

Technology and political speech: commercialisation, authoritarianism and the supposed death of the Internet's democratic potential

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Abstract

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The Internet was initially seen as a metaphor for democracy itself. However, commercialisation, incorporation into existing hierarchies and patterns of daily life and state control and surveillance appear to have undermined these utopian dreams. The vast majority of online activity now takes place in a handful of commercially owned spaces, whose business model rests on the collection and monetisation of user data. However, the upsurge of political action in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010 and 2011, which many argued was facilitated by social media, raised the question of whether these commercial platforms that characterise the contemporary Internet might provide better venues for political speech than previous types of online spaces, particularly in authoritarian states.

This thesis addresses the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces affects their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems through a mixed-methods comparison of the U.S. and China. The findings of this thesis support the hypotheses drawn from existing literature: commercialisation is negative for political speech but it is less negative, even potentially positive, in authoritarian systems. However, this research uncovers a surprising explanation for this finding. The greater positivity of commercialisation for political speech in authoritarian systems seems to occur not despite the government but because of it. The Chinese state's active stance in monitoring, encouraging and crafting ideas about political speech has resisted its negative repositioning as a commercial product. In contrast, in the U.S., online political speech has been left to the market that sells back the dream of an online public sphere to users as part of its commercial model. There is still hope that the Internet can provide a venue for political speech but power, particularly over the construction of what it means to be a political speaker in modern society, needs to be taken back from the market.

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The reason I chose to pursue research and study in the social sciences is because of the complexity and interwoven nature of society and the impossibility of understanding a single individual or topic divorced from its place in the logical whole. Rationally, the contingencies upon which the statistically unlikely occurrence of me handing in my soft-bound PhD at Oxford's formidable Exam Schools depend most strongly are likely to include a selection of liberal and radical political figures in the UK's history, the historical conditions and lucky chances that allowed me to just scrape into a place at an excellent partially selective, non-fee paying school in a different county at age 12 and, above all, my luckiness to be born in a time and place with a stable political and economic system and in which I was afforded access to education.

However, one must approach acknowledgements not as a rational social scientist but as an emotional entity who feels strongly the contributions of those who have been proximately close and for whom I feel a vast upwelling of love when I think of the time we have spent together and their contributions to my development as a person and as an academic. Chief among these my friends who have supported me throughout my PhD and beyond: Tom Adams, Joshua Jackson, Benjamin Pope, Tine Paulsen, Sarah Reeve, Supatra Sachamitr, Duncan Fraser, Elspeth Piggott, Mirela Ivanova, Daniel Toth, Peter Podworski, and, from my undergrad but no less importantly, Peter and Susan Stone.

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*"Brothers and sisters – the name of the game is power and if
you ain't playing for power then you're in the wrong place."*

*Ossie Davis
Congressional Black Caucus Dinner
June 18, 1971*

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Introduction: Commercialisation, authoritarianism and the supposed death of the Internet's democratic potential

In a series on the world's biggest questions, Weinberg recounts the story of three old men sitting in the gardens of China's Changle Palace, over two thousand years ago, debating the world's greatest invention, an argument which, the story holds, led to the creation of the game Rock, Paper, Scissors. After a brief survey of the highlights of human history that includes not only rocks, paper and scissors but also the alphabet, vaccinations, the stern-mounted rudder and the contraceptive pill, Weinberg concludes that the Internet is truly the greatest invention of all time because not only has this technology "transformed at least a dozen fields: education, news, book publishing, music, finance, networking, dating, charity donations, shopping, language-learning, cartography, medicine, hypochondria and the way we talk to friends, (but) above all it has fanned the movement for democratic change in countries whose inhabitants used to be hobbled by the fear that they were alone" (2012).

This idea that the Internet would bring revitalise civic life in existing democracies and democratise authoritarian states was a common theme in early discourse about the Internet; the Internet was seen as "a metaphor for democracy itself... (that would lead to) a new Athenian age of democracy forged in the fora that the Global Information Infrastructure will create" (Gore, 1994).

A great deal of research examined the potential effects of the Internet on political processes,¹ which Lilleker and Thierry break into three strands: how the Internet can be used to inform, to mobilise and to lead to interaction (2013). Early scholars examining the Internet took a relatively technologically deterministic view that

¹ The idea of effect is a contentious one in social science literature. It is sometimes used to imply necessary causation and, in this use, is associated with ideas of technological determinism that see a specific outcome stemming from the use of a technology, regardless of context. This is not the way in which this word is indented in the bulk of this thesis, which, at its very core interrogates, through a context-rooted comparison of commercialisation and political speech in two very different national contexts the extent to which the uses of this technology for political speech are context-dependent.

saw this technology as a democratising force both within the U.S. and globally, due to its inherent structural properties (which were themselves a reflection of the ideological priorities of its founders). For instance Shapiro posited a 'Control Revolution' in which power over information, experience and resources would be radically distributed to networked individuals, based on the technological and structural properties of the Internet (2000).

These information, mobilisation and interaction effects of Internet use on politics were particularly often considered in reference to ideas of political speech and the rise of the Internet was seen as a way of potentially reversing the decline in civic participation in the West. By changing the nature of communication and social association, the Internet was seen as potentially able to provide an online public sphere (Poster, 1997; Rheingold, 1993) to replace the offline sphere that was seen as having been undermined by increasing commercialisation and by a withdrawal of individuals from civic life (Habermas, 1989; Putnam, 2000).

Not only was the Internet seen as potentially reinvigorating democratic regimes in the West, but through increased access to information, lowered barriers to communication and a greater ease of connection to like-minded individuals, the technology was also seen as having the ability to undermine authoritarian regimes. Of this the vast majority of academic and journalistic work has focused on China, as the world's most populace country and largest authoritarian state.

This extension of Internet connectivity to citizens was seen as necessarily undermining the power of authoritarian states due to the inherent properties of the technology. In 2000, then U.S. President Bill Clinton's quipped, in reference to China, that controlling the Internet was akin to trying to nail Jell-O² to the wall (U.S. Government Printing Office). New York Times writer Nick Kristof reflected this popular perception when he wrote that the adoption of the Internet in China constituted a "death by a thousand blogs" for the authoritarian state and that it is

² Jell-O is the brand name for a popular American brand of jello or gelatinous dessert that would be impossible to nail to a wall.

“the Chinese leadership itself that is digging the Communist Party's grave, by giving the Chinese people broadband” (2005).

Academic perspectives concerning the effects of Internet adoption in authoritarian states were more guarded. However, there was still held a great deal of optimism about the democratic potential of the Internet to undermine authoritarianism rather than authoritarianism undermining the democratic potential of the Internet. Again, most of the research into authoritarian states focused on China. Chinese academics and journalists focused on the idea that the Internet might aid the development of Chinese civil society and an online public sphere, concepts that were completely alien when they were first introduced into China in the 1980s (Yang, 2009). Case studies of key events, such as the death of migrant Sun Zhigang in 2003 (which resulted in the abolishment of the custody and repatriation system) or the release of blogger Guo Baofeng after a 2009 postcard writing campaign, painted a picture of a development of a civil society and an incipient public sphere emerging in Chinese cyberspace, within the boundaries of permissible topics (Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Zheng & Wu, 2005; Zhou, Chan & Peng, 2008).

In addition to the development of an online public sphere within state-set bounds of permissible topics, the Internet was also seen as leading to a renegotiation of permissible forms of political speech in China with society constraining the state as much as the other way around (Yang, 2009; Zheng, 2007). Lei found, based on an analysis of survey data, that Chinese 'netizens' were more likely to be politically opinionated, supportive of the norms of democracy, critical of the party-state and potential and active participants in collective action (2011). Supporting this perspective, between 1993 and 2005 the number of mass incidents reported in Chinese government documents increased tenfold from 8700 to 87000, suggesting a rapidly rising amount of citizen political activity that challenged state power (Yu, 2008).

This hopefulness about the potential of the Internet as a liberation technology (Diamond, 2010) in China and other authoritarian contexts continued after

discourse about the Internet's potential effects in existing democracies had turned dystopian. Like other apparently revolutionary technologies before it, the Internet seemed to have been incorporated into existing power structures and patterns of daily life. Despite the dreams about the democratising potential of the Internet, it was found to be dominated by a small number of offline power holders and new group of online elite (who mirrored offline elites). In concluding that digital democracy was a myth, Hindman found that in the realm of direct political speech "the facts bear little resemblance to the myths that continue to shape both public discussion and scholarly debate" (2009, p. 18).

This colonisation of the Internet by existing elites was associated with the transition to a new type of highly commercialised online platform that focused on user-generated content, ease of use and integration into mass patterns of daily life. In what has been called Web 2.0, Internet use is now dominated by a handful of major multinational corporations, such as Google, Facebook, Twitter and Amazon. These platforms rose to prominence after the collapse of the dot com bubble and are based on a new business model that rests on the monetisation of user data and online socialising and the concentration of control of distribution channels into the hands of a few service providers (Lovink, 2011). Although with their ease of publication and dissemination and mass social networks, these platforms provide more affordances for political information, mobilisation and interaction, the participatory potential of Web 2.0 technologies is seen as having been undermined through colonisation by the market, censorship by organisations, states and industries and appropriation by political and cultural elites (Cammaerts, 2008).

These arguments draw from a long history of critique of the process of commercialisation as undermining political speech. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the development of 'the culture industry', centred around mass-produced cultural and entertainment products that served to manipulate individuals in society into docile obedience to capitalism (1972). Developing these critiques still further, Habermas, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, argued that, through the process of

commercialisation, the public sphere was replaced by a “community of consumers” and “a pseudo-public or sham-private world of cultural consumption” (1989, p. 160).

The Internet, which was initially seen as potentially providing spaces for the revival of a public sphere, has now been commercialised and incorporated into existing power structures and patterns of daily life. This process is seen as both driven by and leading to a dominance by offline elites and a reinforcement of existing divides (Hindman, 2009; Norris, 2001; Wu, Hofman, Mason & Watts, 2011). The economic need to provide spaces that are comfortable and pleasant for users is seen as leading to ‘echo chambers’, predominantly exposing users to political opinions that they already agree with (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Conover et al., 2011; Lazer, Rubineau, Chetkovich, Katz & Neblo, 2010; Pariser, 2012). This commercialisation is also seen as leading to a replacement of genuine political activity with ‘slacktivist’ acts, such as retweeting and liking online content, that require little effort but allow the user to feel satisfied that they have contributed to a political issue (Morozov, 2012). Many conclude that the commercial nature of Internet platforms undermines their ability to provide a venue for political speech (Hintz, 2016; MacKinnon, 2012; Youmans & York, 2012) and, thus, this commercialisation of online spaces was a key component of the turn from utopian to dystopian ideas about the effects of the Internet on politics that focused on concerns of distraction, dominance, exploitation and surveillance at the hands of elites, states and commercial companies.

The extension of the Internet into authoritarian states was also seen as undermining these utopian dreams, turning into just another tool of state power. While the proponents of the Internet as a democratising force had assumed that these effects were necessarily associated with the structure of the technology, authoritarian states proved adept at adapting these technologies to their own uses. Many authoritarian states, including Iran, Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, engage in heavy control of their own online spaces and censor the information that

can flow into the country³. With almost a quarter of the world's Internet population living behind China's Great Firewall, some argue it is not accurate to speak of a single, global Internet but of the 'splinternet', with the Internet in certain countries dominated by easy-to-control, domestically developed products (Morozov, 2009).

In China, although there have been some success stories of the Internet being used to break scandals and mobilise public opinion, it seems that a bigger beneficiary may have been the state that utilises these technologies to solidify their power based on systems of censorship, surveillance and data mining (Sullivan, 2014; Wang & Hong, 2010). Some scholars have attributed the failure of challenges to the Chinese state to develop in these online spaces to the approval of the Chinese people of the state's strengthening of the economy, acceptance of the status quo and failure to imagine the possibility of radical political change (Herold, 2008; Stern & Hassid, 2012).

However, the wave of political action that swept through the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 challenged this dystopian narrative. The very same political platforms that were understood as leading to 'echo chambers', 'slacktivism', surveillance, distraction and exploitation were seen as playing a crucial role in facilitating these political actions, shaping the contours of political debate, facilitating the organisation of offline activities and helping spread political ideas across borders (Howard et al., 2011; Howard & Hussain, 2011).

In authoritarian countries, many see the effects of the commercialisation of online spaces and the rise of large commercial social media platforms as having a different effect on political speech than in democratic contexts. Commercialisation of the media in China is seen as reducing the power of the state because

³ It is important to note that Internet censorship and control is not confined to authoritarian states. The number of countries that censor Internet content is growing fast, including countries such as United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands and Australia, and there seems to be a spiral effect toward greater control with, for instance, China justifying its Internet censorship based on the argument that it is normal in the West and America justifying its introduction of a cyber emergency bill based on the argument that it is normal in China (MacKinnon, 2012).

commercial media must satisfy their bottom line as well as The Party (Gang & Bandurski, 2011; Winfield & Peng, 2005) and commercial online platforms compete with each other to provide the most lively spaces for political speech (Yang, 2009).

Thus, while commercialisation in democratic countries is generally seen as negative for political speech because it distracts from politics, the same process is viewed as positive in authoritarian countries because these commercial spaces provide some protection from state dominance.

This presents a key question in terms of understanding the political changes that might be associated with the use of the Internet: are the effects of the commercialisation of online spaces truly different in different political systems? Although one third of the World's Internet users live in authoritarian countries⁴, much less research has been devoted to these contexts than to the democratic countries in which the technology was first developed and adopted. Additionally, very little research takes a comparative focus, which means that the influence of the political, social and economic context of use cannot easily be disambiguated from any potential changes associated with the adoption of this technology.

Furthermore, much of the scholarship about the Internet has approached it as a monolithic technology rather than considering the underlying processes and power structures that shape its constitution. Commercialisation is one of the defining processes of the modern era, influencing long-term changes in politics, society, culture and everyday life and driving the concurrent processes of globalisation, individualisation and mediatisation (Krotz, 2007). A wealth of research has addressed the potential effects of the Internet on politics; much less has considered the effects of the commercialisation of the Internet on its political potential.

⁴ Numbers of Internet users are derived from Internet Live Stats, Internet Users by Country 2014 (Accessed on 2 October, 2015). Authoritarian states are those defined as so (receiving a democracy index of 3.9 or less) by the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy 2014. According to this calculation, 35.55% of the world's Internet users live in authoritarian states.

Thus, this thesis addresses this gap in knowledge about this important topic through a comparison of the effects of the commercialisation of online spaces on their potential as venues for political speech in the U.S. and China.

The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of the structure and content of this thesis and summarises its main conclusions and contributions to academic discourse. Chapter Two begins by establishing context-neutral definitions of political speech and commercialisation, defining political speech as any communicative action that affects or seeks to affect the balance of power in society and commercialisation as an increase in the power of the market in society. Based on a review of the way the concept is employed in literature, the process of commercialisation is broken down into five sub-processes: privatisation, marketisation, exposure to commercial forces, the reconstitution of citizens as consumer and a movement into commercial spaces.

Based on these definitions, Chapter Two continues with an examination of the arguments about the effects of commercialisation on political speech in both democratic and authoritarian political systems, grouping these perspectives into five arguments that commercialisation is negative for political speech and five arguments that the process is not negative and could even be positive for political speech. This review of the literature reveals that the idea that commercialisation is negative for political speech is dominant in democratic contexts, with ideas that commercialisation is not negative or could even be positive a minority view. These perspectives are reversed in literature about authoritarian contexts, leading to the hypothesis that commercialisation is negative for political speech but that it is less negative or could even be positive in authoritarian contexts.

Chapter Three describes and justifies the methodological approach of this thesis, based on a comparison of the process of online commercialisation and its effects on political speech through a mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative and qualitative and macro and micro level data. This chapter justifies the case selection of the U.S. and China as leading examples of democratic and

authoritarian systems and the choice to focus, within these cases, on the key social networking sites of Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China, both leading commercial microblogging platforms that are seen as providing spaces for political speech in both political systems. The novel methodology of structural discourse analysis is proposed that attempts to illuminate how both practical technologies and discourses act to constitute individuals in particular ways and the process of collecting a unique dataset of a random sample of users and their posts on Twitter and Weibo is outlined.

Chapter Four presents a macro-level, qualitative approach to this question through structural discourse analysis. This chapter illuminates four key discourses that appear to structure ideas of appropriate frames of political speech and the status of Internet users as potential political speakers: information abundance in the U.S. and ideological correctness in China, equality in the U.S. and hierarchy in China, the state as a protector in both political systems and the Internet user as a producer and consumer of digital data in both systems. This analysis of the structuring forces that might act to constrain online platforms and the actions of users within them provides a picture of the way in which state and market forces can affect the potential for Internet users to engage in online political speech in both democratic and authoritarian political systems through power over conflicts, agendas and social constructions.

Chapter Five presents a micro-level, quantitative analysis of types of users, levels of commercialisation and political speech and the interaction between commercialisation and political speech in the U.S. and China, based on a random sample of user accounts on the two key commercial platforms of Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China. This analysis finds that U.S. microblogs appear to align more strongly with offline power hierarchies, with a greater representation of market, civic and state accounts and an individual user base that resembles the offline population and population of Internet users. Rates of commercial and informational speech are shown to be higher among individual Chinese microblog users, with rates of personal speech higher among individual U.S. microblog users.

Levels of political speech are higher in the Chinese sample but the difference is not enough to be statistically significant.

Chapter Six presents a qualitative, micro-level examination of the user posts identified in this random sample. Individual speech on U.S. microblogs is found to be dominated by personal content. Individual speech about commercial topics seems to show that users have internalised commercial discourses about their positions as consumers and speech about political topics is largely individualised, symbolic and passive. In contrast, the individual speech acts on Chinese microblogs have a more communal focus, commercial content is dominated by forwarding for the purposes of potentially winning a prize and many political speech acts exhibit an active orientation that questions dominant discourses, provides new information, links to offline situations and promotes the needs of vulnerable members of society.

The final data chapter (Chapter Seven) presents quantitative, macro-level data on levels of commercialisation and political speech in different political systems based on a worldwide survey of Internet users and constructs models that account for the influence of political system, user demographics, political beliefs and levels of commercialisation on the frequency of online political speech. The results of this analysis show that the findings from the analysis of Twitter and Weibo can be largely generalised to the wider context of Internet use over a general timeframe with, for instance, Chinese Internet users reporting much higher rates of both political speech and high levels of commercialisation. Commercialisation is shown to be more strongly associated with the frequency of political speech in China than the U.S. and rates of political speech among Chinese Internet users are shown not to be associated with political opinions or concerns about monitoring or censorship.

Chapter Eight draws together the findings of these four data chapters to provide an assessment of the nature of the commercialisation of online spaces and evaluate the effects of this process on the ability of these spaces to offer a venue for political

speech in different political systems, based on the arguments about the effects of commercialisation on political speech summarised in Chapter Two. It is concluded that these data support both the hypotheses derived from existing literature: commercialisation is negative for political speech but that it is less negative, or even positive, for political speech in authoritarian political systems.

However, the comparative, context-focused approach of this thesis concludes that this is true for a surprising reason. Previous research, that did not consider configurations of power in the context of use, hypothesises that the less negative effects of commercialisation in authoritarian contexts might be due to this process transferring power away from a state, which suppresses political speech, to a market sphere, which provides a space away from state domination. This research concludes, however, that the more positive effects of commercialisation on political speech in China occur not despite state control but largely because of it. The Chinese state's active role in encouraging the use of the Internet for political speech and in participating in a continued dialogue about the ideal configuration of power between the state, the market and civil society and appropriate modes of political speech mitigate the negative effects of increased commercial power over spaces for political speech.

The final chapter of this thesis considers the implications of these conclusions for theories of online political speech and the future of the politics in the Internet age. It argues that to revitalise the democratic potential of the Internet power over what it means to be a citizen online needs to be taken back from the market. In both democratic and authoritarian contexts, the use of the Internet is changing repertoires of political speech. However, when power over what it means to be a citizen in the age of commercialisation is left to the commercial providers of spaces for political speech, the potential of speech within these spaces to change the balance of power in society is undermined. The debates over net neutrality in the U.S. ended in the ruling that the Internet was a common carrier, whose importance to society was too great to be left to the market. It is time to recognise that this importance is not limited to the hardware of the Internet but also its software. The

provision of online spaces for political speech and the crafting of ideas about what it means to be a citizen online are also too important to be left to the market.

In reference to China, this thesis provides limited hope for those who wish that the Internet will facilitate regime change in the world's largest authoritarian country. While commercialisation and Internet technologies appear to have facilitated change at the margins and allowed the growth of a technologically enabled civil society, the state retains ultimate power over the boundaries of acceptable political speech. The results of this thesis support the theories of China as following a path of 'market authoritarianism' and instituting a system of 'authoritarian deliberation'. Evidence is also found in this thesis that in addition to authoritarian deliberation, the state is tolerating the emergence of a constrained civil society sphere of citizen action. Both the market and political speech have been allowed to develop in China as long as they do not threaten the power of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) and the underlying structure of the political system. However, this has occurred only within the boundaries set by the authoritarian state and there is evidence that these boundaries may be getting tighter rather than looser.

In both the U.S. and China, the Internet has been incorporated into existing power structures, with the market taking the lead in the U.S. and the state in China. However, surprisingly it seems that the greater control maintained by the state in authoritarian systems results in a greater potential for this technology to provide spaces for speech that affect or seek to affect the balance of power in society than when control of these spaces and ideas about what it means to be a citizen online are left to the market. In short, it is not commercialisation that protects against authoritarianism but the power maintained by the authoritarian state over conflicts, agendas and, in particular, social constructions that protects against commercialisation.

Commercialisation and political speech

2.1. Chapter overview

The previous chapter described how the utopian dreams for the Internet's democratic potential are seen as having been undermined by commercialisation and authoritarianism but, also, how the events of the Arab Spring have put back on the agenda the idea that commercial online platforms might provide valuable spaces for political speech and that these platforms might have a different relationship with politics in authoritarian, as opposed to the more oft-studied democratic, political systems.

This chapter lays the theoretical groundwork for an investigation of this issue, beginning by establishing context-neutral definitions of political speech and commercialisation that can be used in this thesis for a cross-national comparison of these issues. The remainder of the chapter provides a survey of existing literature concerning the effects of commercialisation on political speech in different political systems. This review highlights a tension in current knowledge about the effects of commercialisation on political speech: namely, that in democratic systems the idea that commercialisation is negative for political speech dominates while in authoritarian systems commercialisation tends to be seen as positive for political speech.

Based on this review of the literature, the final section of this chapter summarises the arguments about the effects of commercialisation on political speech into a framework against which the data collected in this thesis can be evaluated and formally states the research question and hypothesis of this thesis, which examines how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems.

2.2 Political speech

Until now, this thesis has frequently mentioned the concept of political speech and used this term somewhat interchangeable, with other similar concepts such as political participation and political action. However, in order to approach the study

of the effects of the commercialisation of the Internet on politics in a structured way it is important to state and define the exact terms under consideration; this thesis will crystallise its inquiry under the idea of political speech, the form of state-citizen interaction that the Internet was most seen as offering a new venue for through its ability to inform, mobilise and lead to interaction.

Political speech, in its simplest form, is speech about political topics; however, specifying the precise meaning of words and phrases is never simple. Both what constitutes speech and what constitutes political deserve careful consideration.

Speech in the everyday understanding of the word refers to spoken communication, of which there is little online. However, the importance of the concept of political speech and this type of communicative act as part of social and political life means that the phrase political speech has important affective meaning. Due to the social and legal importance of the phrase in democratic theory, the idea of political speech has developed to encompass non-verbal communicative acts, such as those that occur online. For instance, freedom of speech is a cornerstone of the U.S. Constitution and the U.S. legal tradition holds that political speech, due to its important place in society, deserves greater protection than other forms of speech, such as commercial speech (Lee Reed, 1996). First Amendment protection of political speech has been extended to cover non-verbal communication⁵.

However, what was and is understood by this central concept of political speech is contested. At the time when the concept of political speech was being negotiated and enshrined as a particularly important part of societal conduct, the primary mode of individual political communication was either written or spoken language, leading to an association of political speech with individual verbal acts (Epstein & Walker, 2012).

⁵ In the U.S. legal tradition non-verbal communication is referred to as symbolic speech. This definition of symbolic speech is different from that commonly used in theories of political participation in which symbolic speech (in contrast to instrumental speech) refers to speech made without a tangible, immediate goal. The idea of symbolic speech used in this thesis should be understood as referring to that of political participation theory (i.e. non-instrumental speech) unless otherwise stated.

Since the development of the concept of political speech as central to Western political theory and processes, and particularly with the advent of digital communication, venues for symbolic communication have proliferated. However, the concept of political speech remains so important in discourse that it continues to be used to refer to non-verbal and non-written communication on political topics. As such, political speech should be understood to include both verbal and non-verbal communicative acts on political topics.

There is, however, a great deal of debate over what types of actions and activities should be included in definitions of political speech, with these arguments rooted in wider arguments about what constitutes political participation. In their influential study of political participation in America, Verba and Nie define four types of political participation: voting, campaign activities, citizen-initiated contacts with officials and cooperative participation by groups of citizens to deal with social and political problems (1987).

Similarly, Almond and Verba define political participation by citizens as actions made with the deliberate intent of influencing government or the state, which can be legal or illegal, conventional or unconventional and individual or group (Almond & Verba, 1963). There have, however, been several critiques of this perspective and attempts to update theories of political participation to account for changing ideas of the political in globalised, mediatised Western societies. Arguing that it is time to update the definition of political participation, Fox outlines nine current debates over the contours of what constitutes political participation, active versus passive behaviour, individual versus group-orientated activity, instrumental versus symbolic activity, voluntary versus mobilised or forced activity, deliberate aims versus unintended consequences, legal/conventional versus illegal/unconventional activity, influence versus intent, state/government targets versus general political actor targets and successful versus failed activities (2013).

A particularly important area of this debate in terms of online political speech is the distinction between symbolic and instrumental speech. Symbolic political speech is defined in contrast to instrumental political speech, with instrumental speech being made in an attempt to achieve some tangible goal of (or of interest to the speaker); in contrast, symbolic political speech (or activity) is seen as one that has no tangible political goal (Fox, 2013). Scaff draws a similar distinction between instrumental and interactional political participation; he defines instrumental participation as that which has a definite goal vis-à-vis the state, government or elites and interactional participation as horizontal communication arising out of and occurring between individuals as members of a community and which is orientated towards political self-realisation, political knowledge and political virtues (1975).

Theories of the public sphere attach particular importance to this arena of horizontal, symbolic communication between citizens, which is understood as the place in which political opinions are formed based on rational discussion; these opinions then form part of the instrumental political speech that is directed at the state (Habermas, 1989). Later theorists (drawing from feminist and post-structuralist perspectives) have afforded even more attention to symbolic speech and community-level actions. For instance, Fraser (1992) attacked the exclusion of the familial and domestic spheres from the political as reflective of a gendered unwillingness to accept the validity of certain political struggles. Emerging from rights-based discourse, the politics of identity, excluded from original conceptions of political speech, have taken centre stage in political life over the past couple of decades, with highly symbolic forms of political speech particularly important in identity politics (Castells, 2009; Schudson, 2002).

