COMPARING CHINESE AND AMERICAN MEDIA SYSTEMS JOURNALISM, TECHNOLOGY, AND CHANGE

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Implicit in this discussion is the nature of the media to deliver a broad range of content, ranging from news and entertainment to advertising and public service information. Among these, the role of the media to communicate news and information is considered paramount; the remainder of this article will therefore apply this structural perspective to illustrate similarities and difference between the structure of the media systems in China and the U.S., focusing on journalism.

Keywords: Communication technology. Media convergence. Americal and Chinese media. Journalism.

Introduction

At the dawn of the 21st century, China has emerged as a dominant power to rival the United States in a number of areas. Mass media play vital roles in both countries, both supporting and challenging the status quo. But each does so in its own way. The philosophy, evolution, and values championed by journalists in both countries can be interpreted as radically different. But despite vast differences in perspectives and practices, news media in China and the United States seem to be pushing each society closer to the other. As communication technology helps to open communication within China, the United States is experiencing new limits to expression and freedoms of speech.

In an age of media convergence, geographical boundaries are fast becoming superfluous as information crisscrosses the globe almost at will. China has the most elaborate system of information control in the world (Walton, 2001). To keep unwanted information out, they have erected "the Great Firewall" and to manage the spread of information within, they have "the Golden Shield". Like its namesake, the Great Firewall is a giant bank of computers and servers that are programmed to identify harmful material and prevent it from being accessed. The shield has only been added the past few years and actively blocks both Web sites and search engines. Despite these efforts, rapid diffusion of information is transforming China at breathtaking speed. As it changes, the democratizing nature of increased information flow brings challenges as well as opportunities to the people.

Just as conversations influence and change participants and bystanders alike, the convergence of technologies, companies, audiences, and societies results in deep and profound changes across all systems within a society. In order to better understand these processes, it is important to examine, compare, and contrast the structure of the American and Chinese media institutions and organizations.

Media System Analysis

A useful paradigm for understanding the role of media in society is Media System Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach, 1985; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). This theory attempts to "explore and explain the role of media in society by analyzing dependency relationships within and across levels of analysis." (Grant, Guthrie, & Ball-Rokeach, 1991). At the structural level, the theory specifically addresses the interdependencies among the media system, the political system, the economic system, and the audience (Ball-Rokeach, 1985).

Economic System → Media System → Political System
Economic System ← Media System ← Political System
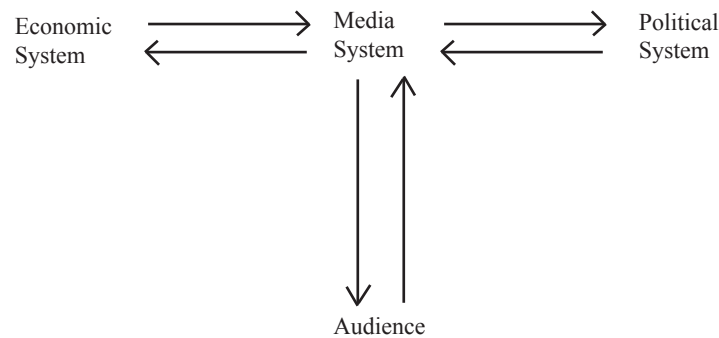Media System ↕ Audience

Figure 1:

Although the specific patterns vary across societies, Ball-Rokeach (1985) identifies a useful set of interdependencies that provide a framework for comparing the U.S. and the Chinese media systems. Each system is dependent upon the others, but those dependency relationships are not necessarily symmetric. These asymmetries help to identify the locus of power in the society.

