‘DIGITAL NATIVE’ IN CHINA: FROM ENTERTAINMENT TO POLITICS

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Youth Population Online

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 activities with computer in high-educated youth

- keep friendship via QQ/SNS
- get news/information
- relax/entertainment
- learn for professional purposes
- make comments for social issues
- for daily life (shopping, tickets, stock)
- as a personal diary

Never = 1; seldom = 2; often = 3; always = 4

Data Sources: The panel study of Chinese college students (2013)
Most common activities with cell phone in high-educated youth

- 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 video: 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?

Public Participation

+

?

-

Participation via WORDS

Discuss/Read/Write

Participation via ACTION

Charity/Donation/Boycott/Protest
Measurement for Public Participation

• Have you done following things in past 12 months? (score 0-7)
  • Discuss public affairs with friends and relatives voluntarily.
  • Read and search for socialpolitical news from newspapers and magazines
  • Write comments or participate discussion in public on socialpolitical events.
  • 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)

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

Public Participation
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.
The emergence of new social association

The differential mode of associations for friends

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.

The group mode of associations for strangers

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)

• 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.
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)
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 first 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!

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