Research into online political speech has tended to conclude that these technologies, for better or worse, prioritise the symbolic over the instrumental. The influential idea of 'slacktivism' describes a state of affairs in which instrumental political speech is replaced by easy symbolic online political actions that make the user feel that they have participated in politics but have little, if any,

effect (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2012). However, others have argued that these online symbolic actions often form the first step toward participation in offline, instrumental action (Zuckerman, 2013b) and survey research in the U.S. has found a statistical association between engaging in online symbolic and instrumental political actions (Center for Social Impact Communication, 2011).

These changes both in repertoires of citizen actions and in understanding of what is political means that the boundaries of what constitutes a political speech act are far from clear. The same series of nine questions raised by Fox concerning what should constitute ideas of political participation apply equally to political speech; for instance, must it be active or is passive or symbolic speech also important and valuable? What is clear, however, is that any investigation into political speech should attempt to craft a definition that does not preclude through its definition acts that should be or are considered by their perpetrators or receivers as political.

A similar concern exists in the definition of the political. As discussed above, the way in which the political should be defined is a matter of much debate. With the emergence in the nineteenth century of the market as a major structuring institution in European societies, a core distinction developed in theory (if perhaps not in practice) between the public and the private (Horwitz, 1982). Theories of political speech that developed out of this distinction, such as Habermas' theory of the public sphere (1989) or the work of Arendt (1999), rest on a separation between a public life that is the realm of the political and a private life that is the realm of the social and the economic.

Theories in this tradition see the incorporation of the social and economic into the public realm as detrimental to the value of the political speech thought to occur therein. For this reason, Habermas lamented the commercialisation of the public sphere and the infiltration of the elite strata by upwardly mobile social classes whose education does not match their status/income and who prefer cultural consumption to discussion (1989, p. 142). These distinctions led to theoretical traditions that excluded certain acts from the political realm; however, with the

rise of identity politics, many argue that daily life and economic action is also and should be considered political (Schudson, 2007).

These theories also are grounded in both Western and democratic traditions and are not necessarily appropriate to evaluate political speech in other contexts. For instance, Chinese traditions of philosophy do not see a clear separation between the domains of economics or family life and the political (Pott, 1981). Thus, theories, such as the public sphere, are not necessarily appropriate for constructing theoretical frameworks to evaluate political speech outside the context of their development. Indeed, the definition of what is political and thus valued and protected under certain legal frameworks and social and cultural norms is itself a political action. As Butler (1995) argues, it is dangerous and counterproductive to preconfigure the boundaries of political life in advance as the philosophical presuppositions of a political movement are often configured through action rather than fully formed before the beginning of that action.

However, it is, of course, necessary to have some sense of what is political and individuals can instinctively understand some topics as political while others are not. What is important is recognising that there is an area of ambiguity, that speech intended as political or having a political effect should not be excluded due to pre-conceived notions and that definitions of what is political and what is not are often used as a tool by existing power holders to delegitimise certain political speakers and topics. The idea of the political is inseparable from the idea of power; politics is about the distribution of power in society and speech acts that concern economic, social and personal topics that are associated with power dynamics should be thought of as political as are speech acts originating in what might be defined as a private realm. Politics is ultimately about power and any attempt at a further restriction of the political is itself a power act that reflects particular discourses and societal structures and should be recognised as such and fought against (although a full escape from structuring discourses is impossible) in any legitimate consideration of the political.

As such, this thesis proposes a context-neutral and inclusive definition of political speech as any communicative act that affects or seeks to affect the distribution of power in society.

In understanding power, this thesis uses Lukes' conception of power as taking one of three forms: power over the resolution of conflicts, power over the setting of agendas and power over social constructions (2005). While noting the existence of the more commonly studied power over conflicts and agendas, Lukes argues that "the supreme and most insidious exercise of power is to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial" (Lukes, 2005, p. 29).

The use of this three-part definition of power constitutes a departure, in this thesis, from traditional studies of political interaction that tend to focus on first form power (looking for disagreements and conflicts) and political communication studies that often focus on second form power (looking at representation, framing and agenda setting). These conceptions are, of course, important. However, this thesis goes deeper in being consciously sensitive to other types of political power, looking beyond what is said, to how political speech might be established, structured and regulated as part of an increased commercialisation of political speech in online spaces.

2.3 Commercialisation

Commercialisation is seen as the major meta-process driving social change in the modern world and underlying other meta-processes such as individualisation, globalisation and mediatisation (Krotz, 2007). However, while this term is used frequently in literature, there are conflicting definitions of commercialisation and considerable disagreement over what aspects of the process of commercialisation are the most important. Additionally, while there has been widespread

commercialisation over the past 25 years, this process has taken a different path in different contexts. Like political speech, an overly prescriptive definition of commercialisation would likely not be appropriate to apply in very different political systems. As such, this thesis defines commercialisation as an increase in power of the market within society and, based on a review of literature, breaks this process into five different types of power transfer to the market within a given society.

Firstly, one of the most obvious and immediate types of commercialisation is the transition between public and private ownership, which is seen as increasing the efficiency of service provision and reducing government bureaucracy. This conception is essentially the same as that of privatisation, the deliberate sale of state owned enterprises or assets to private economic agents. The reduction in state restriction that allow private enterprises to compete in areas that were previously exclusively the preserve of the public sector is also considered to be an aspect of this type of commercialisation (Anuar, 2005).

Until the 1970s, most governments believed that the state should own key services such as telecommunications, transportation infrastructure, postal services, gas and electricity and also, sometimes, key industries such as steel or mining (Megginson & Netter, 2001). However, since the neoliberal turn in the 1970s, deregulation, privatisation and the withdrawal of the state from social provision have been common across the globe (Harvey, 2007).

This has been particularly common in the UK, where a large number of formerly government run services such as British Rail and the Royal Mail have been sold to private owners. In the U.S., which experienced far less nationalisation during the 1970s, there have been fewer outright sales of state-owned property. The mortgage provider 'Fannie Mae' and the student loan provider 'Sallie Mae' are notable exceptions. However, Fannie Mae has been effectively renationalised, after accusations that its predatory lending practices contributed to the U.S. sub-prime mortgage crisis (Labaton & Sorkin, 2008) and Sallie Mae has been subject to

numerous court cases (mostly settled out of court) accusing the provider of unfair and deceptive practices resulting in high levels of student debt (Bidwell, 2014).

Privatisation has been widespread across the globe since the early 1980s and is now an accepted “tool of statecraft by governments of more than 100 countries” as one of “the most important elements of the continuing global phenomenon of the increasing use of markets to allocate resources” (Megginson & Netter, 2001, p. 321). Inspired by the rise of Thatcherism and Reganism, many countries embarked upon large-scale policies of privatisation in the 1980s (Anuar, 2005). Even in China, the Chinese Communist Party has repeatedly stated its commitment to the privatisation (or partial privatisation) of state-owned enterprises (Wildau, 2015).

A second type of commercialisation is the injection or increase of market logic (i.e. the idea of the free market as a self-governing entity) and the emphasis on the need to generate a profit into formerly publicly or socially run enterprises and service. This type of commercialisation, also sometimes known as marketisation, describes the remaking of state services in the manner of a private firm (Kosar, 2006). This conception of commercialisation is also used to refer to the increase in the importance of market forces within already private companies, such as the marketisation of the news media that has closed newspapers and fired staff while maintaining shareholder profits, in keeping with market principles but against the professional ethics of journalism (Fenton, 2011).

This second type of commercialisation is still compatible with high levels of state control over the market. For instance, China, which has experienced little outright privatisation, has seen high levels of marketisation over the past 20 years. In her book *Media Commercialisation and Authoritarian Rule in China*, Stockmann defines commercialisation to be the shift from being managed with the primary goal of serving the public (as defined by the state) to the primary goal of being managed for profit (2012). Similarly, in comparing the prospect for reduced state control through media commercialisation in South Africa and China, Hadland and Zhang define commercialisation as “the shift, over time, from a range of political, social

and journalistic motivations for producing and distributing media, to the dissemination of journalistic or news content oriented toward the generation of profit, usually through increasingly concentrated, often conglomerated media organizations” (2012, p. 391).

There has been widespread media commercialisation worldwide and a reduction in public service media and public funding of media since the 1980s. In democratic countries, this media commercialisation, critics argue, undermines social cohesion and the functioning of the democracy; commercial media outlets must balance their public service responsibilities against their need to make a profit and, in general, are seen as pursuing the latter over the former (Anuar, 2005; Asogwa & Asemah, 2012). In authoritarian countries, this media commercialisation means that while remaining managed by the state (in the state-defined interests of the public), these media outlets must now balance the needs of the state against the needs of the market (Winfield & Peng, 2005). Critics argue this means that these media pander to the lowest common denominator, distracting from political issues, while simultaneously serving the needs of the state (Stockmann, 2012; Y. Zhao & Schiller, 2001). However, there are others who have argued that this commercialisation of the media in authoritarian states creates new opportunities for political speech that challenge state dominated information control (J. Wang, 2011; Yang, 2009).

This second form of commercialisation, the introduction and increase of market logic, has also been prominent in other areas. For instance, many have critiqued the commercialisation of higher education, through licensing, money-making sports teams, patenting and for-profit ventures at public institutions and the rise in for-profit educational institutions (Bok, 2009). This marketisation is also found within the state itself, with the dominance of neoliberal principles that sees the market as a guarantor of freedom and the most efficient mechanism for distributing goods and services within society (Harvey, 2007; Reder, 1999). These underlying processes of privatisation and marketisation are linked to three further

ways in which the concept of commercialisation is used in academic and common speech⁶.

The third way in which the concept of commercialisation is understood is in reference to individual exposure to commercial forces. This is related to ideas of agenda-setting power, with the prevalence of exposure to particular ideas and messages (in this case commercial messages) having an effect on individual thoughts and actions. Advertising now takes up an ever-increasing amount of space in online news media and these commercial messages not only compete with but spill over into editorial content (Boczkowski, 2002). For instance, in Nigeria, it was reported that close to half of news stories on a state broadcasting channel were commercial (Omenugha & Oji, 2008). The effects of this exposure to commercial forces spill over into wider societal discourses. For instance, studies of the advertising in China that began to emerge in the late 1970s and that has accelerated over the past decade has shown how these advertisements have appropriated state and civil society discourses, affecting how these ideas are understood more generally (X. Zhao & Belk, 2008).

This conception of commercialisation as an increased exposure to commercial messages as a form of agenda setting is not limited to exposure advertising but also the presence of commercial goods and services within society, the increasing privatisation and marketisation of the state and other institutions and the influx of commercial players into civil society spaces. In reference to the commercialisation of online spaces, Deuze calls this influx of commercial forces the “Corporate Appropriation of Participatory Culture”, which is seen as particularly problematic because it is often not immediately apparent whether particular aspects of online information or spaces have been created for commercial profit (2008).

A fourth understanding of commercialisation is seen as even more insidious and invisible by critics, namely the reconstitution of citizens as consumers. This is one

⁶ It should be noted that this list, as all categorisations, does not necessarily claim to be completely exhaustive nor to be the only way of breaking down the concept, but rather a useful heuristic in both general understanding and the specific problem under consideration.

of the ways in which Habermas uses the term commercialisation in critiquing the “community of consumers” that undermines the ability of individuals to take part in public sphere speech (1989, p. 160). This is seen as part of a shift in wider societal discourse about what it means to be a citizen, over which the market has increasing power. Livingstone, Lunt and Miller document the increase in the use of consumer discourses on the part of the British communication regulator Ofcom and the conflation of the terms citizen and consumer in a way that marginalises citizen interests as distinct from consumer interests (2007). However, this reconstruction of citizen roles based on consumer discourses is not always seen as negative, with consumer choices embedded in the political context of society and with these historically distinct roles informing and interacting with each other in modern society (Schudson, 2007) and the rise in the power of the consumer seen as empowering individuals and giving them a reason to participate in politics (Read, 2007).

A fifth and final way in which the concept of commercialisation is commonly used is the movement of individuals into commercial spaces. This conception is used by Habermas when he criticises the retreat of individuals from public life into “a pseudo-public or sham-private world of cultural consumption” (1989, p. 160). This is also the drive behind many critiques of the decline of civic life and the movement of individual activities into individualised and commercialised spaces (Putnam, 2000). This has led some commentators to propose that these that private and commercial spaces should also be seen as political spaces (Papacharissi, 2010) and as providing valuable spaces that are free from state domination and control and that respond to the desires of individual users for affordances for political speech (Yang, 2009). However, others argue that these spaces can never be ideal venues for political speech while still owned by private interests (MacKinnon, 2012).

These processes of commercialisation are characteristic of life in the twenty-first century and it is these processes that, more than anything else, are seen as having undermined the dreams for the Internet as offering new and better spaces for political speech and potentially reviving or creating civil society in an online public

sphere. However, there exists a discrepancy in literature on the effects of this process of commercialisation on the ability of spaces to provide a venue for political speech depending on the political system in which this commercialisation takes place.

2.4. Differing perspectives on the effects of commercialisation on political speech

Traditionally commercialisation has been seen as undermining the quality and quantity of political speech. Public sphere theory holds that commercialisation undermines the potential for rational deliberation (Dahlberg, 2001; Habermas, 1989). Research into online political speech in commercial spaces finds 'slacktivism' replacing political action and 'echo chambers' replacing diverse information (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Morozov, 2012). Malina argues that ideas about electronic democracy are skewed to support institutional and economic hegemonies (1999), corporations are colonising online attention and marginalising critical voices (Dahlberg, 2005) and, in a corporate-run society, the Internet and 'netizens' are shaped to in order to satisfy the needs of business and profit maximisation (McChesney, 1996). However, these arguments tend to be made both implicitly and explicitly in democratic contexts (and particularly that of the U.S.).

Less research has considered the effects of commercialisation in authoritarian political systems. However, this body of research has tended to conclude that commercialisation is positive for political speech. Media commercialisation is seen as diversifying state power, tilting toward society in the state-society balance and opening spaces for journalistic freedom (G. Wu, 2000; Lu & Ma, 2015). The rise of large commercial social media platforms is seen as particularly promising in terms of breaking the control that authoritarian states have over information (Diamond, 2010; Howard et al., 2011). The commercial nature of these spaces is also seen as leading them to compete with each other to provide the most lively spaces for discussion (Yang, 2009).

While there are many critics who argue that commercialisation allows authoritarian states to fragment attention, distract from political topics, identify dissenting voices and solidify their control (Morozov, 2012; Pearce & Kendzior, 2012; Stockmann, 2012; Y. Zhao & Schiller, 2001), the dominant narrative still sees commercialisation as providing safe(r), free(r) spaces for political speech and politically empowering individuals through their emergent roles and interests as consumers.

The following sections of this thesis examine, in turn, the positive and negative perspectives on commercialisation and political speech, first in democratic and then in authoritarian political systems.

2.4.1. Commercialisation is negative for political speech: The dominant body of thought in democracies, rooted in the powerful discursive democratic ideal

Commercialisation is widely seen in democratic contexts as negative for political speech. This perspective is rooted in public sphere theory (Habermas, 1989), which is the dominant normative framework for analysing both political systems and political speech (Wright & Street, 2007). This theory sees the public sphere as a space that exists between the state and society in which members of society come together as public individuals to participate in political speech.

Habermas, when he first developed this theory in the mid-twentieth century, felt that a process of progressive ‘socialisation’ of the state and a ‘stateification’ of society had destroyed the bourgeois public sphere. Commercialisation was a key part of this process. The institution of the family, the bastion of private life from which public individuals emerged, had been turned into a community of consumers and the public sphere into a sham-world of cultural consumption; furthermore, “because private enterprises evoke in their customers the idea that in their consumption decisions they act in their capacity as citizens, the state has to ‘address’ its citizens like consumers” (1989, p. 195). Due to this commercialisation, Habermas argued that a key requirement for public sphere discourse was lost,

namely the ability for individuals to leave behind their private lives and engage in rational debate. This claim, that commercialisation undermines the quality of political speech, is the first of five main groups of arguments that commercialisation is negative for political speech.

Deriving their investigation from the theoretical tradition of the public sphere, numerous researchers investigating online political speech have argued that “the expansion of economic interests into more and more areas of online life is leading to the displacement of rational deliberation by instrumental rationality in many online forums” (Dahlberg, 2001, p. 623). Drawing from these arguments, Iosifidis argues that states should invest in creating online public service media because current (commercialised) social media spaces are lacking in the very essence of public sphere discussion (2011). However, the vast majority of popular Internet platforms are commercial, restricting many Internet users’ online political speech acts to these commercialised platforms that currently provide the major spaces for online speech, both public and private.

Habermas also argued that commercialisation undermined public sphere speech in a second way, namely, through distraction. Cultural consumption of mediated content, marketed to the upwardly mobile social classes, had replaced political discussion. Public service broadcasters in the US and Europe were founded because it was thought that if governed solely by market forces the media would gravitate toward soft content, giving people what they wanted to see not what they needed to see. Research into the effects on citizen knowledge of different types of media systems has, indeed, found that “public service television devotes more attention to public affairs and international news, and fosters greater knowledge in these areas, than the market model” (Curran, Iyengar, Lund & Salovaara-Moring, 2009, p. 619). In contrast, commercial run media are seen as tending toward sensationalism, having less tendency to challenge their audiences and ‘deskilling’ their audiences by providing them easier to digest information (Gandy, 2002). The business models of commercial media are also seen as leading them to concentrate attention on the needs of affluent populations, intentionally neglecting issues

related to social justice and the needs of minority populations in the “relentless pursuit of profits” (Anuar, 2005, p. 134).

Many see this process of ‘deskilling’, distraction and neglect associated with commercialisation as accelerating on the Internet. Dahlberg found that online news items are “kept brief for easy consumption and tend to promote consumer identities” and are frequently sponsored by business interests with links at the end of the story to companies offering solutions to the problem outlined (or created) by the article (2005). Similarly, Boczkowski documented the encroachment of advertisement into editorial content in online news sites and a transition of editorial content to “playing a more direct commercial role than the usual advertising function of the press” (2002, p. 275). However, these perspectives on the negative effects of commercialisation focus on mass media products both on and offline. There has been little work that addresses the effects of commercialisation of emerging online platforms on political speech since there are no non-commercial social media platforms to act as objects of comparison, a hole that this thesis seeks to fill in examining the interplay between commercial and political on these commercial platforms that potentially support both functions.

In addition to potentially distracting audience members from serious political topics, commercialised media are also seen as distracting them from serious action. The portmanteaus ‘clicktivism’ and ‘slacktivism’ were created to describe the easy, low-cost actions that are seen as replacing more substantive forms of political speech in online spaces. Morozov instructs readers to kill the ‘slacktivist’ in them, writing that this practice “all too often leads to civic promiscuity—usually the result of a mad shopping binge in the online identity supermarket that is Facebook—that makes online activists feel useful and important while having preciously little political impact” (2012, p. 190). Commercial platforms respond to user desires to participate in political speech with low transaction costs and the existence of these kinds of speech acts is seen as detracting from more substantive action and undermining the quality of political speech in these commercialised spaces.

A third common critique of the effects of commercialisation on political speech is that the commercialisation of spaces for political speech leads to agenda setting, information control and censorship by existing power holders (both commercial and governmental). While proponents argue that commercialisation helps diversify power over media content, critics argue that media privatisation increases opportunities for state control (Hadland & Zhang, 2012; Y. Zhao & Schiller, 2001) and benefits existing power holders with strong connections to the state (Anuar, 2005).

This process occurs both because online speech is seen as a powerful force that commercial entities who then seek to benefit from and because the demand for spaces for online speech is responded to by commercial entities who then have a great deal of power over the contours of speech that occurs on their platforms. In detailing why blogs were failing to live up to their participatory potential, Cammaerts describes both how the commercial paradigm of these sites can act to stifle speech through issues of access and copyright and how corporate entities attempt to use these technologies for their own ends, through such practices as paying bloggers to cover certain issues or post positive content and creating fake blogs that appear to be independent but are rather part of a “manipulative PR strategy of a company (or industry)” (2008, p. 5).

Similar issues are present on commercial social media sites. The practice of ‘astroturfing’, creating an artificial grassroots, has been discovered in multiple instances on Twitter, often related to spreading false information about politicians or political issues (Howard et al., 2017; Kollanyi, Howard, & Woolley, 2016; Ratkiewicz et al., 2011). In reference to online activism during the Arab Spring, MacKinnon documents how the real name policy of Facebook led to the deletion of a group organising protests in Egypt (2012) and Youmans and York discuss the case of YouTube’s removal of a video of two police officers sodomising an Egyptian bus driver even though it was part of a popular movement (2012). Online activists experience a double bind; commercial media platforms often offer the most effective means for achieving their goals but these activists face having their

content or profiles deleted when their political speech aims are seen as threatening the commercial interests of the site and, given the ease with which profiles are created and information is published on these sites, commercial entities can draw from their existing resources exert undue power over online discourse.

Another common and related critique of commercialisation rests on the idea that when online spaces are administered by commercial (rather than public) interests, offline power hierarchies are transferred online and offline elites dominate in this commercialised environment. This is contrary to the discourse of utopianism surrounding the Internet, and social media in particular, that it would allow more voices to speak, reducing elite dominance of agendas. However, those that critique this optimism argue that while many can speak, only a handful are heard and that it is attention that is most limited online, with the vast majority of attention afforded to existing power holders because the commercial framework favours those with existing resources.

In his critique of the *Myth of Digital Democracy*, Hindman argued that “despite – or rather because of – the enormity of content available online, citizens seem to cluster strongly around the top few information sources in a given category”; offline power hierarchies are transferred online and, at best, the Internet simply results in a new information elite who are drawn from the same rich, white, educated, male population as the existing elite (2009, p. 18).

Dahlberg came to a similar conclusion arguing that, although diverse spaces and voices existed online, it is not necessary to control all or even an extensive part of Internet space because “the route to the domination of online practice is the domination of online attention... Space may be preserved for critical communication free of corporate interests; yet such communication may be largely marginalised in the competition for user attention” (2005, p. 164).

This occurs because Internet users have an existing, strong brand loyalty and trust in mainstream media sites that leads them to consume similar information online as off (Dahlberg, 2005). Similarly, in reference to blogs, Farrell and Drezner argue

that elites are more likely to be linked to and reported on because they exert both a push and pull movement, fans are drawn to the blog of their political or cultural idol and, as they are famous to begin with, a push-movement reinforces their messages (2008).

The fifth, and final, major critique of commercialisation focuses on third-form power (over social constructions) and argues that commercialisation results in the construction of citizens as consumers, changing how they think of their place in society, their rights and responsibilities and their ability to take political actions. Habermas lamented the repackaging of political critique as a consumer item that becomes a “tranquilising substitute for action” (1989, p. 134). Similarly, in his critique of the commercialisation of the media, McChesney damningly states that “the role of the citizenry is to conform its ambitions and goals to satisfy the needs of business and profit maximisation” (1996). Anuar argues that this reconstitution of citizens as consumers is associated with the audience segmentation upon which commercial business models rest; media products that appeal to specific audience segments encourage these individuals to think of themselves “more as consumers of the media content and less as citizens that have concerns for the welfare of fellow citizens, and particularly the underprivileged” (2005, p. 135). Online this audience segmentation accelerates with personalised media that lead to the creation of online ‘echo chambers’, providing only information that supports the users existing views (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Pariser, 2012).

As society has become more commercialised, this critique goes, commercial forces are able to shape individual political ideas, taking over the role that was once played by the state, the education system, civic organisations and the family. This perspective posits that the identity positions of an individual as a citizen and an individual as a consumer are mutually exclusive (being, as they are, associated with state and market power, respectively) and that the process of commercialisation has led to the conflation of the terms citizen and consumer in a way that marginalises citizen interests as distinct from consumer interests (Livingstone, Lunt & Miller, 2007). However, there are others who have argued

that this distinction between citizens and consumers is a false one and the rise of the idea of an individual as a consumer, associated with commercialisation, does not undermine political speech or negatively affect citizen roles (Scammell, 2000; Schudson, 2007)

While it is easy to lament the power of commercial forces to construct individuals as consumers, it is difficult, and few research projects have attempted, to actually identify instances of this (re)construction or how it might take place. This is perhaps because doing so often acts to undermine the agency of individuals being studied and, as such, most research focuses on critiquing this process theoretically without elucidating the mechanism through which this power might be exercised.

In summary, the dominant perspective on the effects of commercialisation on political speech in democratic contexts holds that this process is highly negative. Many of these critiques are drawn from ideas about deliberative democracy and public sphere theory, which represents for many the ideal form of (democratic) political system and which holds that both spaces of political speech and the speech that occurs within it must be free of private/commercial interests. These critiques fall into five broad categories: that commercialisation undermines the quality of individual speech acts; that commercialisation distracts from political topics and from substantive political actions; that commercialisation leads to agenda setting, control and censorship by commercial interests; that commercialisation leads to dominance by existing elites, and that commercialisation leads to problematic constructions of citizens as consumers. However, although this is the dominant perspective, others have argued that commercialisation can have positive effects for political speech in democracies, empowering individuals, providing spaces for marginalised groups, increasing access to diverse information, preventing government dominance and inefficiency and providing spaces that are comfortable and familiar to speakers.

2.4.2. Commercialisation can have a positive effect on political speech: A more recent body of work that rejects the strictures of public sphere theory

Some of the very first critiques of public sphere theory focused on how the requirement of an exclusion of private/economic interests constituted an exercise of power, excluding certain topics from the political agenda (Fraser, 1992). Given that a primary role of the political system is the distribution of scarce resources, a multitude of political struggles have been fought over how these resources are distributed in society, particularly in cases in which certain individuals are systematically disempowered. For instance, equal access to commercial resources was a key component of the U.S. civil rights movement. Political action over these commercial issues often takes place in commercial spaces.

In the same way as access to commercial services has been a key part of many political movements, it is also the case that movements also often use commercial choices to exercise their political goals, from boycotting goods from certain countries to purchasing goods that are in line with or support particular social principles. Voting with one's wallet is seen as an effective mechanism for addressing social and environmental issues that have been aggravated by asymmetries of power between the state and massive, global corporations (Becchetti, 2012). Scammell, concluding that normative ideas about citizens are an apt description of consumer behaviour, argues that "just as globalisation squeezes orthodox avenues for politics, through the state and organised labour, so new ones are being prised open, in consumer power" (2000, p. 352).

Public service media were founded based on the idea that public-run media would be more egalitarian. However, this idea is based on a public sphere or monitorial citizen model (based primarily around information rather than action). The multiple public spheres model, which is a strong alternative conception of political speech, requires spaces for political speech for a wide variety of groups so that they can come together and discuss their needs and their agendas amongst themselves (Fraser, 1992).

A major hope for the Internet was that it would do a better job than offline venues of providing spaces for dispersed and marginalised groups to come together. There are many examples of online spaces serving this function, empowering groups as diverse as women in the Arab world (Radsch, 2012), breast cancer sufferers (Orgad, 2006), members of the Indian diaspora (Mitra, 1997) and queer women (Nip, 2004). In a relatively rare quantitative study on the subject, Krueger, based on a random survey of the U.S. population, found that the Internet was enabling the political participation of a new group of individuals, who were previously interested in politics but unlikely to participate via traditional mechanisms (Krueger, 2002).

In addition to empowering individuals and providing spaces for marginalised groups, others have argued that commercialised spaces act to increase access to diverse information and facilitate offline actions. Similar to the way in which commercialisation was seen as providing spaces for marginalised groups because commercial forces would provide for their demands, commercialisation has also been seen as leading to the provision of and access to more information due to the demand for this information. This was a common claim of Internet utopians in the early days of the technology; for instance, Corrado wrote that the availability of a vast amount of information online, unfiltered by traditional content producers, would create a revitalised area for political free speech and thus increase democratisation in the U.S. (1996).

