

## **E-GOVERNMENT USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ENHANCING DEMOCRACY IN CHINA**

*Dr. Jensen J. Zhao, Ball State University, jzhao@bsu.edu*  
*Dr. Sherry Y. Zhao, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, syzhao@alum.mit.edu*  
*Dr. Melody W. Alexander, Ball State University, malexand@bsu.edu*  
*Dr. Allen D. Truell, Ball State University, atruell@bsu.edu*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This study assessed how the Chinese province e-government social media enhance interactive online communication between government and citizens as a means to government transparency, citizens' participation, and democracy. Web analytics and focus interview were used to collect data from the 31 Chinese province official e-government sites. The findings indicate that the majority of the world popular mass media and social media sites were accessible in China. While the majority of the 31 province e-government sites offered email, suggestion box, report fraud box, and WeChat, a popular Chinese chat room tool, only 48% offered Weibo, a Chinese Twitter-like tool, and 39% provided mobile Web service. Many citizens actively participated in (a) commenting on current issues, government initiatives, and new policies; (b) presenting their views and suggestions, and (c) participating in government decisions. Such social media tools clearly served as enablers for enhancing democracy in China.*

**Keywords:** E-Government, Social Media, Government Transparency, Public Participation, Democracy

### **INTRODUCTION**

Democracy is a form of government by the people, in which all citizens have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives. Ideally, this includes citizens' equal, direct or indirect participation in the proposal, development, and passage of legislation into law. Democracy can also encompass social, economic, and cultural conditions that enable the free and equal practice of political self-determination through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections (e.g., Wikipedia, 2015; Merriam-Webster, 2015). With the advancement of Internet technologies, Internet-based social media have empowered the people to engage in democracy campaigns around the globe. According to the January 2014 Statistical Report of China Internet Network Development Status (CNNIC, 2014), Chinese Internet users reached 618 million, which was 45.8% of China's total population. On average, every user spent 25 hours per week on the Internet for business, entertainment, news, school, shopping, social, cultural, and other activities.

To engage citizens for participation in anti-corruption and government transparency, Chinese central and province e-government to citizens (eG2C) sites provided services such as email to top officials, suggestion and complaint box, and report fraud box for citizens' communication and participation in government administration and policies. For example, the eG2C site of the China Ministry of Supervision started the report fraud box on September 2, 2013, and by September 21, 2013, it received 15,253 reports from citizens regarding government officials' corruption, bribery, negligence, malfeasance, or other violations of law (Chen, 2013).

To promote an interconnected world shared and governed by all worldwide, China hosted the First and Second World Internet Conference in November 2014 and December 2015, respectively. Both conferences attracted several thousand of leading figures from governments, international organizations, companies, and science and technology communities around the world for strategic discussions on global Internet security and governance and the Internet industry as an economic growth engine (Tian, 2015; Xinhua, 2014).

China is now the second-largest economy of the world and has the largest population of Internet users in the world. However, no empirical study has been documented in the literature to investigate the impact of e-government use of social media for enhancing democracy in China. This research gap suggests a need for an empirical study. This

paper describes a nation-wide study that assessed how the Chinese e-government use of social media enhances democracy in China.

### **PROBLEM AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The problem addressed in this study was to assess how the Chinese province e-government social media enhances interactive online communication between government and citizens as a means to government transparency, citizens' participation, and democracy. In order to solve the problem, we raised the following four research questions (*RQ*):

1. Which world popular mass media and social media Web sites are available for citizens to access in China?
2. What e-government services and social media tools are available on the Chinese province e-government sites?
3. How do the Chinese e-government social media enable citizens to communicate and participate in government affairs?
4. What are the Chinese citizens' views and experiences of their participation in government affairs via social media?

The primary purpose of the study is to advance the global knowledge base of the social media development in the e-government discipline by including the findings from China that is the second-largest economy of the world and has the largest population of Internet users. Second, the findings of the study would serve as benchmarks for e-government administrators and developers to continuously improve their social media services as a means to government transparency, public participation, and democracy. Finally, the findings would enable educators to update their curricular by including comparative studies of government and public use of Internet-based social media among different countries and adding effective ways of using social media services so that students will be able to choose proper media to meet their online communication and participation needs.

