaving one blog host and starting a new blog with a new web address hosted by a different provider. Some even stated that they are willing to buy blog space which is more reliable and has less censorship. For example, Wang Ganglin, a reporter for *Legal Daily*, chose to blog in public sites which are based in the U.S. The set up fee was 8000 RMB, with ongoing charges of 80 RMB per month. Another reporter, Longzhi from *Southern Metro Newspaper*, also expressed the same idea on his blog.

In this study, we have also observed that some sensitive words were usually replaced by similar words or abbreviations to escape external censors. Playing around with abbreviations to make them close to the politically sensitive terms is a witty way to get published. For example, Gaoshan, a reporter for *Beijing Youth Daily*, published a post in Pinyin, the most commonly used Romanization system for Chinese language, with tone marks on her blog: "chong(2)qing(4)zong(4)huo(3)an(4)作案人 xiao(1)yong(3)hua(2)的 yi(2)shu(1)" (in English, it is "the last words of the arsonist in Chongqing"). The numbers 1-4 in the brackets represent the Chinese tone marks. It records a serious criminal case. According to *Xinhua News,* a fire on a bus that killed 27 people in Chongqing was an arson attack by Xiao Yonghua, a former employee of a public transport company. He had been suspended from his post and angry about this punishment. However, Xiao had left a letter on the internet detailing his unfair treatment and corruption in the company, different from news reports. This reporter said: "If Xiao's letter was the statement of only one of the parties, who can guarantee the report in *Xinhua News* represents the facts, and who can provide the public with a comprehensive, objective story?"(Gao, October 13, 2007). This post was deleted by the net administrator, and thus this reporter was forced to use Pinyin to replace the title, using "hidden transcripts" as an alternative. This sort of coding has entered the public sphere through skillful blog posts, whose meaning is understood by readers who are aware of restrictions.

The result of this study is that in the game of a cat and a mouse between external censors and China's increasingly outspoken bloggers, blocking of message content has for the most part been ineffective. By using the previous strategies, despite censorship, journalists can accept the system of public blogs and maintain strong control over the blog content as long as the deviant views and opinions do not directly challenge the Party's ideology and leadership. Therefore, we have noted in this study that some journalists change blog hosts due to unreasonable deletion of posts. However, after a period of time, some of the bloggers would move back. One interviewee, Gaoshan, told us, "My friends are all at *SINA*. I tried to change the blog host but it feels like moving house to get better care but ending up with no friends or relatives there. I didn't feel at ease in a strange place, so I moved back" (Gaoshan, December 8, 2008, interview). The sense of "being at home" is very important, and sometimes it can override fears of censorship.

Conclusions

In this study, we note that both public blogs and newspaper blogs are constructed as a negotiated space between censorship and bloggers' private domains. Content control in China not only occurs through formal regulation of public blogs, but also through informal means on newspaper blogs. Under stronger external censorship on public blogs compared to that of newspaper blogs, journalists adopt different strategies to deal with the pressure. Using satirical, implicit wordings which are comprehensible to readers, reporters can avoid troubles. Therefore, even though censorship of public blogs is tougher than that at newspaper blogs, we found reporters can often accept higher levels of external censorship at public blogs. On the contrary, on newspaper blogs, even though controls imposed by the press are loosened, self-censorship and other similar constraining factors hamper the development of newspaper blogs and make it currently at a stage of low communication: there is insufficient interactivity, low response rates and low overall usage.

In conclusion, the content of public blogs is markedly different from those published on the newspaper blogs. Independent public blogs feature more behind-the-scenes stories, informal interviews with news sources, full interviews with sources, in-depth analysis of current issues, unpublished stories, personal opinion and other stories beyond careers by reporters. On the

contrary, newspaper blogs are less individualistic because journalistic blogging on newspaper platforms is more strongly influenced by the organization to which they belong. Comparing the two blog platforms and the strategies bloggers employ in writing, we can conclude that newspaper blogs did not make good use of the freedom provided by the internet to make qualitative changes to their content.

There are limitations in this study. One major issue is its sample. Due to the difficulty to obtain a complete sampling frame on the internet, this paper chose to study a total of fifty blogs from four blog sites and thus they are by no means a "representative sample" of all journalistic blogs in China. Nonetheless, the study presents a snapshot of how blogging and journalism are developing in China so as to reveal possible patterns.

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