However, research into online mass media has found this optimism to be largely unfounded in democratic contexts; the diversity of actors, opinions and framings was found to be no more diverse in online opinion forums than in offline newspapers (Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010) and ideological segregation was found to be higher in the consumption of online news products than offline ones (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010). Research into information diversity on social networking sites has found that while diverse information does exist, there is a significant 'echo chamber' effect that means that most individuals are only exposed to opinions that match their own (Adamic & Glance, 2005). The rapid development of a filter

bubble that, responding to the commercial paradigm, presents Internet users with the content that they are most likely to consume has led many to conclude that information consumption is actually less diverse in online commercial platforms than offline ones (Pariser, 2012).

There is more evidence, however, for the second part of this argument that the commercial nature of online spaces facilitates political speech acts that lead to offline political actions. The 'slacktivist' actions of forwarding, liking and commenting may be the first step in a chain of building individual awareness or critical mass. Zuckerman argues that online symbolic actions (which he calls voice) are important in their own right in raising awareness about the existence of an issue and setting the agenda and are also often the first step in moving toward instrumental action (2013b). A study of those who frequently engaged in promotional activity (i.e. 'slacktivist' actions) on social media supports this conclusion; researchers from Georgetown University, found that these individuals were as likely to donate money, twice as likely to volunteer their time or take part in charity events, more than twice as likely to buy products or services that supported a cause, three times as likely to solicit donations for a cause and four times as likely to encourage others to contact sign a petition or contact representatives than those who did not engage in these actions (Center for Social Impact Communication, 2011).

A fourth argument that commercialisation might be positive for political speech claims that the commercialisation of spaces protects against government inefficiencies. There is a prevailing assumption in modern democratic states that the market is an efficient mechanism for allocating access to public goods (Harvey, 2007). Under this framework, market forces are assumed to be an efficient mechanism for serving both individual and public needs and under the public choice model of governance it is assumed that the market should be allowed to govern in situations where it functions at least as well as a government would; the market is given the benefit of the doubt as a beneficial force for public good in the absence of competing evidence (Reder, 1999). This view sees the free market as

predominantly, through individual choice and market mechanisms, as acting in the public interest.

The narrative of commercialisation is inextricably linked with this perspective, as more and more formerly publically run services have been commercialised based on the arguments that market forces will provide more efficient, more diverse and better-quality services. However, as Cuilenburg points out, free market logic only works when “there is a large number of sellers, so no one seller can dominate the market, and there is a large number of buyers and buyers and sellers are fully informed about supply and demand” (1999, p. 193), a situation that not the case for online platforms.

In relation to providing spaces for political speech, the arguments that market forces will act to provide spaces for marginalised voices and more diverse information have already been discussed. However, it is important to consider holistically the widespread argument that commercial forces are efficient adjudicators of public interests. In relation to online spaces for political speech, state-run spaces have been critiqued, in particular, as suffering from low levels of participation (Dahlberg, 2001; Schmitz, Rogers, Phillips & Paschal, 1995). Commercial platforms, in contrast, are able build economics of scale offering both commercial and political affordances and, thus, provide spaces for more users to interact. It should be noted, however, that this deficit is likely due to the underfunding of state-run online spaces rather than a natural consequence of their non-commercial nature.

State-run platforms are also often curated, meaning that posts stay on topic, creating a more respectful atmosphere in line with public sphere ideals for political speech (Wright & Street, 2007). In contrast, commercial platforms are generally not curated (although they are sometimes censored), meaning that individuals can more easily challenge dominant/state narratives and citizens can more easily take control of the agenda. However, this also seems to lead to more aggressive, more off-topic and less well-supported speech, producing spaces that align more with

agonistic, persuasive and monitorial conceptions of political speech. Commercial platforms have also shown themselves to be much faster to respond to demand among individuals for particular services, which is important in the fast-paced online environment, compared to relatively slow moving state-run services.

A fifth, and final, argument that has been made in favour of commercialisation's beneficial effects on political speech is somewhat different from the previous. Rather than arguing that commercialisation produces better political outcomes, in some way, than state/public-run platforms, this perspective argues that, for better or worse, commercialised spaces are comfortable and familiar to speakers and therefore this is where political speech happens. This is the main argument of Papacharissi's private sphere theory of political speech (2010). She, following the example of political theorists such as Mouffe (2005), surveys the actual terrain of political speech in the modern, networked world and finds that much of it occurs on commercial platforms. She argues that this is, in and of itself, an act of political speech that sends a message about the desirability of commercial spaces over public spaces. While this perspective makes it difficult to take a critical perspective on the commercial system, it facilitates the more immediately practical line of reasoning that asks how existing commercial Internet spaces can be made to encourage normatively valuable (political) speech acts.

It is also important to note that this debate is not entirely new; a similar one was fought concerning offline spaces in the U.S. In the face of declining use of public spaces such as town squares, many protests and other forms of political speech followed people into private, commercial spaces such as shopping malls. These commercial spaces had the right to control the activities and individuals in their space, which would have negated much of the possibility for political speech occurring there. However, in the 1980 case *Pruneyard Shopping Center v. Robins* the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that in cases where commercialised spaces are functionally akin to public spaces the owners cannot act to restrict freedom of expression and exclude acts of political speech. These rulings have, so far, only been applied to physical spaces. However, Internet access is increasingly seen as a

human right and the Internet as national infrastructure, so if it could be demonstrated that Internet platforms were functionally equivalent to public spaces (potentially following from the private sphere model) then this label of quasi-public space might be expanded creating a real private sphere for political speech online.

In summary, several arguments have been made that commercialisation might be positive for political speech in democratic contexts. The argument that commercialisation would lead to more diverse information consumption has been largely discredited but significant evidence does exist that commercialised spaces support a multiple public spheres model, provide spaces for marginalised groups and encourage certain acts of political speech that are both important in their own right and facilitate offline actions. Commercialised online spaces are also seen as protecting against state-dominance and inefficiency, responding more quickly to individual needs and providing more chaotic but potentially more powerful spaces that are familiar and comfortable to individual users. Theoretically, it has also been argued that the distinction between the commercial and the political is a false one and that commercial forces can act as an efficient mechanism for distributing public goods and responding to public needs. However, little empirical work exists in reference to these claims, which will be examined in this thesis based on case studies of commercialised platforms in both democratic and authoritarian contexts.

2.4.3. Commercialisation empowers individuals and protects against government dominance: The dominant perspective in authoritarian states

Dominant discourses about the effects of commercialisation on political speech are almost the polar opposite in authoritarian contexts, with the majority of (the much smaller volume of) academic work supporting one or more of the five arguments that commercialisation could be positive for political speech outlined in the previous section.

The first argument that commercial activities are political is essentially a theoretical one, but one that has different meanings in political systems in which the state has a much greater amount of power in society. For instance, in a situation in which the state controls access to everyday resources through a planned or controlled economy, individual consumption is understood as inherently political. Similarly, in situations in which state legitimacy is based on economic development and skewed toward welfare, rather than civic or political, rights, the idea of a separation between economic and political spheres is certainly less appropriate, if it is relevant at all (Perry, 2008; Shue, 2004).

In authoritarian political systems, commercial activities can also become more political because they constitute a relatively safe space of (political) action and the justification of private interests can allow the freer expression of political topics. This is reflected in the common idea that the development of a middle class is a crucial part of the transition from authoritarian to democratic political system (B. Moore, 1966). However, more recent work has argued that it is not just the development of a middle class but the relationship between a variety of different key class groups and the state that is the catalyst for political change in authoritarian countries (Gainsborough, 2002; Rueschemeyer, Stephens & Stephens, 1992).

Research in China has pointed to the development of powerful homeowners associations associated with the urban, middle-class as providing a relatively safe space for activism within the authoritarian system, with many leaders of these associations seeing themselves as working on the cutting edge of political change and addressing issues of rights consciousness, empowerment and democratisation (Read, 2007). Similarly, the middle class was seen as a catalyst of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, which initially left workers and peasants on the sidelines; Kandil concludes that it was recent the neoliberal reforms that “undermined many of the material and political achievements” of the Egyptian middle class that created the conditions for revolt against the authoritarian state (2012).

The second key argument that commercialisation might be positive for political speech is that it can provide new spaces for marginalised groups. This argument also finds much more traction in authoritarian political systems. In an authoritarian state, many more groups are marginalised from the political process than in a democratic state. This has led many to see the Internet as facilitating the development of an online public sphere where none existed offline (Rahimi, 2003; Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Zhou, Gallagher, Jackson, Mei & Resnick, 2010). A multitude of case studies have explored how individuals in authoritarian states have used commercial Internet platforms to raise awareness about their grievances (Herold, 2008; MacKinnon, 2012; Pu & Scanlan, 2012; Sullivan, 2014). In authoritarian systems, there is much more demand for political self-expression to which commercial forces respond in the absence of non-commercial channels for these speech acts.

The contributions of commercialisation to providing more diverse information and facilitating offline actions are also seen as greater in authoritarian political systems. This is, indeed, the main reason that the Internet was seen as potentially undermining authoritarian rule because information would be able to more easily pass across national borders and because ‘netizens’ would be able to publish and circulate information that might otherwise have been censored. The commercialisation of online spaces is seen as protecting against government dominance because commercial spaces would appeal to the demand of consumers for information on sensitive issues, providing “dramatic new possibilities for pluralising flows of information and widening the scope of commentary, debate and dissent” (Diamond, 2010, p. 71).

Media commercialisation in authoritarian systems is seen as leading to a diversification of power over information, a movement away from the state toward society and the opening of spaces for greater journalistic freedom (G. Wu, 2000). Commercial media are seen as having a greater incentive to publish information that is of interest to audiences, which some argue tends to be information that challenges the status quo. For instance, Lu and Ma found that candidates in the

CCP's 2012 intra-party election that received the most coverage in, what they call, the 'partially free media' received fewer votes from party congress delegates, which they argue is evidence that, motivated by profits and newsworthiness, partially free media tend to focus on candidates that are interesting to audiences because they, in some way, challenge the status quo and implicit norms of the regime (2015).

The introduction of the Internet in authoritarian political systems is also seen as able to break state control over information and provide valuable contacts to the "outside world", with Internet users placing more trust in these media compared to state-controlled sources (Hofheinz, 2005). These connections to new sources of information, facilitated by commercial social media platforms, were seen as particularly important in the events of the Arab Spring. Howard et al. find that the linkages between individuals in authoritarian states and media in other countries created a feedback loop; individuals were able to access news published by outlets such as CNN and the BBC online and then these individuals posted information online that increased the quality and quantity of the coverage of these protests by foreign news outlets. Furthermore, the Internet helped distribute information about these events to individuals in other authoritarian countries in the Middle East and North Africa, spreading the protests across the region (Howard et al., 2011).

However, the prevalence of these foreign connections should not be overestimated. Researchers at the Berkman Center found that approximately five percent of Chinese web traffic is to sites hosted outside the mainland and estimated that a maximum of 3% of the 562 million Internet users in nations that filter the web aggressively use tools, which are often commercial in nature, to circumvent this control (Roberts, Zuckerman, York, Faris & Palfrey, 2010)⁷. However, these small number of individuals in authoritarian states making connections to outside

⁷ This is perhaps not surprising given that, even without blocking technologies, Internet user traffic clusters by language and geography (Taneja & Wu, 2014). However this clustering of Internet traffic supports the approach of this thesis in comparing the U.S. and Chinese Internet spheres.

information may act as bridges, bringing new information into the country, in the same way that cassette tapes of the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini's sermons were smuggled into Iran in the 1970s by a small number of travellers and then distributed widely within the country (Zuckerman, 2013a).

However, the diversification of information associated with the introduction of commercial platforms in authoritarian states is not seen as limited only to connections to foreign information sources. In particular, the affordances of social media platforms allow individual users to publish information that can spread rapidly within the country, undermining state control of information. A multitude of cases in China, such the 2009 fire in Beijing that threatened the new CCTV headquarters or the high-speed train crash in Wenzhou in 2011 that killed at least 40 people, have demonstrated how the rapid proliferation of user-generated content documenting emergent events has forced the government and the mass media to recognise and address these situations, reducing the ability of the state to control information (MacKinnon, 2012; Sullivan, 2014).

Similarly, videos and photos documenting state brutality posted by individuals on online commercial platforms fuelled protests in Egypt and Tunisia during the Arab Spring (Youmans & York, 2012). Photos of the young Khaled Said who died in police custody in June 2010 incited outrage in Egypt when they were circulated online, leading to the founding of the Facebook page "We are all Khaled Said" that attracted hundreds of thousands of followers in the days after his death and was seen as an important impetus for the subsequent revolution (MacKinnon, 2012). A survey of participants in Egypt's Tahrir Square protests found that a quarter of the protesters first found out about the protests on Facebook and, additionally, a quarter of protesters used Facebook to disseminate pictures and videos of the protests, with Twitter and blogs used to communicate about the protests as they unfolded (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

In addition to these extraordinary cases, there is evidence that access to online information helps change the political opinions of users in authoritarian states,

much more so than in democratic countries where offline information is more diverse. For instance, Chinese ‘netizens’ are more politically opinionated and “more likely to be simultaneously supportive of the norms of democracy and critical about the party-state and the political conditions in China, while also being potential and active participants in collective action” than traditional media users and non-media users (Lei, 2011, p. 291)⁸.

Zheng and Wu compare the opinions of individuals in eight countries about whether Internet use can help people better understand politics or help people have more say in what their government does. In China (the only authoritarian country surveyed), nearly 80% of people thought that by using the Internet they could better understand politics and 61% thought that they could have more say about what the government does. In contrast, in the U.S. only 43% of people thought that by using the Internet they could better understand politics and 20% thought that they could have more say about what the government does. The authors conclude that this is “because in democratic countries, besides the Internet people have other channels to express their opinions and to participate in politics, whereas in China the Internet is perhaps the single most important avenue for people to criticise government policies and to participate in politics” (Zheng & Wu, 2005, p. 525).

The fourth argument that commercialisation might be positive for political speech suggests that commercial spaces protect against government dominance and inefficiency. Commercial social media platforms were found to have provided important spaces for political debate during the Arab Spring and when the Egyptian state moved to block access to these platforms users found ways to circumvent these restrictions (Howard et al., 2011; MacKinnon, 2012; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). However, it is not only foreign commercial platforms that are seen as providing protection from state dominance in authoritarian systems.

⁸ This survey does not show the direction of this association, i.e. whether it is Internet access that results in these differing opinions or whether those with these opinions are more likely to seek access or both; however, Lei hypothesises that access to more diverse information online plays a role in the development of these perspectives.

In China where popular foreign commercial media platforms are blocked and replaced by domestic alternatives, the commercial nature of these spaces is still seen as providing a venue for political speech. For instance, in concluding that online platforms provide a space for authoritarian deliberation in China, Jiang argues that there are a great deal of economic incentives for Internet companies to provide a relatively open environment to attract users (2009). Similarly, Yang argues that commercialisation has forced online platforms to compete to provide lively spaces for political discussion, particularly because they are prevented, under the state system of information control, from creating their own original news content (2009). The existence of commercial spaces, which are seen as distracting from the relationship between the state and citizens in democracies, are seen as providing valuable spaces for political speech that are somewhat protected from state influence due to their commercial nature in authoritarian systems.

The final argument that commercialisation might be positive for political speech holds that individuals feel comfortable and familiar in online commercial spaces and, thus, these spaces become important venues for political speech. While this issue has been relatively less investigated in authoritarian contexts than the previous four aspects, it is likely that Internet users in these authoritarian systems would experience a similar, if not more acute, level of comfort in commercial spaces compared to state-controlled spaces as Internet users in democratic states. Existing research into levels of trust in news media have shown higher levels of trust of commercial and online than state-run news media in authoritarian contexts (Hofheinz, 2005; Stockmann, 2012). This greater level of trust and sense of freedom and comfort in spaces that appear to be less influenced by the state is likely to spill over into the online world. For instance, in China, Poell et al. find that “Weibo’s comment culture, which in this sense corresponds with social media comment cultures worldwide, increases the sense of shared joy... (and turns) political controversy into a celebration of wit” (2014, p. 3). Thus, in authoritarian

contexts many see commercial online spaces as attempting to provide spaces for political speech that individuals in that country desire and cannot find elsewhere.

2.4.4. Commercialisation does little to undermine authoritarian power, distracting and obscuring the continued pervasiveness of state power in authoritarian contexts

While the idea that the commercialisation of online spaces is positive for political speech in authoritarian contexts remains the dominant viewpoint, others have challenged this viewpoint arguing that the same concerns about the effects of commercialisation in democratic countries apply in authoritarian states and, furthermore, that commercialisation helps the state solidify control rather than transferring power to networked individuals.

For instance, Stockmann has argued, albeit in reference to the commercialisation of offline media, that the apparent benefits for political speech actually undermine political outcomes by creating a false sense of security and trust in commercialised platforms that must still follow the requirements of the state despite their appearance of greater independence and, thus, that “media marketisation strengthens the ability of one-party regimes to disseminate information and shape public opinion in a way conducive to their rule” (2012, p. 4). Similarly, in comparing the effects of media commercialisation on state control in democratic South Africa and authoritarian China, Hadland and Zhang conclude that in both cases the process of media commercialisation resulted in greater state intervention in the media (2012).

Another prominent critic of media commercialisation is Zhao who, looking at the commercialisation of the mass media in China following integration into the World Trade Organisation, argues that commercialisation is part of a divide and rule strategy by the state to “feed urban sophisticates a diet of consumer culture while disenfranchising the rural poor” (Zhao & Schiller, 2001). These perspectives, however, are crafted in reference to mass media outlets, which are fewer, slower and easier to control than the users of online social networking sites, who are able

to publish and disseminate information much more rapidly via distributed networks. More work is, thus, needed to establish how the addition of commercialised online platforms might have changed the effects of commercialisation on politics in China (Creemers, 2014).

While little research exists that directly examines the effects of commercialisation of online spaces of political speech in authoritarian contexts and even less points to a conclusion that this process has had a negative effect, there is some evidence in existing research that moderates the dominant, optimistic perspective discussed in the previous section. For instance examining the nature of political speech on commercial social networking sites in authoritarian states, several authors have concluded that, while it may be positive that this speech can exist, the commercial nature of these spaces potentially undermines the quality of political speech, distracts from more substantive political actions and benefits the state more than the people (Herold, 2008; S. Li, 2010; Wang & Hong, 2010).

However, the way in which political speech acts are evaluated is a key determinant of the conclusions of these examinations. Much has been made of the ability of the Internet to facilitate new kinds of political speech in authoritarian states. In China, various authors have pointed to online word play, such as the grass mud horse meme whose name in Chinese sounds like a common swear word, as evidence of the power of symbolic online actions to have political effects (Tang & Yang, 2011). Similarly, in Vietnam, Sharbaugh and Nguyen conclude that remix and meme culture are empowering civic engagement (2014).

However, these are the very same actions that are labelled as 'slacktivist' and detracting from more desirable forms of political speech in democratic contexts. While it is a relatively isolated viewpoint, Gladwell strongly critiqued the contribution of these forms of political action to political repertoires in authoritarian contexts arguing, in reference to the Arab Spring, that real activism requires high levels of trust developed through face-to-face interactions that can

withstand the risk of arrest, injury or even death that is a part of political movements that challenge authoritarian power structures (2010).

Some have also questioned the efficacy of online political speech compared to more traditional forms, even in authoritarian political systems. For instance, Pu and Scanlan studied the case of two Chinese farmers contesting illegal land grabs through multiple media sources including online platforms; they concluded that mass media support for one and not the other individual, rather than the ability to publish information online, was a key factor that contributed to the success of one farmer's case and the failure of the other's (2012).

While in democratic contexts the undermining of the quality of individual speech acts usually focuses on the criteria of rationality and evidence giving, in authoritarian states there tends to be more concern about misinformation and vigilantism on unregulated commercial media platforms. For instance, the idea of a 'human flesh search' developed in China, in which individuals ask for the help of other Internet users to identify and punish documented or accused wrongdoing. The first such case was in 2006 when a lady was identified, fired from her job and had to make a public apology following an Internet-initiated mass search to find the individual videoed stamping on a kitten with their high heels; this mass upwelling of action based on online speech has also resulted in suicides and murders (Liang & Lu, 2010).

Additionally, in authoritarian contexts where there is less trust in offline information, information posted online may have more chance to trigger panics, such as the panic buying of salt in China that ensued after it was falsely reported that the iodine in the salt would help protect against the effects of radiation caused by the meltdown of a nuclear reactor in Japan (Kent, 2011). These cases represent the negative side of the newfound abilities for political speech enabled by commercialised online platforms that risks potentially undermining the quality of speech online and distracting users from key issues.

The commercial forces that encourage platforms to create lively spaces for political discussion also encourage them to appeal to sensationalism in order to attract readers, leading Li to conclude that the Chinese “online sphere (has been) transformed from a site encouraging civic virtue to a market place encouraging sensational performance and voyeuristic peeping” (S. Li, 2010, p. 73). Similarly but in reference to the mass media, Shirk concluded that commercialisation in authoritarian contexts has encouraged editors to dramatise, exaggerate and emphasise conflict over cooperation in order to attract readers, whipping up nationalist sentiments and creating an ‘echo chamber’ that can result in an increased nationalism in state foreign policy in response to perceived nationalist ardour (Shirk, 2010). Commercialisation is, thus, sometimes seen as increasing the quantity but decreasing the quality of political speech in authoritarian contexts.

The commercial nature of online spaces in authoritarian states has also been seen as enabling the state and commercial interests to attempt to set the online agenda, based on leveraging their superior economic resources in this commercialised online environment. In China, the commercialisation of online platforms and the speech acts on them has led to the common practice of employing individuals or using automated accounts to increase the popularity of certain pages, messages or products. This practice is common both by the state (whose employees, christened the Five-Cent Army, post positive and distracting political content) and commercial entities (whose Water Army endorses particular content through posts, comments and forwards) (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2016). Similarly, in Syria, the pro-regime ‘Syrian Electronic Army’ attempted to drown out opposition messages on Twitter through automated accounts that posted photographs of Syrian landscapes using the hashtag #Syria (Youmans & York, 2012). These practices show how the functionalities of commercial platforms can be exploited by authoritarian as well as democratic voices, with existing power holders in society potentially benefiting from greater resources to manipulate these services than dissenting voices. For instance, in one study on Weibo, just over one percent of users accounts were

found to be fraudulent but these accounts were responsible for almost half of posts (Yu, Asur, & Huberman, 2012).

Agenda setting by authoritarian states also occurs through censorship of certain topics online while allowing and even encouraging political speech on others, leading some to debate whether online political speech in authoritarian states constitutes a safety valve or a pressure cooker (Hassid, 2012). When authoritarian states respond to individual instances of discontent expressed online, this helps prevent more widespread unrest and allows the state to consolidated its power by addressing problems at lower levels (Herold, 2008).

In China, the existence of certain kinds of political speech on the Internet is fostered and encouraged by the state because it facilitates the governing process (Poell et al., 2014). This is evident in the official encouragement to report corruption of Party officials, which has overwhelmingly occurred through online fora. Political speech in this area has flourished, with, for instance, officials such as Yang Dacai the former head of the Shaanxi Province Work Safety Administration arrested after evidence of possible corruption was posted online. However, many conclude that this practice, while encouraging political speech online, actually serves the needs of the state because the CCP is “able to propagate its image as (a) benevolent protector of the nation let down by the wrongdoings of its representatives” (Sullivan, 2014, p. 31).

However, the way in which these political speech practices are evaluated depend on the normative framework used; those who hope for regime change in these authoritarian states are disappointed but those who are interested in whether individual citizens have more opportunities for political speech in newly formed online spaces tend to find evidence of positive effects.

This idea that political speech in commercial online spaces might act as a safety valve, solidifying the power of authoritarian states, rather than a pressure cooker, fostering discontent that might undermine state power, is related to the fourth argument about the negative effects of commercialisation identified in the previous

sections: namely, that it allows offline power hierarchies to be transferred online, resisting a redistribution of political power to networked individuals.

The extent to which access to online commercial platforms enable large-scale data collection that may then work to undermine opportunities for political speech by allowing the government to monitor emergent issues and identify online opinion leaders is a major concern in authoritarian states. Through a similar process by which individuals in authoritarian states show more trust in commercial newspapers than state ones, although both are governed by the same reporting restrictions, online commercial platforms may lull users into a false sense of security in speaking about political topics on these platforms and sharing data that enables the state to control political speech to their own ends.

In Iran, the Revolutionary Guard and the paramilitary Basij used Twitter to identify participants in protests following the 2009 presidential election. For instance, Morovoz reports that the publication of a batch of 85 photos harvested from social media with 165 faces circled in red on a pro-state news website resulted in public tip-offs that led to the arrest of at least 40 people (2012). Similarly, in Sudan, pro-state agents joined anti-state communities online, spreading disinformation and gathering information in order to triangulate the identities of organisers (Boswell, 2011). In considering the potential for political speech in commercial online space to contribute to undermining the power of authoritarian states, Burns and Eltham caution “those who believe Twitter and other social network technologies will enable ordinary people to seize power from repressive regimes should consider the fate of Iran’s protestors, some of whom paid for their enthusiastic adoption of Twitter with their lives” (2009, p. 306).

Similarly, in discussing the potential for commercial social media platforms to undermine authoritarian rule, Pearce and Kendzior argue that, unlike the countries that experienced an Arab Spring in which documentation of state crimes on social media mobilised the population, in Azerbaijan, state arrests of those who posted anti-state content online discouraged others from participating on online political

speech (2012). These concerns about state surveillance led Wang and Hong to conclude, in reference to blogs, that “cyberspace creates the structure of the surveillance environment by implementing technological architectures that mine information about human behaviour and preferences. As a result, China’s blogosphere has relatively little value as a medium for organised free speech” (2010, p. 67).

The final common critique of the effects of commercialisation on political speech is that it creates problematic constructions of individuals as consumers. Little research exists that addresses this issue in reference to the Internet in authoritarian states; however, some researchers have discussed the topic in its general form. For instance, Herold argues that, in China, economic progress distracts from political change and that as long as the “the subjectively felt and perceived state of the Chinese economy” continues to improve there will be little political speech that challenges the power of the state (2008, p. 36). Similarly, while a comparison of how Chinese and U.S. users talk about rights illustrated that Chinese individuals think of rights more in terms of economic rights than civil rights, it also showed that the state is key in encouraging this line of thinking (Zhou et al., 2010). Given this situation it is important to understand the forces that act to construct the legitimacy of the authoritarian states based on economic progress and act to encourage citizens to evaluate politics based on economic criteria.

2.5. Summary and hypotheses

This chapter has laid the theoretical groundwork for this thesis by establishing definitions of commercialisation and political speech and surveying the existing literature that considers the effects of commercialisation on political speech, paying particular attention to arguments about the effects of the commercialisation of online spaces on the political speech that might occur within them and the potential differences between the arguments made with reference to democratic and authoritarian political systems.

The perspectives in this literature can be roughly divided into five arguments that commercialisation is negative and five that it is not negative or can even, perhaps, be positive (Table 2.1.). This is a necessary simplification for the purposes of clarity of the complex arguments presented in this chapter. The summary of the arguments presented in this table is not intended to suggest an equal weighting for each of these perspectives (some of which have much more evidence for them than others) or scope of these perspectives (several of these arguments could easily have been split into two or even three separate arguments). Rather, this framework is intended to provide a clear picture of the arguments in existing literature and a framework against which the data about commercialisation and political speech in online spaces collected in this thesis can be analysed.