The specific interdependencies identified by Ball-Rokeach include:
1. The media system is dependent upon the political system for:
   (a) Legitimation
   (b) Capability to generate conflict that is the substance of media content
   (c) Judicial, legislative, and executive protection
2. The political system is dependent upon the media system for:
   (a) Inculcation and reinforcement of political values and norms
   (b) Maintenance of order and obedience to the state
   (c) Mobilization of citizenry
   (d) Controlling and winning inter-system conflict

3. The media system is dependent upon the economic system for:
   (a) Revenue, from advertising
   (b) Corporate growth, via access to capital
   (c) Technological development
4. The economic system is dependent the media system for
   (a) Inculcation and reinforcement of capitalist values
   (b) Access to consumers
   (c) Conflict management between managers and workers or between corporations and regulatory agencies
5. The audience is dependent upon the media system to fulfill personal goals of
   (a) Play
   (b) Orientation
   (c) Understanding
6. The media system is dependent upon the audience for:
   (a) Revenue, from subscriptions
   (b) Attention, which allows audience to be commodified for sale to advertisers
   (c) Access to audience provides influence over political system

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Journalism in China, US

Journalism in the United States is based on the historical notion of a democratic, open, and free press, grounded in the First Amendment to the U.S. constitution that guarantees freedom of the press (Pember and Calvert, 2007). This tradition provides special protection for the news media. For example, it precludes government intervention or censorship before publication (although in extreme cases, there may afterward be action taken against the news organization). Journalists in the U.S. are not licensed or registered; in fact, almost anyone can argue that they are a journalist.

In the U.S., however, different media have evolved under differing regulatory frameworks. Newspapers are governed primarily by laws and legal traditions derived from the First Amendment. On the other hand, U.S. television and radio stations are subject to restrictions on ownership and content based upon the "doctrine of scarcity" related to the fact that the limited spectrum available for broadcasting required increased government control over the medium. Telephony is subject to a third set of rules, derived from "common carrier"

regulations that governed railroads (a vestige of the evolution of telephony from telegraph lines that were first installed parallel to railroad tracks (Pember and Calvert, 2007).

In the U.S. system, the combination of these intertwined regulatory traditions and the interdependence of the media and the economic system lessens the degree of control of the political system over the media system. Journalists, as well as all media organizations, use their position in the society to resist attempts to control news and other content (with varying success).

China Journalism

In post-revolutionary China, an evolving totalitarian state, the role of journalism has traditionally been to promote the general welfare. Supporting the government is the most visible means of accomplishing this goal. The role and purpose of journalists are to maintain stability, harmony, and the existing social order. Broadcast presenters deliver the news in an understated/muted and straightforward manner. Likewise, the newspapers in China are carefully monitored and practice self-censorship as well as submit themselves to government scrutiny.

Press regulation is founded in the concept of "the common good," with specific freedoms and limitations derived from an interpretation of the needs of the people and safeguarded by the Communist Party. Over the past few years, the recognition of the functional power of the press has led to a trend in Chinese journalism whereby investigative teams travel to other provinces to uncover graft and corruption and scandal. They publish their accounts in their home province, but sometimes the subjects of their reports will fight back and ban the reporters from coming back.

Government efforts to work with the press continue to evolve. In February, 2008, revised working rules regarding the press were issued for provincial governments. Officials in Yunnan province, for example, "will be subject to media supervision" according to Xinhua. The province has established a news-reporting system, under which important news is sent to relevant officials every day. The government says that all departments should investigate and rectify the problems reported by the media. (Media to monitor officials, 2008, February 11).

There are other recent examples indicating the government is trying different strategies to manage information and even its image. A veteran Hong Kong journalist was released on parole from a Guangzhou prison in February, 2008, 2 ½ years after being arrested and jailed for spying for Taiwan. The release coincided with the Lunar New Year holidays (Fung and Wu, 2008, February 6). Ching Cheong was serving a five-year jail term. Some experts said it was unusual for those convicted of spying on the mainland to be granted parole and the release was due to political considerations. Ching was a writer for the Singapore newspaper The Strait Times and was arrested for espionage in mid-2005. A number of China

observers said the early release of Ching showed that state leaders have a more open attitude (Hung and Fung, 2008).

