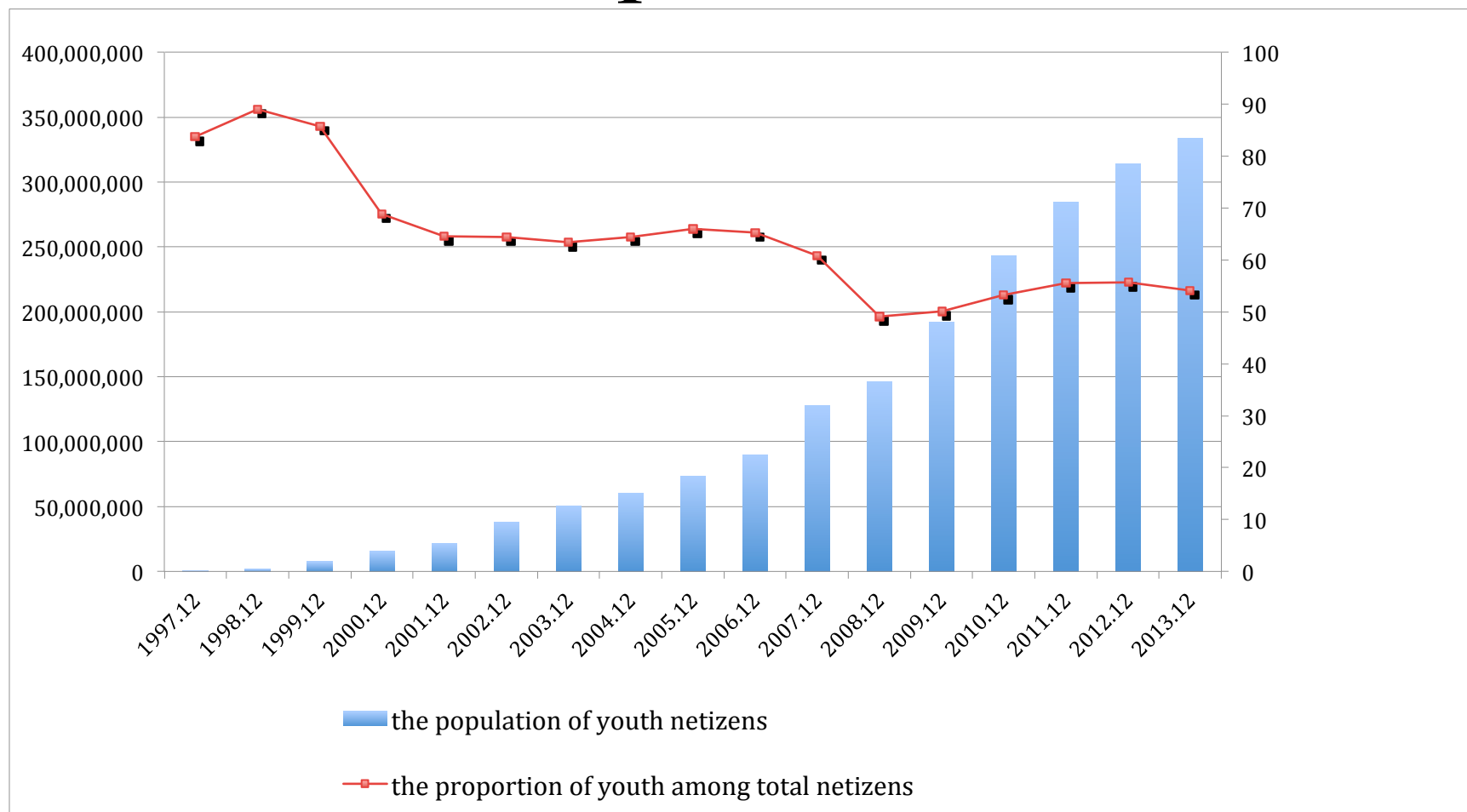# 'DIGITAL NATIVE' IN CHINA: FROM ENTERTAINMENT TO POLITICS

SHI Yunqing

Institute of Sociology,

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Youth Population Online

The age definition of youth: 16-35 in 1997-1998; 18-35 in1999-2007; 19-39 in 2008-2013.
Sources: CNNIC Internet Survey (1997-2013)

Little empire in digital globalization

Only Child

Rich in digital resources
Digital devices: 1.8/person
99% owns a cellphone
        80% smartphone
89% owns a computer
Internet access: 99% (46%)
Mobile internet access: 80% (81%)

Market

The rise of consumerism & individualization
Online shopping:94% (43%)

Urbanization

New way for association
Access to SNS 64% (49%)
Access to Weibo 83% (65%)
Follow friends : 66%
Follow interests group: 36%