The analysis in this chapter has revealed that the perspective that commercialisation is negative for political speech tends to be dominant in democratic contexts but the opposing viewpoint dominates in authoritarian contexts. The ways in which online political speech and its effects are evaluated are also different, with similar online acts seen as positive forms of political expression in authoritarian contexts but 'slacktivist' in democratic ones. However, there is a lack of research on this issue particularly in non-democratic contexts and on social media platforms and no research that addresses this topic using a comparative framework. This is a particularly important area for further research given the extent to which social media use dominates the modern Internet, the burgeoning number of Internet users who live in authoritarian states and the prevalence of the popular discourse surrounding the potentially beneficial effects of the Internet on political speech in these contexts.

Table 2.1. Summary of the arguments about the effects of commercialisation on political speech

Commercialisation is negative for political speech	Commercialisation is positive for political speech
Commercialisation undermines the quality of political speech	Commercialisation is politically empowering
Commercialisation distracts, both from political topics and from more substantive forms of political speech	Commercialisation provides spaces for marginalised groups
Commercialisation leads to agenda setting, control and censorship	Commercialisation increases the diversity of information and facilitates offline action
Commercialisation leads to domination by offline elites	Commercialisation protects against government domination and inefficiency
Commercialisation leads to problematic constructions of citizens as consumers	Commercialised spaces are comfortable for users and are where people want to engage in political speech

The remainder of this thesis will undertake to address this important issue, which can be formally expressed as follows:

Research question: How does the commercialisation of online spaces affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech?

Hypothesis 1: Commercialisation is negative for political speech.

Hypothesis 2: Commercialisation is more negative for political speech in democratic contexts than in authoritarian contexts.

A Methodological Strategy for Researching the Effects of Commercialisation on Political Speech in Different Political Systems

3.1. Chapter overview

The first chapter of this thesis introduced the current debates about the extent to which the utopian dreams for the Internet's democratic potential appear to have been undermined by commercialisation and authoritarianism. The previous chapter built on these arguments, laying the theoretical groundwork for an investigation of this issue, establishing definitions of commercialisation and political speech and examining arguments about the effects of commercialisation on political speech in different political systems. This literature review revealed the pattern that in democratic systems commercialisation tends to be seen as negative for political speech while in authoritarian systems these same processes, spaces and actions are often seen as positive for political speech. This led to the hypothesis that commercialisation is negative for political speech but that it might be less negative, or perhaps even positive, in authoritarian political systems.

With the theoretical framework of this inquiry established, this chapter lays out a methodological framework for approaching this question through a mixed-methods research design that combines macro and micro and quantitative and qualitative approaches. The choice of focus on the cases of the U.S. and China as key representatives of democratic and authoritarian political systems and approaches to the governance of online spaces is discussed, and the platforms of Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China are introduced as key commercial online spaces in which political speech might be expected to occur in these two political systems under analysis.

Each of the four methodologies used in this thesis - structural discourse analysis, quantitative analysis of a random sample of microblog users and their posts, qualitative analysis of the content of a random sample of individual user posts and analysis of a survey of Internet users – is discussed and the strengths and weaknesses of each of these four methodologies are outlined.

3.2. Theoretical and methodological overview

This thesis proposes a mixed-methods research design to address the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems. Mixed-methods research combines different methodologies and methodological paradigms in order to address an underlying research question (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). This methodological pluralism is seen as frequently resulting in superior quality research compared to single-method designs (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Greene, Caracelli and Graham break the literature on the rationale behind mixed-methods designs into five groups: triangulation (which seeks convergence and corroboration between the results of different methods), complementarity (which seeks elaboration), enhancement (in which the results of one method are seen as clarifying another), development (which seeks to use the results of one method to inform the other), initiation (which seeks the discovery of new paradoxes and contradictions based on the comparison of the results of different methods) and expansion (which seeks to extend the breadth and depth of research through mixed methods) (1989). While early scholarship on mixed-methods research focused on triangulation and the convergence of results, more recent developments in mixed-methods research have noted the importance of insights gained from the comparison of divergent results (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Mixed-methods research is particularly appropriate for this research topic for several reasons. Firstly, in the existing literature on online political speech there appears to be a bias associated with research methodology, with quantitative research more often reaching negative conclusions about the democratic potential of the Internet and qualitative research more often reaching positive conclusions. Secondly, much current research concerning online spaces is characterised by the use of digital data, which, while providing important new opportunities for social science research, often loses some of its meaning when analysed out of context. Thus, this thesis combines the analytic strengths of digital social research

approaches with a deep study of the contexts of production and reading of the collected data.

However, conversely, a limitation of many qualitative approaches to the study of online spaces is that conclusions reached through these methods are often not generalisable. By using quantitative data to support case selection for qualitative analysis, the validity and generalisability of qualitative analysis can be strengthened. Similar tensions exist with relation to macro and micro approaches. Studies of particular platforms, topics and delineated time periods can provide deep and detailed descriptions of how online political speech functions in these circumstances. In contrast, macro approaches can elucidate the wider structures and contexts that are necessary to explain observed behaviour at the micro level but that might be limited without the depth of micro approaches.

In addition to these advantages of a mixed-methods research design that focus on the potential for triangulation, complementarity, development and initiation, a mixed-methods research design can also provide for an expansion of the research conclusions in this project. The previous chapter established a context-neutral definition of political speech as any communicative action that affects or seeks to affect the balance of power in society. This definition rests on an understanding of power, for which Lukes' three-part conception of power (as power over conflicts, agendas and constructions) is used.

An analysis of the power over social constructions requires a critical interrogation of the discursive forces that might shape the actions of individual users with respect to their political speech acts. This can only be achieved through a qualitative analysis of societal discourses. However, this research question is also focused on the nature of online political speech under conditions of commercialisation. A micro, quantitative approach is called for to provide a picture of the actual nature of political speech in these commercial online spaces. An investigation of political speech (as defined in this thesis), thus, calls for a

combination of quantitative and qualitative and macro and micro approaches. The combination of methodological employed is summarised in Table 3.1.

Each of these methodologies is addressed in separate chapters, in respect of the different epistemological underpinnings of these diverse approaches. Each of these chapters is intended to stand alone as a contribution to answering the overall research question posted in this thesis. The results of each of these four distinct methodological enquiries are drawn together in the discussion chapter, when these findings are evaluated under the theoretical framework put forward in Chapter Two. The methodological process and strengths and limitations of each of these different approaches to addressing the overall research question of how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems are discussed in more detail the following sections.

Table 3.1. Comparison of the four methodologies used in this research

	Macro	Micro
Qualitative	Structural discourse analysis of the constraints on individual online speech from both the state and the platform in two political systems and on two case study platforms in these political systems (Chapter Four)	Qualitative analysis of the content of randomly selected users posts on two case study platforms in different political systems (Chapter Six)
Quantitative	Analysis of a survey of Internet users (Chapter Seven)	Quantitative analysis of a random sample of user accounts and their posts over a month-long period on two case study platforms in different political systems (Chapter Five)

The first data chapter presents a qualitative, macro approach that intends to critically analyse the constraints on individual user actions in each of the political systems under comparison; a structural discourse analysis is used to identify the key themes that are communicated to users regarding their statuses as citizens and consumers in online spaces (Chapter Four). This chapter contributes to the overall

research question by providing a deep analysis of the forces that act to constrain Internet users with respect to their status as potential political speakers in these two political systems. These findings can then help explain the nature of online political speech (or lack thereof) identified in later chapters and ground these online speech acts in their contexts of production and reading.

The next chapter (Chapter Five) presents a quantitative analysis of the voices represented and the content of individual speech acts on two key commercial online platforms, based on a random sample of user accounts. This chapter provides generalisable data concerning user representation, commercialisation and political speech on these platforms and the interaction between these factors, such that an understanding of the frequency of online political speech and the factors affecting it can be established.

The third data chapter (Chapter Six) presents a qualitative analysis of the content of the random sample of individual speech acts analysed quantitatively in the previous chapter, using the results of the preceding analysis to structure the qualitative inquiry. This chapter provides a characterisation of the nature of speech acts (and in particular political speech acts) on both platforms and the accordance of the actual nature of political speech on these platforms with different theories of political speech.

The final data chapter (Chapter Seven) brings the discussion back to the macro level by analysing the results of a worldwide survey of Internet users to provide an account of how online political speech might be affected by the variables identified in the previous sections and establish a model for the interaction between commercialisation and political speech in different political systems. This methodology allows for the potential differences between populations of Internet users in different political systems to be disambiguated from effects of commercialisation and helps generalise the results of previous chapters to wider Internet-using populations and longer time scales.

3.3. The importance of comparative research

The key question in the literature to which this thesis aims to contribute is whether the commercialisation of online spaces has different effects in different political systems. This question calls for a comparative approach. Although it could be feasibly argued that the study of the effects of commercialisation in a single (likely non-democratic) political system could be compared to existing research on the topic, this type of comparison would be difficult given that the datasets and methodologies might not be comparable and the theoretical underpinnings of this approach posits one experience as primary (namely the more frequently researched one) to which the experience of the other is compared. Thus, a key underpinning of this thesis is an attempt to examine political speech in democratic and authoritarian systems without a priori bias toward either system.

Comparative research in the social sciences is a particularly important methodology in that it allows the specific factors that might affect a particular outcome to be accounted for in a systematic way and allows conclusions to move past system-specific factors (Przeworski & Teune, 1970)⁹. In achieving this aim, most comparative research is located somewhere between the poles of most-similar and most-different systems designs. A most-similar systems design chooses cases that are as similar as possible so that when differences between the cases are identified, the potential reasons for these differences can be easily honed in on; in contrast, a most-different systems design chooses cases based on the observed difference in the lower levels of the system and operates iteratively with the addition of new variables to assess the influence of systematic factors (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). However, these ways of conceptualising comparative research are highly quantitative and imply an existing knowledge of levels of the variables under consideration; most comparative research follows the spirit of a most-

⁹ Arguments of system uniqueness are particularly acute with reference to China (one of the two countries chosen for analysis in this thesis). However, this sense of uniqueness is encouraged by the Chinese state because it allows the government greater flexibility and plausible deniability, and examining China through a comparative lens is arguably the best way to understand both the country and the modern politics more generally (Kennedy, 2011).

similar or most-different systems design but does not utilise such a quantitative focus.

In terms of the research question under consideration (how does the commercialisation of online spaces affect their ability to offer a venue for political speech in different political systems), the U.S. and China are chosen as cases of comparison based on the level of differences between their political systems (representing key examples of democratic and authoritarian approaches to online political speech) combined with the level of similarity of their online platforms (with respect to the association between these platforms and the configurations of state and market power within the country).

There are many ways of conceptualising political systems (not all of which are linear); however, democracy and authoritarianism are generally seen as sitting on opposing ends of the political spectrum. For instance, the Democracy Index rates countries as one of four types of system (full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime and authoritarian regime). Within this index, the U.S. has the lowest score of all 20 countries rated as full democracies and China's score places it approximately in the centre of the 51 authoritarian regimes in the index (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016). However, the U.S. and China are seen as the influential models of these two extremes of political system and as opposed on the world stage, with the U.S. the largest fully democratic country and China the largest authoritarian country. More than one third of the world's Internet users now live in authoritarian states but much less is known about Internet use in these contexts compared to oft-studied, Western democracies, thus a study of China is important not only because of its prominent position on the world stage and influence over the global internet but as an example of an authoritarian system that can, perhaps, provide an understanding about and certainly inspires the actions of leaders in other authoritarian systems. Similarly, the U.S. often is seen as an example of a democratic system that is followed by other countries.

While the U.S. and China sit on opposite poles of the political spectrum, they are among only a handful of countries in which the national political, economic and social contexts can be seen reflected in the online platforms used by their citizens. In most areas of the world, online platforms originally created in the U.S. context and reflecting these conditions of creation, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, predominate. Only China, Russia and Iran have significant alternatives national online spheres. The practice of restricting access to popular U.S.-based platforms and fostering domestic alternatives is particularly common in China: Facebook is banned and Renrenwang fulfils this market niche, Youku and Tudou replace YouTube, Baidu Zhidao is used instead of Wikipedia and Sina and Tencent Weibo¹⁰ are the major microblogging platforms for citizens who must jump the great firewall to access Twitter. Thus, in addressing the research question of how the commercialisation of online spaces affects their ability to provide a venue for political speech, the U.S. and China are selected as countries of comparison because of their opposing political systems and the similarity of their online spaces as reflecting their political, economic and social contexts of use.

The literature review and theoretical background presented in the first two chapters of this thesis introduced the key unanswered question of the effects of the commercialisation of online spaces on their ability to provide a venue for political speech. However, within this literature, there was a great deal of debate and focus upon social networking sites as the highly commercialised, mass online spaces that are the defining platforms of today's Internet. On the one hand, critics point to 'slacktivism', 'echo chambers', distraction and surveillance as negative aspects of these commercial platforms (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Lovink, 2011; Morozov, 2013). On the other hand, others point to the potential political contributions of mass online social networks, ease of publication and dissemination of information,

¹⁰ Weibo (微博) in Chinese literally means microblog and several commercial microblogging platforms exist, including those run by Sina and Tencent. However, Sina Weibo is the largest microblogging platform in China and is often simply referred to as Weibo (potentially being seen as synonymous with the concept of microblogging). In line with this discourse and for simplicity, in further references in this thesis Weibo (capitalised) should be understood as referring specifically to the Sina Weibo platform.

the potential undermining of information gatekeepers and increased diversity of information on these platforms (Howard et al., 2011; Penney & Dadas, 2013; Yang, 2009).

Thus, within these two countries, two key social networking platforms are selected for comparison that provide similar affordances and fulfil similar market niches (in terms both of their levels of commercialisation and their use as part of the political process): Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China. Both Twitter and Weibo are microblogging platforms, which allow users to publish short 140-character messages that are disseminated to their network of followers and which other users can choose to repost or comment on. Indeed, Weibo was launched in 2009 (three years after Twitter's launch) as a Twitter clone, although its functionality has now grown to exceed that of Twitter.

Both Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China were developed domestically and reflect the values and conditions of their development and use. Twitter reports that it has 313 million monthly active users as of June 2016 of which it is reported that approximately 67 million are located in the U.S. (Statista, 2016; Twitter, 2016a). Weibo reports a similar population of monthly active users, 297 million as of September 2016 (Weibo, 2016a). A similar percentage of the populations of both countries use these microblogging services. In January and February 2016, 16% of U.S. adults reported using Twitter (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016) and the 2015 Statistical Report on China's Internet Development reported that 18% of the Chinese population uses a microblogging services (although figures are not given for particular platforms) (CNNIC, 2015).

Although neither of these sites is the largest website nor the largest social networking site within the country, with Twitter the ninth most popular site by user traffic in the U.S. and Weibo the eighth most popular site in China (Alexa, 17 December 2016), both of these platforms are seen as particularly important venues for online political speech in their respective countries, based on their affordances, public nature and large user bases.

Previous research that examined trending topics on Twitter concluded that it was a news medium rather than a site for publishing personal information (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010a) and surveys of U.S. Internet users found that more than half of Twitter users used the site as a source of news (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). The massive social networks on Twitter are often based on mutual interest rather than offline connections, meaning that the platform has been seen as important in distributing information about and building critical mass in a variety of political events, from the Green Revolution in Iran (Burns & Eltham, 2009), to the Indignatos in Spain (González-Bailón & Wang, 2016), to the Occupy movement in the U.S. (Penney & Dadas, 2013) and the 2011 Egyptian protests that resulted in an overthrow of the government (Howard et al., 2011).

Weibo holds a similar position within China, having been seen as an important potential venue for political speech due to its ease of use, massive user based and rapidity of dissemination (Poell, Kloet, Zeng, & Guohua, 2014; Sullivan, 2014). A variety of cases, such as the Grass Mud Horse (Tang & Yang, 2011), the death of migrant Sun Zhigang in police detention (Qiu, 2009), a suspicious fire near the Beijing headquarters of the state TV channel (Sullivan, 2012) and the Wenzhou train crash (Nip & Fu, 2016), have pointed to the importance microblogs as venues for political speech in China. Although, the crackdown on online rumours that started in late 2012 seems to have undermined some of the political functions of microblogs and encouraged individuals to move toward private services such as WeChat (M. Moore, 2014), it is still the case that microblogs, and Weibo in particular, are the main potential venue for online political speech in China.

The difference in Internet using populations in the U.S. and China is important to note. The U.S. has a relatively high Internet penetration rate, with 87% of U.S. adults having access to the Internet (Perrin & Duggan, 2015). In contrast, only 48% of Chinese individuals use the Internet (CNNIC, 2015). Although digital divides are closing in China, particularly with the greater adoption of cheap, domestic smart phones such as the Xiaomi, the Internet using population in China is likely still far more skewed toward urban, educated, affluent users than the Internet using

population in the U.S. Furthermore, microblog use is generally seen as skewed toward this same population, even within the population of Internet users in both countries. However, exact statistics about the demographics of active microblog users in both countries is not available and the provision and analysis of this data will be a contribution of this thesis.

In summary, both Twitter and Weibo are major social networking sites in and reflecting their respective national contexts. They are both commercial platforms, traded publicly on stock markets and primarily geared to generate profit, but they are also seen as both potentially and practically fulfilling important public functions in their ability to provide a venue for political speech for their users. These two sites are, thus, chosen as key platforms of study for the macro portions of this research both because they are among the most important potential sites in which an online public sphere could develop but also because insights from the interaction between the market, the state and society on these platforms might shed light on how these processes might work in other online spaces.

There are certain strengths and weaknesses to this comparison. As previously mentioned, the fact that these platforms are embedded in the U.S. and Chinese contexts, respectively, means that their contexts of production are intimately linked to the context of use. However, this also means that they provide different affordances and exist in different online spheres, which could affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech. A separate but very different research project could have examined Twitter use by individuals in China (who tend to be a very specific sub-population) to hold the platform constant or Twitter use in an authoritarian country where the platform is not blocked to hold constant site architectures. However, this type of investigation would seem to be taking online platforms as givens, rather than as reflections of their context of production and use, and thus a comparison between Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China is chosen.

Additionally, Facebook, although it has different affordances, could have been chosen as a subject for study in the U.S. for, although it is more private and less resembles a public sphere than Twitter, it is important for the distribution of news and other political information in the U.S. Similarly, Tencent Weibo, although its user base is somewhat smaller, could have been chosen for study in China. The effects of platform choice must be kept in mind when these results are interpreted and care is taken in this thesis to provide a deep and thorough examination of the differences between the architectures of the platforms chosen as case studies (at the time period in which they were studied). In any case, the results of the survey examined in Chapter Seven largely show that the conclusions derived from the analyses of Twitter and Weibo can be generalised to the wider population of Internet users in the U.S. and China across the diverse online spaces which they use, meaning that, far from leading to spurious conclusions based on the specifics of the platforms chosen for comparison, the choice of these two case study platforms provide deep and detailed conclusions that can speak to wider conditions in both countries.

3.4. Background data on levels of commercialisation and political speech in the U.S. and China

This section draws from existing sources of data on the U.S. and China to paint a general picture of commercialisation and political speech in both countries, which can provide the background for and to which the results of this research can be compared.

3.3.1. Existing macro data on levels of (online) political speech

This thesis intentionally constructed a broad definition of political speech, as any communicative act that affects or seeks to affect the balance of power in society. The issue of online political speech is a particularly important one and, thus, a great deal of research (although not in relation to commercialisation) has been conducted. However, it is important to remember that the definitions of political

speech used in these studies may be very different from the broad, context-neutral, theoretically grounded definition employed in this thesis.

The Pew Research Centre's Internet and American Life Project has conducted a great deal of research into online political speech in the U.S., mostly based on random digit dialling. They found that the majority of social media site users in the U.S. users engage in online political speech, with 66% of social media users having carried out some form of political engagement online, 38% of social media users liking or promoting political material, 33% reposting political content, 31% using tools that encourage others to take action and 34% posting their own thoughts or comments (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady & Verba, 2012).

China does not have comparable, representative national datasets; those few figures that are available vary wildly and are poorly defined. For instance, Chinese Academy of Social Science researcher Yu Jianrong reported in 2008 that government figures showed that in 2005 there had been 87,000 mass incidents (which is the term that the CCP uses for incidents of social unrest including rioting and petition campaigns) (2008). In contrast, the 2011 Annual Report on Chinese Social Opinion reported that there were 183 public opinion incidents in 2007, rising to 480 in 2011. However, of these 480 incidents the report indicates that 25% originated from Internet news, 20% on microblogs and 14% on discussion forums (Public Opinion Research Laboratory of Shanghai Jiaotong University, 2012). This suggests that, although the overall level and nature of political speech and political participation in China is obscured and extremely difficult to estimate, the Internet now plays (or at least played at the time of this data collection) an important part in facilitating political speech within the country.

These data suggest that the Internet may be an important venue for political speech in both the U.S. and China. However, the lack of up-to date, comparable statistics on the rates and nature of political speech relevant to the current configurations of power in the U.S. and China and the current state of Internet technologies (which have become increasingly commercialised and in which social

networking sites increasingly dominate) is a major impetus behind and intended contribution of this thesis.

3.3.2. Existing macro data on levels of commercialisation

In contrast to the dearth of comparable data on rates of online political speech, a great deal of data exists that can help compare levels of commercialisation in the U.S. and China; although, again, in interpreting these statistics it is important to remain cognisant of the type of commercialisation to which these statistics refer.

While the U.S. and China are the world's two largest economies (by GDP), significant differences exist between their levels of commercialisation. The Chinese state has far more control over the market and market entities than the U.S. state. The Chinese economy is also less developed and more reliant on agriculture and industry, while the U.S. is more reliant on services; however, the distribution of GDP between agriculture, industry and services in both countries is converging.

China still lags far behind the U.S. in terms of the development of its consumer sector (World Bank, 2014). Individual purchasing power, even after the relative cost of local goods, services and inflation rates are taken into account, also shows a large disparity, with per capita GDP (using a purchasing power parity (PPP) calculation) approximately four times higher in the U.S.: \$54,629 in 2014 compared to China's \$13,217.

Wealth in both the U.S. and China is unequally distributed across the population. Although statements about China's development often include a caveat about the unevenness of this development, the GINI coefficients of the U.S. and China (a measure of within-nation income inequality) are similar: 47 in China in 2014 and 45 in the US in 2007 according to CIA World Factbook figures while World Bank data placed China at 42 in 2010 and the US at 41 in 2013 (CIA, 2015; World Bank, 2015).

Table 3.2. Top 25 sites (by traffic) in the U.S. and China

U.S.	China
Google – commercial search engine	Baidu – commercial search engine
YouTube - commercial social networking site/media product provider (Google-owned)	QQ – commercial communication services/social networking site (Tencent-owned)
Facebook – commercial social networking site	Taobao – commercial online mall (Alibaba-owned)
Amazon – commercial online retailer	Sohu – commercial web portal
Yahoo – commercial web portal	Hao123 – commercial web-portal
Wikipedia – not-for-profit encyclopaedia	360.cn – commercial Internet security/virus protection company
Twitter – commercial social networking site	Sina – commercial web portal
Reddit – commercial online forum	Tmall – commercial online retailer
Ebay – commercial listings provider	Weibo – commercial social networking site
LinkedIn – commercial social networking site	Soso – commercial search engine
Neflix – commercial media product provider	Google – commercial search engine
Instagram – commercial social networking site	Guangming Daily – centrally administered newspaper
Craigslist – commercial listings provider	YouTube - commercial social networking site/media product provider (Google-owned)
Live – commercial search engine	CNZZ – commercial online analytics company
CNN – media company (TV network)	Xinhua – press agency of the central government
Bing – commercial search engine	YouKu - commercial social networking site/media product provider
ESPN – sports-orientated media company (TV network)	Google Hong Kong – commercial search engine
Imgur – technology start-up (image hosting)	Tianya – commercial online discussion forum
Tumblr - commercial social networking site (Yahoo-owned)	People's Daily - official newspaper of the CCP
Pintrist - commercial social networking site	360.com – commercial Internet security/virus protection company
NYTimes – media company (national newspaper)	So – commercial search engine (360-owned)
t.co – subdomain of Twitter	Haosou – commercial search engine (360-owned)
Office – commercial software provider	CCTV – main TV channel of the central government
Chase – commercial U.S. bank	China Youth Network – state-owned youth-oriented web portal
Blogspot – commercial blog hosting provider (Google-owned)	Zhihu – commercial Q&A forum

Source: Alexa. 12 November. 2016

However, in reference to the online economy, the value of China's online retail sector is far larger: \$441 billion in 2014 (Xinhua. 2015) compared to the U.S.'s \$260 billion in 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau. 2014). Taking into account both the size of each country's Internet population and the relative difference in the cost of goods and services (using the World Bank's 2013-14 PPP conversion factor), this means that each Chinese Internet user spends, on average, \$1,146 per year on online retail platforms compared to \$929 for U.S. users, indicating a similar level of individual commercial activity among Internet users in both countries that may be explained by the greater skew of the online population in China toward more affluent individuals.

However, despite this higher level of online commercial activity in China, non-commercial (state-owned) sites appear to have a greater share of the online market. Out of the top 25 sites (by traffic) for Chinese Internet users, four are state mouthpiece media outlets (Guangming Daily, People's Daily, Xinhua and CCTV) and one is the website of the China Youth Network. Out of the top 25 sites in the U.S., only one is not a commercial company (Wikipedia, a not-for-profit, user-generated encyclopaedia) and three are commercial media companies (CNN, ESPN (a sports network) and the New York Times) (Table 3.2.).

Thus, while the Chinese economy is relatively less developed, the differences in Internet penetration rates (of which the U.S.'s is almost double China's) mean that the Internet using populations in both countries appear to be relatively similar in their levels of commercial activity.

However, these figures are based on simplistic measures of commercialisation and cannot account for the complexity of the process, as it is understood to relate to political speech and as it is defined and theorised in this thesis. While they provide important background as to the level of political speech and commercialisation in both countries of comparison, this thesis will go much further than previous work in examining the effects of online commercialisation on political speech in different

political systems based on a mixed-method design that enables these key concepts to be operationalised in a variety of ways.

3.5. Structural discourse analysis

In contrast to other qualitative methodologies for researching social science that aim to understand or interpret social reality, discourse analysis attempts to uncover the way in which this social reality was produced (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Discourse analysis, in general, explores the relationship between discourse and reality (ibid) and this thesis seeks to uncover the relationship between commercial and state discourses in different political systems and the status of individual Internet users as potential political speakers. While this methodology is particularly useful in its ability to question assumptions, contribute to theory and inform political practice and struggles, the depth and breadth of this methodology means that there is no one approach that works in all cases and each methodological enquiry must be tailored to the specific question and context under consideration (Burman & Parker, 1993; Tonkiss, 2004).

It is also the case that discourse analysis has rarely been applied in online spaces and to online architectures. Thus, this thesis proposes the novel methodology of structural discourse analysis based on a combination of the two types of discourse analysis described by Rose in her book *Visual Methodologies* (2011). The first type of discourse analysis that Rose describes is similar to standard forms of discourse analysis, such as the method outlined by Fairclough that examines the formal properties of the text, the intertextual elements and the socio-cultural context of the text's production and reading (2001, pp. 21–22). However, one limitation of this is that it examines the discourses contained within select textual or visual elements outside the conditions of their viewing or presentation.

