

# The Effect of Internet Use on Offline Political Participation: Based on an Analysis of Random Digit Dialing Telephone Survey

ZENG Fanbin

## Abstract

In recent years, political participation of Chinese citizens has gradually become a widespread concern and topic of studies for all scholars. This study examined the impact of Internet use, including time spent online and different types of internet use, on offline political participation. Based on an analysis of random digit dialing telephone survey of Internet users in Guangzhou (N = 518), it is found that time spent online has no effects on Internet users' offline political participation. However, one of the types of internet use that express views on a variety of public things online is found to be a positive predictor on offline political participation even after controlled other variables. The result of this study showed that the effect of Internet use on political participation depended on a public sphere for political expression rather than a source of political information in China. This study also argued that when the internet is used as a communication medium and as one of entertainment tools, it had no relation with offline political participation. This study pointed out that the Internet would serve to activate those citizens who are already predisposed or interested in politics, but also give these citizens a public sphere for political expression in China.

## Keywords

Time spent online, different types of internet use, offline political participation, Uses and Gratifications

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# 互联网使用对现实政治参与的影响 ——基于一项随机电话抽样调查的分析

曾凡斌

## 摘要

近年来,中国公民的政治参与成为一个热点话题和研究重点,本研究分析互联网使用,包括互联网使用时间,互联网使用方式是如何影响现实政治参与的,根据对广州市网民的随机电话抽样调查获得518个网民的分析,发现互联网使用时间对网民的现实政治参与没有影响,不过互联网使用方式的一种在网上发表个人对各种公众事物的看法和意见对现实政治参与有影响,本研究还发现中国公民的互联网使用对现实政治参与的影响是提供了一个公共领域,而不是提供一个政治信息的来源,本研究还发现当互联网使用作为沟通交流工具和娱乐使用时候,都未能对现实政治参与产生影响,本研究还指出,中国互联网会促使原有对政治感兴趣的网民参与政治,同时还给予他们一个公共领域用以表达政治意见。

## 关键词

互联网使用时间、互联网使用方式、现实政治参与、使用与满足

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## Introduction

In western democracies society, political participation encompasses the many activities used by citizens to influence the government's policies and the selection of political leaders. People involved in political participation always expected or at least hoped that their actions could affect the government's policies in spite of final limited effects. Thus, in the field of politics and sociology, political participation is a hot topic. For example, some scholars defined political participation as a way to influence the activities of the political policy, which includes voting, working for political parties, doing community work, contacting government officials, attending political meetings and others (Verba, et.al., 1971: 52-80, Verba,et. al., 1995:

1-30).

Despite the fact that the concept of political participation comes from western societies, scholars in socialist countries are also very interested in it. Some researchers from the former Soviet Union and the socialist countries of eastern Europe showed that people in these countries were willing to participate in politics, which includes contacting with government officials to seeking help or to express their own opinion individually. For example, Inkles and Raymond Bauer (1959:294-298) found that Soviet citizens were more concerned with personal interests, but little with political rights and constitutional protection. These studies show that people in socialist countries are different from western countries by trying to influence policy implementation rather than policy making processes. In addition, they are more based on their individual, informal approach and the atomic way (Jennings, 1997).

In recent years, political participation of Chinese citizens has gradually become a widespread concern and topic of research for all scholars. Related studies, however, put more emphasis on political and sociological areas. For instance, Hu Rong (2006, 2008, 2011) analyzed the impact of social capital and other factors on the political participation.

As the study of political participation is popularizing, researchers began to focus on the relationship between media use and political participation, especially between Internet use and political participation, which has been attracting a growing interest among political scientists as well as communication and media scholars(Hacker & Dijk, 2000: 1-24; Weare, 2002). For example, some researchers have tried to explore whether the Internet can solve the political apathy of citizens and found that compared to other ways, the Internet can reduce the cost of people's political participation, create new mechanisms and open up new channels of information communication so that it may help to improve people's political interest and the enthusiasm of political participation. Other studies suggest that citizens are increasingly using the Internet to follow news and political campaigns and engage in online political activities such as donating (Howard, 2006:170-198). However, some researchers have found that the Internet provides a limited role on political participation through empirical research (Lin & Dutton, 2003). In China, Li Yayu (2011) analyzed the status of online political participation and explored the effects of political participation through the analysis of survey data, However, it regarded political participation as online, rather than offline. Nevertheless, it's much difference between offline and online because offline political participation needs more time and cost than online political participation. Therefore, the research object of this paper is offline political participation, which is also called traditional political participation, including offline interest expression, offline interest struggle and a series of other behaviors.