### **METHODS**

Web content analytics and focus interview were used to collect data and answer the research questions of this study. Web content analytics is one of the dominant research methods used for assessing organizations' strategies, deliveries, and interactions to customers, employees, investors, and other stakeholders on their Web sites (e.g., Boggs & Walters, 2006; Campbell & Beck, 2004; Wilkinson & Cappel, 2005; Zhao & Zhao, 2010; Zhao & Zhao, 2015).

To systematically and objectively record what world popular mass media and social media Web sites are available for access in China and how e-governments use social media for government transparency, citizens' participation, and democracy, a random sample of world popular mass media and social media Web sites were prepared and an instrument for assessing e-government use of social media was developed based on the review of related literature (e.g., Awad, 2004; Boggs & Walters, 2006; CNNIC, 2014; King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013; Wilkinson & Cappel, 2005; Zhao, 2003).

To determine whether the world popular mass media and social media sites were available for Chinese citizens to access in China, we randomly selected the following 18 western mass media sites from a pool of 30 world popular mass media sites that were well-known in China: BBC (<http://www.bbc.com/news/>), Boston Globe (<http://www.bostonglobe.com/>), Chinese Readers (<http://www.creaders.net/>), Christian Science Monitor (<http://www.csmonitor.com/>), CNN (<http://www.cnn.com/>), Daily Beast (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/>), Chicago Tribune (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/>), Economist (<http://www.economist.com/>), Fortune Magazine (<http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/>), L.A. Times (<http://www.latimes.com/>), New York Times (<http://www.nytimes.com/>), Sing Tao Net (<http://www.singtaonet.com/>), Time Magazine (<http://www.time.com/time/>), U.S. News & World Report (<http://www.usnews.com/>), Voice of America (<http://www.voanews.com/>), Wall Street Journal (<http://online.wsj.com/home-page/>), Washington Post (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/>), and Wenxue City (<http://www.wenxuecity.com/>).

Similarly, among the randomly selected 20 world popular social media sites for testing their accessibility in China,

nine were in English and the other 11 were in Chinese. The nine English social media sites consisted of Blog (<http://blog.com/>), Chat Room (<http://www.chat-room.com/>), Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/>), Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/>), LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com/>), Google+ (<https://www.google.com/>), Twitter (<https://twitter.com/>), Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/>), YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/>). The 11 Chinese social media sites were Dian Dian (<http://www.diandian.com/>), Dou Ban (<http://www.douban.com/>), Jie Pang (<http://jiepang.com/>), Peng You (<http://www.pengyou.com/>), People's Weibo (<http://t.people.com.cn/>), Ren Ren (<http://www.renren.com/>), Sina Weibo (<http://e.weibo.com/>), Tencent Weibo (<http://t.qq.com/>), WeChat (<http://www.wechat.com/>), Xinhua Weibo (<http://t.home.news.cn/>), and You Ku (<http://www.youku.com/>). Also included in the instrument were email, Web-based suggestion and complaint box, fraud report box, and mobile Web service, which enables users to access e-government social media from mobile devices such as smartphone, iPad, or iPod Touch.

The population of the study was the official e-government sites at the province level. The People's Republic of China consists of 22 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 direct-controlled municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing), and 2 mostly self-governing special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau). Since Hong Kong and Macau are self-governing special administrative regions, they were not included in this study. Therefore, the study included all 31 e-government sites of the 22 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, and 4 direct-controlled municipalities according to the requirement of for sample size (Cochran, 1977).

The instrument for assessing Chinese e-government social media consisted of (a) user-interface design such as homepage, languages, content, navigation convenience, and hyperlink locations; (b) available types of e-government services and social media tools; and (c) social media capacities and activities on e-government sites. The content validity of the instrument was tested by a three-member panel of Web design faculty who had at least five years of teaching, research, and consulting experience with Web design and development for e-business. Panel members agreed that the instrument items addressed issues stated in the problems of the study. The measurement reliability of the instrument was tested by two researchers who are very familiar with Chinese politics, cultures, and society. After a short training session on how to assess the Chinese e-government and social media appropriately, the two raters were assigned to three pilot Chinese e-government sites for the content analysis. The raters worked independently on each site but the same time for Web content consistency. After completing the three pilot sites, an inter-rater correlation coefficient of 98.6% was identified at the .05 significance level.