Globalization

Lifestyle/subculture affected by information globalization
American TV series 37.7% ;
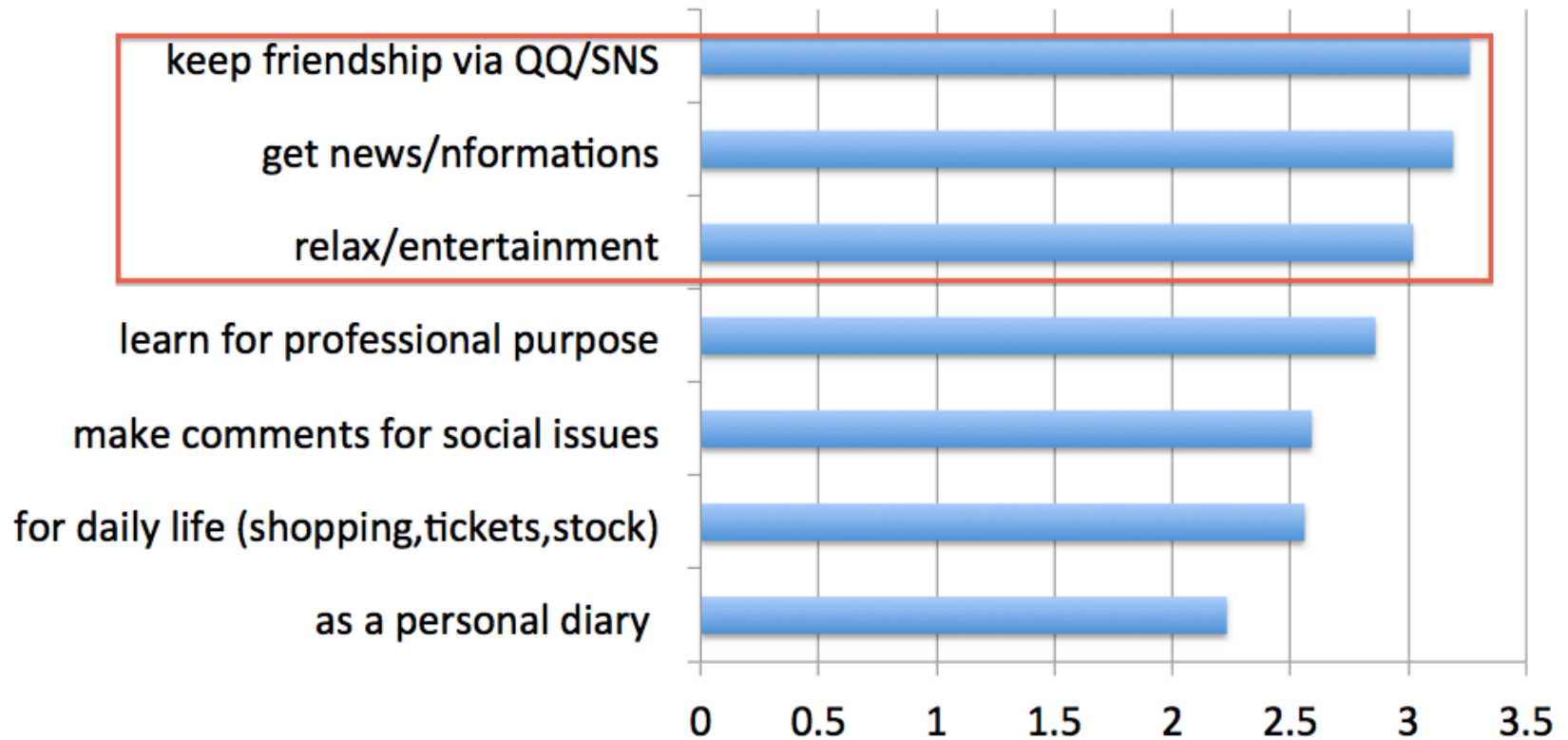American and European pop music 31.4％

Sources: 1) Panel Study of Chinese Colleagues Students (2013.9)
             2) numbers in () are from CNNIC Internet Survey for National Netizens (2013.12)