Rose uses the example of a museum to illustrate the importance of institutions and ways of seeing to understanding discourses, a strategy which she calls Discourse Analysis Two. Imagine a poster advertising a movie displayed in a museum. Standard forms of discourse analysis, such as that outlined by Fairclough, would

examine the discourses contained within the poster, the way that the individuals presented speak to traditional stereotypes and archetypes, the cultural knowledge necessary to understand the satire and humour of the advertisement.

However, this second form of discourse analysis would be concerned more precisely with the conditions of the presentation of this poster. This poster would be read differently if it was hung on the wall of someone's home, outside an independent movie theatre or in a museum gallery showcasing pop culture objects inspired by the moon landing. In that museum gallery, the presentation of the poster, including aspects such as room design and visitor flow, line of sight, lighting, its relationship with other objects and the descriptions and annotations presented with that piece, will have an effect on how viewers of that poster will respond to the discourses presented in the poster and indeed may interact with or change the dominant discourses of the text.

Recently Internet studies has paid much greater attention to the effects of site structures, codes and algorithms on user outcomes (Benney, 2014; Freelon, 2013; Nelimarkka, 2014; Pariser, 2012). However, despite this growing realisation of the importance of site structure and context, there is no methodology that explicitly investigates the structuring discourses that shape individual action in online spaces. This perspective is important if this research aims to be sensitive to the existence of second- and third-form power (over agendas and social constructions), which are enacted through the structures of online spaces and the discourses inherent in and surrounding these structures. The methodology of structural discourse analysis is, thus, crafted for use in this thesis inspired by previous discourse analysis work on offline institutions, such as Foucault's work on prisons (1977) or Bennett's work on museums (1995).

One way of conceptualising the power of institutions is to differentiate between their apparatuses and their technologies; apparatuses are the forms of power and knowledge that constitute the institutions and technologies are the practical methods that are used to practice that system of power and knowledge (Rose,

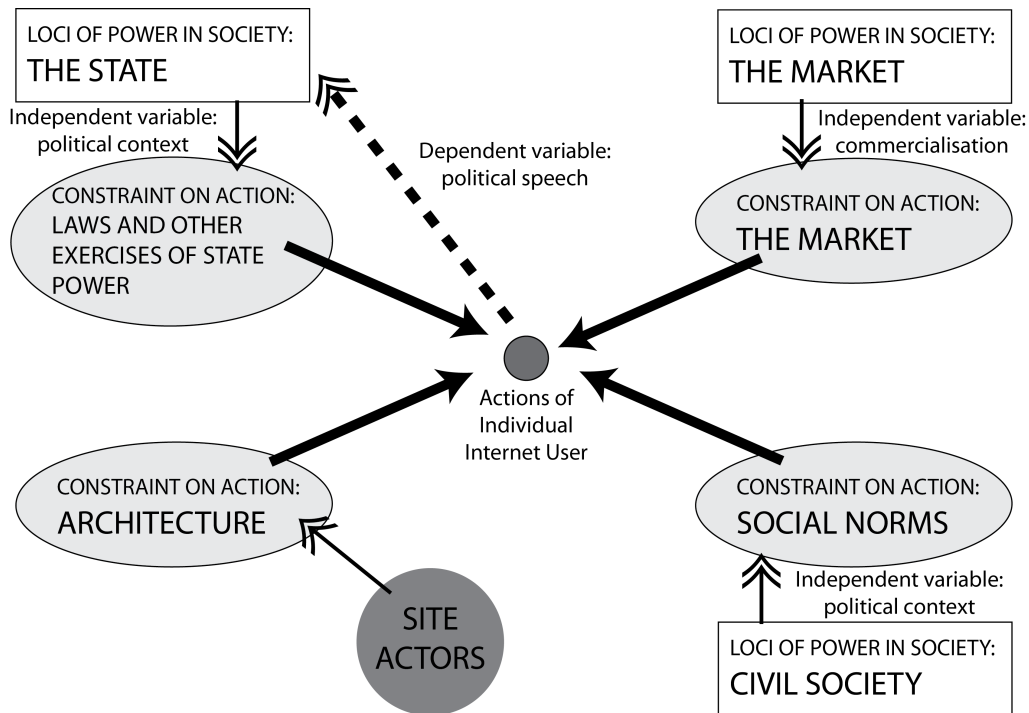
2011, p. 230). Thus, to address the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces affects their ability to provide a venue for political speech, it is important to investigate the way in which users of these spaces are positioned with respect to their potential role as political speakers and to consider whether the roles in which users are positioned align most strongly with normative ideas of citizens or consumers.

In *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*, Lessig breaks the aspects that regulate or constrain individual behaviour, both on and offline, into four categories: the market, laws, architectures and social norms (2000, p. 123). These four ways of regulating individual action can be seen as linked to the three loci of power in society, with laws stemming from the state, social norms stemming from civil society and the market as the given name of both the loci of power and its mechanism of regulation. The fourth source of structure discussed by Lessig, architecture, is an example of an exertion of power of different individuals or groups depending on the institution under consideration; in the case of the online platforms examined in this thesis, site architectures are created by site actors who are themselves constrained by laws, the market, social norms and the existing architectures in which they are embedded.

Practically, therefore, in order to conduct a structural discourse analysis of an online space, the necessary first step is to identify the sources of structure that contribute to the apparatuses and technologies that afford this institution its power. Although each of these four aspects acts to regulate individual action, in this project the aspect of the market takes a different position because commercialisation and the increase in power of commercial (market) forces over online spaces, resources and actions is a key independent variable of study. In describing these four constraints on individual behaviours, Lessig argues that their influence should be understood relative to the context in question. As such, in this investigation, constrained individuals are understood as situated within the architecture of a particular online space and in a particular political context,

typified by the configuration of power between the state, the market and civil society (Figure 3.1.).

Figure 3.1. Sources of constraints on individual online political speech



Within this model of the structural constraints on individual online political speech, there are two starting nodes that an examination of would illuminate how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to offer a venue for political speech in different political systems. The first is the architecture of online platforms, created by site actors who are themselves constrained by a particular set of laws, social norms and market forces. The second is the political context under consideration, evidenced in the political system (as the structure of laws, regulations and other exertions of state power), the social norms with regard to political speech in that political context and the interaction between the power of the state, the market and civil society in this context. However, although each of these three aspects of political context forms an important constraint on individual online political speech, this research question focuses specifically on the influence of the nature of the political system (and in particular the potential difference

between the effects of commercialisation in democratic and authoritarian political systems). As such, the constraining influence of the power of the state is more important in addressing this particular research question than the constraining power of social norms.

Once these sources of structure have been identified, the second stage of a structural discourse analysis is to collect materials that will enable the power of these structuring mechanisms to be disclosed. A list of the different types of materials that would shed light on the power of social networking sites, as commercial institutions, over the political speech acts of individual users is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Source materials for structural discourse analysis

Constraint on individual political speech	The technological structure of the constraint	The forms of power and knowledge underlying the constraint	Discourses about these constraints
Political context	The framework of state power, including legislation, regulation, law enforcement and the judiciary Evidence from the implementation of these frameworks of power	Official (state) commentary on frameworks of state power and their implementation Official and non-official commentary on principles and doctrines underlying these exertions of state power Academic and theoretical work concerning theories of power, politics and political speech	Media and expert commentary on these frameworks of state power and their implementation
Site architecture	Functionalities and affordances and site appearance Terms and conditions	Interviews with site actors and official publications	Media and expert commentary on site actors, site architecture, the constraints and the principles behind site architecture

Within each of the bodies of potential source materials listed in Table 3.3., the document search of this research focused initially on searches for key materials in

collated legal and media databases and examined site architectures from the perspective of a typical user. When the materials were more numerous than could be examined individually, preference was given to examining materials that would likely have wider reception in society (e.g. larger rather than smaller circulation media publications or those that had been mentioned in other documents). Materials referenced in other documents were also sought out and included, where relevant, and these materials were supplemented by analyses of blogs and other online media that were mentioned in other materials.

Material on site architectures was collected based on a process that attempted to mimic the site usage patterns of a typical user (including signup). User profiles were created and a random selection of accounts was followed on each platform. Screenshots were taken of different site pages at different times during usage of the site and the text of key documents, such as help files and terms and conditions were stored for analysis. The majority of these data were collected between February and October 2016 and, thus, represents the structure and architecture of these platforms during this specific time period.

Several points about this process are worthy of note. The Chinese Media Law database was used as the main source of Chinese legislation; key unofficial documents, such as the leaked Document 9 and policy speeches, are included in this database, making it a more comprehensive source for locating documents of relevance to state control of online spaces than state maintained databases. The phrase Internet governance was used as a seed word to locate media publications on state controls of online spaces in both the China Core Newspaper Database for Chinese publications and the Factiva Newspaper and Magazine Database for U.S. publications. This phrase was chosen in preference to other potential terms after preliminary analyses of the material returned based on different search terms because the idea of Internet governance in both English and Chinese corresponded the most strongly with discussions of normative ideals about state regulation of online spaces and overarching politics rather than specific instances of laws. In searching for media publications that would shed light on how key site actors

presented and conceptualised the site, the names of Twitter founder Jack Dorsey and Weibo CEO Charles Chao were used as seed words (although in practice articles containing interviews with other Twitter site actors and occasionally other Weibo site actors were returned with this keyword). The seed phrases microblog, social networking, Twitter, Weibo and Weibo Gongyi (Weibo's integrated public interest sub-site) were also used to narrow down media documents for consideration. Frequently, however, these searches produced far too many potential documents. In this case, article headlines were scanned for potential relevance, larger media outlets were focused on and articles were chosen such as to span the period of time under consideration. Further details of the materials examined are outlined in Chapter Four and in the Appendix.

While significant effort was taken to select texts for analysis that could provide a comprehensive picture of the technologies and apparatuses that might constrain individual political speech acts on commercial platforms and since these discourses are pervasive and dominant it would be expected that they are represented across many different documents, it should be remembered that if different materials were selected, for instance if online sources or discussion boards were examined instead of media publications or different keywords were used to select media publications for examination, the representation of discourses might be quite different. However, these choices would be associated with slightly different research questions and operationalisations thereof and the choices made as part of this search strategy (which are detailed further in the next chapter) were deemed to most accurately reflect the theoretical and practical orientation of this thesis.

Once these materials are been collected the third stage of a structural discourse analysis, which is conceptually tertiary but practically should be conducted in a time frame overlapping the second stage, is to analyse these materials under appropriate frameworks. This investigation, following Rose (2011), constructs a framework that focuses on four aspects: key themes, truth claims, complexities and contradictions and absences and omissions. During analysis of these materials,

notes were made under each of these headings that were updated iteratively as new material was examined and these frameworks were used to structure the analyses that are presented in the next chapter.

The methodology of structural discourse analysis outlined in this section and crafted specifically for the purposes of this inquiry, as a structured way of approaching the study of the constraining power of institutions over individuals, forms the first data chapter of this thesis. This methodology has several strengths, which are almost impossible to achieve with other methodologies. The explicit orientation toward power of the methodology makes it uniquely able to speak to configurations of power and society (Dijk, 1993). Discourse analysis is also more closely linked with theory than other methodologies, giving it the ability to engage with and make critical contributions to theory (Phillips & Hardy, 2002) and it is particularly suited to challenging assumptions and problematising the status quo, through its focus on dominant and unquestioned discourses (Rose, 2011). Within the contours of this thesis, frontloading a critical analysis of second- and third-form power (over agendas and constructions) can help explain the nature of the political speech acts found on these platforms in the later data chapters.

However, the breadth and critical depth of the methodology is both a strength and a weakness, in that the methodology is labour intensive and there is little explicit prescription on how it should be undertaken (Burman & Parker, 1993). There is also a difficulty in selecting materials to begin the investigation and knowing when to stop the investigation (Rose, 2011). However, in discourse analysis what matters is not the quantity of texts analysed but rather the richness and depth of insights gained from the analysis (Tonkiss, 2004). It should be remembered that this thesis captures a snapshot of how users of social networking sites are constructed with respect to their status as political speakers at a particular time and with reference to two particular websites. However, it is hoped that the discourses identified are relevant to other online platforms and longer time frames. This thesis attempts to mitigate these limitations, while benefiting from the critical perspectives provided by discourse analysis, through clearly laying out the

methodological process undertaken and by following up this investigation with a quantitative analysis of a representative sample of individual microblog users on the two key social networking sites under consideration that provides generalisable and specific data on commercialisation and political speech in these two political systems.

3.6. Quantitative analysis of a random sample of microblog users

Quantitative research, based on the collection of digital data, present a massive new opportunity in social science research, with the advent of ‘big data’ enabling a vast new array of new questions to be answered (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013). Given its intrinsic link with digital data, studies of the Internet very frequently employ ‘big data’ techniques, such as network analysis and quantitative analysis of large datasets (e.g. Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto & Gummadi, 2010; Fu & Chau, 2013; González-Bailón & Wang, 2016). These studies have provided some of the incredibly valuable insights referenced in this thesis such as the frequency and type of online censorship in China (King et al., 2012), the extent of the ‘echo chamber’ effect online (Adamic & Glance, 2005) and the influence of platform architecture on offline political outcomes (Bond et al., 2012).

Despite this turn toward ‘big data’, however, most research into social networking sites focuses either on trending topics or case studies of events, users or groups. Until now the only academic work, to the knowledge of the author, based on a random sample of microblog users was a big-data study of almost 30,000 Weibo accounts, which cautioned that more than half of these users had empty timelines and thus platform user numbers were likely inflated; however, this study did not delve into the practices of the body of Weibo users who do actively use the platform based on this sample (Fu & Chau, 2013). Thus, basically all of the work on political speech on microblogs is based on a non-random sample and thus cannot speak to the underlying pattern of speech acts (political or otherwise) on these platforms. In order to fill this large gap in the literature, this thesis constructs a random sample of U.S.-based Twitter users and mainland China-based Weibo users and a random sample of speech acts by individual U.S. Twitter users and mainland

Chinese Weibo users. This methodology can provide the generalisable understanding of the actual nature of political speech and political speakers on these commercial online platforms that forms a crucial part of addressing the overall research question.

Every Weibo user is associated with a 10-digit ID number and every Twitter user a 64-bit ID number. Custom python scripts were used to query the APIs of Twitter and Weibo based on randomly generated potential ID numbers. On Weibo, a total of 95,148 randomly generated potential ID numbers were queried between 29 July and 24 September, 2014; 15,972 of these were associated with user profiles of which 1,057 had posted in the last month, had listed their location as within China and had not set their profiles to private. The vast majority of user profiles on Weibo had not posted within the previous month.

On Twitter, a total of 269,837 randomly selected potential ID numbers were queried between 31 July and 11 September 2014: 105,721 of these were associated with user profiles of which 10,890 had public profiles and had posted in the last month. However, there is no established mechanism for geolocating Twitter users (Graham, Hale, & Gaffney, 2013). A space for the user to enter their location is available on Twitter; however, this box is optional and open ended. The number of users who enter location information into this box has been found to be between 84% and 72% by different studies of Twitter users (Cheng, Caverlee, & Lee, 2010; Graham et al., 2013; Hecht, Hong, Suh, & Chi, 2011; Takhteyev, Gruz, & Wellman, 2012). However, qualitative examinations of this data have found that only between 63% and 66% of profiles actually have entered information in this field that can be attached to a particular location (Hecht et al., 2011; Takhteyev et al., 2012).

A three-stage process was constructed in which user-input location, geolocated tweets and user description were considered in order to attempt to locate the country of origin of the randomly selected accounts. Of the 10,890 randomly selected, active, non-protected Twitter accounts, 4,587 (42.12%) could be located

based on this three-stage process. The strength of the sample would obviously be greater if 100 percent of the active profiles could be geolocated. However, the rights of Twitter users to protect their privacy by not publicising their location need to be respected.

Nevertheless, the results of this study are intended to be generalisable to all active U.S.-based Twitter users and there is a distinct possibility that there are differences between the groups of those who could and could not be geolocated that would bias this sample. For this reason, profile data from the users that could be geolocated was compared against those that could not be. This comparison suggests that users in Japan and the Middle East might be underrepresented in the geolocated sample and that users who post the most frequently might be underrepresented in the geolocated sample. However, the number of followers and profiles followed, the proportion of users with English and Spanish as a platform language and the proportion of users in the three major U.S. time zones is roughly the same in the initial random sample and the geolocated subset (Table 3.4.). This suggests that, at least with relation to U.S. users, the fact that only about half of accounts could be geolocated may not introduce significant bias into the sample.

Table 3.4. Comparison of geolocated Twitter users compared to all active, non-protected users in the initial random sample

	Geolocated Users	All Active, Non-Protected Users
Average number of profiles followed	505	525
Average number of followers	392	475
Average number of statuses	3369	5252
Proportion of top five most prevalent platform languages	English – 56.73% Spanish – 15.94% Japanese – 6.44% Thai – 4.63% Portuguese – 3.63%	English – 50.93% Spanish – 14.42% Japanese – 11.04% Arabic – 4.09% Portuguese – 3.69%
Proportion of top five most prevalent time zones	(None – 41.44%) Eastern Time (US & Canada) – 5.82% Central Time (US & Canada) – 4.94% Pacific Time (US & Canada) – 3.67% London – 2.93% Bangkok – 2.86%	(None – 56.47%) Eastern Time (US & Canada) – 4.57% Central Time (US & Canada) – 3.5% Pacific Time (US & Canada) – 2.43% Tokyo – 2.18% Brasilia – 2.02%

Profiles from 125 countries were found in this random sample of monthly-active, non-protected, geolocated Twitter accounts (Table 3.5.). The largest percentage (21%) of geolocated profiles were based in the USA. This number is roughly in accordance with recent analyses of the locations of Twitter users, which put users in the USA at roughly 20 percent of global Twitter users (Ribeiro, 2014, p. 4). Indonesian users were the second most prevalent (8.94%) followed by the UK, Japan and Brazil.

As this research is primarily concerned with comparing mainland China-based Weibo users and US-based Twitter users, the worldwide geographic spread of Twitter users will not be analysed in depth. However, given the rarity of this data, they are presented here and several important insights are noted.

Firstly, there are several countries most notably China but also India, Russia and Nigeria, where there are large numbers of Internet users but very few Twitter users. Secondly, a minority (46%) of Twitter users live in Western countries. This percentage may even be smaller since Middle Eastern and Japanese users may be underrepresented in the geolocated sample. Thirdly, this highlights large populations of understudied users. In particular, users located in Indonesia are the second largest population of Twitter users, but little is known about the Internet usage practices of individuals in this country. It is hoped that comparative work, such as this project, can contribute, in a small way, to a much-needed de-westernisation of Internet studies.

Table 3.5. Number of users in the geolocated Twitter sample by country

Country	Number of users (per listed country)	Percentage of Twitter users (per listed country)	Country	Number of users (per listed country)	Percentage of Twitter users (per listed country)
USA	948	20,67%	Indonesia	411	8,96%
UK	368	8,02%	Japan	298	6,50%
Brazil	176	3,84%	Spain	166	3,62%
Turkey	153	3,34%	Mexico	137	2,99%
Canada	103	2,25%	Russia	101	2,20%
Argentina	91	1,98%	Saudi Arabia	88	1,92%
Venezuela	78	1,70%	Colombia	74	1,61%
France	70	1,53%	India	54	1,18%
The Netherlands	53	1,16%	The Philippines	52	1,13%
South Africa	42	0,92%	Australia	39	0,85%
Chile	38	0,83%	Nigeria	36	0,78%
Italy and Malaysia	33	0,72%	Germany	28	0,61%
Egypt	27	0,59%	Ireland	26	0,57%
South Korea	25	0,55%	Peru	22	0,48%
Thailand	18	0,39%	Ecuador, Kuwait and UAE	17	0,37%
Dominican Republic	14	0,31%	Guatemala	13	0,28%
Pakistan and the Ukraine	11	0,24%	Greece, Norway, Poland and Uruguay	10	0,22%
New Zealand, Panama, Paraguay and Puerto Rico	9	0,20%	Czech Republic, El Salvador and Portugal	8	0,17%
Belgium	7	0,15%	China, Denmark, Serbia and Taiwan	7	0,15%
Belarus, Kenya, Singapore and Switzerland	6	0,13%	Honduras, Iran, Morocco and Sweden	5	0,11%
Bangladesh, Finland, Ghana, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine and Qatar	4	0,09%	Azerbaijan, Croatia, Cyprus, Iraq, Israel, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Romania and Vietnam	3	0,07%
Algeria, Austria, Bahrain, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Hong Kong, Jamaica, Jordan, Latvia, Moldova, Montenegro, Suriname, Tanzania, Tenerife, Tunisia and Uganda	2	0,04%	Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Bahamas, Belize, Benin, Cameroon, Cayman Islands, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Estonia, Fiji, Gabon, Hungary, Kurdistan, Liberia, Macedonia, Mozambique, Oman, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Senegal, Slovenia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Trinidad and Tobago, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe	1	0,02%

At the end of this first stage of analysis, this dataset consisted of 1,057 randomly selected, monthly active, non-private, China-based Weibo accounts and 948 randomly selected, monthly active, non-private, U.S.-based Twitter accounts. In the second stage of this data collection process, the online activity (posts and retweets) of these users was collected over a four-week period to construct a representative sample of online speech on both platforms. The period of 8 October to 4 November, 2014 was chosen for data collection because this thesis is specifically interested in the use of these commercial online platforms for political speech and important (approximately) bi-annual political events occurred in both countries at the end of this period: the 2014 U.S. midterm election was held on 4 November (the final day of this four-week period) and Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China occurred between October 20 and 23. This period was, thus, designed to capture online political speech about the formal political process that might not occur at other times due to the relative infrequency of these events.

Python scripts were used to query the APIs of both platforms to collect post data. Pre-test and post-checks were conducted to ensure that the data collected via these scripts accurately corresponded to user posts made during this period. It was found in the Weibo pre-tests that posts from three accounts were not collected by the script. Each of these accounts appeared to be spam accounts and, thus, it is hypothesised that some user posts on Weibo are restricted from appearing on the public timeline because either the post or the user themselves have been marked as spam.

These scripts started collecting data for the sample of 1,057 randomly selected, monthly active, non-protected, China-based Weibo accounts and 948 randomly selected, monthly active, non-protected, U.S.-based Twitter accounts. However, due to account deletions, unfollows, temporary account non-availability and non-activity the number of users for whom full timeline data could be collected was much smaller: 686 on Twitter and 580 on Weibo.

After the construction of this random sample of user accounts and their speech acts, a content analysis was conducted to ascertain what type of user these accounts belong to. This data is important in determining the spread of voices and representation of different types of power holders within these commercial spaces and as a step toward the identification of individual user's online speech acts, which this thesis is concerned to analyse. Accounts were coded as one of 13 types: individual; public individual; celebrity; business (more than 50 employees); small business; small group or individual content or product producers; media outlet; blog, forum or online directory; civic group; non-profit organisation, charity or professional or advocacy organisation; university, school or official university or school organisations; government department or publically run entity or robot or spam account (Table 3.6.).

This initial list of account types was based on research conducted by the author on Weibo (Bolsover, 2013) but was updated during the coding process, in particular, such that the categories used would be applicable and comparable across both the Twitter and Weibo datasets. In order to arrive at categories that properly described the dataset but also were rigorous and replicable, a subset of accounts in both datasets were first roughly categorised. Based on the results of the first content analysis placement, rules were created that could distinguish between different kinds of accounts (e.g. individuals and robots and businesses and small businesses) and then the data was re-coded following these rules

The categorisations for account type were verified by a second coder (who is a native Chinese speaker and bilingual in English and Chinese). The second coder coded a random selection of approximately one third of the Twitter accounts (239 accounts) for account type as well as U.S. state and gender (two variables which, like country, are available for all accounts on Weibo but which have to be hand-coded on Twitter). The percentage agreement of both coders for account type for the coded sub-section was 82% with a Krippendorff's Alpha of 0.60. For state, the percentage agreement was 92% and an alpha of 0.91. For gender, the percentage agreement was 90% with an alpha of 0.821. These levels of agreement are within

acceptable levels for this type of research (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002).

Table 3.6. Definitions of categorisations of accounts

Category	Description	Examples
Individual	A regular user of the microblogging platform. Post content will likely contain content on a variety of topics and information about that person's daily life	In the absence of other evidence, it is assumed that these accounts are individual accounts
Public individual	An individual who has expertise in a particular area and for whom the majority of their posts concern this area of expertise	Journalist, academic, businessman
Celebrity	An individual whose private life is of interest to a large number of people	Individual celebrity or celebrity group, such as a popular band or major sports team
Business	An account dedicated to publicising information about or related to a particular business or branch/department of a larger business entity	Manufacturer, architectural firm
Small business	A business with 50 or fewer employees	Small restaurant, hairdresser
Small group or individual content or product producer	An individual or small group of individuals who use the microblog to showcase the content or products they produce (likely as a hobby not as a full-time job)	Individual musician, band, artist
Media outlet	A major media outlet	Newspaper, radio station
Blog, forum or online directory	An account dedicated to providing a certain kind of information, does not rest on the offline identity of the account administrator	Fashion blog, inspirational quotes, an individual blogger whose content is dedicated to a particular topic
Civic group	An account belonging to or administered by members of a specific civic group for the purposes of publicising the work of that group and/or recruiting new members	Local sports club, church, grass roots media outlet, student-run school or university organisation
Non-profit organisation, charity or professional or advocacy organisation	An account labelled as belonging to a non-profit, charity or professional or advocacy group	Adoption service, child advocacy group
University, school or official university or school organisations	An account owned/administered by a university or school or an employee thereof for the purposes of publicising information related to that department or institution	University counselling service, high school
Government department or publically run entity	An account owned/administered by a government department or an employee of the government for the purposes of publicising information related to that department or institution	Individual police department, state-run museum
Robot	An account that exists for the purposes of providing a paid service for posting and reposting content	Accounts that post only adverts for certain products, post many adverts in a short space of time or contain no interaction with other users

On Weibo, due to a very high prevalence of individual accounts, the second coder coded a non-random selection of approximately one third of the dataset (214 accounts). All of the accounts that had been coded as not belonging to individuals were included in this coding set, plus a random selection of 174 accounts that had been coded as individuals. The percentage agreement between the first and second coder of the account types in the Weibo dataset was 82%, the same as for the Twitter dataset. However, the subset of accounts that was double coded was not random. The percentage agreement of the 177 accounts coded by the first coder as individuals was much higher: 90%. Based on this figure, the estimated overall percentage agreement of the two coders across the whole Weibo dataset would have been 87%.

Percentage agreement is generally seen as an unreliable metric for intercoder reliability. However, within the Weibo dataset the expected agreement for account type is 80% because almost all of the users are individuals. With such a high proportion of individuals, it is almost impossible for measures that take into account expected agreement to fall within normally accepted levels. The Krippendorff's Alpha for this coding is 0.34. While measures that take into account percentage agreement, such as Krippendorff's Alpha, are usually a better indication of coding validity, in the case of the Weibo account dataset where more than 90% of accounts are individual, they are poor indications of agreement and thus percentage agreement is favoured, which falls within acceptable bounds for this type of research.

In order to provide a picture of the actual prevalence of political speech by individual users on these two platforms, a random selection of 500 speech acts (posts and retweets) by individual users on both platforms during the four-week period under consideration was coded to ascertain the type of speech act: personal (sharing information about the self or personal messages to another user), commercial (entertainment, products and services or employment), informational (inspirational or helpful content, memetic or viral content or links to offsite, non-

political information), political (commenting on society, sharing news, commenting on the political process, attempting to exert influence or political humour) or spam.