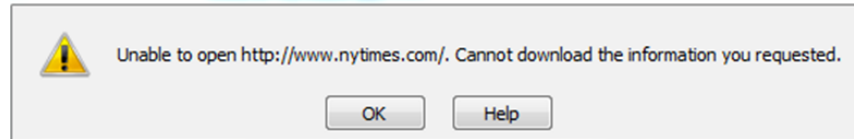
To obtain an in-depth understanding of Chinese citizens' use of e-government social media, a follow-up focus interview was conducted among 36 randomly selected citizens who were local government officials, law enforcement officers, college students, teachers, workers, farmers, or retirees, who represented female and male groups, varied age groups, varied educational backgrounds, and were involved in administering or using the Internet and social media, at various provinces of China. The face-to-face, one-to-one focus interview is a research technique used to understand particular social, economic, and political phenomena inductively by asking the people involved for their in-depth feelings, attitudes, perceptions, or viewpoints concerning the phenomena (e.g., Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991). The open-ended questions of the focus interview asked for interviewees' feelings, views, and experience of (a) the availability of world popular mass media and social media sites in China, (b) e-government services and social media for government transparency and public participation, (c) citizens' use of e-government services and social media and participation in government decisions and policies, and (d) interviewees' overall feelings and experiences of freedom of speech and life in China in the Internet Age.

All the data of Web content analysis and focus interview were collected in January through May 2015 and then coded for analysis. Frequency counts, percentage distributions, means, and standard deviations were prepared.

## RESULTS





















*RQ1* asked, "Which world popular mass media and social media Web sites are available for citizens to access in China?" As Table 1 illustrates, the majority (72%) of the 18 world popular mass-media websites were available for citizens to access in China. This majority consisted of *BBC*, *Boston*, *CNN*, *Daily Beast*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Economist*, *Fortune*, *L.A. Times*, *Time*, *Voice of America*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and *Sing Tao Net*. By contrast, the minority (28%) of the websites not accessible in China were *Christian Science Monitor*, *New York Times*, *U.S.*

*News & World Report*, and two popular overseas Chinese website—*Chinese Readers* and *Wenxue City*. For example, clicking on *New York Times*' URL address in China resulted in the following note:



<b>Table 1</b> <b>Accessibility of World Popular Mass Media Web Sites in China (N = 18)</b>						
English Website	URL	Home Office	Accessible in China			
			Yes	%	No	%
BBC	<a href="http://www.bbc.com/news/">http://www.bbc.com/news/</a>	UK	√	5.5%		
Boston Globe	<a href="http://www.bostonglobe.com/">http://www.bostonglobe.com/</a>	USA	√	5.5%		
CNN	<a href="http://www.cnn.com/">http://www.cnn.com/</a>	USA	√	5.5%		
Daily Beast	<a href="http://www.thedailybeast.com/">http://www.thedailybeast.com/</a>	USA	√	5.5%		
Chicago Tribune	<a href="http://www.chicagotribune.com/">http://www.chicagotribune.com/</a>	USA	√	5.5%		
Chris. Sci. Monitor	<a href="http://www.csmonitor.com/">http://www.csmonitor.com/</a>	USA			√	5.5%
Economist	<a href="http://www.economist.com/">http://www.economist.com/</a>	UK	√	5.5%		
Fortune Magazine	<a href="http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/">http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/</a>	USA	√	5.5%		
L.A. Times	<a href="http://www.latimes.com/">http://www.latimes.com/</a>	USA	√	5.5%		
N.Y. Times	<a href="http://www.nytimes.com/">http://www.nytimes.com/</a>	USA			√	5.5%
Time Magazine	<a href="http://www.time.com/time/">http://www.time.com/time/</a>	USA	√	5.5%		
U.S. News & World Rep	<a href="http://www.usnews.com/">http://www.usnews.com/</a>	USA			√	5.5%
Voice of America	<a href="http://www.voanews.com/">http://www.voanews.com/</a>	USA	√	5.5%		
Wall Street Journal	<a href="http://online.wsj.com/home-page/">http://online.wsj.com/home-page/</a>	USA	√	5.5%		
Washington Post	<a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/">http://www.washingtonpost.com/</a>	USA	√	5.5%		
<b>Chinese Website</b>						
Chinese Readers	<a href="http://www.creaders.net/">http://www.creaders.net/</a>	USA			√	5.5%
Sing Tao Net	<a href="http://www.singtaonet.com/">http://www.singtaonet.com/</a>	USA	√	5.5%		
Wenxue City	<a href="http://www.wenxuecity.com/">http://www.wenxuecity.com/</a>	USA			√	5.5%
<b>Total</b>			<b>13</b>	<b>72.2%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>27.8%</b>

Table 2 presents the accessibility status of the 20 world popular social media sites. The majority of the 20 world popular social media sites were accessible in China, except for the four English minorities: Chat Room, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The Chinese social media site of We Chat is functionally equivalent to the English Chat Room; Dian Dian, Bou Ban, Jie Pang, Peng You, and Ren Ren are similar to FaceBook; People's Weibo, Sina Weibo, Tencent Weibo, and Xinhua Weibo are equivalent to the Twitter; whereas the Chinese You Ku is equal to YouTube in function.