Living digital in China：
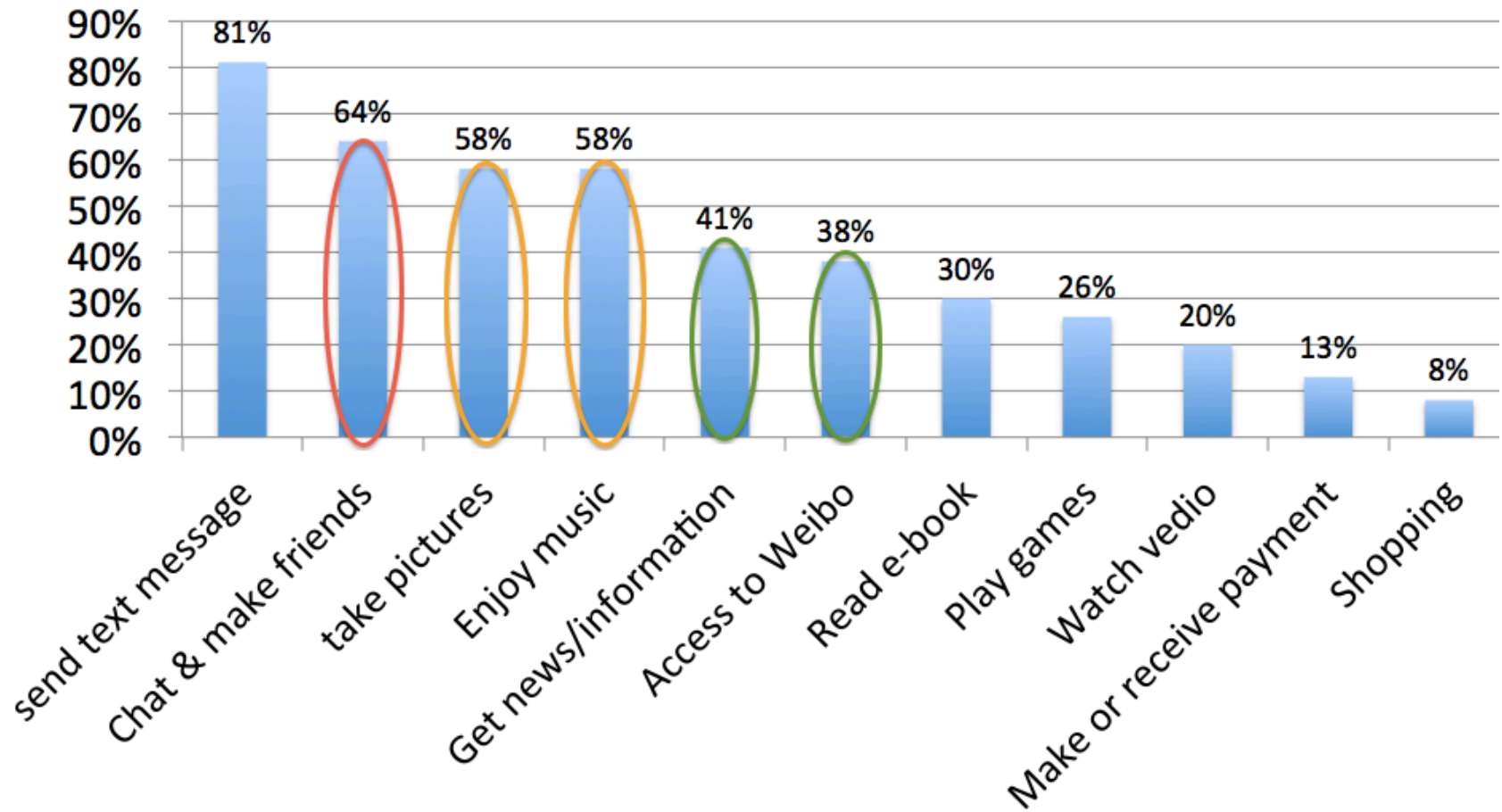# Politics？ Entertainment？

Most common actives with computer in high-educated youth

Horizontal bar chart showing (from top to bottom):
- keep friendship via QQ/SNS — ~3.25
- get news/nformations — ~3.2
- relax/entertainment — ~3.0
- learn for professional purpose — ~2.85
- make comments for social issues — ~2.6
- for daily life (shopping,tickets,stock) — ~2.55
- as a personal diary — ~2.25

X-axis: 0, 0.5, 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, 3, 3.5

Never＝1；seldom＝2；often＝3；always＝4
Data Sources: The panel study of Chinese college students (2013)

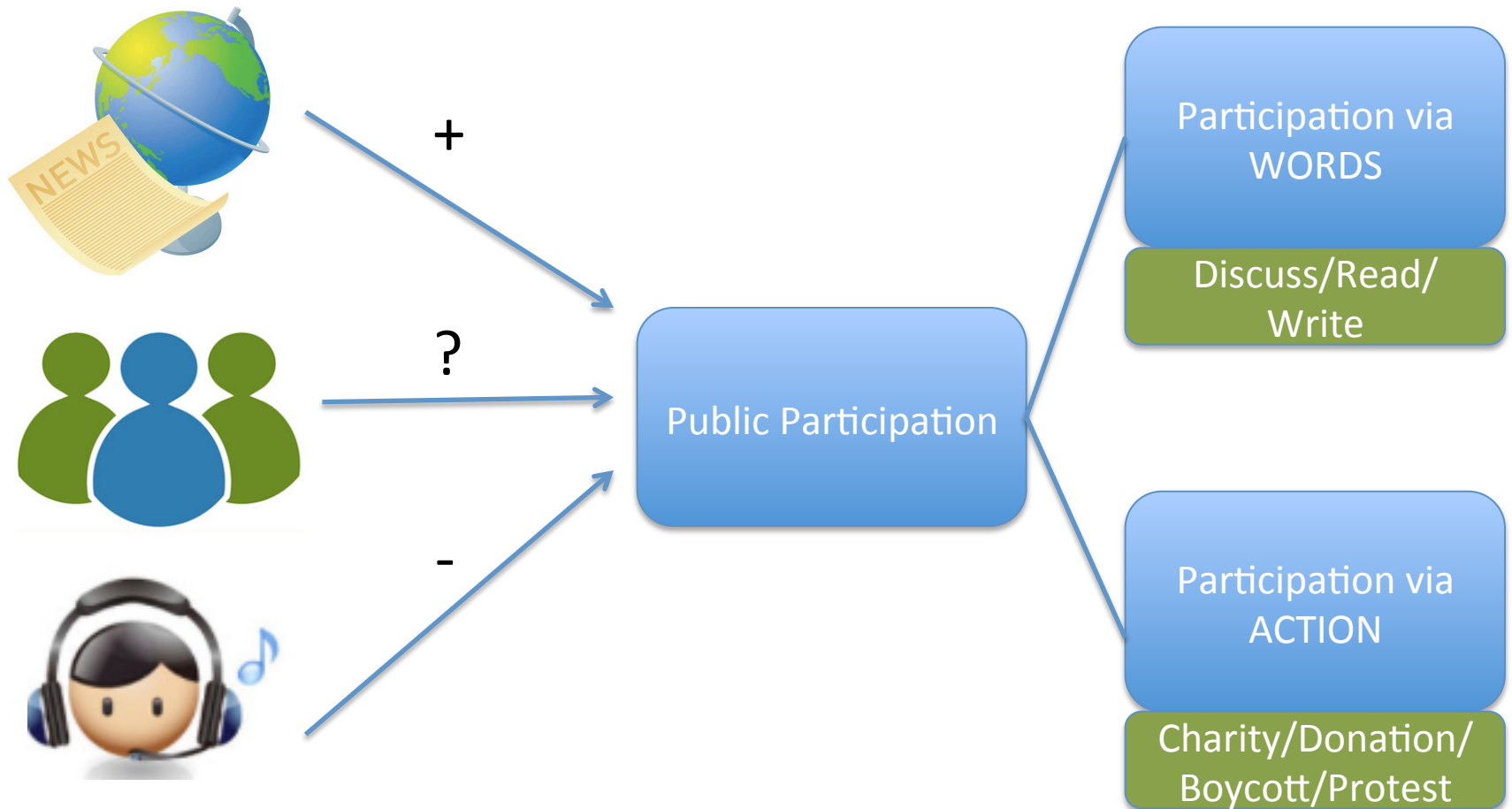# Most common actives with cell phone in high-educated youth