In later studies, Pan et.al (2012) explores the relationship between Internet use and citizenship engagement in China and found that media use, especially Internet use, had differential effects on individuals' citizen engagement, but the effects of media and Internet use vary significantly across geographic units. Zheng & Pan (2012) showed that social networking and Internet use variables are related to both higher levels of civic participation and expressive engagement even controlling the effects of the variables representing resource-possession and psychological conditions. However, citizenship engagement isn't political participation, despite they have much similarity.

This study employs Uses and Gratifications theory to analyze the relationship between time spent online, types of internet use and offline political participation. Uses and Gratifications theory proposed by Katz(1959) places more focus on the consumer, or audience, instead of the message itself by asking "what people do with media" rather than "what media does to people." It assumes that members of the audience are active in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. The theory also holds that audiences are responsible for choosing media to meet their needs and suggests that people use the media to fulfill specific gratifications. This theory implies the media competes against other information sources for viewers' gratification. (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974:19-32) In other words, The Uses and Gratifications theory focuses on how the user's needs and motivation leads to media use and other effects (Blumler & Katz, 1974: 270-318). For traditional mass media, such as television, radio and newspaper, some basic needs of media uses include the purpose of receiving information, the purpose of social interaction, the purpose of entertainment and the purpose of personal identification (McQuail, 1984). In recent decades, researchers expanded the Uses and Gratifications theory to the research of interpersonal communications media, such as the fixed line phone, internet and mobile phone. Since 1990, the number of studies published on the Uses and Gratifications theory has been increasing, which can be linked directly to the rapid development of new media. In researching the Uses and Gratifications theory, media use and its consequences are an important factor in the theoretical framework of the theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974:19-32). For example, Finn (1997) proposed the key elements of Uses and Gratifications theory as the following: (a) Media User audience's social and psychological needs (b) Different media uses will lead to different results (c) Audience's involvement with different media. Therefore, this study tries to explore Internet use, including how time spent online and different types of Internet use affects offline political participation.

## Literature Review and Related Questions

In China today, the use of the Internet has become a common phenomenon. According to the latest

statistical report on the Internet development in China released by CNNIC, China had 649 million Internet users as of the end of 2014. The percentage of those using mobile phones to go online jumped from 81.0% in 2013 to 85.8%. In 2014, weekly average time spent online among Chinese Internet users reached 25.9 hours. Internet applications also have various types, which includes instant messaging, search engine, online news, online music, blog/personal space, online video, online game, shopping online, online payment, online literature, microblog, online banking, email, social networking site, travel booking, group purchase, forum/bbs, Internet wealth management. Till now, the question on how various types of Internet use affect offline political participation hasn't been clearly answered.

#### Time spent online and offline political participation

Previous research has focused on the impact of time spent online. For example, some scholars regard that if people spend too much time on the Internet, it will reduce offline social interaction time and eventually weaken or damage offline social network, or even minus participating in social activities (Kraut, et.al., 1998; Nie & Erbring, 2002), which can be called the time-replacement hypothesis. This is based on the following reasons: Firstly, people spend time on the Internet for kinds of entertainment which diverts their time away from establishing a social network; secondly, it may not develop the positive trust of political participation because online communication is different from offline communication. Thirdly, most community players have the same interests, so it would just provide a place for people with same or similar ideas to communicate, rather than promote multiple viewpoints. (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Mutz, 2002)

Of course, some would bring up different viewpoints. For example, Best & Krueger (2005) indicated online communication can increase people's trustiness. In addition, the Internet is an important source of political information and the information provides an important foundation for offline political participation. Recently, some researchers have shown that there is no relationship between time spent online and offline political participation. For example, Quintelier & Vissers (2008) researched 6,330 16-year-old Belgian adolescents, and found that time spent online by teenagers has no relationship with offline political participation. Of course, this research only investigated the age of 16 adolescents who didn't have the right to vote. From the entire population of Internet users, the relationship between time spent online and offline political participation is still unclear. Therefore, this study proposes the following first question:

RQ 1: What is the relationship between time spent online and offline political participation among Internet users?