Table 2 Accessibility of World Popular Social Media Sites in China (N = 20)						
English Social Media	URL	Home Office	Accessible in China			
			Yes	%	No	%
Blog 	<a href="http://blog.com/">http://blog.com/</a>	USA	√	5%		
Chat Room 	<a href="http://www.chat-room.com/">http://www.chat-room.com/</a>	USA			√	5%
Facebook 	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/">http://www.facebook.com/</a>	USA			√	5%
Flickr 	<a href="http://www.flickr.com/">http://www.flickr.com/</a>	USA	√	5%		
LinkedIn 	<a href="http://www.linkedin.com/">http://www.linkedin.com/</a>	USA	√	5%		
Google+ 	<a href="https://www.google.com/">https://www.google.com/</a>	USA	√	5%		
Twitter 	<a href="https://twitter.com/">https://twitter.com/</a>	USA			√	5%
Vimeo 	<a href="https://vimeo.com/">https://vimeo.com/</a>	USA	√	5%		
YouTube 	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/">http://www.youtube.com/</a>	USA			√	5%
<b>Chinese Social Media</b>						
Dian Dian 	<a href="http://www.diandian.com/">http://www.diandian.com/</a>	China	√	5%		
Dou Ban 	<a href="http://www.douban.com/">http://www.douban.com/</a>	China	√	5%		
Jie Pang 	<a href="http://jiepang.com/">http://jiepang.com/</a>	China	√	5%		
People's Weibo 	<a href="http://t.people.com.cn/">http://t.people.com.cn/</a>	China	√	5%		
Peng You 	<a href="http://www.pengyou.com/">http://www.pengyou.com/</a>	China	√	5%		
Ren Ren 	<a href="http://www.renren.com/">http://www.renren.com/</a>	China	√	5%		
Sina Weibo 	<a href="http://e.weibo.com/">http://e.weibo.com/</a>	China	√	5%		
Tencent Weibo 	<a href="http://t.qq.com/">http://t.qq.com/</a>	China	√	5%		
We Chat 	<a href="http://www.wechat.com/">http://www.wechat.com/</a>	China	√	5%		
Xinhua Weibo 	<a href="http://t.home.news.cn/">http://t.home.news.cn/</a>	China	√	5%		
You Ku 	<a href="http://www.youku.com/">http://www.youku.com/</a>	China	√	5%		
<b>Total</b>			<b>16</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>20%</b>

RQ2 asked, “What e-government services and social media tools are available on the Chinese province e-government sites?” As Table 3 shows, the majority of the province e-government sites offered the following 11 service links: Business/Trade/Laws, Government Agencies, News/Issues/Events, Online Service for Business, Online Service for Citizens, Press Release, About the Province/Autonomous Region/Municipality, National/Provincial Facts, Site Map, Site Search, and Contact Us. Regarding the availability of social media and other related communication tools on e-government sites, only six tools were identified: Email, Suggestion/Complaint Box, Report Fraud Box, We Chat, Weibo (Chinese Twitter-like tool), and Mobile Web Service although many other social media tools were available and also widely used by people in China.

