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Title

The Evolution of the Chinese Internet: Creative Visibility in the Digital Public

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/13n6f4hr>

Journal

Contemporary Sociology A Journal of Reviews, 51(3)

ISSN

0094-3061

Author

Xu, Fang

Publication Date

2022-05-01

DOI

10.1177/00943061221090769i

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Peer reviewed

Pöder, Kaire, and Kaie Kerem. 2011. "Social Models' in a European Comparison. Convergence or Divergence?" *Eastern European Economics* 49(5):55–74. <https://doi.org/10.2753/EEEE0012-8775490503>.

Svallfors, Stefan. 2012. *Contested Welfare States: Welfare Attitudes in Europe and Beyond*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

The Evolution of the Chinese Internet: Creative Visibility in the Digital Public, by **Shaohua Guo**. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020. 328 pp. \$90.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781503613775.

FANG XU

University of California-Berkeley
fangxu@berkeley.edu

Using illustrative examples of online celebrities on Bulletin Board System (BBS) hosted on elite college campuses in the 1990s, to commercially operated blogspace, to microblogging sites—epitomized by Weibo—and most recently the all-encompassing platform WeChat, Shaohua Guo chronologizes the Chinese internet behind the so-called Great Firewall. *The Evolution of the Chinese Internet: Creative Visibility in the Digital Public* is an impressive and ambitious endeavor, capturing decades of internet usage in a single volume.

The author's qualitative and interdisciplinary approach generates a comprehensive analysis of state policies, the operations of platform companies, and media coverage. There is a particular focus on highly publicized cases involving celebrities in the entertainment industry and influencers who are subject not only to the gaze of netizens but surveillance by the state. The author uses the "network of visibility" as an analytical lens to examine the mechanisms behind the rise and fall of online media platforms and cultural celebrities' often transient dominance of collective attention. How the myriad ways of seeing and being seen on the Chinese internet differ from those outside the Great Firewall is surveillance and censorship by an authoritarian regime.

Also documented in the book is the rise and fall of the hope for a democratic society

that emerged from the seemingly open online space. The sprouting virtual public sphere (Habermas 1974), with engaged netizens practicing social activism through citizen journalism and digital witness—"blogging on the scene" as news bypassing state regulations on news agencies—was crushed after the transition of political leadership in 2012. Digital platforms such as Sina Weibo survived by convincing the state that "their proffering of microblogging services would help sustain authoritarian rule" (p. 46), while many online celebrities were detained and charged (p. 51).

As it turned out, digital platforms provide yet another venue for state propaganda. Through social media accounts of governmental agencies, such as the Communist Youth League of China, the state fosters and mobilizes a new generation of young patriotic netizens, the so-called "Little Pinks" who launch populist movements that attack cultural elites and arouse nationalistic sentiments (p. 184).

The author compares and contrasts Sina and Tencent, the companies that own Weibo and WeChat respectively, in their managing and promoting original content through the examples of significant digital contention surrounding public figures or cultural celebrities and social events. Full of fascinating stories of Chinese cultural celebrities capitalizing on the attention of blogspace and social media platforms, the Chinese internet replicates the winner-takes-all mindset of the real world. The author strings the historization of four online platforms with significant internet celebrities: elite college-aspirer Furong Jiejie, entertainer and cultural entrepreneur Papi Jiang, writer and social critic Han Han, TV anchor and cultural entrepreneur Yang Lan, journalist and feminist writer Mu Zimei, young writer and cultural entrepreneur Guo Jingming, and journalist and cultural entrepreneur Mi Meng. What all these figures share is their timely capitalization of online attention to obtain symbolic, social, and economic capital in the Bourdieusian sense (1986). Some of their rags-to-riches stories even resonate with the state's "China Dream" propaganda. When tracing their rise and fall, the author stresses the nuances and ambivalences of the Chinese internet

and the intricate relations between the state, commercial entities, and netizens. However, the author does not engage with the abundant literature on the attention economy or the exploitative nature of user-generated content on social media platforms or build dialogues with scholarship about surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019).

By providing a rich and vivid depiction of the online mocking of Furong Jiejie, the author illustrates “how the Chinese internet community has at times fanatically idolized, vehemently condemned, and obsessively attended to her” (pp. 74–75). Furong’s rags-to-riches experience and netizens’ reactions are similar to a few other online celebrities across various platforms depicted by the author. However, the author falls short of scrutinizing the underlying mentality of such behaviors in the internet community. Does such collective behavior in mocking, condemning, or praising elitist or anti-elitist? How do we read contemporary Chinese society from such online collective effervescence, to borrow the term from Émile Durkheim ([1912] 2008), especially when some of these online celebrities’ experiences align with the achievement of the “China Dream”?