But there remains tight control over certain kinds of information, especially almost anything regarding the Communist Party. In 2008, the deputy party secretary of Hohhot, Inner Mongolia and a civil servant were both shot dead by a senior public security official who then killed himself. But reports about the event were removed from major mainland Web sites within hours of their posting (Lee, K, 2008, February 14). Analysts said the authorities were concerned about damage to the government's image. The security official was said to have faced being fired for corruption, bribery, and involvement with gangs, and the killing was simple revenge.

Structural Relationships

From a structural perspective, a key difference between the media systems in China and the U.S. is the degree to which Chinese media are disproportionately dependent upon the political system. Where the U.S. media rely upon the capitalist economic system for financial support, Chinese media have until relatively recently relied entirely upon the political system for financial support. Even though media companies are shifting toward an advertising-based system, the media system in China is therefore an example of an asymmetric dependency relationship, where journalists—and the rest of the media system—are more dependent upon the political system than vice-versa.

Two factors are leading to changes in China's media system: The increased reliance of selected media upon advertising revenue, and a new dimension of the interdependency of the media and the audience. The following section explores this second trend, embodied in the empowerment of audience members as journalists.

Rise of Citizen Journalism in Both Societies

Both countries are grappling with the empowerment of individual audience members as citizen journalists. This change in the media structure has created new opportunities, challenges, and limitations for traditional media organizations that are struggling to negotiate their roles vis-à-vis other social systems..

In the US, the story involving President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky was first broken on Matt Drudge's Web site (Naughton, 2006). Presidential contender John Kerry was infamously "swift-boated" by Republican sympathizers during the 2004 election campaign. The term has entered the popular nomenclature for spinning disinformation about a public figure. In the 2006 party primary debates, questioners submitted their questions via YouTube (and shown on a huge video wall to home viewers as well as the participants.

In Late 2007, in Hubei province, a construction foreman named Wei saw government officials in a conflict with some villagers. He took video on his cell

phone. They saw him and witnesses say more than 50 inspectors turned on him and beat him to death. The blogosphere in China was outraged, and the government had no choice but to intervene. Police detained 24 officials, investigated more than 100, and fired the chief of the urban administration bureau in the city of Tianmen. Reporters Without Borders protested the killing and stated "Wei is the first 'citizen journalist' to die in China because of what he was trying to film." (Man beaten to death in China for taking pictures, CNN online, January 11, 2008).

Another example of how the Web is changing events by spreading information the authorities don't want disseminated occurred in Hong Kong during Lunar New Year holidays in February, 2008. The Internet was at the forefront of a scandal involving young celebrities and photos involving nudity and sexual activity. A computer technician stumbled upon the photos while repairing movie icon Edison Chen's computer hard drive and promptly posted dozens of the pictures on the Internet. Police were quick to intervene, tracking down and arresting eight people for uploading or passing them along to others. This resulted in a demonstration by net users who decried such a clampdown in a city operating according to so-called Western principles of law and justice (Chow and But, February 9, 2008).

The U. S. and Chinese cases represent the same phenomenon. In each case, individuals outside of the traditional media system took the initiative to gather and convey information to the public, eroding the role of traditional journalists and media organizations to control the flow of information.

TV news in China

In order to understand the content of television news in China, the structural role of Chinese television must be examined. The look and feel of local TV news is sedate, conservative, without emotion or chatty crosstalk. The stories themselves are mundane and non-threatening. They tackle the top stories and those that benefit or improve the society. This content is a logical result of the dependence of Chinese television upon the political system, with the content predominantly reflecting the needs and goals of the government rather than those of the audience or the economic system.

Huang and Yu (1997) provided an in-depth account of how television and radio stations have consistently been under the control of the Maoists since 1949. They note that TV stations in particular have been focal points for intra-Party power struggles (p.33).