Several iterations of this coding scheme were tested. The original coding scheme was based on existing research into types of online speech (e.g. Asur, Yu, & Huberman, 2011; Kwak et al., 2010), with categorisations of political speech based on the theories introduced in the previous chapters. However, during a series of pre-tests on different random samples of the original dataset, several categories (such as political humour) were added and others merged to more accurately reflect the actual nature of online speech on both platforms. The category of identity assertion as a form of political speech was dropped because it was deemed by both coders to be too difficult to ascertain for an individual tweet without knowledge of the offline context of the speaker. A second coder coded a random selection of 100 of the 500 tweets on each platform. The intercoder percentage agreement for tweet topic under the five broad categorisations was 80% on both Twitter and Weibo, with an alpha of 0.68 on Twitter and 0.72 on Weibo. Interaction data (retweets, favourites and comments) for the 1000 coded tweets were also collected via the APIs of both platforms, several months after their posting, in order to provide data on the levels of interaction of other users with different types of online content.

This dataset is unique in that it is the first attempt to provide an accurate measure of the actual nature of types of speech acts engaged in by individual users on these key commercial social networking sites. The vast majority of efforts to investigate political speech on both Twitter and Weibo focus on specific cases, trending topics or opinion leaders, but as Sullivan points out, with reference to Weibo, this preselects for successful cases and thus analysis of a large dataset without preselecting for outcome is necessary to truly understand the nature of political speech acts on microblogs (2014).

Although the difficulty of geolocation on Twitter, the necessary restriction to public accounts and account and post deletion could potentially bias this dataset, it is still

extremely valuable in that it provides a generalisable picture of users and speech acts on these microblog platforms. As previously mentioned, this dataset focuses on monthly-active, non-private users and is restricted to U.S. and mainland China based users. As such it cannot speak to infrequent users or those who might create temporary accounts for particular purposes. It also cannot speak to the population of users who set their profiles to private. Certain types of political speech need to occur in public settings and, thus, would not occur on private profiles. However, the necessary exclusion of private users from this dataset means that some instances of (particularly symbolic) political speech might be excluded from the dataset.

Several further specifics of this dataset should be noted. Firstly, recent research on Chinese online spaces has shown that attempts to mobilise are rapidly censored (King et al., 2012) and that employees of the Chinese state are actively engaged in posting distracting and positive content at the time of key political events, such as the CCP Plenary included in this dataset (King et al., 2016). The Weibo data collection script queried the posts of randomly selected users on the public timeline (which in pre-tests was shown to include all posts of the followed users except those labelled as spam) approximately every five minutes. It was not possible to query more frequently due to limits on the number of API queries imposed by the site. It is therefore possible that some posts were posted by users in the sample but were deleted before data was collected. The likely infrequency of these type of posts makes this relatively unlikely however this limitation should be remembered since the full extent of censorship on Weibo is unknown. However, the content analysis of user accounts means that public opinion guidance accounts would have likely been excluded from the dataset of individual user posts, similarly a content analysis of the identity of authors of retweeted statuses was also conducted that would likely have highlighted the existence of these accounts in the dataset. The influence of these accounts over discourse in general on Weibo should be remembered; however, this is an integral part of online discourse in China that needs to be considered rather than excluded from the dataset.

This data on speech type is also limited due to the small size of the dataset necessitated by the need to hand-code the tweets for content. This means that only statements about large differences between rates of speech can be confidently made based on this dataset, which, again, can only speak to the speech acts of monthly active, non-private, individual users on the platforms and within the time frames under consideration. Political speech might be very different on more private social networking sites, like Facebook or Renren, or in different time periods, for instance before Xi's crackdown on online rumours or outside periods of formal political events. However, in order to mitigate this limitation insights from this dataset are compared to surveys of Internet users in both the U.S. and China in Chapter Nine, which were collected prior to Xi's crackdown on online speech.

These analyses use digital social research techniques to provide a quantitative picture of the ability of these commercial platforms to provide a venue for political speech and the interaction between measures of commercialisation and rates of political speech within these commercial platforms. These techniques examine data outside of their contexts of production and reading and cannot speak to the qualitative content of these online speech acts (boyd & Crawford, 2011; Bolsover, 2013). However, these two limitations are mitigated by comparison with insights from the structural discourse analysis of the previous chapter, which provides an in-depth picture of the conditions of production and reading of speech on these two platforms, and the qualitative analysis of a random selection of individual user tweets that is conducted in Chapter Six.

3.7. Qualitative analysis of a random sample of individual microblog users' speech acts

The broad categorisations of speech (personal, commercial, informational, political and spam) employed in the previous chapter enable quantitative analysis but are too general to fully evaluate the effects of the commercialisation of online spaces on their ability to provide a venue for political speech under the theoretical framework laid out in the previous chapters. In particular, many arguments about

the effects of commercialisation on political speech focus on the content of these speech acts rather than their frequency and, thus, this chapter builds on the random selection of individual speech acts detailed in the previous section with a qualitative analysis of their content based on the theories of and arguments about political speech covered in the literature review.

A content analysis based on a more detailed set of categories of post content is used to structure the groups of posts considered with this qualitative methodology (Figure 3.2.). The percentage agreement for these more detailed categories was 68% on Weibo and 71% on Twitter, with a Krippendorff's alpha of 0.66 on both Twitter and Weibo, which again is within acceptable bounds for this type of research. Based on these categories, a description and analysis of the actual nature of the speech acts that individual Chinese Weibo users and U.S. Twitter users engage can be undertaken. This is a particularly important contribution to answering the overall research question in that it can provide a generalisable picture of the nature of political speech acts occurring in commercial online spaces.

Figure 3.2. Detailed post content categories

Personal:

- Sharing information about the self
- Personal message to another

Commercial:

- Entertainment
- Products and services
- Employment

Informational:

- Informational content such as inspirational quotations, astrology and life hacks
- Viral videos, jokes or memes
- Links to offsite, non-political information

Political:

- Expressing an opinion or commenting on society or social practices
- Sharing news or information or expressing an opinion about current affairs or political events
- Expressing an opinion on formal political processes
- Attempting to exert influence on states, companies, organisations or individuals
- Political humour

Spam

The nature of online political speech acts and who engages in political speech acts in these commercial spaces is of particular importance to this thesis and, thus, this methodology is specifically concerned with providing a picture of the actual political speech acts (or lack thereof) occurring on these sites. Many arguments about the effects of commercialisation on political speech focus on who is speaking with some arguing that the commercialisation of online spaces leads to dominance by established power holders (Dahlberg, 2005; Hindman, 2009), while others find that, particularly in authoritarian contexts, commercial platforms can provide spaces for minority voices and foster the emergence of an online public sphere (Howard et al., 2011; Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Yang, 2009).

There is also a great deal of debate over the way that political speech itself might be being changed by the process of commercialisation. Many scholars have critiqued the nature of political speech (or lack thereof) in commercial online spaces, pointing to diversionary content, 'slacktivist' acts and corporate domination of discourse (Asur, Yu, & Huberman, 2011; Dahlberg, 2001; Morozov, 2013). However, others have argued that the definitions and theories of political speech need to be updated to account for the new forms of political speech emerging in these commercial online spaces that provide a valuable addition to the political process (Fox, 2013; Papacharissi, 2010; Zuckerman, 2013b). However, these efforts are premature before an accurate picture of the actual nature of political speech in commercial online spaces is established.

Arguments about political speech and what constitutes political speech are broken into four categories that are intended to cover the breadth of these arguments about what is or should be considered political speech. The first aspect of this is the symbolic (passive) or instrumental (action-orientated) nature of this speech. This dichotomy aligns with two of the nine areas of debate, outlined by Fox (2013), about what the definition of political speech should be, the two forms of political participation suggested by Scaff (1975) and Zuckerman's distinction between instrumental political speech and voice (2013b). It is often argued that the commercialisation of online spaces is increasing symbolic political speech at the

expense of more valuable instrumental speech. Gladwell argues that online, symbolic speech will never lead to actual political change (2010) and Morovoz criticises these symbolic acts as 'slacktivist' and undermining necessary, instrumental political speech (2012). However, it has also been argued that these commercial platforms facilitate offline action and this has been documented in various case studies both in the U.S. and China. Thus, this analysis will consider the extent to which online political speech acts can, indeed, be characterised as symbolic and 'slacktivist' or whether there is evidence of instrumental speech on these commercial online platforms.

The second key aspect of the nature of political speech considered in this chapter is the position of these speech acts within the existing power structure in society. This area relates to two of the key debates laid out by Fox: namely whether speech is voluntary, mobilised or forced and whether this speech is legal or illegal (2013). This aspect is also related to theories of authoritarian deliberation that sees the emergence of deliberative political speech in online commercial spaces in China, that push at the margins of acceptable political speech with farce, coded criticism and political satire while remaining within the boundaries of acceptable political discourse set by the state (Jiang, 2009).

However, in analysing political speech in China, many scholars look only, implicitly or explicitly, for illegal speech acts, seeking to find evidence that the Internet can undermine the power of authoritarian states. This leads to a focus on censorship and censored speech in Chinese online spaces (Fu, Chan & Chau, 2013; King et al., 2012). Similarly, many of the studies of political speech in China are particularly concerned with authoritarian control and the level of state influence over discourse in general (through, for instance, online opinion manipulation). This perspective can lead to a discounting of political speech that falls within the opaque boundaries of legality in China because of the influence of the state over constructions of political speech within China. It is for this reason that the structural discourse analysis will seek to provide a comprehensive picture of the messages that individual social networking site users are receiving from the state

and platforms of use regarding their position as potential political speakers. Based on these understandings, the political speech acts that actually occur on these commercial online platforms can be related to these discourses about ideal political speech.

The third key aspect of the nature of online political speech analysed is the extent to which these political speech acts actually affect or seek to affect the balance of power in society (which is the definition of political speech adopted by this thesis). This aligns with three of the key debates outlined by Fox: namely, influence versus intent, deliberate versus unintended consequences and successful versus unsuccessful political acts (2013). This also relates to concepts of monitorial citizenship that see the online political acts as information-orientated, staying abreast of the political environment such that action could be taken if necessary (Schudson, 2002). However, many critics of online commercial platforms have pointed to the 'echo chamber effect' in which online political speech has little effect because it is only heard by those who already agree with that point of view (Adamic & Glance, 2005), which would undermine the ability of these spaces to provide functionalities for monitorial citizenship.

Critics of commercial online spaces and commercialisation, in general, point to the online political speech that might occur within these spaces as a providing a convenient, packaged substitute for actual political action and thus undermining the potential for this political speech to actually affect the balance of power in society (Habermas, 1989; Morozov, 2012). However, the focus in studying social media on case studies of particular events rather than random samples of speech means that these events have already been pre-selected for a certain level of success and it is not known what proportion of political speech acts on these platforms might actually be successful in achieving any political speech aims that the speaker might have had (Sullivan, 2014).

This thesis intentionally takes a broad definition of political speech in order that acts deemed by their speakers to be political and those that might be considered

political in their context of speaking would not be excluded. However, within this definition, it is important to consider the extent to which these speech acts actually align with what more traditional definitions consider as political speech, i.e. speech that has a deliberate intention to influence the balance of power in society and that which does indeed achieve this aim (Almond & Verba, 1963; Conge, 1988; Fox, 2013; Verba & Nie, 1987).

The fourth aspect of the nature of political speech that will be analysed is the position and orientation of this political speech act within the structure of society: namely, the nature of the speaker and the interests being forwarded within the political speech act and whether this speech act is directed at a state or government target, a general political target or some other target. This aligns with the final two arguments outlined by Fox in his summary of the debates over what should constitute an act of political participation: namely, whether the speech act is an individual or a group act and whether the speech act has a particular state or government target (2013). This is important in that it speaks to arguments about whether discourse in online commercial spaces is dominated by elite users, new groups of online opinion leaders or provides spaces for marginalised voices and more diverse information (Hindman, 2009). This evaluation can also potentially provide evidence for a changing nature of political discourse that some argue increasingly is concerned with specific, delineated issues and might have non-state or local targets (Sloam, 2007).

This analysis is unique in providing a picture of the actual nature of the speech acts that individual social networking site users engage in online and the extent to which these speech acts align with existing theories of online political speech. Previous research has focused on case studies, key words, trending topics or key users but this is the first attempt, to the knowledge of this author, to provide a measure of the amount of political speech that individual users of microblogs engage in or to provide a picture of the actual nature of this speech based on a random sample. However, these findings are limited in that they are based on a relatively small sample of users and user posts on only two Internet platforms in a

distinct time period and without reference to the offline situation of these users. These results also rely on the evaluation of the researcher of these speech acts without an understanding of the specific offline position and intention of the individual speaking; this may be inferred from the speech act but it cannot be known using this methodology. To balance these limitations, the fourth and final data chapter of this thesis analyses survey data from Internet users in the U.S. and China to ascertain whether and how far the results of this case study of Twitter and Weibo can be generalised to the entire population of Internet users in both countries.

3.8. Modelling rates of online political speech based on a survey of Internet users

Surveys are one of the most common quantitative methodologies used in the social sciences. They are particularly useful in that they allow the collection of descriptive, factual information about populations (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2003) and produce standardised, quantified data that allow groups of individuals to be compared and for different variables associated with individual survey respondents to be accounted for in analysis (Sapsford, 1999). In terms of addressing the overall research question, a survey methodology is, thus, particularly useful in that it can produce comparative data about Internet users in different political systems that can account for differences between Internet using populations. This methodology is also important in that it allows survey respondents to contribute data about their own actions and beliefs (which until now has been missing from this research design).

The previous methodologies applied the definition of political speech proposed in this thesis to random samples of online microblog posts. However, these analyses are unable to account for these particular individuals' understandings of their own speech acts and the influence of individual (rather than system) levels of commercialisation. Also, they cannot account for potential intervening variables that might be associated with the effects of the process of commercialisation on the ability of online platforms to provide spaces for political speech, such as the levels

of education and affluence of Internet using populations in the countries of study and the beliefs of Internet users about the safety and appropriateness of their potential online political speech acts.

Through a survey that includes questions related to individual demographics, Internet use, political beliefs, the frequency of online political speech and individual commercial beliefs and practices, models can be built that account for the effects of commercialisation on online political speech in different political systems. These models utilise linear regression, which measures the amount of variance in a particular independent variable (in this case the self-reported frequency of symbolic and instrumental online political speech acts) that is due to the variance in other variables (in this case measures of commercialisation and political context) (Walliman, 2006).

This analysis utilises data from the 2012 World Internet Values Project survey. Survey respondents were recruited from the existing panels of two survey research firms – Toluna and comScore - with the intention of representing the Internet population in each country of interest. A total of 11,225 cases were retained from users in 63 countries; 3147 of which lived in 13 different democratic countries and 2942 in 13 authoritarian states (the remaining respondents lived in countries that are categorised as either flawed democracies or hybrid regimes)¹¹. Eight hundred survey respondents lived in the U.S. and 527 in China. Hong Kong and Taiwan were separate options within this survey so only mainland Chinese Internet users are considered within this sample.

The questions in the survey were based on several well-known Internet surveys including the World Internet Project, OxIS, the Pew Internet and American Life Project, comScore and the BBC World Service Internet poll. The online questionnaire was programmed to randomise question order and force answers to minimise non-response biases. The survey was fielded online between July and

¹¹ The 2015 Democracy Index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit is used to assess government type for survey respondents.

September 2012 and was offered in nine different languages, including English and Mandarin Chinese. This survey data was, thus, collected after many of the events of the Arab Spring but before the crackdown on online speech that began after Xi Jinping took office in late 2012. In contrast, the data examined in the previous chapters were collected after this change in Chinese leadership and, thus, similarities between these datasets could be said to be a longer-term indication of underlying phenomenon, whereas changes may be due to this difference in state approaches to regulating online political speech in China.

Survey respondents were asked how frequently they posted an opinion about politics online and how frequently they signed an online petition (daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly or never). These data, thus, speak to the self-reported frequency of one particular form of instrumental political speech (signing online petitions) and the self-reported frequency of making symbolic speech acts online that the respondent characterises as political. However, these data do not speak to the content, quality or topic of these speech acts.

The literature review in Chapter Two grouped the ways in which the process of commercialisation is generally understood into one of five areas: privatisation, marketisation, exposure to commercial forces, the reconstitution of citizens as consumers and a movement into commercial spaces. The process of privatisation, however, occurs at the societal level, with formerly state-provided goods and services moving into the domain of the market and the process of marketisation occurs at the level of the institution, whether state, market or civil societal, with the introduction of market logic into operational frameworks. Survey data can only capture data at the individual level and, thus, these first two meanings of commercialisation are not considered here.

The first metric of commercialisation considered is the reported frequency of making online purchases (daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly or never). When time spent online is taken into account, this metric provides a proxy measure of the third meaning of commercialisation: namely, the amount of

exposure to commercial forces. It is hypothesised that those individuals who more frequently make online purchases might have a greater level of exposure to commercial messages, both that draw them more frequently to make these purchases and during the time they spend on these platforms in order to make these purchases.

The second metric of commercialisation considered is extent to which the respondent agrees with the practice of collecting user data in order to sell targeted advertisements, a practice that platforms present as one of the services they offer. Survey respondents were asked to rate on a scale of one to seven their preference between a situation in which “online companies do not monitor my activity or personal data, although I may not receive the most personalised information and offers suited to my liking and needs” and “online companies should monitor my activity and personal data to offer me the best information suited to my liking and needs”. This variable provides a rough measure of the difficult-to-access fourth type of commercialisation: the extent to which the individual user has internalised the idealised role of the consumer presented by commercial online companies. (Although this does not measure the flip side of this argument of a movement from the role of a citizen to the role of a consumer, which is measured, in this analysis, in part by the frequency of online political speech and in part based on opinions about the state and political speech.)

The third metric of commercialisation considered is the frequency of making a post to a social media site (daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly or never). When time spent online is taken into account, this provides a measure of the fraction of a user’s time that is spent in these particular commercial platforms of interest to this thesis that have been seen as potentially providing new spaces for political speech.

However, one limitation of these data is the necessity to use quantitative scales and relatively simple operationalisations of key concepts as part of the survey methodology (trading strength of conclusion for depth and complexity of understanding). This methodology is very strong in that it can provide specific,

quantified conclusions about the effects of commercialisation on political speech. However, the limitations of these operationalisations and the limited extent to which these individual survey data can represent the complex concepts considered in this thesis mean that it is important to combine their results with other methods through a mixed-methods design.

Surveys can be limited by non-response bias and selection bias, especially given that these surveys are not based on random samples (Couper, 2000). Many online surveys suffer from the problem that they intend to speak to a specific underlying population but they can only access Internet users. This project, which focuses on Internet users, is not affected by this problem; however, this survey may be affected by selection bias. Thus, to account for the potential distinct population of survey respondents, a variety of demographic variables are included in these models.

Surveys can also be limited by response bias, where the respondent answers questions in a way that they think matches with what the survey takes want or expect or simply do not answer questions with care or thought. There is also a distinct possibility that survey respondents in the U.S. and China might interpret the questions in a different and contextually standard way. For instance, as discussed in the theory section, ideas about what constitutes political speech can be very different in the two countries under consideration. Previous research has found that survey populations show different patterns of answers to the same survey questions (Harzing, 2006) and in particular Asians are less likely to pick extreme responses on surveys (Wang, Hempton, Dugan & Komives, 2008). However, particularly when combined in a mixed-method research design that also includes comparative analysis based on standardised instruments this can be a strength rather than a limitation because it can allow the differences between the underlying populations to be better elucidated because the research design will include both self-reported and researcher-coded categorisations of the frequency of online political speech.

3.9. Summary

The previous two chapters of this thesis introduced the debate about how the process of commercialisation may have undermined the democratic potential of online spaces, finding that arguments about the effects of commercialisation on (online) political speech differ in different political systems. This finding led to the hypothesis that commercialisation is negative for political speech but that it might be less negative or perhaps even positive in authoritarian contexts.

In order to address this question, it is necessary to investigate the context in which individual Internet users are embedded and the way that they might be constrained in their political speech acts, to understand both quantitatively and qualitatively the nature of online political speech acts and to isolate the effects of commercialisation on online political speech from other variables that might affect these activities.

This chapter has laid out a methodological framework for answering this question based a combination of quantitative and qualitative and macro- and micro-level data. Each of these methods has its own inherent strengths and limitations; however, it is hoped that through a mixed-methods design that the strength of conclusion and depth of insight can be greater.

Each of the following four chapters presents an analysis of the effects of the commercialisation of online spaces on their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems, framed in a comparative analysis of the U.S. and China and, in part, focusing on the key platforms of Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China. The results of these enquiries will be drawn together in the final chapters of this thesis in order to provide a comprehensive and theoretically grounded answer to the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems.

The structuring power of site architectures and political context over the constitution of Internet users as political speakers

4.1. Chapter overview

This chapter begins to address the question, posed and framed in the previous chapters, of how the commercialisation of online spaces affects their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems. The analysis of existing literature presented in Chapter Two, found that the dominant view in reference to democratic systems is that commercialisation is highly negative for political speech with a less common view holding that it might not be negative or could even be positive. However, these perspectives are reversed in literature concerning authoritarian systems, with the dominant view holding that commercialisation is positive for political speech. This finding presents a key unanswered question: namely, does the increase in the power of the market through commercialisation truly have opposite effects in different political systems?

This chapter begins to address this question through the macro, qualitative method of structural discourse analysis that aims to interrogate the way in which social networking sites work as institutions embedded in their political context to constitute particular types of audiences with respect to their status as potential political speakers.

The previous chapter identified the key areas of constraint over online political speech acts as site architectures and political context (as a combination of the political system and social norms). This chapter, thus, examines materials that could shed light on the functioning of these constraints: namely, the laws and regulations that govern these platforms, the positions of key individuals and groups (politicians, site administrators, public opinion leaders and media commentators), the political economy (commercial and political position) of the sites and the structure and architecture of the sites

This analysis identifies four underlying key themes: a contrast between discourses of information abundance in the U.S. and ideological correctness in China, a contrast between discourses of equality in the U.S. and hierarchy in China, the idea that the state should act as a protector in both political contexts and the idea that social networking site users are producers and consumers of data in both political contexts.

4.2. Theoretical and methodological overview

The theoretical underpinnings and technical process of the novel methodology of structural discourse analysis were outlined in the previous chapter. This methodology combines the two types of discourse analysis described by Rose in her popular methodological text *Visual Methodologies* (2011), focusing both on the content of texts and on the institutional structures in which they are embedded and enacted.

Discourse analysis is a methodology that focuses on how language (and structures) work to constitute particular social realities (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Foucault suggests that institutions (such as that of the prison) work in two ways to constitute particular types of individuals: thorough the forms of power/knowledge that constitute the institution and through the practical technologies that are used to put into practice these forms of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1977; Rose, 2011). Following this distinction, the analysis of social networking sites as institutions is split into three areas: the practical technologies¹² that might constrain and construct users with respect to their status as potential political speakers, the forms of power and knowledge which appear to underlie these practical technologies and societal discourse about these practical technologies.

This chapter begins by examining the structuring nature of two key platforms seen as potential spaces for political speech: Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China

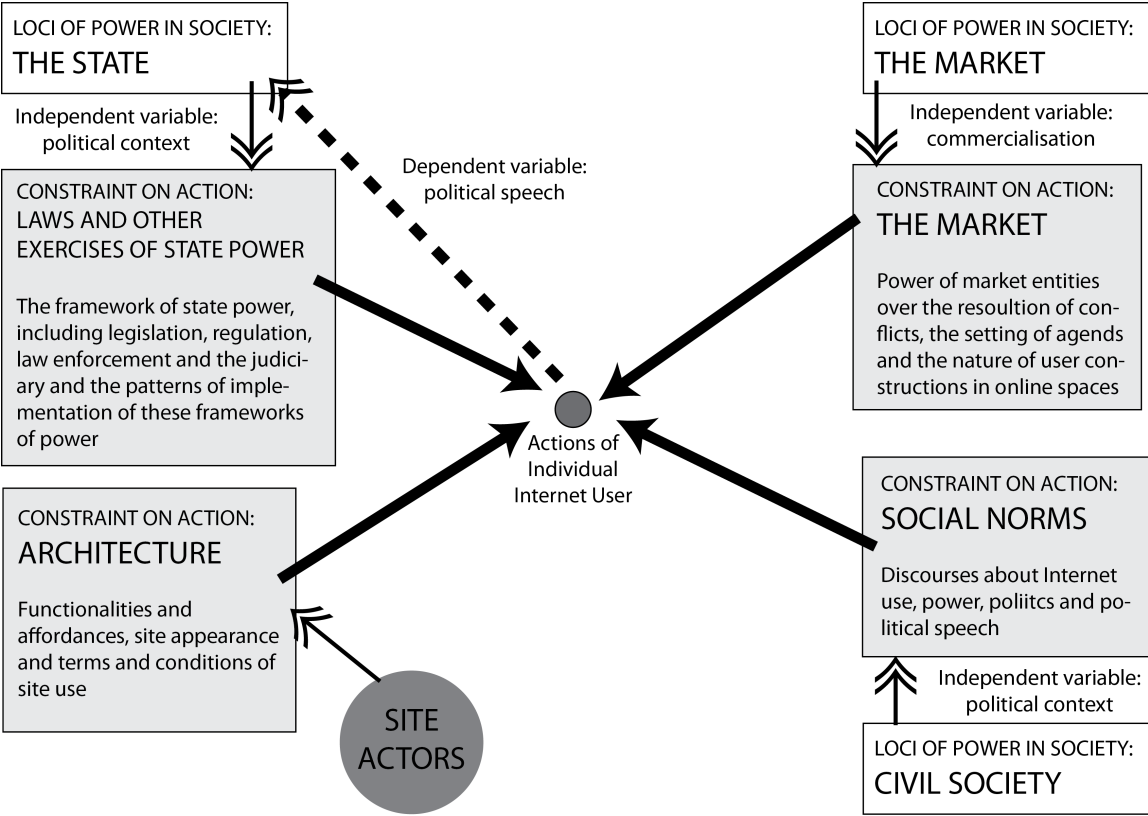
¹² The word technologies is used here in the Foucauldian sense of the word as practical mechanisms that are used to put into practice a system of power and knowledge within an institution. For clarity, the phrase practical technology/technologies will be used when referring to the Foucauldian sense of the word compared with simply technology/technologies for the general sense of the word.

(Figure 4.1.). In reference to the online architectures of these platforms, the practical technologies used to constrain online action consist of the structure, affordances and appearance of the online platform and the terms and conditions and management practices that underpin platform use. These are analysed in Section 4.3.1. An analysis of the words and publications of site actors in reference to these practical technologies and the apparent discourses underlying discourses is presented in Section 4.3.2. Finally, media discourses about these constraints are analysed in Section 4.3.3.

However, these platforms are embedded in a wider political context that constrains both the actions of the individuals that use them and the actions of site actors in constructing these sites. Thus, the second section of this chapter examines the political context of use of these sites, focusing on the political system (namely the power and position of the state in society as the key independent variable of focus in this study) but including, where relevant, a discussion of social norms related to political speech in that context (drawing from existing research and original texts related to theories of the state and appropriate forms of political speech in these two contexts).