#### Different types of internet use and offline political participation

In addition to time spent online, type of internet use also correlates with the political participation; some types have positive correlation with offline political participation, while others have negative ones (Polat, 2005; Turkle, 1995: 340-347). Therefore, to understand the impact of Internet use on offline political participation, we need to distinguish the different types of internet use.

Related studies (Shah, et. al., 2001b) showed that the use of information on the Internet could inspire people to take part in social activities and offline political participation, that is to say, people using the Internet to find information of interest, collect news and exchanging ideas with others were found to have more social interactions and political participations than others. For instance, Wellman et.al (2003) pointed out that the emergence of the Internet would attract a variety of users, and advance the use of social networks, which can help connect the users and their communities.

In terms of the relationship between internet use and political participation, there are four explainable reasons:

(1) The Internet as an information source. These studies argued that the Internet may potentially contribute to increased participation because it enables easier access to a high volume of information, thus encouraging a more informed society (Browning, 1996: 175-200; Rheingold, 1991). However, the linkages between more information and increased participation are not self-evident. It is also possible to argue that those who are more informed about politics could be more frustrated, which may lead to abstention from participation (Warren, 2002).

(2) The Internet as a communication medium. These studies argued that the Internet may open new channels of communication such as email and social networking tools which may again lead to more participation (Groper, 1996).

(3) The Internet as a virtual public sphere. These studies argued that the Internet offers certain opportunities, especially for issue-based groups, to come together online. Through these online communities, there is a potential possibility for capacity building, getting support and information from other like-minded people and encouraging further political participation (Wilhelm, 1998). The Internet also provides a resource for political discussion and creates opportunities for exposure to conflicting viewpoints, which leads to more political talk (Mutz & Martin, 2001). On the other hand, political discussion raises awareness about social problems, and thereby promotes civic participation (Kwak, Williams, Wang, & Lee, 2005; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). However, some suggested that capitalist patterns of production transform the Internet into a commercially oriented media that has little to do with the promotion of social welfare or democratic practice (Papacharissi, 2002).

(4) The Internet as one of entertainment tools. Previous studies showed that using traditional media, especially the TV, for entertainment would fail to benefit political participation. It's found that using the internet for entertainment also fails to benefit offline political participation. For instance, Putnam (1995, 2000:29-64) believes the Internet will have a negative impact on engagement because this technology is being used primarily for entertainment. Shah et.al (2001a, 2001b) found that using the Internet for entertainment negatively related with social capital, which is an important factor impacted on offline political participation. For the above mentioned literatures, this study puts forward the following second question:

RQ 2: What is the relationship between different types of internet use and offline political participation among Internet users?

## Methodology

### Data

This survey was conducted from April to June in 2011, interviewing the people using the Internet during the past six months above 18 year old dwelling in Guangzhou. Based on a random digit dialing (RDD) telephone survey, which is a method for selecting people for involvement in telephone statistical surveys by generating telephone numbers at random. The interviewers of this survey were undergraduates who attended "Web Journalism" and other courses taught by author and the success RDD rate is 24%, according to of the American Association for Public Opinion (AAPOR, 2011) the Response Rate 3, of which the formula is as follows:

$$\frac{I}{((I+P) + (R+NC+O) + e (UH+UO))}$$

(I=Complete Interviews, P=Partial Interviews, R=Refusal and break off, NC=Non Contact, O=other, e=estimated portion of cases of unknown eligibility that are eligible, UH=Unknown household, UO=Unknown other.)

Finally, 555 respondents were interviewed successfully and a total of 518 pieces of data was gained after the unsatisfactory samples and data with missing values were removed. Each respondent required about 20 minutes to complete a questionnaire. Interviewers were trained on interview procedures and SPSS 16.0 was employed to perform the statistical analysis of the survey data.