Activity	Percentage
send text message	81%
Chat & make friends	64%
take pictures	58%
Enjoy music	58%
Get news/information	41%
Access to Weibo	38%
Read e-book	30%
Play games	26%
Watch vedio	20%
Make or receive payment	13%
Shopping	8%

Data Sources: The panel study of Chinese colleague students (2013)

Most important things in digital life for college students:
Social, Information, Relax

Online behavior ＊Public Participation?

Measurement for Public Participation

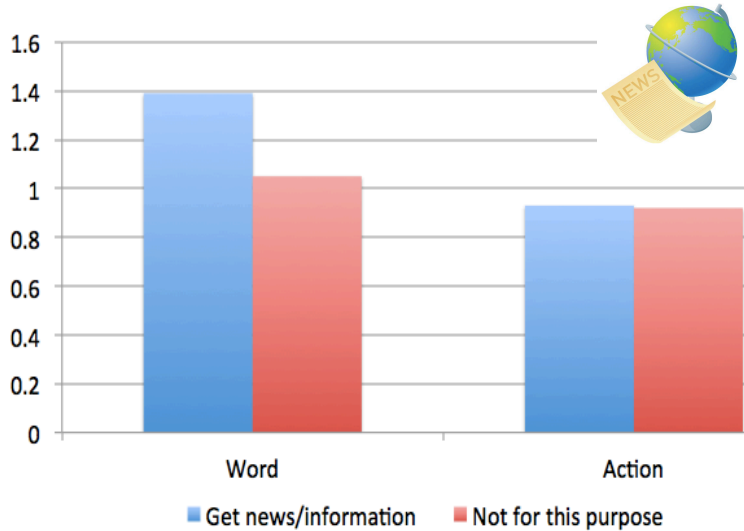- Have you done following things in past 12 months? (score 0-7)

  WORDS

  - Discuss public affairs with friends and relatives voluntarily.
  - Read and search for socialpolitial news from newspapers and magazines
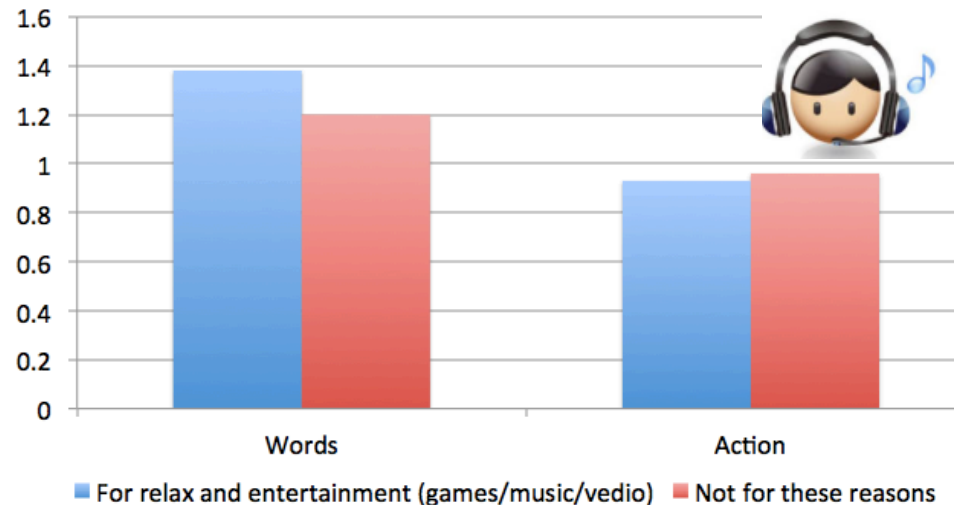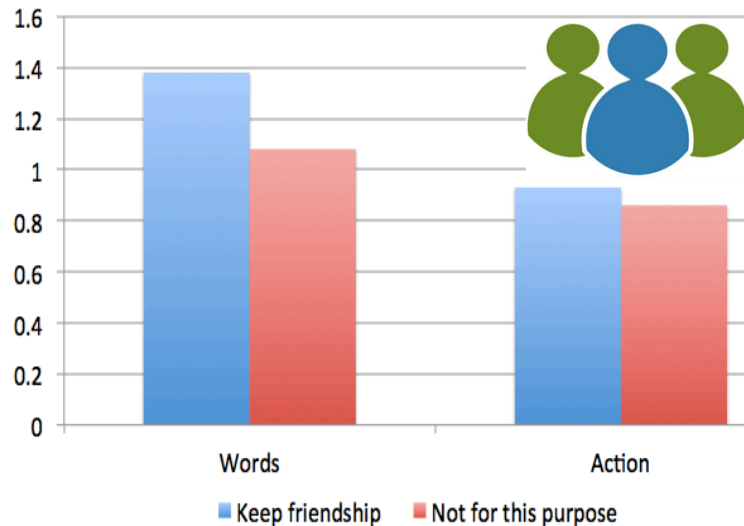 - Write comments or participate discussion in public on socialpolital events.