The practical technologies used by the state to constrain online action, generally, consist of legislation, policy and ideology and the enforcement of this framework; this is considered in Section 4.4.1. The forms of power and knowledge underlying these state technologies include normative theories of politics and the discourses that influence state actors; these are considered in Section 4.4.2. In reference to societal discourses, Section 4.4.3. focuses on how these practical technologies and forms of power and knowledge are framed in the media. The media, in both countries, have a strong agenda setting power and represent societal discourses but should not be seen as a totality of them. As a counterpart to the focus on media discourse in this chapter, the actual political speech acts of users of these platforms are analysed in Chapter Six to shed light on the apparent underlying discourses that shape how individuals actually act as online political speakers.

Figure 4.1. Sources of constraints on individual online political speech



A summary of the materials specifically collected for this analysis is presented in Table 4.1. A wide variety of other materials inform and contribute to this analysis but are not included in totals in Table 4.1. A full list of materials specifically collected for this analysis, organised under these headings, is provided in Appendix 1.

The final section of this chapter (Section 4.5.) brings together the insights of these analyses to provide a picture of how the commercial nature of these two social networking sites might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech based on the ways that these institutions position their users with respect to particular roles such as a citizen or a consumer and how these roles themselves are constituted.

Table 4.1. Summary of materials specifically collected for analysis

	U.S.	China
Political Context		
The technological structure of the constraint		
The framework of state power, including legislation, regulation, law enforcement and the judiciary	Source: Congress.gov Number of materials examined: 20	Source: China media law database Number of materials examined: 11
Evidence from the implementation of these frameworks of power	Sources: ACLU, FindLaw.com, Lawyer Herald Number of materials examined: 3	Source: China media law database Number of materials examined: 3
The forms of power and knowledge underlying the constraint		
Official (state) commentary on frameworks of state power and their implementation	Source: WhiteHouse.gov Number of materials examined: 28	Source: China media law database Number of materials examined: 17
Official and non-official commentary on principles and doctrines underlying these exertions of state power	Source: NYTimes Number of materials examined: 1	Sources: China media law database, Xinhua Number of materials examined: 5
Academic and theoretical work concerning theories of power, politics and political speech	Number of materials examined: 20	Number of materials examined: 22
Discourses about these constraints		
Media and expert commentary on these frameworks of state power and their implementation	Sources: Factiva Newspaper Database, Electronic Freedom Foundation, American Civil Liberties Union, NYTimes, Mashable, Independent, BBC, Wall Street Journal Number of materials examined: 81	Sources: China Core Newspaper Database, China Media Project, China Media Law Database, NYTimes, BBC, Telegraph, Guardian, CNN Number of materials examined: 67
Site Architecture		
The technological structure of the constraint		
Functionalities and affordances and site appearance	Sources: Twitter profile creation, news feed, profile page and other content pages	Sources: Weibo profile creation, news feed, profile page and other content pages
Terms and conditions	Sources: Twitter terms and conditions, FAQs and other explanatory material	Sources: Weibo terms and conditions, FAQs and other explanatory material
The forms of power and knowledge underlying the constraint		
Interviews with site actors and official publications	Sources: Factiva Newspaper and Magazine Database, Information Week, The Guardian, Twitter publications and videos Number of materials examined: 47	Sources: China Media Law Database, China Core Newspaper Database, Weibo publications and videos Number of materials examined: 12
Discourses about these constraints		
Media and expert commentary on site actors, site architecture, the constraints and the principles behind site architecture	Sources: Wikipedia, Baidu Baike, Factiva Newspaper and Magazine Database, Mashable, Wired, Social Media Collective, NPR, Electronic Frontier Foundation Number of materials examined: 33	Sources: Wikipedia, Baidu Baike, China Core Newspaper Database Number of materials examined: 49

4.3. The structuring power of site architectures over constructions of Internet users as political speakers

The previous chapter constructed a model of the constraints on online political speech, based on Lessig's model of four constraints on online action (2000). Online architectures and political context (as a combination of the political system, typified by the power of the state, and of social norms) were identified as the two key independent variables that should be investigated in relation to this research question. This section begins by examining how social networking sites as institutions (in the Foucauldian sense) work to constitute particular kinds of individuals with respect to their status as political speakers within these spaces through practical technologies, the forms of power and knowledge that underlie these practical technologies and societal discourse about these practical technologies.

It is important to note that the structure of online platforms is constantly evolving and, thus, this analysis represents a snapshot of a particular time. It is hoped, however, that the insights generated might illuminate underlying discourses that inform the structures of these and other platforms in the longer term.

4.3.1. The technological structure of architectural constraints on Twitter and Weibo

The insights presented in this section are based on an analysis of the structure, appearance and functionality of these sites from the perspective of an individual user. VPN services were used to replicate site appearance for domestic populations. This analysis finds two, general, ways in which site architectures construct individual users: namely, who the user is and what the user should do. The first is primarily associated with how the user is presented and what options the user is given to define themselves and the second with the affordances provided to the user and how their attentions are directed.

In reference to the first area, users are given three ways to define themselves: their profile information, who they follow and the actions they take on the site.

According to Chinese law, all individuals and organisations registering for microblog accounts must use their true identity online and microblog providers must guarantee the authenticity of registered users information (BPPO, BPSB, BCMB & BIO, 2011); thus, in line with this state restriction, when signing up to Weibo domestic users must input their national identify number and must be verified by phone number.

However, in addition to these fulfilling these state mandated requirements Weibo users must also enter their birth date, sex and location (to the city or county level) when registering. In contrast, Twitter users are required only to enter their name, username and phone number or Email (which is not verified) upon signup. Options to enter additional information on Twitter are restricted to a short biography, open-ended location, website link and birthday.

The additional information input options on Weibo focus on CV points (schools, jobs) and categorisations that are often exploited by commercial entities, such as one's star sign. Options for these categories tend to be locked-down rather than open-ended and those that are open-ended are shorter than those offered on Twitter. On Weibo, therefore, the options offered and required for profile creation work to force users into particular groups that provide useful data for both commercial and state entities and to link users to their offline identities.

These differences in the way in which users of Twitter and Weibo are required and prompted to define themselves seem to result in the idea that Weibo profiles are much more linked to the full, offline identity of the individual user. In contrast, profile information options on Twitter are more limited and less verified and, thus, constructs users of the site more through their online actions than their offline identities.

There is, however, a great deal of similarity in terms of how users are presented on these microblogs. On both platforms, users are most commonly represented by two photos (the profile and header picture) and three numbers: the number of accounts followed, the number of followers and number of posts (Figure 4.2.). This

serves to quantify the user based on their online interactions, suggesting greater value for those with more tweets and followers (regardless of the content of the tweets or the nature of the followers). The focus on the user as represented by these three numbers, which are displayed both on user pages and when a user's name is moused over throughout the site, serves as a subtle but continued encouragement to create more content (through tweeting), consume more content (through following) and to understand the worth of one's online presence based on how much of one's content is consumed (through being followed and also by being retweeted). This continued representation of the user by these three numbers acts to construct the user as a data producer and consumer focusing on the quantified acts of production and consumption rather than the content or value of the data consumed or produced, in line with ideas of a (re)constitution of social networking site users as consumers.

Figure 4.2. The user represented as two pictures and three numbers



This data production is also encouraged, on Weibo, by the level system, which is prominently displayed on user profiles. In the user summary shown in Figure 4.2., the user level is shown in white on an orange background next to the username, which stands out compared to the black text on a white background of the rest of the profile information. Weibo offers prizes when a user reaches a certain level and a regular prize drawing in which users with higher levels are entered more frequently. Users gain levels based on their online activities and on the number and levels of the profiles they follow or that follow them. In addition to user verification,

the platform also offers a paid-for VIP service to any user, which provides additional services (such as enhanced customer care and the ability to follow more accounts) and gives the user the opportunity to acquire levels more rapidly. On Weibo, thus, the idea of constructing a user as a sum of their online actions and a producer of online data rather than of content and discursive speech acts is a more prominent and recurring theme than on Twitter. Online user actions on Weibo are explicitly commercialised through the level system that provides rewards for online actions and represents an introduction of market logic into the practice of producing and consuming content on the site.

In terms of the second aspect of user construction (the affordances provided to the user and how their attentions are directed), users on both sites are encouraged to create and interact with content (and particularly to create commercially relevant content and interact with sponsored content). These two sites were chosen as platforms of comparison because they offer similar affordances, fulfil similar market niches and are based on similar economic models. The base functionality of both sites allows user to post 140-character messages that are seen by a user's followers, to follow other users and to retweet/forward posts made by others.

However, the restriction of 140 characters is an example of how the same affordance can produce different effects in different contexts; approximately four times as much information can be conveyed in 140 Chinese characters as 140 English ones (Liao, Fu & Hale, 2015). Weibo also offers the functionality to create a long-format blog post and has more functionalities for multimedia integration.

Figure 4.3. Commenting on Twitter



Additionally, Weibo offers more functionality for engaging with other user's posts. On Twitter when a user comments on another's tweet that content is retweeted on their profile below their comment (Figure 4.3.). This functionality is the same as forwarding on Weibo; when a user forwards a weibo, they are given the option to add their own 140-character comment onto the original post (Figure 4.4.)

Figure 4.4. Forwarding on Weibo



Weibo has an additional inline commenting system located at the site of the original post (Figure 4.5.). These comments are not posted to the wall of the commenting user and can be sorted by popularity or restricted to those that were posted by verified accounts or accounts that the user follows. Users can like or respond to individual comments.

Figure 4.5. Weibo's inline commenting system



In general, these structural affordances and restrictions on user action, which are more prominent on Twitter, drive users toward posting frequent, short messages and away from interaction and discussion. These affordances also contribute to discourses of popularity and hotness that focus on the accumulation of value through quantified level systems, numbers of followers and numbers of retweets. This focus on hotness and popularity among users and posts on both sites

demonstrates a dominance of market logic, not just in terms of the ownership and administration of these spaces, but that users themselves are automatically integrated into a market-like system within the site that manages the apparent worth of users and their posts based on these quantified metrics.

These discourses of hotness and popularity (based on levels, followers and retweets) works to create a snowball effect for popular accounts and posts, in which those who are already popular or already have offline popularity are privileged within the site-internal market for information. The brevity of these messages also encourages the use of hyperlinks and multimedia content. This leads towards a reliance on external content, which is, in turn, biased toward large and established content providers whose content can be more easily linked to and shared.

In terms of the content of posts, the original prompt on Twitter asked users “What are you doing?” and was changed to “What’s happening?” in 2009, as part of an overall shift in ideas about Twitter content from private to public (Dybwad, 2009). In contrast, Weibo’s prompt reads, “What new thing do you have that you want to tell everyone?” (有什么新鲜事想告诉大家?). These prompts indicate different priorities; the Twitter prompt does not ask users to consider the repercussions of posting information whereas the Weibo prompt specifically suggests that posts should be limited to content that is appropriate to broadcast to the wider public and emphasises the premium placed on newness on the platform. The differences in these prompts are representative of the different dominant discourses about ideal (political) speech in these two political contexts that focus on information abundance in the U.S. and ideological correctness in China. The role of the state in shaping these two discourses is discussed further in following sections.

Weibo offers users far more affordances than Twitter in terms of posting content; users are given the option to add an emoticon, picture, video, hashtag or publish an article underneath the post content box and an additional drop-down menu allows

the creation of a review of a film, music or book; to post at a specific time; to post music;; to post a poll; to request or make a donation or to attach a file (Figure 4.6.). The review functionality defaults to hot/popular content and forces users to input a star rating for the content (adding a textual review is optional). These ratings are used to generate a “buzz” around hot or popular content on the pages of these products, which are created automatically. This is part of a general greater emphasis on commercial content on Weibo and a structural system that more overtly pushes users to create content that is commercially valuable to site advertisers, driving users toward consumer roles.

Figure 4.6. The Weibo post prompt



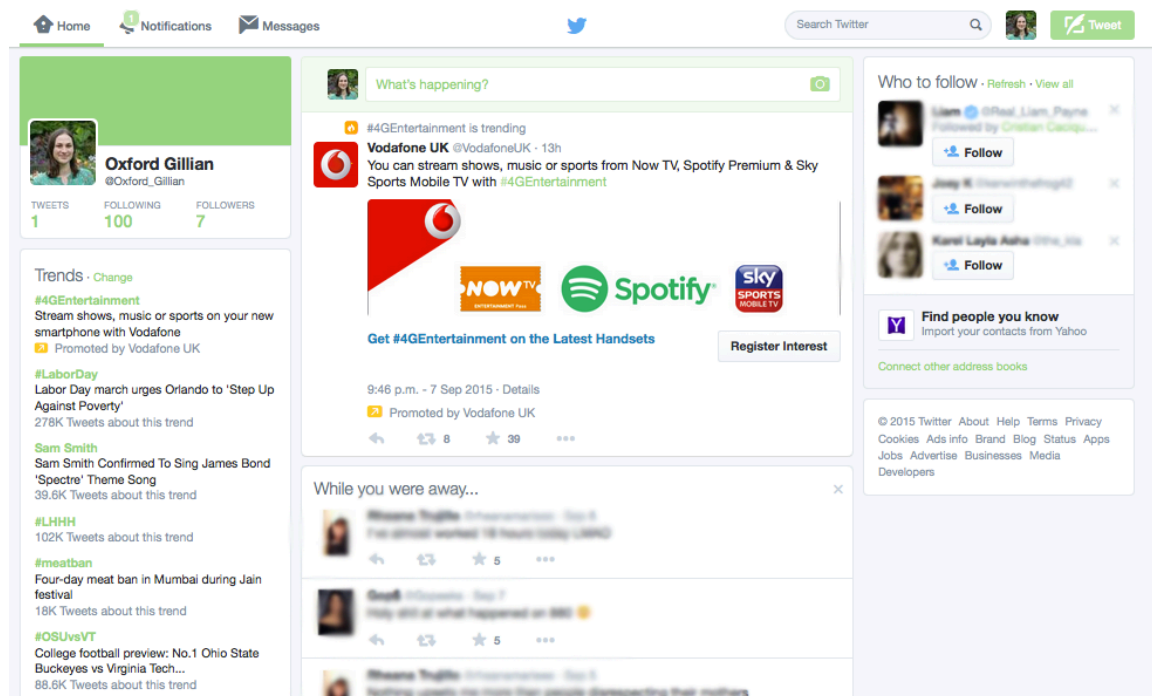
On the Weibo news feed (the first page a user sees when they log on), a banner advertisement is always displayed under the prompt to enter content, a second banner ad is displayed at the bottom of the content that the user sees when they scroll to the bottom of the page and seven containers on the right sidebar push various types of content from within the Weibo platform and its parent company Sina (Figure 4.7.). Weibo users are exposed to a great deal of commercial content as part of site use.

Figure 4.7. The Weibo news feed page



Twitter, in contrast, has much less space specifically devoted to advertising content. There are no banner ads on the Twitter home screen and there are fewer prompts to consume popular content (Figure 4.8.). However, like Weibo, Twitter includes sponsored content interspersed with posts from followed accounts in its main container and encourages the user to interact with this content.

Figure 4.8. The Twitter news feed page



The seamless weaving of sponsored/commercial and non-sponsored content on both platforms means that the user is always placed in the position of a consumer. The erasure of the difference between commercial and non-commercial content is a key theme on Twitter. In its terms and conditions, Twitter states that tailored promotional content is one of the services it offers and that promoted content should appear natural and relevant to the user (Graves, 2010; Rosenbush, 2012; Twitter, no date). Individual Twitter users are given some agency over how they are profiled and targeted and how their trending topics are constructed, with the platform's instructional documents emphasising that "it's up to you" (Twitter, no date). However, this discursive practice obscures the fact that users cannot opt out of their construction as consumers, only modify this construction in a way that contributes to their profiling.

Weibo has a different mechanism for pushing users toward creating valuable data, which is structured around the theme of hotness. Users are not only continually prompted to consume hot content but they are also pushed toward participating in this game of hotness themselves through a variety of gamefied mechanisms,

including the level system and leader boards that display trophies and badges next to the profile information of users who were responsible for starting currently popular and trending topics.

In addition to producing more content, users are also pushed toward consuming more content. During signup, Weibo users automatically follow accounts based on the topics of interest that they are required to supply and Twitter users are prompted to select topics of interest to them and then are, by default, subscribed to 40 accounts based these topics and the user's IP address location. Users of both sites are continually prompted to follow more accounts that sit at the intersection of popular accounts and the way in which that user has been profiled. This places the user in the position of constantly being encouraged to consume more content that the platform directs them towards and creates conditions of information abundance and overload that the site then positions itself as helping the user manage.

In addition to promoted, suggested and prominent content, a particularly important architectural means by which this information abundance is regulated within the site and which acts as a structuring mechanism for user actions are trending topics. On both the Twitter news feed and the pages of individual users, a list of 10 trending topics for the logged in user's region, generally with one promoted topic at its head, are listed on the left-hand side of the page. On Weibo, nine trending topics, again with a promoted topic foremost are listed on the right-hand side of the news feed. Additionally, on Weibo, 10 "wonderful recommended weibos" (精彩微博推荐) from accounts that the user does not follow are presented above weibos from accounts the user follows on the news feed and a hot topic or weibo is shown inside the box that users can use to post information themselves. (This is the text at the top right of the post prompt shown in Figure 4.6.)

The presence and functionality of trending topics on both Twitter and Weibo is associated with two key underlying discourse: firstly, hotness, newness and popularity and, secondly, the idea of information abundance and that 'correct'

information will rise to the top. As will be discussed in further sections, both of these sites present themselves as spaces to access new information. The presentation of trending topics on both sites suggests to users that a free market for information functions on both platforms, driven by the mechanisms of retweeting and the frequency of key phrases and hashtags within user posts. This suggests to users that information that is trending (i.e. hot) should be consumed and afforded attention and, furthermore, within the conditions of information abundance stimulated by these sites that information that is important and of relevance to users (i.e. that they should pay attention to and post about) will rise to the top through these quantified, self-governing mechanisms.

On Weibo, trending topics are specifically presented using measures of hotness and popularity. All trending topics on Weibo are assigned a popularity score and the holder of this score is either the particular user who has initiated the trending topic or the cultural/entertainment product (with the exception of cities) that platform algorithms have identified as 'hot'. The site previously featured a central list of trending topics and lists of trends broken down by topic, such as news, entertainment, food, sport or travel. However, this format was changed between September 2015 and April 2016 so that these pages now focus on the individual users who are responsible for starting trending topics rather than the content of the topic; trending topics can still be found within the Weibo site but categories, such as news, are no longer presented separately. The new format for trending topics restricts the publication of political trending topics to those that are published by official government, media or education accounts, which reduces the potential for sensitive trending topics and biases established interests in terms of being heard on the platform.

In contrast, Twitter's trending topics appear to be more closely aligned with ideas of 'correct' information that has risen to the top through the structural affordances of a free market for information constructed through site architectures. These ideas are representative of the wider state and societal discourse of information abundance in the U.S. that is discussed further in later sections.

It used to be the case that Twitter's trending topics simply reflected the most commonly used keywords on the platform, but this was changed in 2010 so only keywords that are new and spreading rapidly are included (Twitter, 2010b). Prior to the change, the pop-star Justin Beiber was a permanent trending topic; these changes were ostensibly made to increase the political (or at least breaking news) nature of trending topics (Parr, 2014).

Twitter specifically markets itself as a place for accessing breaking news information (Earle, Bowden & Guy, 2012; Gaudin, 2009). However, the platform has been accused many times of censoring certain accounts and keeping certain political topics off the trending lists (including #whichhillary, #wikileaks and #occupywallstreet). There is little evidence, however, to back up these claims and they seem to be based more on a misunderstanding of how Twitter calculates its trending topics rather than on evidence of actual censorship (Lotan, 2011).

However, these accusations of censorship are indicative of a mismatch between how Twitter's trending topics function and how users believe they should function. Indeed, the way in which Twitter presents its trending topics (as a place to access important news information and as a mechanism for facilitating a marketplace for ideas) aligns more closely with how users believe the site should function than how it actually appears to function. In contravention to the idea of a marketplace for ideas, the functionality of the Twitter architecture privileges new rather than on-going discussions, rapidly spreading topics rather than those discussed passionately by a certain group and content posted by established accounts rather than new contributors. Trending topics, thus, appear to be skewed toward an algorithm that favours established and commercial interests and that promote discourses of newness that keep users returning to the site.

It is important to note that trending topics on Twitter are tailored to the individual user's location and based on the people that a particular user follows. This information is included in the Twitter FAQs but this tailoring is infrequently mentioned. This means that although the algorithm appears to be a mechanism by

which ‘correct’ information rises to the top in conditions of information abundance, it is, in actual fact, tailored to the individual. This choice, while aligning with the commercial needs of the site, undermines its ability to act as a public space because each user sees different content, positioning the user as a consumer of individualised online content rather than a citizen acting within a shared public sphere.

The mechanisms behind what information is presented for consumption on Twitter is an area of conflict between the site and its users; in an interview on the TODAY programme when asked “Does Twitter censor the content of its users?” CEO Dorsey replied “absolutely not” but continued to say “people can follow whoever they want and it’s our job to make sure that they see the most important things and the things that will matter to them” (TODAY, 2016). Many members of the public felt that this sentiment – that the platform’s most prominent executive saw the site’s mission as to show users content that it felt was important and that it had decided was important to them – did constitute a form of censorship or at least that this perspective did not match with what the public functions they desired for the site.

Twitter often markets itself as a place for political speech, through, for instance, promotional videos such as “Twitter: See what’s happening in politics,” which has been viewed more than 2.7 million times on YouTube and advertising videos that encouraged U.S. citizens to follow and tweet about the U.S. presidential debates. Furthermore, as discussed in the following section, site actors frequently discuss the political speech affordances of Twitter as its most important functionality. However, the functionality of trending topics suggests that while Twitter markets itself as a place for political speech, this perspective is subordinate to the overall commercial imperative of showing users the content that keeps them returning to the site (and getting them to post content that will be useful to advertisers and interact with advertiser content).

However, the interests of the site are not wholly in promoting commercial content. Weibo has been criticised for introducing too much commercial content that will drive away users (Ao & Li, 2013; Q. Huang, 2013; Z. Zhao, 2013) and both sites must balance the need to display the content that brings users to the site and the content that is commercially profitable. Weibo tries to construct users so as to align these two interests (encouraging the consumption of popular content) and Twitter tailors content to the individual user. However, the market niche of both sites rests on, in part, providing a place for accessing political and social content and this generates a conflict between the site's self-construction as a place for political speech and the platform's commercial interest.

4.3.2. The forms of power and knowledge underlying architectural constraints

This section considers the key themes, truth claims, complexities and contradictions and absences and omissions in official and non-official discourses from the site and site actions, based on company publications (shareholder reports, promotional videos, blog posts etc.) and the words of key site actors in media interviews and speeches in order to attempt to provide a picture of the forms of power and knowledge underlying the practical technologies described in the previous section.

One area in which a difference in discourse about the site and implied correct usage practices is apparent in how the site actors describe the site's founding. Twitter's founders often speak of how they started the platform as a labour of love, without a business plan, and focused on creating a service that was valuable for people before thinking of how to monetise it (e.g. AFP, 2011; Twitter, 2013; Wagner, 2008; Wolfe, 2014). This idea reflects the wider context of Twitter's founding, associated with the discourse of Silicon Valley entrepreneurship. Twitter was created as an ad hoc product by a group of tech-savvy friends. Although users of Twitter are not necessarily equal, for instance there is a cult of personality that exists around Jack Dorsey and other site founders (Isaac & Goel, 2015; S. D.

Solomon, 2015; Stahl, 2012; Swartz, 2015), there is a strong discourse surrounding the site that posits equality among site users. This emphasis on equality stands in sharp contrast to Weibo's complex level and badge systems.

These properties of equality and individualisation are presented as a means to facilitate political speech. Twitter personnel often express the idea that providing equal access to tools of speaking and dissemination is the platform's main contribution to society (particularly after the idea of it as a platform for political organisation came to the fore in 2011); in interviews, Twitter personnel frequently reference the idea that tweets from politicians, marginalised political activists and one's own mother all coexist together on an equal footing on the platform (e.g. AFP, 2011; Gaudin, 2009). This is part of the conflation of public and private speech that ostensibly places all types of speakers and speech acts on an equal platform and acts to commercialise all actions and speech acts on Twitter regardless of their potential political content.

There is a strong truth claim underlying discourse about speech on Twitter, which is that information should be free across the world (it is assumed that there is already a free market for information in the U.S.). (e.g. Advertising Specialty Institute, 2012; AFP, 2011; Gross, 2011; Stone, 2011, 2012). Not only is this a particularly common theme but it is presented as a politically neutral assumption; in an interview on National Public Radio in 2011, Twitter co-founder Biz Stone underscored the idea that the platform's actions to circumvent the Internet blockages imposed in Egypt during student protests, by creating a functionality so that protestors could publish tweets by speaking into a telephone, was not a political action but that the position was neutral and should be naturally applicable across all contexts (Gross, 2011). Twitter is presented in media and official discourse as a neutral technology that provides equal affordances to all users and that this equality results in positive political outcomes due to freedom of speech that is a non-negotiable, universal good.

Unsurprisingly Weibo's place in society and what it contributes to users is presented very differently by site actors and this discourse is associated not only with China's authoritarian political system but also the conditions of the platform's founding. When Weibo was launched in China in the summer of 2009, its parent company's market niche was saturated and Sina was urgently seeking the next "gold mine" (Xin, 2010). Weibo, itself, was born out of the desire to create a microblogging service for the Chinese market and, even before its launch, it was crafted to generate revenue for the company (Chao, 2009). It was also designed as a more controllable domestic alternative to Twitter and appears to have closer ties with the Chinese state than other web platforms; it was launched after a purge of other microblogging services and there is evidence, such as the incident in March 2012 when commenting functions were shut down on Weibo and other platforms following online rumours of a political coup by then Chongqing Party Chief Bo Xilai, that the architecture of Weibo is significantly influenced by state priorities (Benney, 2014; Xinhua, 2012).

However, this does not necessarily mean that Weibo's priorities align completely with the state's interests. As a commercial company, it must balance state and market needs and, as such, has an interest in pushing the boundaries of permissibility. For instance, Weibo was relatively slow in implementing real name registration because it would affect their business model, for which it was admonished by the state (Bischoff, 2015; Hille, 2012; *Some Beijing Municipal Provisions on Microblog Development and Management*, 2011).

In many speeches (in China) Sina CEO and president Charles Chao, has specifically aligned Weibo's ideology with that of the Chinese state and has spoken about how online communication platforms and the government should work together to "deepen reforms" and "realise the Chinese dream" (both keywords of the Xi government) (Chao, 2009, 2012, 2014). However, Chao has also spoken, in the U.S., about the importance of transparency, referring to Weibo's political effects as creating checks and balances and breaking the system of information control in society (Chao, 2013) and, in China, about how microblogs change the entire

landscape of domestic media production by allowing participants and witnesses to report news events (J. Liu, 2011; X. Wang, 2011).

This tension shows the difficulty that Chinese online service providers face in balancing political and economic imperatives and social interests. One particularly interesting example of the way in which these tensions play out is in the creation of the Weibo Public Interest (Gongyi) (微公益) platform that provides a codified and state- and platform-endorsed structure for online political speech (Mao, 2011; Yan & Lu, 2013). This sub-site is embedded within and accessible by Weibo platform, using the same login and profile information (Figure 4.9.)

Figure 4.9. The Weibo Gongyi sub-site



The sub-site facilitates the use of microblogging for civil society actions, donating money, items, volunteering or forwarding charity messages. Weibo was used for many of these functions before the creation of the sub-site and its codification suggests that Weibo was attempting to balance state desires for the control of

online political speech (with projects on platform needing approval before listing) with the provision of civil society functions desired by its users.