The history of broadcast journalism in China demonstrates thee dependence of the media system upon the political system. During the 1960s, almost no TV series were produced other than those designed to support Mao and his government. Huang and Yu (1997) note that, even in 1970, a British broadcaster visiting China found "within a 26-minute principal evening news broadcast by the Beijing TV station, 18 minutes were devoted to rolling captions of chairman Mao's quotations

against a background of music praising Mao." (p. 35). An NBC news team in Hong Kong had a similar experience with the Guangdong TV stations during this time. After monitoring the programs aired by the Guangdong Provincial TV Stations for three consecutive weeks in 1970, they noted:

> "The TV broadcasts started at 7 p.m. with Mao's portrait on the screen and the sound of 'The East Is Red,' China's unofficial national anthem. These were followed by newscasts of such topics as commemoration of heroes, the work of educated youth in a remote village, reception of foreign visitors by the Chinese leaders, and the 'heroic struggle' of the North Vietnamese. Next came revolutionary ballet and films, usually old Chinese movies about the anti-Japanese war or the war waged by the Communist Party against the Nationalists.... At 10:30 p.m., the station signed off. "(p. 36).

Compared to a generation ago, China broadcast journalism has come a very long way. It continues to be an important and well-monitored institution and dependent upon the political system. But as editorial controls are constantly re-evaluated, some broader, more structural nation-building issues take precedent. For example, there continues to be an ongoing debate in China about the use of local dialects in broadcast news. In particular, Cantonese has come under fire by the government which insists that Putonghua should be used for news reporting on the mainland (Lee, K., February 11, 20008). Defenders say reporting news in the local dialect preserves local culture in a nation that prides itself on cultural diversity. Guangdong province, which speaks Cantonese dialect, has been repeatedly criticized for having the highest number of programmes broadcast in the local dialect in China. A presenter for one local television station said the use of Cantonese was approved by authorities, and since Putonghua news is available in every province, they all have subtitles so there is no problem (Lee, K., February 11, 2008).

Technological improvements must also be considered. In Hong Kong, high-definition televisions have been approved to be installed in taxis (Mak, February 11, 2008). Eight-inch wireless screens will deliver programs and advertisements over a mobile channel run by media firm InMedia. The channel would show videos related to fashion, beauty, recommend travel and dining, and other commercials. Passengers would have the option of turning down the sound. After the experiment with commercial speech, there will be the issue of how to add other types of desired information such as news, sports, and weather.

Issues of content and control will continue to be of interest. In January, 2008, the broadcasting authority in China chastised a provincial TV station for violating a ban on lewd programming. The State Administration of Radio Film and Television said Hubei People's TV rebroadcast shows that were banned earlier. Although no information was provided about the programming, references to "sex lives, sexual experiences, sexual reflections, sex organs and the effects of sex tonics" were involved. (Agency blasts breach of ban on lewd TV shows, January 26, 2008).

A major speech by Communist Party Leader Hu Jintao in January 2008 urged officials to "breathe new life" into government propaganda. His comments reflected growing concern that officials were losing their edge in the face of the Internet and other independent sources of information and entertainment. TV stations in China continue to push the boundaries in order to attract viewers. These changes may reflect increasing dependence of Chinese television upon the economic system and the audience, as the media realizes the potential for increased financial support from the economic system rather than the political system. Examples of the new content include TV talent shows that have become popular, adapted from western shows like "America's Next Top Model" and "American Idol."

American Television News

In the U.S., almost all news media are dependent upon advertising or subscriptions for revenue. As a result, all content—including journalism—is focused on attracting the largest possible audience, maximizing revenues. This pattern of dependencies leads to a disproportionate amount of sensational content and a presentation that relies as much upon entertainment value, flash, and showiness as upon solid journalism. American television and cable network programmers are also routinely accused of pushing beyond accepted boundaries of taste and decorum. Both China and the United States will continue to grapple with the audience desire for content that may be deemed to be "pleasurable but harmful."

Recent Trends in American Journalism

The American media landscape is dramatically changing. The Internet has evolved from a large-scale computer network to take its place as an integral part of the media system. As with any new distribution medium, traditional media organizations are exploiting the new technology side-by-side with start-up media organizations, expanding the scope—and the power—of the media system. All serious news organizations have a Web presence. Many newsrooms now adopt a "Web-first" strategy where stories may be broken on the Web site, then repurposed and either broadcast or printed in a newspaper or magazine. As audience media use changes, so also the economics seem poised to morph into something completely different from past generations. Traditional media now compete with blogs and YouTube with mixed results (State of the media, 2007/2008), representing a challenge to traditional interdependencies.