Comparison sample data with statistical data

For the reason to ensure the validity of the sample, the comparison sample data with statistical data is as follows: (1) The comparison of Sample Data with China Internet Development Statistics Report in January 2011 is as table 1; (2) The comparison of sample data with Statistics of 1% population in Guangzhou (n. d.) is as table 2.

**Table 1: Compare Sample Data with China Internet Development Statistics Report in January 2011**

	Statistics (%)	Sample data (%)
Gender		
Male	55.8	49.4%
Female	44.2	50.6%
Age (Note 1)		
18-19	7.1	5.4%
20-29	38.6	63.9%
30-39	30.4	19.3%
40-49	16.4	7.9%
50-59	5.1	2.5%
60+	2.4	1%

Note1: This survey didn't include the age below 18 years, so the statistical data recalculate the ratios of different groups above 18 years. On the other hand, this survey compared with the statistical data in 2011 because it is conducted in 2011

**Table 2: Compare sample data with Statistics of 1% population in Guangzhou**

Gender	Statistics (%)	Sample data (%)
Male	50.4	49.4%
Female	49.6	50.6%
Geographical distribution of households		
Liwan District	9.1	10.4%
Yuxiu District	11.4	16.4%
Haizhu District	14.3	16.4%
Tianhe District	11.1	29.7%
Baiyun District	14.6	9.5%
Huangpu District	3.2	3.1%
Panyu District	13.4	7.5%
Huadu District	6.8	2.1%
Nansha District	1.5	1.4%



Luogang District	1.9	1.4%
Zhengcheng District	8.2	1.7%
Conghua District	4.5	0.4%

From table 1 and table 2, it is found out that the sample data is able to represent the Internet users in Guangzhou city by measuring the gender, age and geographical distribution in general.

#### Offline political participation

Based on interviews held in early 1990, an age without Internet, with probability samples drawn from four Chinese countryside counties, Jennings (1997) emphasizes three modes of "autonomous" participation: cooperative actions, voicing opinions to cadres, and contacting representatives, which represents offline political participation in China. Although in the rural and semi-rural areas where such local elections were held, voting is an important mechanism of electoral connection between elected leaders and local residents (Manion, 1996, 2000), voting in Chinese urban area, such as Guangzhou, does not fit this conception of political participation very well because the absence of an institutional setup for open and fair elections and the fact that the opportunity structure for voting was configured in service, voting could not be viewed as a universally accessed and voluntary act of political participation in Chinese urban area. On the other hand, given China is not a country of free voting, so someone who doesn't do this is not because he/she doesn't want to, it is just that he cannot do it, so it is not a valid measure in China in terms of political participation, especially in Chinese urban area. As a result, in this study, there are 6 items used to measure offline political participation except voting. Items were measured by the use of a 6-point likert-type response scale(Always=6; Often=5;Average=4;Less likely=3;Unlikely=2;Never=1) as table 3 below.

**Table 3: The data of offline political participation (N=518) in Guangzhou**

Items	Always	Often	Average	Less likely	Unlikely	Never	Mean	SD
(1) Expressing opinions to company leaders for his or his friends' interests	1.0%	4.6%	14.7%	16.0%	18.1%	45.6%	2.18	1.32
(2)Expressing opinions to government officials for his legal interests	0.6%	3.3%	11.0%	12.7%	17.6%	54.8%	1.92	1.22
(3) Expressing opinions on social issues via mass media	1.4%	2.9%	6.9%	15.3%	15.3%	58.3%	1.85	1.21

(4) Expressing opinions to the members of NPC or NCPCC	0.2%	1.4%	3.9%	9.7%	11.0%	73.9%	1.48	0.94
(5) Expressing complaints to government departments by letters	0.2%	1.2%	4.1%	9.5%	10.6%	74.5%	1.47	0.93
(6) Appealing for help by visiting government departments	0.0%	0.8%	3.9%	8.5%	8.9%	78.0%	1.41	0.86

The variable of offline political participation is the sum-up of these 6 items, of which the mean of this variable was 10.30 (SD = 5.40). In table 3, it shows that expressing opinions to company leaders for his or his friends' interests becomes an important channel for political participation in China and up to 1.0% and 4.6% of the respondents chose "often" and "more often" on it. However, when expressing opinions to government officials for his legal interests, only 0.6% and 3.3% said that they would choose "often" and "more often".