Table 3 Characteristics of China's Province E-Government Service Sites (N = 31)					
Characteristics	Frequency	Percent	Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
<b>E-Gov. Services</b>			<b>Site Languages</b>		
1. Business/Trade/Laws	31	100%	• Chinese	31	100%
2. Gov. Agencies	31	100%	• English	19	61%
3. News/Issues/Events	31	100%	• Japanese	3	10%
4. Online Service for Business	31	100%	• French	2	6.5%
5. Online Service for Citizens	31	100%	• Russian	2	6.5%
6. Press Release	31	100%	• Korean	1	3%
7. About the Province	30	96%	<b>Location of the Links</b>		
8. National/Provincial Facts	27	87%	• Top side of screen	31	100%
9. Site Map	21	68%	• Left side of screen	31	100%
10. Search Tools	20	65%	• Right side of screen	31	100%
11. Contact Us	16	52%	• Within related text	31	100%
12. Privacy/security	11	36%	• Bottom side of screen	5	16%
<b>Social Media Tools</b>			<b>Navigation Convenience</b>		
1. Email	30	97%	• Very convenient	21	68%
2. Suggestion/Complaint Box	30	97%	• Convenient	8	26%
3. Report Fraud Box	29	94%	• Less convenient	2	6%
4. We Chat	27	87%	<b>Page Length &amp; Loading Speed</b>		
5. Weibo (Chinese Twitter-like tool)	15	48%	• Homepage Loading Time ≈ 1 Second	30	97%
6. Mobile Web Service	12	39%	• Homepage Length ≈ 1 Screen	24	77%

Concerning the site languages, while all the 31 province e-governments sites were in Chinese, 19 sites also provided their sites in English version. However, only a few sites were also presented in other languages: Japanese, French, Russian, and Korean. The Chinese e-government service links were mainly placed on the top, left, and right sides of the screen or within related texts. Only a minority of the links were located at the bottom side of the screen. When visiting the sites, the majority of the 31 sites were *very convenient* or *convenient* for citizens to navigate. When users clicked on hyperlinks, 97% of the service homepages appeared on screen around one second and 77% of the homepages were presented within approximately one screen for page length.

*RQ3* asked, “How do the Chinese e-government social media enable citizens to communicate and participate in government affairs?” The user-interface measures of social media characteristics on the 31 e-government sites indicated that 97% of Email tools were rated as *convenient* for users (see Table 4). People could use the e-government email to send questions, comments or complaints, report fraud, and report website errors. Similarly, the Suggestion or Complaint Box was also available on 30 sites and 29 of them were *convenient* for users whereas only one was rated as *less convenient* for users. The majority of the boxes enabled users to send suggestions or complaints via text input box.

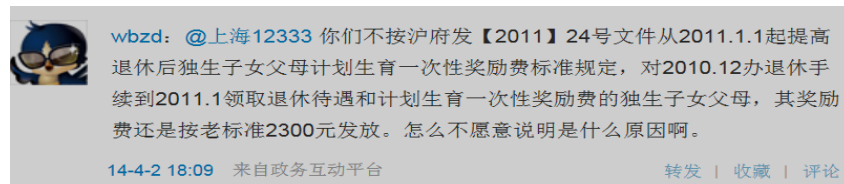
<b>Table 4</b>		
<b>Characteristics of Province E-Government Social Media Services</b>		
<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Email (n = 30)</b>		
Convenient for users	29	97%
Not convenient for users	1	3%
<u>Email Purposes:</u> For citizens' questions	27	90%
For citizens' comments/complaints	27	90%
For citizens' reporting frauds	24	80%
For citizens' reporting website errors	5	17%
<b>Suggestion/Complaint Box (n = 30)</b>		
Convenient for users	29	97%
Less convenient for users	1	3%
Sending suggestion/complaint via text input box	26	90%
Sending suggestion/complaint via email	2	7%
Sending suggestion/complaint via fax	1	3%
<b>Report Fraud Box (n = 29)</b>		
Convenient for users	29	100%
Report with personal information	22	76%
Report with registration for creating an user account	6	21%
Report frauds anonymously	1	3%
<b>We Chat (n = 27)</b>		
Convenient for users	22	82%
Less convenient for users	5	18%
<u>Types of information posted:</u> Important decisions	11	41%
Current issues	6	22%
New initiatives	6	22%
New policies	5	19%
<b>Mobile Web Services (n = 12)</b>		
Convenient for users	12	100%
Informative for users	12	100%
Current and active	11	92%
Less Current and active	1	8%
<b>Weibo (n = 15)</b>		
Current and active	5	33%
Very current and active	10	67%
<u>Types of information posted:</u> Important decisions	15	100%
Current issues	15	100%
New initiatives	15	100%
New policies	15	100%
<u>Number of people communicating on eG2C Weibo:</u>		
More than 10 people	15	100%

The Report Fraud Box was available on 29 sites and all of them were *convenient* to use. While 76% of them required users to report fraud with their personal information such as name, gender, phone number, permanent address, etc., 21% required users to create an account with user name and password by registering personal information. Only one site allowed users to report frauds anonymously at its report fraud box (see Table 4). The instant message site of We Chat was available on 27 sites and the majority (82%) of them were rated as *convenient* to use. We Chat users shared information about important government decisions (41%), current issues (22%), new initiatives (22%) and new policies (19%). Only 12 sites provided Mobile Web Services and all of them were

*convenient and informative* for users. In addition, the majority of the 12 Mobile Web Service sites were rated as *current and active*.