  ACTION

  - Participate social charity activities voluntarily
  - Donate money or goods to social events voluntarily
  - Boycott certain products due to socialpolitical reasons
  - Participate in activities like protest , demonstration and strike.

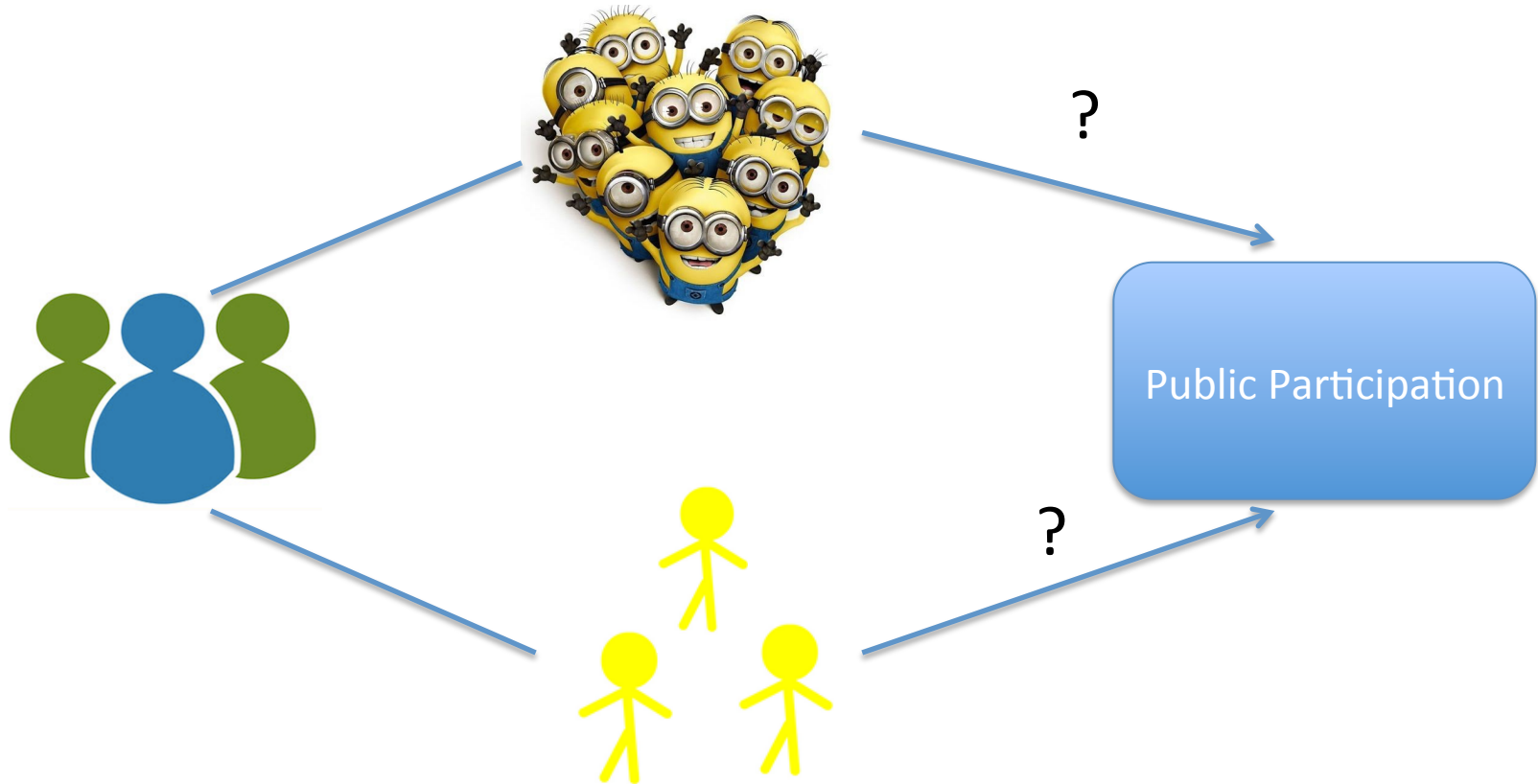# Online behavior ✻ Public Participation?