In addition, convergence in technologies, ownership, and audiences has resulted in huge changes in the American landscape. U.S. media organizations are looking for ways to certify, verify accuracy, and avoid "swift boating" from the blogosphere.

Convergent communication technologies have blurred the boundaries separating traditional journalism and citizen journalism, mass media, and the

blogosphere. In the 1990s, few anticipated the coming of YouTube. Now, almost anything can be considered "content" and even "news" at any given time.

Media education has become ubiquitous, and there seems no limit to how young a child can be to get on-air experience (Kohlenberg, 2003). For journalism and mass communication to survive as professions, crafts, or vocations, it seems some setting of standards is needed. But credentialing and enforcing those standards has been an insurmountable problem to date. From a structural perspective, any attempt for external actors to set standards has the potential to reduce the power of the media. Ironically, the emergence of citizen journalists also challenges the power of the media.

Calls for standards by the industry are seen as mere attempts to control. A December, 2007 op-ed piece in the New York Times by several Deans of noted Journalism programs expressed concerns about "opinion journalism" and the need for standards in the new media environment. They stated "we do not believe that the market can be absolutely trusted to provide the local news gathering that the American system needs to function at its best.' ("A License for Local Reporting", 2007, December 22). But a response by blogger Steve Boriss (The future of news.com, December 23) likened the views of the "so-called scholars" to that of religious cults and Karl Marx.

Two weeks earlier there was similar outrage among citizen journalists when a journalism professor and former network correspondent called for some form of licensing and/or standards. An aggressive response by Dan Gillmor at the Center for Citizen Journalism (and the posts by other citizen journalists) attacked the notion and argued the traditional view long held by big media and journalism professors alike, that of self-regulation:

> "The media industry and journalism educators do have a valuable role to play in all this. It's to teach media literacy for a media-saturated world. That is not about regulation or do-it-this-way standards. It's about helping media audiences and creators alike to understand how media and persuasion work. For journalists, citizen or otherwise, it is very much about principles and ultimately honor. For the audiences, we need to instill deep, critical thinking and a solid grasp of media techniques.

> Let's regulate ourselves to end up with a diverse, vibrant journalistic ecosystem that serves and informs us." (http://citmedia.org/blog/12/13/needed0-regulation-to-prevent-journalists-turned-professors-from-embarrassing-themselves." (Gillmor, 2007, December 13).

This battle reflects the realization of the challenges that the issues of standards and citizen journalism represent to the interdependent locus of the media system in relation to the audience and other systems. The challenge to the media is maintaining its structural position—and its power in society—as it faces the increasing influx of citizen journalists and new media organizations.

A different challenge has been presented by the political system. In the past decade, there have been increasing instances of government-sponsored or created

media. More disturbingly is that the content of these media releases are often not identified as such. The blurring of lines between public relations, journalism, and government propaganda has entered a potentially dangerous area. In the past few years, policies such as No Child Left Behind and the Medicaid bill were pushed on the public through professionally-crafted content that was thought to be impartial and unbiased journalism. The budget for public relations contracts (which resulted in media releases and reports) during George W. Bush's first term was over 250-million dollars. This was double the amount spent in the previous term by the Clinton administration (Barstow and Stein, 2005).

Perhaps the most telling example of how institutions of government are developing resources to persuade the public is to visit the official U.S. government Web site. As children tend to be less sophisticated and more trusting of authority figures, U.S. government includes specific information campaigns to present its views directly to children (http://www.whitehouse.gov/kids/).