Weibo, the Chinese Twitter-like tool, was available in four popular brands: Sina Weibo, Tencent Weibo, Xinhua Weibo, and People's Weibo. These four Weibo brands were provided on 15 of the 31 China's province e-government sites and were rated either as *very current and active* (67%) or *current and active* (33%). The information communicated on these Weibo sites included important decisions, current issues, government initiatives, and new policies. All these 15 e-government Weibo sites had more than 10 people actively participated in (a) commenting on current issues, government initiatives, and new policies; (b) presenting their views and suggestions, and (c) participating in government decisions.

For example, one tweet (@上海 12333) posted on Shanghai e-government Weibo questioned "why the local government agency failed to follow the new policy of increasing the financial award to the single-child parents who had retired in January 2011 and demanded an explanation" (see the Chinese original below).



In response to the complaints of parking violations in a community, a feedback tweet (@北京 12345) on Beijing e-government Weibo stated that workers were re-organizing parking spaces in the community and parking violations would be reduced (see the Chinese original below).

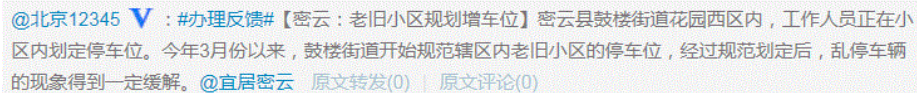
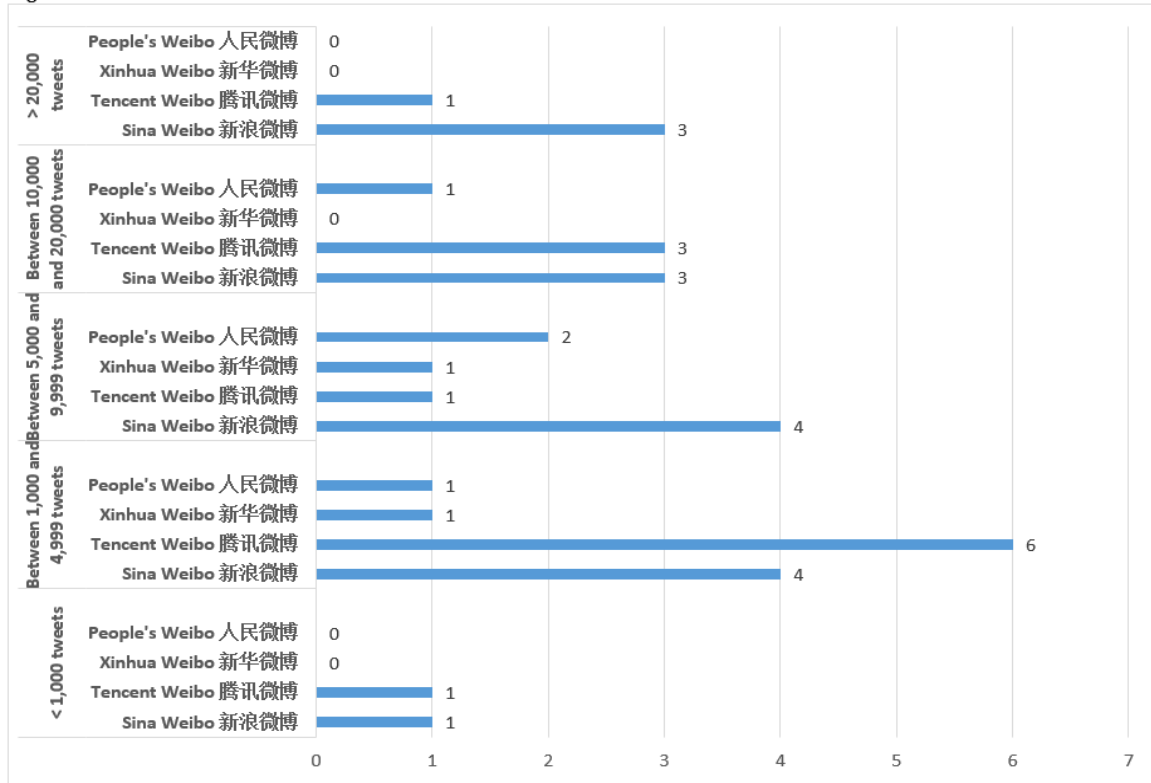


Figure 1 summarizes the citizens' tweets posted on the e-government Weibo sites. Sina Weibo and Tencent Weibo were more widely used than People's Weibo and Xinhua Weibo for people to post tweets.