#### Time spent online

Time spent online is measured by the following question, "What is the average time you spend surfing the Internet daily? \_\_\_ hours." The result of this survey is 5.09 hours (M=5.09,SD=2.726), which is higher than the report of the average time of Chinese internet users using the internet by CNNIC in 2011, but only a little higher than the study of Tianjin, Shanghai and Guangzhou cities with a daily average of 4.25 hours (Li Yayu, 2011).

#### Different types of internet use

The operation of the type of internet use in this research focuses on the purpose of Internet use, which is based on the Uses and Gratifications theory. In previous research, 9 items for the motivation of watching television were summed up by Rubin (1981). And Mcquail & Brown(1972: 135-165) proposed 4 motivations of watching TV, which is entertainment, social utility, self-identity and environmental monitoring. Based on the Uses and Gratifications theory and other theories, Zhu & He (2002) proposed six types of internet use. This study proposed an operation of the types of internet use according to the aim of this study. The final data is as in table 4, which includes: (1)Go online to learn domestic and international news;(2)Shopping online or online payment;(3)Communicate with friends, family or other people online;(4)Express views on a variety of public things online;(5)Go online to play games or meet personal hobby;(6)Go online to learn the information about the working and living. Items were measured by the use

of a 5-point Likert-type response scale (Rarely=1, Seldom=2, Sometimes=3, frequently=4, Always=5).

**Table 4: Descriptive statistics of the frequency of different types of internet use(N=518)**

Types of internet use	Rarely	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	Mean	SD
(1) Go online to learn domestic and international news	6.9%	16.8%	38.8%	19.5%	18.0%	3.25	1.14
(2) Shopping online or online payment	16.0%	18.9%	26.6%	21.6%	16.8%	3.04	1.31
(3) Communicate with friends, family or other people online	2.9%	9.5%	22.2%	30.7%	34.7%	3.85	1.09
(4) Express views on a variety of public things online	19.5%	32.0%	27.2%	13.3%	7.9%	2.58	1.17
(5) Go online to play games or meet personal hobby	4.1%	6.8%	21.4%	31.9%	35.9%	3.89	1.10
(6) Go online to learn the information about the working and living	3.9%	12.5%	31.3%	30.7%	21.6%	3.54	1.08

#### Political interest

The effect of Internet use on engagement may also be mediated by psychological variables, which index individuals' interest in public life and their attitudes toward involvement. As one of psychological variables, political interest is one of the most powerful and persistent predictors of political participation, for example, Best & Krueger (2005) found that political interest exerts the second most powerful influence on the likelihood of Internet political activity, suggesting that although the Internet may alter the resources necessary to participate, individuals still require the psychological motivation to engage in online political activity. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they agreed (1= Very uninteresting and 5=Very interesting) with each of the following statements: "Do you feel very interested in politics". The mean of the variable of Political interest was 2.86 (SD = 0.968).

#### News consumption in traditional media

Media use, especially news consumption that index individuals' interactions with their information environment, which can be viewed both a constituting part of individuals' engagement and a key venue to prepare them for engagement in other forms (Delli, 2004; Jacobs, et.al., 2009; Verba, et.al., 1995:1-

30). Consumption of print news has been among the most common predictors of civic participation. (Gary, 1985). Later findings suggested that the use of local public affairs content, especially print news, had positive effects on political discussion and community participation. (John & Mark, 1996). Norris (1996) discovered that watching television news and participating public affairs contribute to the development of democracy and showed that watching news programs is positively related with political participation. McLeod et.al (1996, 1999) also proved the local people participated in local political affairs by reading newspapers and watching the local news. Both newspaper and television news use indices were created using measures of exposure and attention to news content. We developed a scale to measure frequency of reading newspaper, frequency of watching TV news. Items were measured by the use of a 5-point Likert-type response scale that ranged from 1 (extremely less) to 5 (extremely always). The mean of the variable of frequency of watching television news was 3.19 (SD = 1.20), the variable of frequency of reading newspaper was 3.00 (SD = 1.22),