information: + words
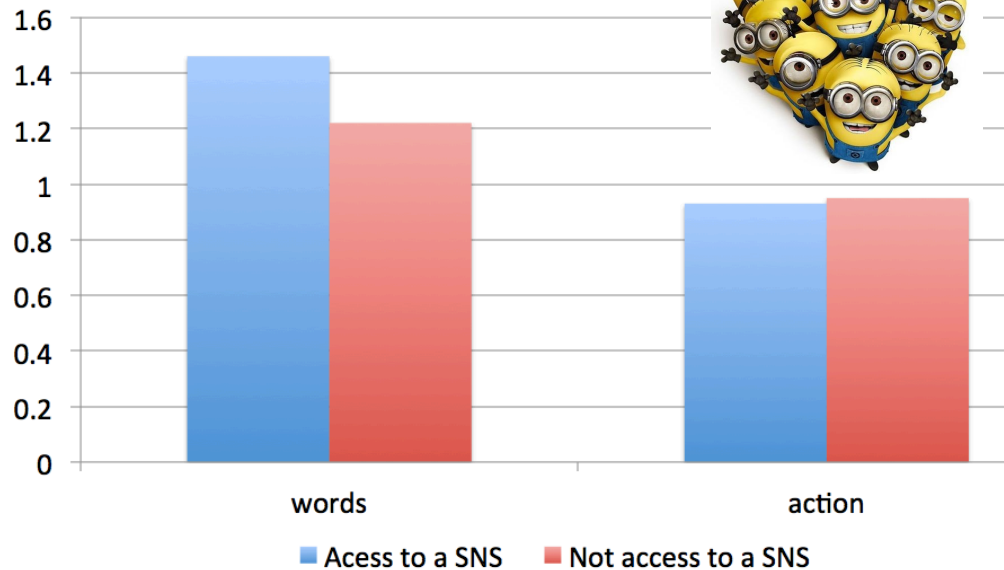social: +words; + action
relax: +words; - action

Social ties: Friends or strangers?
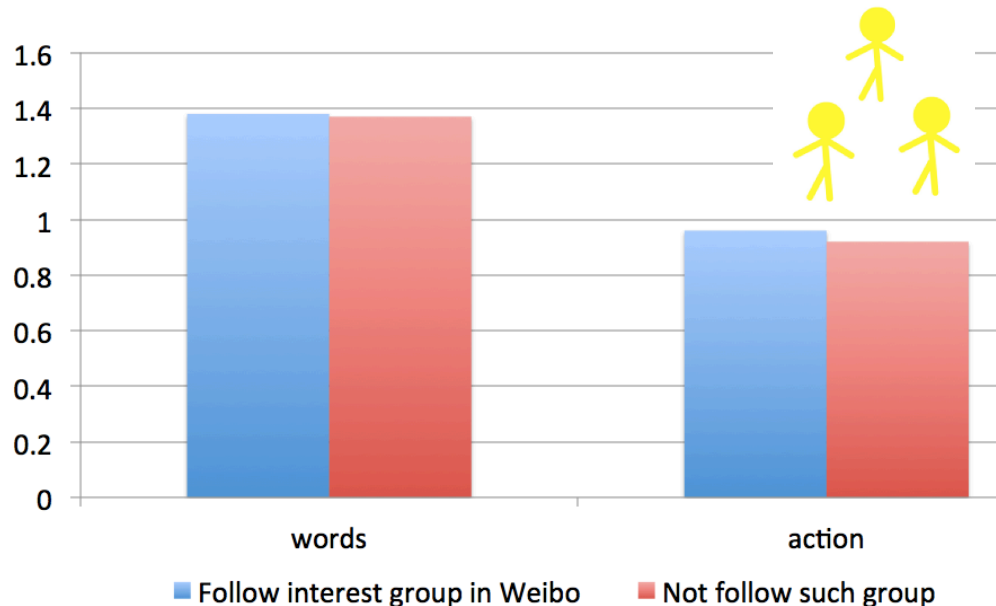
Family/friends/colleagues (who you know in real)

?

?