**Figure 1. Number of Citizens' Tweets on China's Province e-Government Weibo Sites**



RQ4 asked, “What are the Chinese citizens’ views and experiences of their participation in government affairs via social media?” The focus interview of 36 citizens from various professions, gender and age groups identified the following five major findings.

First, when asked about e-government services and social media, all the interviewees (100%) indicated that they and many other people they know were overall pleased of the growth of China’s e-government services and social media. Specifically, the central government and province governments offered a wide range of easily accessible e-government services and social media that people need. While most of these services were just for information sharing, file searching or downloading, and sending emails, some services had the transactional or intelligent capacities enabling citizens to do business online such as filing taxes, renewing licenses, and managing online accounts. Such transactional and intelligent e-government services greatly enabled citizens to conveniently and effectively communicate and do business with government. Therefore, more e-government services need to move the advanced transactional and intelligent phases.

Second, when answering the question of how citizens participate in government decisions, the majority (86%) of interviewees reported their awareness of that to promote government transparency and citizens’ participation, local governments were required to post important initiatives and decisions on e-government sites for public review, comments, and suggestions. Such initiatives and decisions included the individual income tax rates, the public transportation fare increase, the security and warranty of parcel and postal delivery service, the reform of college admission examinations, and other economic, political, and civic reforms. For example, the province e-government sites must post the appointment information of officials for citizens’ feedback on whether these officials were qualified for promotion to the key administrative positions at the province level. Therefore, the interviewees felt that via e-government services and social media, citizens could directly communicate their views and participate in government decisions.

Third, 86% of the interviewees expressed their satisfaction that most e-government sites encouraged citizens' active participation in making government policies and offered email links, suggestion/complaint boxes, report fraud boxes, and other social media for citizens to communicate to top government officials, to participate in government decisions, to fight corruptions, and to nurture democracy. These media have become important channels for law enforcement agencies to gather information directly from people who have witnessed bribes, corruptions, and other illegal activities among government officials, business-persons, and criminals. In addition, five interviewees representing government officials indicated that with citizens' active use of the e-government services and social media, many officials consider these new media as effective self-regulation tools for them to listen to citizens, improve their government work, and be good public servants.

Fourth, when asked about citizens' freedom of speech and life in China, all the interviewees (100%) indicated that nowadays in China, people could publicly express their views, comment on government policies, and criticize bribes and corruptions. For example, it was common to hear comments and complaints in subways or on buses about the inflation of consumer goods and the environmental pollutions caused by rapid industrialization and urbanization. Actually, the central and province governments encourage citizens to use e-government services and social media to communicate with government, make comments and suggestions, and report bribes, corruptions, and other frauds since citizens' participation is an important force for anti-corruption.

Finally, when asked if they have any more examples of freedom to share, 56% of the interviewees pointed out that since China's Economic Reforms and Open Policies from 1976 up to now, Chinese citizens not only have more freedom of speech than ever before but also enjoy their freedom to move. Farmers could freely move from their native rural areas to metropolitan cities and become workers in construction, manufacturing, service industries, or in government agencies. Students could choose to study abroad and after graduation they could choose to find jobs in foreign countries or to return to China for employment and career development. Citizens could buy houses in other places and even in foreign countries and live there as immigrants. Six interviewees who were in their 60s and 70s, stated that even though inflation, pollution, and corruption exist in China, people's life now is far better than before and the country is more democratic than ever before in Chinese history.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

First, the majority of the world popular mass-media Web sites were accessible in China. People could freely visit the Web sites of the following 13 world popular mass media in China: *BBC*, *Boston Globe*, *CNN*, *Daily Beast*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Economist*, *Fortune Magazine*, *L.A. Times*, *Time Magazine*, *Voice of America*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and *Sing Tao Net*. Also accessible in China were the majority of the popular social media sites, such as Blog, Flickr, LinkedInDocument4, Google+, and Vimeo.