The author reveals a constant negotiation and self-censorship practiced by cultural entrepreneurs and celebrities to survive on the Chinese Internet. Those cultural entrepreneurs walk on thin ice, cautious of netizens’ responses to their original content and how much they cross the state’s boundaries. For example, Mi Meng’s entire cultural enterprise—millions of followers on Weibo and WeChat—all fell apart and filed for bankruptcy after a few critical Weibo posts by People’s Daily, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

The author defines the subject of this study as “the Chinese internet as a product of the ways in which Chinese-language users navigate digital spaces and make sense of their everyday lives” (p. 3). However, the methodological choice to focus on online celebrities and their public accounts does not capture or represent tens of millions of Chinese netizens’ everyday online experiences. It would be more informative for the author to elaborate on “the need to coin euphemisms to get

around the Great Firewall” (p. 124), a collective behavior not restricted to online celebrities or influencers but practiced by ordinary netizens in composing their posts every day.

In detailing the growth and expansion of the four primary digital platforms, the author “illustrates the process by which Chinese tech companies and attention entrepreneurs have transitioned from being copycats of global business models to digital creators” (p. 20). For example, Sina, a leading online media company, launched Weibo in 2010 and “gradually transitioned from an imitator of Twitter and Facebook into a multifunctional platform” (p. 48). The all-encompassing platform WeChat merges functions such as telecommunication, social networking, information dissemination, and e-commerce (p. 55) and accounts for the largest share of data consumption within China (p. 200). It would be useful to extend the argument about platforms’ transitions from copycats to innovators to the discussion about Chinese cultural entrepreneurs or influencers on social media platforms. There are parallel online celebrities and influencers in the United States whose self-presentations and communication styles bear similarities with their counterparts in China. After all, the Chinese internet behind the Great Firewall is not completely isolated or insulated from global cultural trends.

The evolution of the Chinese internet from a quasi-public sphere to yet another venue receptive of state propaganda that aligns with the state’s interests further demonstrates the strength of the regime and its success in social engineering. For example, the dispute over China’s sovereignty claims in the South China Sea (p. 186) is yet another case of rising nationalism and support for aggression on the international stage among Little Pinks that serve the regime’s interests. Regardless of how much Chinese internet companies or social media platforms’ functions resemble those outside of China, there is no ambivalence in understanding who the big boss is. This in-depth, informative study on the Chinese internet should enjoy a broad readership, including scholars of contemporary Chinese society, political science, media studies, and cultural sociology.

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Research Exposed: How Empirical Social Science Gets Done in the Digital Age, edited by **Eszter Hargittai**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. 288 pp. \$30.00 paper. ISBN: 9780231188777.

MEGAN STUBBS-RICHARDSON
 Mississippi State University
 megan@ssrc.msstate.edu

With a keen interest in digital research methods, I enjoyed reading Eszter Hargittai's *Research Exposed: How Empirical Social Science Gets Done in the Digital Age*. Readers will leave with knowledge of successful methodological approaches for digital research, including how to detect bots, explore absent data, recruit difficult-to-reach samples through social media advertising, and obtain information on best practices for adapting more traditional designs to studying online behavior. This book can be divided into four areas of digital research: (1) data science approaches to examining digital media (Chapters 1–2), (2) recruitment efforts for studying technological topics (Chapters 3, 5, 10), (3) online contributions to ethnographic research (Chapters 6, 7, 8), and (4) traditional research methods applied to internet research (Chapters 4, 9, 11, 12).

For scholars interested in the methodological decisions made from the start to the finish of a project, this book covers how ideas are formulated, methods are adapted, and monetary or financial concerns are resolved. Indeed, Hargittai states, "By focusing attention

on the concrete details seldom discussed in final project write-ups or traditional research guides, it equips both junior scholars and seasoned academics with essential information that is all too often left on the cutting-room floor" (p. 2). Hargittai achieved this goal, as authors of book chapters discuss potential pitfalls and solutions for improving sample size, study implementation, and overall study design as learned through first-hand experience while collecting or analyzing data. Academics may benefit from ideas expressed in this book by expanding on study details that, as mentioned, often get cut from final project write-ups and by engaging in best practices for open science and transparency.

The range of topics covered in this book provides further insight into how methods can be used for hard-to-reach populations of interest, such as sexual and gender minority youth, political journalists, subjects over age 60, sex workers, homeless individuals, remote populations, independent artists, and digitally marginalized populations. A variety of traditional and nontraditional research methods and data triangulation approaches are covered while exploring these populations, strengthening the use of these applications for digital research.

A theme carried throughout the book is that studying topics in the digital age is challenging because the landscape is constantly changing. For example, demographics and users of digital platforms can change dramatically in a year. Ad requirements and access to data through Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and associated rate limits and data collection standards also change quickly, which limits the types of access points historically obtainable. This requires new approaches to studying digital data, such as the techniques identified for studying "absent data" outlined in Chapter One. Some of the solutions offered include exploring existing datasets collected on similar topics, scraping the Internet Archive, collecting data through replies to original posts, and locating unexpected data dumps.

Another theme in the book is how digital media can be used to complement information found using offline methods. This notion is referred to as "unexpected data" in Chapters One and Six. Unexpected data can