#### Controlled variables

The variables of age, gender, memberships, education level, income were found to affect the dependent variables, so those variables were taken as controlled variables (Jeffries, Atkin, & Neuendorf, 2002; Shah, et.al., 2001a). Overall, as in table 5, 49.4% of participants (n = 256) were male and 50.6% (n = 262) were female. 7.9% of participants (n = 41) were CCP members and 92.1% (n = 477) were Non-CCP members. With respect to educational levels, 3.1% of participants (n = 16) were junior high school and below, 22.0% of participants (n = 114) were senior high school or technical secondary school, 25.7% of participants (n = 133) were higher education, 45.4% of participants (n = 235) were undergraduates, and 3.9% of participants (n = 20) were graduates. With respect to income, 51.0% of participants (n = 264) were under 2500 RMB per month, 29.5% of participants (n = 153) were between 2501 to 5000 RMB per month, 14.1% of participants (n = 73) were between 5001 to 7500 RMB per month, 3.3% of participants (n = 17) were between 7501 to 10000 RMB per month, and 2.1 % of participants (n = 11) were above 10001 RMB per month. The mean of the variable of age was 27.65 (SD = 8.78).

**Table 5: The variation of Demographic variables (N=518)**

Controlled variables (Class variables set)	Variable separation	
	1(Frequency / percent)	0(Frequency / percent)
Gender (Male =1, Female =0)	256 (49.4%)	262 (50.6%)
political identity(member=1, non-member=0)	41(7.9%)	477(92.1%)

Demographic variables (Sequencing variables)		
Education level	junior high school and below (3.1%), senior high school or technical secondary school (22.0%), higher education (25.7%), undergraduate (45.4%), graduate (3.9%)	
Income	under 2500 RMB (51.0%), 2501-5000 RMB: (29.5%), 5001-7500 RMB (14.1%), 7501-10000 RMB (3.3%) 10001 or above RMB (2.1%)	
controlled variables	Mean	SD
Age	27.65	8.78

### Result

In this study, the dependent variable is a continuous variable, whereas the independent variable and controlled variables is categorical variable (dummy variable) or continuous variable, in order to study the effect the multilayer variable and the controlled variables on the dependent variable, the layering multiple regression was used to analyze the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable, which is listed in table 6.

		Beta	t
Controlled variables	Gender	-0.091*	-2.121
	Age	0.065	1.191
	Education	0.003	0.056
	Political identity	0.186***	4.377
	Income	-0.025	-0.528
	R Square (%)	5.8	
Political interest	Political interest	0.267***	5.939
	Increase in R Square (%)	7.9	
News consumption in traditional media	Frequency of reading newspaper	-0.035	-0.684
	Frequency of watching TV news	0.076	1.508
	Increase in R Square (%)	0.0	
Time spent online	Time spent online	0.01	0.222
	Increase in R Square (%)	0.0	

Type of Internet use	Go online to learn domestic and international news	-0.077	-1.549
	Shopping online or online payment	-0.088	-1.861
	Communicate with friends, family or other people online	-0.036	-0.746
	Express views on a variety of public things online	0.195***	3.969
	Go online to play games or meet personal hobby	-0.059	-1.247
	Go online to learn the information about the working and living	0.074	1.595
	Increase in R Square (%)	2.3	
	Final in R Square (%)	16.0	
	F	5.25	
	SIG	0.00	
	Note:*p<0.05;**p<0.01 ***p < 0.001		

As is shown in table 6, in the controlled variables, political identity ( $b=0.186$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) has a significant positive impact on the offline political participation. This means that CCP party-members have more offline political participation than non-Party members. Gender ( $b=-0.091$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) has a significant negative effect on offline political participation. In other words, it's found that women have more offline political participation than men. The controlled variables explain 5.8% on offline political participation.

Political interest ( $b=0.267$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) has a significant positive impact on offline political participation. This means the higher the political interest of the respondents is, the higher the general political participation is. The political interest variables explain 7.9% on offline political participation, which is the most influential variable block to explain offline political participation in this study.

In the news consumption in traditional media variable, no variables have a significant positive impact on offline political participation. The news consumption in traditional media variables explains 0% on offline political participation.

When controlled variables and communicated variable are fixed, the variable of time spent online has also no impact on offline political participation because the R square of the two independent variables is increased 0%.