Government efforts to bypass journalism and media organizations are not limited to the federal government. Local institutions such as police departments have also changed the dynamic using technology and in-house media skills. A generation ago, the staple of novice reporters was to be assigned "police beat" where the rookie reporter went to the police station to look through stacks of filed reports. The power of decision-making was in the hands of the reporter who could select to follow-up on anything that seemed interesting. Today that system has changed, ostensibly to make the reporter's job easier but it may result in a slightly less-informed public.

Recorded police announcements are provided to media with what they have determined to be newsworthy. As news organizations become smaller and leaner, time becomes important. The temptation to accept being spoon-fed news items may be too great to resist. But this capability essentially gives editorial control to the police. This practice does not become an issue until something happens the police don't want publicized. If the newsroom deems it to be newsworthy, it might become difficult for the journalist to seize back the role of gatekeeper and watchdog.

The technologies are also being used to create new forms of police news and information. Many residents in New York City no longer need rely on the media for crime news. The NYPD Web site regularly provides podcasts with the latest local police news. Such a service may sound like journalism, but it is still sponsored, controlled, and presented by the public relations arm of a government institution.

The Internet and Control of Content, Information

The Internet is positioned to become a powerful new force that will play a major role in the evolving interdependencies among the Chinese media system and other

Chinese systems. The Ministry of Information Industry in China announced in February, 2008 that by the end of the year broadband services would reach more than 95% of villages. Some central and eastern provinces were expected to have all their townships and villages wired by the end of 2008. By the end of 2007, broadband access was reported to reach 92% of all villages nationwide (More villages to get broadband 2008, February 11).

The key to understanding the role that the Internet will play in China is recognizing the role of the political system in building and controlling this deveopment. Throughout 2008, China's Ministry of Public Security will conduct an "Internet purification" campaign to clear obscene pictures, articles and videos from cyberspace in China. Search engines and weblogs are targeted for being a main channel of pornographic information distribution, according to the ministry. Editors of online forums and chat rooms must register their real names. In 2007, censors shut down 44,000 web sites, removed 440,000 pornographic videos and arrested 868 suspects, according to Xinhua (Campaign on Web porn extended to September; 2008, February 17).

China's top authority on maintaining social order announced it would target the Internet in 2008. The Central Committee for Comprehensive management of Public Security announced it would step up surveillance and control over virtual communities of the Internet (Watchdog targets Internet, February 13, 2008).

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the Beijing Olympic Committee said there is debate whether to relax control of the Internet during the Olympics, allowing access to banned Web sites such as the BBC. Officials hope the move would be "one of the ways the Olympics may promote progress in China" (Agence France Presse, 2008, February 6).

But the economic system is making inroads into control over the Internet in China. The country's most popular search engine is Baidu.com. At the end of 2007, Baidu.com held a 60% share compared to Google at 26% and Yahoo China at nearly 10%. The China search engine market reached 946.6 million yuan in the fourth quarter of 2007, almost double the previous year (Baidu leads search engine market with 60pc share, 2008, January 26). Meanwhile, China's second-largest Internet portal, Sohu.com, reported doubling fourth-quarter 2007 profits because of its popular new online game, Tian Long Ba Bu. Profits jumped from $6 million to $15 million on total revenues of US$65 million. Active paying accounts (players) numbered above one million, growing by 100,000 per month the previous quarter.

But growth in the economic system includes retrenchment in other areas. Even as Sohu.com enjoys huge profits, some changes and accommodations must be made. China continues to deal with the issue of piracy and intellectual property. Sohu.com is being sued by global music labels for copyright infringement in MP3 search services offered by its subsidiary Sogou. Sponsored search contributed

US$1.5 million to Sohu's revenue the final quarter of 2007, roughly half the amount of the previous year (So, February 6, 2008).

In addition, a new interpretation of the mainland's piracy law has spawned additional lawsuits against other Web companies. In 2005, the piracy laws contained a loophole enabling portals to claim that since they were not the source of the piracy, they had no liability. This loophole was changed in 2006. Search engines such as Yahoo China and Baidu must also deal with lawsuits involving illegal music downloads (So, February 12, 2008).