Public Participation
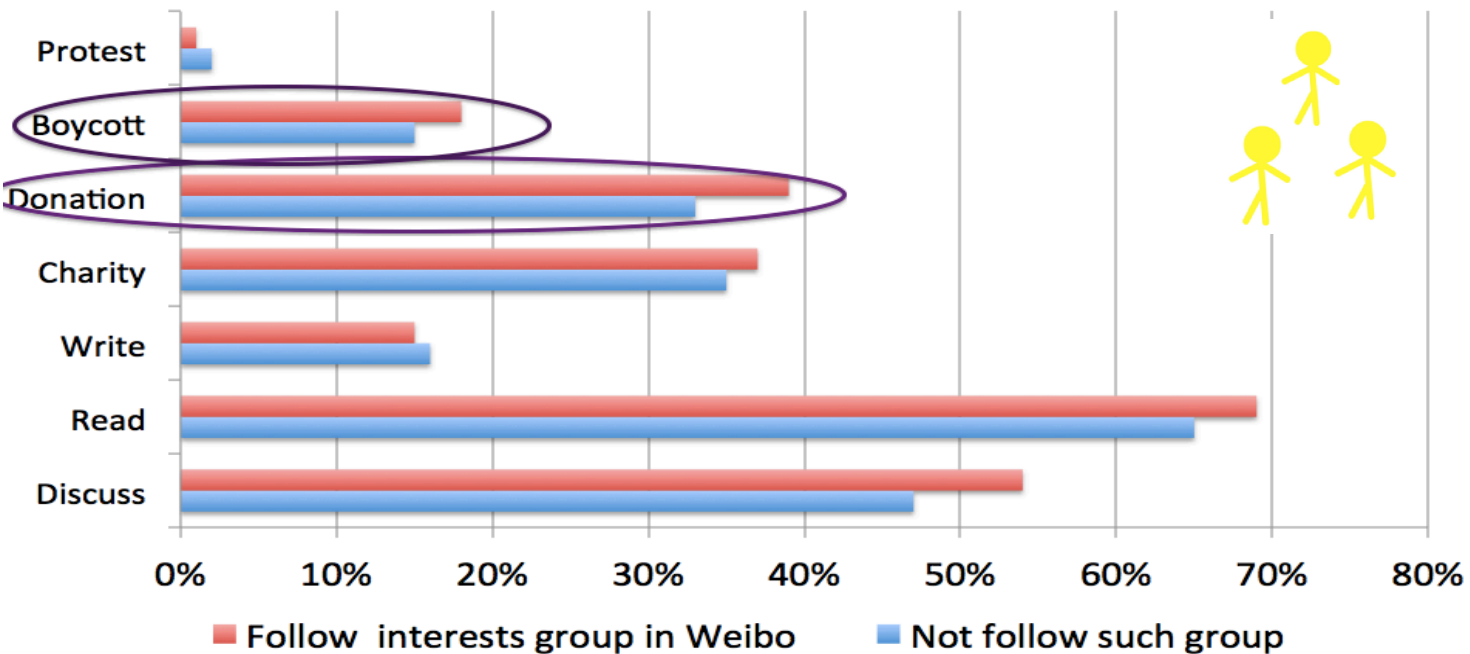
Who Share the same interests/identity with you (strangers online)

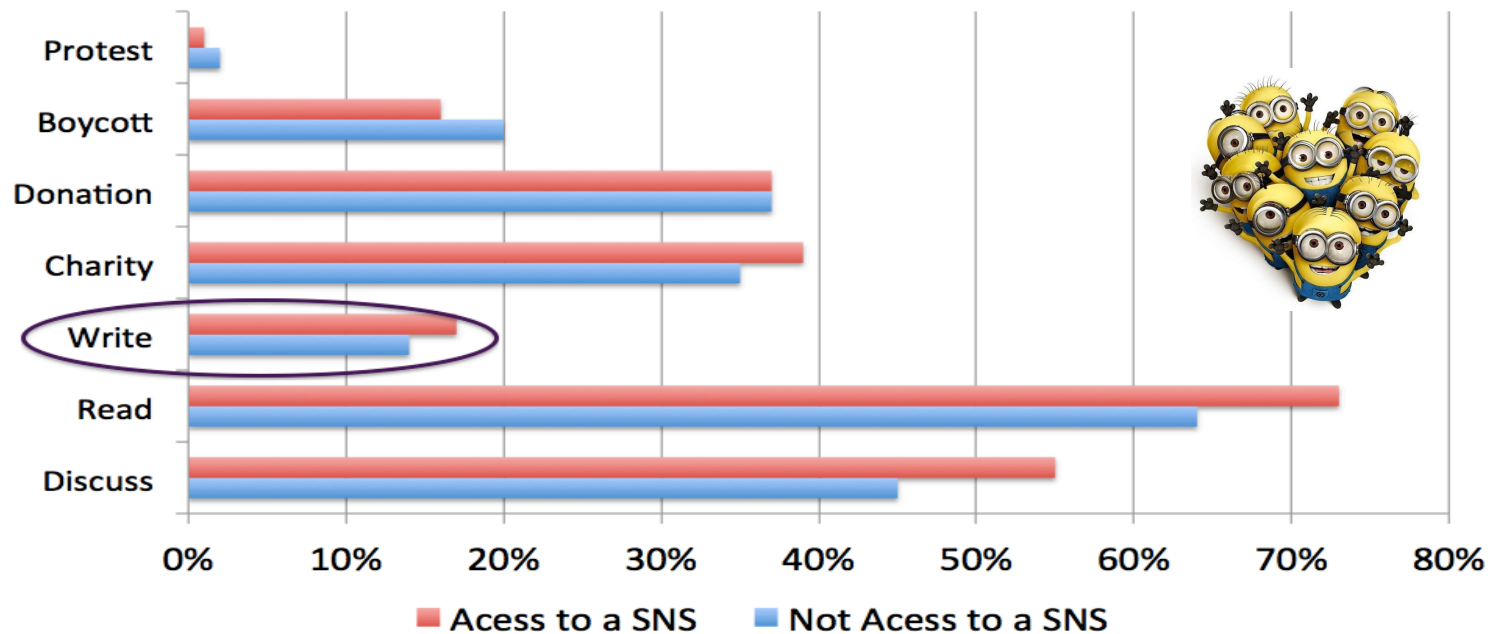**SNS** (Renren.com) for Participation via WORDS