Second, while various Chinese popular social media were available and also widely used by people in China, only 15 of the 31 province e-government sites offered Weibo, a Chinese Twitter-like tool, although most of the 31 eG2C sites did provide other social media related tools such as email, suggestion/complaint box, report fraud box, and WeChat. Obviously, the 15 province e-government sites offering Weibo served as a good example for other province e-government sites to follow.

Moreover, the majority of social media tools on the province e-government sites were current and convenient for users to send questions, comments or complaints, to report frauds, and to report website errors. Many people actively participated in (a) commenting on current issues, government initiatives, and new policies; (b) presenting their views and suggestions, and (c) participating in government decisions. Such social media tools clearly served as enablers for enhancing democracy in China.

Last, most interviewees expressed their satisfaction of government Web postings of important initiatives and decisions for public review, comments, and suggestions. The interviewees also reported their satisfaction that the e-government sites offering email links, suggestion or complaint boxes, report fraud boxes, We Chat, and Weibo for citizens to participate in government decisions, to fight corruptions, and to nurture democracy. With citizens' active participation on e-government social media, many officials considered these new media as self-regulation tools for

them to listen to citizens, improve their work, and be good public servants. As interviewees pointed out, now Chinese citizens not only have more freedom of speech but also enjoy more freedom to move.

These findings evidenced that the Internet and social media have enabled the Chinese government to conveniently consult with its ordinary citizens and to actively engage them in government decisions and democratic processes. Therefore, continuous adoption and integration of more social media tools to e-government sites is needed.

#### RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study assessed the Chinese province e-government use of social media for enhancing democracy in China. A further study is recommended to investigate how Chinese province e-government use of social media services affect government transparency and business participation for economic competitiveness and prosperity in China as well as in the Global economy. Another further study is recommended to investigate why a minority of the websites such as *Christian Science Monitor*, *New York Times*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Chinese Readers*, *Wenxue City*, *Chat Room*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *YouTube* were not accessible in China while the majority of the sites were accessible in China.

#### REFERENCES

- Awad, E. M. (2004). *Electronic commerce: From vision to fulfillment*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Boggs, R. A., & Walters, D. (2006). A longitudinal look at e-government in practice. *Issues in Information Systems*, 7(2), 161-164.
- Campbell, D. & Beck, A. C. (2004). Answering Allegations: The Use of the Corporate Website for Restorative Ethical and Social Disclosure. *Business Ethics*, 13(2), 100.
- Chen, Z. Z. (2013, September 23). Internet-based report fraud box at China Ministry of Supervision Web site received more than 760 reports daily over 20 days since the start of the reporting service. *China Discipline Inspection and Supervision Report*. Retrieved from [http://www.ccdi.gov.cn/xwyw/201309/t20130923\\_10575.html](http://www.ccdi.gov.cn/xwyw/201309/t20130923_10575.html)
- CNNIC. (2014, January 16). The statistical report of China Internet network development status. Retrieved from [http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwzxbg/hlwjbg/201401/t20140116\\_43820.htm](http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwzxbg/hlwjbg/201401/t20140116_43820.htm)
- Cochran, W. G. (1977). *Sampling techniques* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Frey, L., Botan, C., Friedman, P., & Kreps, G. (1991). *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. (2013). How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression. *American Political Science Review*, 107(2), 326-343.
- Merriam-Webster. (2015, April 7). Definition of democracy. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/democracy?show=0&t=1303397738>
- Tian, D. (2015, December 18). Wuzhen to host 2015 World Internet Conference (WIC). *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sponsored/china-watch/technology/12029452/wuzhen-to-host-2015-world-internet-conference.html>
- Wikipedia. (2015, April 7). Definition of democracy. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy>

- Wilkinson, V. O. & Cappel, J. J. (2005). Impact of economic prosperity and population on e-government involvement. *Issues in Information Systems*, (6), 204-209.
- Xinhua, (2014, November 21). Xinhua insight: Conference urges international action against cyber-terrorism. Retrieved from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-11/21/c\\_133806166.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-11/21/c_133806166.htm)
- Zhao, J. J. (2003). *Web Design and Development for E-Business*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Zhao, J. J. & Zhao, S. Y. (2010). Opportunities and threats: A security assessment of state e-government Web sites. *Government Information Quarterly*, 27(1), 49-56.
- Zhao, J. J. & Zhao, S. Y. (2015). Security and vulnerability assessment of social media sites: An exploratory study. *Journal of Education for Business*, 90(8), 458-466.