These signs that China is cracking down on piracy and upholding intellectual property rights are even extending to traditional media. In early 2008, producers of government-sponsored China Central Television were accused of copyright infringement. CCTV's Spring Festival Gala resulted in a lawsuit against the producers for copyright infringement by a photographer named Li, who recognized his work in one of the performance skits. The photographer hired a lawyer and hoped to set an example and be given compensation. (Ng, T-W, 2008, February 14).

But even in the midst of these examples of give-and-take, the political system is continuing to exercise its dominance. In February, 2008, the Chinese government announced a ban the sale of audio and video products that contain "elements of mystery and horror", a move it said was aimed at protecting children from being psychologically or emotionally harmed. A notice from the General Administration of Press and Publications said such products "involve alien-looking characters and fictional storytelling, both specifically plotted for the sole purpose of terror." This was yet another move by state censors to curb questionable content, although usually the efforts target sexual material. Xinhua said this effort first started in April, 2006, targeting a Japanese comic called Death Note, about a notebook that could kill people if their names were written in it. (Lee, K., 2008, February 14).

Governmental institutions are also employing media technologies in other ways to maintain structural balance. Chinese police officers in Kunming, Yunnan province, will wear hats with videocameras to collect evidence while on duty. The Chuncheng Evening Post reported that the small cameras would be used when large groups of suspects were involved (Police to wear cameras, 2008, February 14).

Conclusion: The Power of the Web?

In Hong Kong, in February 2008, a couple of hundred "netizens" representing the "Web community" demonstrated in Hong Kong to protest heavy-handed police tactics in a crackdown on some illegally-obtained obscene photos of local celebrities. The police defended their actions but what was striking was just how little power this so-called Web community had. They were able to call attention to over-aggressive police enforcement, but addressing the issue quickly fell to traditional media and other institutions for follow-up.

At the same time in America, a few thousand regular users of eBay were protesting a new rate structure and changed policy guidelines (CNN, Feb 10, 2008). A spokesperson for eBay said this was not going to affect anything.

The thing these two events have in common is that they demonstrate how the Web can—at times—hold virtually no power or ability to marshal groups of people together to affect change.

Much has been written about the ways the WWW has changed the world. The Web has altered practices in politics (Web blogs), entertainment (YouTube), music (digital downloads vs. store-bought content), business (Amazon, eBay), education (Wikipedia), travel (Priceline), social networking (Facebook), and personal expression (Myspace).

While scholars have often written about the unlimited capability of the Web to change society, there is also the need to understand the actual limitations. The Web is most effective when it is an active medium. Boycotts on the Web do not seem to work so well. Perhaps it's because audiences actively choose from a variety of possibilities. Because there is no time or geographical constraints, almost any site may be visited by the estimated 1.3 billion persons online globally (World Internet Stats, 2008).

Conversely, there is no equivalent (yet) to the compelling image of people with signs standing outside a company headquarters makes headlines while someone sending a virtual petition with thousands of names to the same company is ignored. This is not to say that there is no way to protest online; there are. But the Web works best when it cultivates activity; when people coalesce online and take a concerted action (besides sending a petition which is actually somewhat similar to "real" protests when they give someone a list of names). Protests are by definition pro-active. Even sit-ins are proactive because people must actually go someplace and physically be removed by others who don't want them there.

Media technological convergence helps us see two pendulums swinging toward each other. Truth, balance, harmony may exist somewhere in the middle. The result may be to see a global standard emerge for the practice of journalism. It is both a 4th estate and check on government/a watchdog, as well as an institution that works with other institutions (government, military, business, education) to safeguard the society.

As China becomes increasingly interdependent with other nation-states, the internal institutions will also adjust to maintain stability both inside and outside its borders. Convergence is bringing a number of changes and opportunities for the government as well as the citizenry to influence the ways by which the media remain relevant. The Internet continues to shape every nation in a different way, at a different rate, and with perhaps a different end. Media system dependency theory helps us understand how the Chinese and American political systems grapple with these changes, and the issues that will emerge in the future.

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