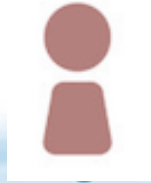Existing social ties for the produce and travel of information

Interests group for Participation via ACTION

Join in online interest groups may help develop individualism, which may indicate the emergence of new social association based on sharing identity but not Guanxi. Thus it facilitates the participation via action.

Chart 1 legend: Acess to a SNS / Not Acess to a SNS

Chart 1 categories (top to bottom): Protest, Boycott, Donation, Charity, Write, Read, Discuss

X-axis: 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%

Chart 2 legend: Follow interests group in Weibo / Not follow such group

Chart 2 categories (top to bottom): Protest, Boycott, Donation, Charity, Write, Read, Discuss

X-axis: 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%

The emergence of new social association
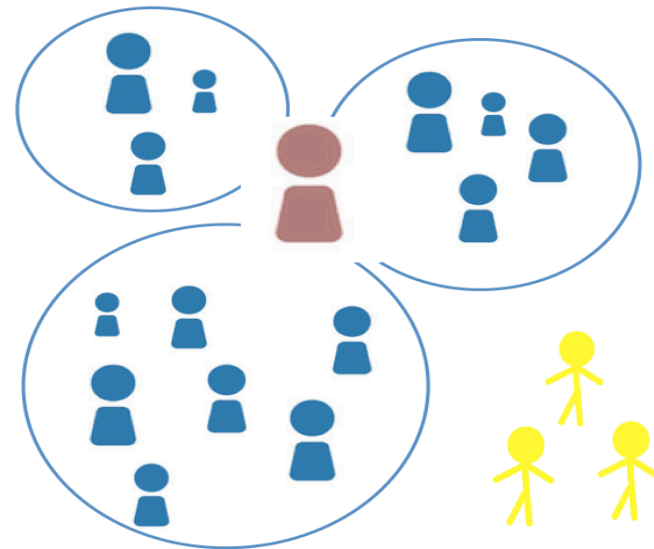
The differential mode of associations for friends

The group mode of associations for strangers

Dependent self set in the center
Layers indicates the relationships (Guanxi)
The farther, the weaker.

Strangers is nowhere in this mode.
Action with strangers is hard.

Independent self chooses membership by joining in online interest groups.
Circles indicates identities, getting self and strangers together.

The rise of individualism and new social association, facilitating public action.

Last but not least:
Digital Content with Political Implications

- Information Paternalism
  - Information Paternalism is the belief that too much information is harmful to society and that it is the state's job to be a gatekeeper that protects citizens from harmful information. (Wang, 2013)
    - Source： Wang, T. (2013). *Talking to Strangers: Chinese Youth and Social Media*, PH. D. Dissertation of Philosophy in Sociology, University of California, San Diego
- Digital hidden transcript
  - "Public Transcripts" and "Hidden Transcript" are a pair of concepts termed by American Sociologist James Scott to elaborate the social interaction between dominant and subordinate social groups. In his opinion, as the powerless are not free to speak their minds in the presence of power, these subordinate groups instead create a secret discourse that represents a critique of power spoken behind the backs of the dominant. It is "Hidden Transcript" that indicates the ideological resistance of subordinate groups.

Digital hidden transcript

www.vancl.com
400-616-8888

VANCL 凡客诚品

圆领印花短袖T恤
RMB 29

I SEE YOU

爱网络,爱自由,
爱晚起,爱夜间大排档,
爱赛车,也爱29块的T-SHIRT,
我不是什么旗手,
不是谁的代言,
我是韩寒,
我只代表我自己。我和你一样,
我是凡客

Love internet, love freedom,
Love sleeping in, love night booths,
Love racing car, love ￥29 T-shirt,
I am a banner-barer for nowhere,
I am a spokesman for nobody,
I am Han Han,
 I just speak for myself. I am just like you,
I am a Fanke (Ordinary traveler)

Digital hidden transcript

Loving strolling through streets , loving sweeping away goods,
Loving race, loving environment, loving cups (tragedies),
Loving shining shoes,
Loving putting in uniforms to bring others under control most,
We are the most attractive group in the world,
Everyone screams at the fist sight they see us.
We are the city inspectors.
We will rule the world.

Conclusion

- Digital entertainment- public participation -politics
- Social media for friends -public participation via WORDS.
  - Chinese youth is willing to getting information from friends as well as share personal opinions with them.
- Social media for strangers - public participation via ACTON.
  - Especially the non-contentious action
  - The youth in digital age is learning to interact with strangers through online groups with same interests or identity
  - Indicating the emerging new social associations.
- Digital hidden transcript is a complex combination of entertainment and politics under Chinese context.

Thank you!

shiyq@cass.org.cn