In addition, after controlling other variables, different types of Internet use variable explained offline political participation by 2.3%. Expressing views on a variety of public things online variable has a significant positive impact on offline political participation ( $b=0.195$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

## Conclusion and discussion

This study analyzed the effects of time spent online and different types of internet use on offline political participation. The answer to RQ1 is that time spent online has no effects on Internet users' participation in offline politics in Guangzhou. However, as one of the type of internet use, expressing views on a variety of public things online is found to be highly relevant with offline political participation. In other words, the impact of time spent on the Internet is far less than the impact of types of Internet use on offline political participation. From July 2005 to January 2015, the China Internet Development Statistics Report showed that China's Internet users' average weekly duration increased from 14.0 hours to 25.9 hours. The amount of time spent on the internet by Chinese people is rising, but this doesn't mean that their offline political participation is in the same direction.

When comes to RQ2, the type of internet use that express views on a variety of public things online is found to be highly relevant with offline political participation. Previous studies showed what the Internet has brought to China is not necessarily democratization, but a nascent public space (Yang, 2003a; 2003b; 2003c) or, to say the least, an alternative platform for expressing one's opinion. It is found that although the individuals expressing their online public views more are part of Internet users, they have the highest offline political participation. Therefore, mastering public opinion on the internet would grasp the main opinions of the people who participate in offline politics actively.

On the other hand, going online to learn domestic and international news has no impact on offline political participation, which is different from similar studies abroad. For example, Shah (2005) and others found the role of the Internet as a source of political information and a sphere for public expression. The conclusions of this study may be explained that the sources of information offered by the Internet are always from traditional media, so the impact of going online to learn domestic and international news is no more than the news from traditional media. For example, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2004 (Comfield & Horrigan, 2004:1-7) demonstrates that mainstream news sources dominate the online news environment. As respect to China, the sources of information mostly come from Chinese traditional media because foreign information is unable to come in China easily. For example, Feng & Guo (2012) found evidence that the Chinese government has customized blocking strategies for what it considers to be important websites. Going online to learn domestic and international news, along with news consumption in traditional media, has no impact on offline political participation after controlling other variables and political interesting variable.

Although previous studies showed that the Internet provided a source of political information and a sphere for political expression in contrast with traditional media (Dahlgren, 2000; White, 1997), both of

which would seem to support political participation in western countries. The result of this study showed that the effect of Internet use on political participation depended on a public sphere for political expression rather than a source of political information in China.

Other types of internet use have no significant effect on offline political participation, which includes shopping online or online payment, communicating with friends, family or other people online, going online to play games or meet personal hobby, going online to learn the information about the working and living because these types can be attributed to communication medium or entertainment tools. It means that when the internet is used as a communication medium and as one of entertainment tools, it had no relation with offline political participation

In terms of news consumption in traditional media, this study found these variables had no impact on political participation when political interest and other variables are controlled. This may be the result of people's political interest spurring news consumption in traditional media and news consumption stimulates political participation. On the other hand, political interest spurs information seeking via mass media is verified by many scholars (Rahn, Brehm & Carlson, 1999: 111–160) and this study also verified these arguments. One group of previous studies argued that the Internet will serve to activate those citizens who are already predisposed or interested in politics (Bonfadelli, 2002; Krueger, 2002; Polat, 2005; Weber, Loumakis & Bergman, 2003). Another group of previous studies argued that the Internet could mobilize politically inactive populations (Krueger, 2002; Ward, Gibson & Lusoli, 2003; Weber, et.al., 2003). For the reason that political interest and expressing views on a variety of public things online are positive predictors of political participation, this study argues that the Internet will serve to activate those citizens who are already predisposed or interested in politics, but also give these citizens a public sphere for political expression in China .

However, there are still some limits on this research, such as it is a cross-sectional investigation. Although expressing views on a variety of public things online is related to offline political participation, we cannot just infer expressing views on a variety of public things online leads to offline political participation because it may also be that offline political participation leads to expressing views on a variety of public things online. This study could not be to put forward verifying the variables of cause and effect. Given if verifying the variables of cause and effect, we have to know some information including time and cross-section. Surely, that information is rare to find in social science (Taris, 2000:125-176), so we also need to start more international study.

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