An area of tension emerges over the relative transparency of these platforms and existing charities and foundations; a number of commentators argue that there is a crisis of confidence in existing charities in China and that public interest initiatives of microblogs increase project transparency, effectiveness and the ability of individuals to participate in public service (Hu, 2012; C. Zhang, 2012; S. Zhang, 2012). However, others have argued that microblogs' micropublics suffer from a lack of transparency and that government legislation is necessary to supervise and guide this online public speech and action (J. Li, 2012; Xing, 2012; S. Zhang, 2012). This issue mirrors the wider area of tension about transparency in Chinese society and the contribution of microblogs to increasing transparency. There is a great deal of emphasis within the posted projects on the Gongyi sub-site of providing documented evidence of need, such as certified hospital bills and dated photos that chronicle a life of hardship. This provision of evidence within the Gongyi site serves to anchor still further online identities and actions on Weibo in their offline contexts of use and position users of the site as members of a civil society that exists both on and offline.

Another area of tension emerges in terms of how these projects interact with the state and state action. Some writers argue that these initiatives complement state social work and that these projects are an indication of a healthy civil society that comes together in mutual assistance and support of those in need (Hu, 2012; Wang & Shi, 2011; Xing, 2012; Zhu, 2011). However, others see these sites and the poverty and need that they showcase as an indication of problems in society and a state that is not providing for the needs of its citizens. Some users commented on projects on the subsite saying, "Isn't the government dealing with this..." and "What about the local government? If you have the problem, ask the government to deal with it".

Ultimately, however, the creation of the Gongyi platform suggests that Weibo, like Twitter, markets itself and attracts users through the provision of functionalities for political speech and it is these functionalities, as well as accessing entertainment content, that attract users to the site to fulfil the platforms' business model of advertising and data-based revenue streams. These sites provide commercial online spaces for political speech and, as such, if successful in attracting users are part of a movement of individuals into commercial online spaces and a provision of spaces for public functions by commercial entities.

However, it is not likely the case that these sites represent a movement from a supposedly pure, non-commercial, offline space for political speech into commercial online spaces; even the coffee shops and salons so lauded by Habermas were businesses. What is different, however, on Twitter, Weibo and other social networking sites is that it is not just the space that is commercially owned but that the economic model of these spaces rests on the commercialisation of the individual speech acts taking place within them. While Habermas' coffee shops may have been commercial establishments selling coffee for a profit, they had little interest in what people did while drinking their coffee. In contrast, Twitter and Weibo do not charge users and their business model rests on the economic value of the data that users generate (primarily but not only their online speech acts) that occur within and are associated with these spaces.

Indeed, both Twitter and Weibo have extremely similar revenue models, with the majority of their revenue from platform advertising; however, a greater percentage of Twitter's revenue comes from advertising (Table 4.2.). Both companies generate revenue by selling data services (access to user data over and above what is provided through the open API). Weibo also obtains revenue through their in-platform games and wireless value added services (Dou, 2012; Weibo, 2015).

The similarity of the underlying business models of the two companies is indicative of a necessarily similarity in the underlying approach of both companies toward the construction of their users. Both need users to come to the site to view

advertisements; both need users to interact on the site in a way that generates data that can be used for tailoring advertisements and to sell to advertisers. Weibo, additionally, has a supplementary revenue stream within site use through both inbuilt games and the gamification of the platform (under which users can pay for VIP access, promoted posts etc.). However, there is a difference in how both platforms achieve the first objective of bringing users to the site and the market niche with which they present themselves to users.

Table 4.2. Sources of revenue of Twitter and Weibo (in millions of US dollars)

	2012	%	2013	%	2014	%	2015	%
Twitter								
Total Revenue	\$317 million		\$665 million		\$1,403 million		\$2,218 million	
Of which:								
Advertising	\$269 million	85%	\$595 million	89%	\$1,255,688,000	90%	\$1,994 million	90%
Data services	\$48 million	15%	\$70 million	11%	\$147 million	10%	\$224 million	10%
Weibo								
Total Revenue	\$66 million		\$188 million		\$334 million		\$478 million	
Of which:								
Third party advertising	\$51 million	77%	\$97 million	52%	\$130 million	39%	\$208 million	43%
Related party Alibaba advertising			\$49 million	26%	\$108 million	32%	\$144 million	30%
Related party other advertising			\$0.2 million	1%	\$28 million	8%	\$51 million	11%
Other	\$15 million	23%	\$40 million	21%	\$69 million	21%	\$75 million	16%
Source: Twitter, 2016b; Weibo, 2016a								

Twitter's business model rests on a more political footing, marketing itself as a place where users can access "their world" and the information that they are interested in (AFP, 2011; TODAY, 2016; Twitter, 2010a, 2011). Particularly since 2011, Twitter has marketed itself to users based, in part, on its political functions; its role as a provider of political and breaking news information is the most prominent aspect of many of its marketing materials (Twitter, 2013, 2014). There is, however, a discrepancy between how Twitter markets itself to users and to advertisers. To advertisers Twitter presents itself as a means to access valuable consumer data, marketing itself as holding valuable data that companies desire about consumer opinions on a multitude of products from television programmes

to cutting edge technologies (Nielsen, 2013; Twitter, 2016c). This business model is, thus, predicated on users posting about commercial and entertainment content.

In contrast, Weibo focuses more on attracting and retaining users based on the ability to connect with celebrities (Guo, 2014), through schemes such as the Weibo Media Microblogging contracts (微博签约自媒体) and the encouragement of celebrities, public individuals, government outlets and media outlets to contribute content to the platform (Weibo, 2015).

However, an underlying key theme of both Twitter and Weibo is the construction of the user as an individualised producer and consumer of data. Underlying the business model of both sites is the need to get users to continually return to the site and to interact with content on the site to generate revenue. Neither site has yet achieved a stable business model despite their valuable user data (Twitter, 2016b; Weibo, 2016a). Twitter may market itself, in part, as a place to access political information but this does not necessarily align with how users use the platform. The extent of political and commercial actions of individual microblog users will be addressed in the following chapters; however, an important further constructing force over these user interactions are media discourses about what these sites are and how they should be used.

4.3.3. Media discourses about site architectural constraints

This section considers how these two platforms and appropriate repertoires of use are presented in the media in both countries. The agenda setting power of site architectures has been examined in previous sections; however, it is important to recognise that these sites neither exist nor are used in a vacuum. The media is consistently recognised as having important agenda setting power and, thus, this section considers how the structure and nature of these online platforms and their users is presented in the media of both countries. It is important to note, however, the different placement of media in these two countries; the voice of media outlets within a democratic system is closer to civil society (or sits as a fourth estate) whereas the voice of media outlets in authoritarian contexts is closer to the state.

Nevertheless, in both political systems, these media discourses about the constraints on online action of these key platforms both shed light on the functioning of the structuring constraints of the platforms and also, themselves, act as a structuring mechanism.

The insights in this section are based on keyword searches of magazine and newspaper databases. In the Chinese Core Newspaper Database (which collates 618 key national and regional newspapers) there are 7,917 articles that contain the phrase Sina Weibo. The Factiva database (which includes 2,178 U.S. publications) contains more than 2.4 million articles that include the word Twitter that were published in the U.S.¹³ However, few of the articles returned in this search were focused on Twitter as a platform (rather than on the content within it). This is indicative of a position in which Twitter is far more integrated into the existing landscape of social life in the U.S. Most mentions in newspaper articles are done so in passing, Twitter's role is normalised and assumed. The architecture of the site is familiar to U.S. readers and is not often deemed worthy of comment or analysis. There are, of course, media publications that address Twitter directly and it is these materials that are considered in this section, based on a search for newspaper articles with Twitter in the title; however, it is important to note that in the wider societal discourse the structure of Twitter and its place within society are rarely discussed.

Almost all coverage of Twitter isn't about its architecture but about what happens on Twitter; newspapers provide their readers with summaries of the week's top stories on the platform, publish articles that are simply a collation of celebrity tweets about a topic and the ebbs and flows of popular topics on Twitter are a source of news in and of themselves (e.g. Fausto, 2014; Newsweek, 2012; Revkin, 2012). A key theme in coverage of Twitter is its size, which is construed as a symbol of its importance in society (Bilton, 2012). The omission of a discussion of

¹³ As of September 2016.

Twitter's structure and role in society in these media discourses suggests an assumption that they cannot be or are unable to be improved.

This key theme of Twitter as an integral part of life and a normalised, everyday technology is also matched with an emphasis in news coverage on the individuals who are charge of making decisions for the platform (Benner, 2015; Goel, 2014, 2015; Miller, 2013). This accords with previous discussions of the differences between these two platforms in their respective contexts. Twitter is viewed as a neutral conduit for information; its commercial nature, functionality and role in society are not under discussion but it is an important part of society and, thus, its future (as represented by changeovers in key personnel) are a topic of interest.

However, a key theme of coverage of Twitter in the U.S. media concerns issues of data and surveillance. There was contradiction within these media discourses in that some articles presented data and analysis of this data as a positive for society while others presented this as a worrying practice. Quite a number of articles spoke about the relationship between Twitter and the U.S. state with regard to the data contained on the site, with Twitter generally presented as protecting the private data and free speech of U.S. citizens and the state as forcing the company to turn over user data through the judicial system. This discourse, again, aligns with the truth claim of the platform as a neutral and fixed technology that protects the free speech of users, a function that is seen as politically neutral and unequivocally good.

In contrast, coverage in the Chinese media focuses on Weibo's functionality, commercial nature and place in society. The way in which the technology is presented in Chinese media discourse suggests that it is seen as having a much greater potential to change the established balance of power or established practices than Twitter in the U.S. and thus these issues are ones of active discussion.

Much of the media discourse concerning Weibo centres on the issues examined in this thesis: commercialisation and political speech. It might have been

hypothesised that the Chinese state, wishing to undermine the potential for online spaces to offer a venue for political speech, would make this a taboo subject. However, perhaps given the strong international discourse that social media sites would provide spaces for political speech in authoritarian countries, it seems that the government has moved actively to shape this discourse for its own needs, to create 'online politics with Chinese characteristics'.

Newspaper articles speak of the political potential of this technology but do so by placing the state as the agentic actor. This technology is constructed as having a two-fold political purpose: to allow the state to communicate better with its citizens and to monitor online public opinion (P. Liu, 2012; Long, 2016; J. Zhao, Tao, Tian & Wang, 2011; X. Zhou, Ni & Liu, 2012). These spaces are presented in the media as places for communication between the people and the state but they are places for the government to listen to the people and to monitor public opinion; power in this arrangement remains with the state. Internet users can and should speak about political topics online (within the bounds of acceptable speech) but they should both have faith that their speech will be dealt with appropriately by the state and be aware that the state is actively listening to online discourse.

The issue of Weibo's commercialisation is also a topic frequently addressed in news articles. The fact that Weibo, until late 2015, had never turned a profit was frequently presented in the media as a challenge for the platform (K. He, 2012; Lü, 2015; Luo, 2016). The dominant perspective is that advertising is annoying and, thus, commercialisation drives users away from this platform (Ao & Li, 2013; Q. Huang, 2013; Z. Zhao, 2013). Commercialisation is also presented as undermining the equality of the platform and thus its political speech potential because the main political contribution of these platforms was to flatten information hierarchies and allow direct communication between individuals and the state (K. He, 2012; P. Liu, 2012).

This examination of newspaper articles in the Chinese media highlights the fact that the structure, functionality and uses of Weibo and other platforms reflect the

wider political system in which they are used. In particular, in China, where the media are closely aligned with the state, the priorities of the state are reflected in media coverage, in the words of site actors concerning site architectures and in the structure and affordances of the sites themselves. However, regardless of the political system in which they operate, social networking sites and the individuals that create and administer them are bound by the laws and social norms of that political context. For this reason, it is important to understand not only how the architecture of online platforms might act to constrain and construct users with respect to their status as potential political speakers but also how the political context of both the power of the state and social norms regarding political speech might act to constrain both these sites and their users.

4.4. The structuring power of the state over constructions of Internet users as political speakers

This thesis examines whether the commercialisation of online spaces has a different effect on their ability to offer a venue for political speech in different political systems. The U.S. and China were chosen as cases of comparison because in both of these countries (and almost uniquely in the world) the key online platforms of use were developed domestically and, thus, the political, social and economic contexts of site use are intrinsically linked with the structure of these platforms.

The previous section examined the practical technologies, forms of power and knowledge and media discourses about two key commercial platforms: Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China. This section considers how the political context of both the U.S. and China, embodied both in state power as representative of the political system and in underlying social norms with regard to political speech, might act to constrain site architectures and construct Internet users with respect to their status as potential political speakers.

4.4.1. The technological structure of state constraints

The power of the U.S. state over its domestic Internet is exercised primarily through legislation and the enforcement of this legislation. Additionally, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), an independent agency, regulates interstate communications, with a remit that covers radio, television and the Internet. In terms of legislation, a search on congress.gov found 114 laws passed since 1984 that were tagged in the science, technology and communication policy area. Relevant legislation fell into one of five areas: funding and promotion of U.S.-based research, promotion of access, protection of minors from potentially harmful online experiences, cyber security and online taxation. However, some of the most key laws that shape individual activity online fall into other categories such as judiciary (*The Digital Millennium Copyright Act*, 1998, *The Electronic Communications Privacy Act*, 1986) or intelligence, international relations and financial services (*The USA PATRIOT Act*, 2001).

Legislation in the science, technology and communication policy area constructs the state as having an active role in developing the Internet (e.g. *The American Technology Pre-eminence Act*, 1991) and to ensure an equality of access and provision (e.g. *The Broadband Data Improvement Act*, 2008). The overall implication of legislation is that the Internet is considered an infrastructure of national importance and a technology to which citizens have a right to equal access rather than something that should be left to the market.

In this legislation, a contradiction emerges in that, although the technology is presented as too important to be left to the market in terms of provision and access, the active stance of the state in terms of facilitating development and access is enacted in partnership with commercial providers and is associated with a marketisation of state functions. The legislation, however, is concerned with providing access and developing technology in general and contains no mention of specific platforms or service categories.

Relevant laws in other policy areas reveal a tension, both real and constructed, in this legislative framework, between individual freedom and state protection. Much of U.S. legislation directly about the Internet focuses on the provision and promotion of this technology but far reaching state powers to constrain online actions are presented as the necessary counterpart to access, restricting freedom of speech online in order to provide protection.

The USA PATRIOT Act is one prominent example. Two months after the terrorist attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001 then President George W. Bush signed into law this controversial act that expanded surveillance and data collection programmes by the state. This act extended previous laws, such as the Electronic Communications Privacy Act (1986), that made it easy for the state to access stored electronic data and forbade companies from notifying their customers if the state had requested information on them. The courts ruled parts of this act unconstitutional but it remains a significant source of power for the state to constrain online platforms and user actions through requirements to collect, store and divulge user data and the potential chilling effect of state surveillance of online speech.

The Prism programme revealed in the documents leaked by former National Security Administration (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden brought to light a massive state surveillance programme of online social media platforms; Google, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, Yahoo, AOL, YouTube and Skype were all listed providing their server data to the NSA (Greenwald & MacAskill, 2013). Although Twitter is notably absent from this list, its public nature means that the majority of information on the platform would be available to law enforcement without the platform's consent.

Since the Snowden leaks, major platforms have begun publishing transparency reports that detail the level of information requested from them by the state. According to these reports, the U.S. state makes by far the most requests to Twitter, with this number rising every year. In the first half of 2016, the U.S. state made

2,520 information requests concerning 8,009 unique accounts to Twitter, which is almost an order of magnitude larger than the second largest requester, Japan, which made 732 information requests concerning 988 accounts (Twitter, 2016c).

Twitter also complies with U.S. state requests far more than for other countries, providing information to the U.S. state in 70-80% of cases between 2012 and 2015 compared to an average of only 32% for other countries. Facebook, a platform on which data is far less public, receives far more information requests from the U.S. state, reporting more than 36,000 requests from the U.S. state in 2015 concerning more than 56,000 users with information being divulged in 80% of these more than 36,000 cases. This high level of compliance with U.S. state information requests by Twitter and other major U.S.-based online platforms (compared to compliance with requests by other states) is indicative of the level of U.S. state control and influence over the online spaces used by domestic Internet users. Now that these, formerly secret, surveillance programmes have become public, it appears that knowledge of state surveillance may have affected the online actions of U.S. Internet users and had some chilling effect on potential online political speech.

Research on Wikipedia has found that there was an immediate and long-lasting drop in traffic to articles on privacy-sensitive topics after the NSA/PRISM surveillance revelations in June 2013 (Penney, 2016) and interviews with U.S. social justice organisations found a significant impact of state surveillance on political activity (Starr, Fernandez, Amster, Wood & Caro, 2008). Furthermore, a 2015 survey found that 30% of U.S. adults said that they had taken at least one step to shield their personal information from the government after finding out about the state surveillance programmes and 22% had changed their patterns of technology use 'a great deal' or 'somewhat' (Rainie & Madden, 2015).

It is important to note, however, that in U.S. legislation and media discourse, the level of state surveillance is rarely mentioned because it is kept secret by the government in the interests of national security. This means that essentially all of

the media coverage around this issue followed from the Snowden leaks and was often couched in criticism of the negative effects and illegality of these leaks.

The legislative regime forbids site actors from passing information onto users regarding the nature of information requests made by the U.S. state. Twitter filed a court case in 2014 arguing that it should be able to make more detailed information about information requests available to users; however, this case was partially dismissed by the courts (Lee, 2014; Lawyer Herald, 2016). This case is part of a wider discourse in the U.S. that positions these online platforms as protectors of free speech against the state that monitors and restricts online speech in the interests of protection.

However, while nearly 90% of U.S. adults are aware of state surveillance programmes (Rainie & Madden, 2015), legislative restrictions on reporting mean that these restrictions function primarily through their secrecy. State access to this large amount of user data for use in the future makes participation in political speech in online spaces a potentially risky prospect, as it is not known what types of communication are specifically being monitored nor how user data could be used in the future.

However, although there may have been some chilling effect on online political speech as a result of knowledge about state surveillance, the underling discourse of freedom of speech in the U.S. means that these effects may have been minor and, indeed, the Snowden leaks may, in some ways, have increased political speech due to the public backlash against these programmes. For instance, an analysis of survey data from U.S. Internet users found that those who most disagreed with the government and most believed that their online behaviour was being monitored were the most frequent participants in online political speech (Krueger, 2005).

The Chinese state's model is very different to that of the U.S., with the level of government monitoring of online communications continually emphasised in state and media discourse and legislation specifically addressing the regulations and policies governing individually named online platforms. The Chinese legislative

framework lays out in detail the types of forbidden online content (*Some Beijing Municipal Provisions on Microblog Development and Management*, 2011) and the process for the collection of identity verification data for users of social media platforms (*Internet User Account Name Management Regulations*, 2014). The Supreme People's Court Adjudication Committee issued an interpretation in September 2013 that specified the exact conditions under which online activity could be seen as constituting "concocting facts to defame others", such as when the information has been read 5,000 times or reposted 500 times (*Interpretation Concerning Some Questions of Applicable Law When Handling Uses of Information Networks to Commit Defamation and Other Such Criminal Cases*, 2013). This is indicative of the common user construction in both contexts of the online individual as a data producer but points to a different interpretation in the Chinese context in which individuals are responsible for and must think actively about the effects of the data they create online, with the platforms held responsible for ensuring the legality of the content posted on them.

In addition to the much more specific nature of Chinese legislation regarding the state control of online spaces, the sources of state power are more diverse and less codified, with key technologies developed based on speeches, publications in state media outlets and unspoken norms as well as formal legislation and regulation. While legislation in China provides a specific framework for conflict resolution over online political speech, it is important to remember that these policies are derived directly from overall ideological directions presented by the country's leaders.

Paramount leader Xi Jinping, who succeeded Hu Jintao at the end of 2012, has significantly centralised state power and introduced greater state control over online spaces. This has seen the Ministry for Information and Technology and the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), which also regulates online spaces, lose power to a newly formed steering committee on the Internet (among other new steering committees which Xi chairs) (Bandurski, 2015).

The Chinese state also makes heavy use of law enforcement, with, for instance, prominent critics intimidated, arrested and, occasionally, disappeared (MacKinnon, 2012; Nip & Fu, 2016). This use of law enforcement to resolve conflicts over online speech accelerated after Xi took office, as part of the crackdown on online 'rumours' that began in the spring of 2013 (Benney, 2014; Buckley, 2013). This led prominent political tweeters to stop posting or quit Weibo and the overall number of posts on the platform fell sharply after this crackdown (M. Moore, 2014).

Chinese state power is also exerted, famously, through censorship. Certain sensitive words simply cannot be published, automated means delete other content post-publication and individual employees read online content to meet government guidelines, outlined in leaked documents, that illegal information should be deleted within five minutes of publication (Creemers, 2012; Fu et al., 2013; King et al., 2012).

The Chinese state also actively controls the online agenda with state employees creating an estimated 448 million posts on social media per year that serve to distract from sensitive issues, particularly those with collective action potential, and promote pride in the state and nation (King et al., 2016). Robot accounts have also been found to be commonly used on Twitter to manipulate the political agenda; however, it is not known whether these bots are generated by campaigns, supporters, candidates or some combination of the three (Howard, Woolley, & Kollanyi, 2016; Ratkiewicz et al., 2011). However, until a December 2014 Email leak from a city-level propaganda department in Jiangxi province, it was thought that public opinion manipulation in China was conducted through a 50-cent army of individual posters paid 50 cents per post to flood social media with pro-state content rather than the much more sophisticated and centralised network of state official employees that were revealed in these leaked Emails. A similar leak would likely be necessary in order to gain insight into the structures of association behind the use of robots on social media in U.S. politics. However, what is clear is that

there is a greater deal of political opinion manipulation occurring on commercial online platforms associated with entrenched political interests in both countries.

An important point of contrast, however, between the configurations of state power in the U.S. and China is evident in how state discourse presents these technologies to the public. The key legislative topics in the U.S. context of funding research and providing access are absent in China, where this technology is more frequently constructed as something potentially dangerous that needs to be controlled rather than a key infrastructure that should be nurtured. Chinese legislation places responsibility for monitoring the users and content of online spaces on platform providers, holding these commercial entities responsible for preventing conflicts arising. This results in a greater separation between the state and market roles in terms of the provision of Internet access and services in China; while these platforms and their users are constrained by state laws, there is less marketisation of state functions than in the U.S. where the state actively promotes access and development of these technologies. In contrast to the responsibility placed on platforms in China, platforms in the U.S. are absolved of responsibility for divulging user data to the state. Whereas online spaces in the U.S. system are seen as a neutral platform and a conduit for information, online platforms in China are seen as tools of state (and market) power that can and should act independency based on a non-neutral state-set ideology to shape and guide speech acts within them.

A key truth claim is notable in these technologies of state power in China vis-à-vis online political speech. This technology is presented as a potential threat that must be actively and aggressively controlled by both the state and the platform (and by the actions of responsible citizens). There is an absence of attention in the legislation of how the technology might help the state or its citizens. This rests on underling discourse of the state, market and civil society in China as working toward a common goal, most recently presented by President Xi Jinping as the Chinese Dream. The idea that these sectors of society might have different interests that might need to be balanced is absent in the configuration of state technological

power, which assumes the responsibility for speaking for and acting in the interests of the people upon which the state's legitimacy to govern rests. This contrasts with the U.S. conception in which each of these three sectors of society is seen as having different needs and goals.

This analysis of the technological structure of state constraints over both online platforms and their potential as venues for political speech shows a marked difference in the two political systems under examination. Both states engage in widespread surveillance and control of online speech; however, this is much more opaque, pervasive and multi-faceted in China. The U.S. legislative framework positions the state as an active player in helping develop and distribute these technologies, which are seen as neutral conduits of information that support a regime of free speech. In contrast, the Chinese legislative framework positions the state as enlisting the cooperation of these large commercial providers to monitor and control the potentially destabilising and chaotic online sphere. Although much more active in censoring and shaping online political speech, the Chinese state places much more emphasis on the potential use of these technologies for political speech functions. These state technological frameworks are rooted in very different structures of power and knowledge with respect to the underlying ideas about what constitutes appropriate political speech and the appropriate use of these platforms within society.

4.4.2. The forms of power and knowledge underlying these constraints

The U.S. and China were chosen as cases of analysis in this thesis due to the underlying differences in their political systems, with the U.S. a leading example of a democracy and China of an authoritarian state. Democratic and authoritarian regimes tend to have opposite approaches to political speech, state control of the Internet and other information and communication technologies and, indeed, information itself.

The idea of freedom of speech one of the most key concepts underpinning U.S. democracy, enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution as a

prohibition on any law that abridges freedom of speech or infringes on the freedom of the press. Although some have argued that the idea of freedom of speech enshrined in the constitution likely referred more to the idea that legislators should have freedom to deliberate rather than citizens should have a right to speak their mind (Schudson, 2007), the current discourse of freedom of speech in the U.S. aligns more closely with the latter.

In the U.S. tradition, however, political speech is seen not just as a right but also as a responsibility. Ideas about ideal forms of political participation in the U.S. (and other Western countries) are dominated (although not without critique) by the deliberative ideal (Wright & Street, 2007).

The deliberative turn in democratic theory occurred around 1990 but is associated with earlier works by Rawls (1971) and Habermas (1989) (whose *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was written in 1962 but not translated into English until 1989). This public sphere is seen as a supra-individual structure in society in which private citizens come together to deliberate on issues of political and social importance in spaces free from influence from the state or economic interests (Habermas, 1989). Public sphere speech is seen as characterised by a set of requirements: reflexivity, ideal role taking, discursive inclusion and equality and autonomy from state and economic power (Dahlberg, 2001). This dominant perspective emphasises that democratic legitimacy should be based not just on representation (through instrumental action) but on rational deliberation by citizens (Dryzek, 2002), with citizens having a responsibility, as well as a right, to participate in political speech for the healthy functioning of the democratic system.

This idea of a public sphere and of an active citizenship has been both theoretically and empirically discredited (Fraser, 1992; Mouffe, 1999; Schudson, 2007). In influential work on political participation and civic attitudes, Almond and Verba concluded that the tension between the ideal of the 'rational-active' citizen and the reality that few people participate frequently in politics is a necessary condition of the functioning of democracy in the U.S. and U.K (1963); it is important, they

conclude, that ordinarily citizens hold the belief that people should participate frequently in politics while at the same time not doing so themselves in order to resolve the tension between the necessity for the state to have power to act and the necessity that they are responsive to citizens (ibid). However, similar to Schudson's concept of the monitorial citizen (2007), Almond and Verba conclude that it is important in a democracy that citizens have a potential to act politically if there is a need (1963).

These ideas are important in that they suggest that there is a disconnect between the apparently dominant discourse of how individuals in the U.S. should act as political speakers (as rational and active) compared to the reality of how they do act. This chapter is interested in identifying the dominant discourse of the U.S. state in terms of how individuals should act as political speakers but the thesis as a whole is interested also in how individuals do act as political speakers. The results of the previous section show that these ideas about a rational-active citizen are reflected in how Twitter presents itself to site users and how site actors speak about the site; indeed, the platform capitalises on these dominant discourses of freedom of speech and the rational-active political speaker to attract users to the platform.

Similarly, these underlying ideas about what constitutes appropriate political speech are reflected in the structure and architecture of Weibo that was elucidated in the previous section. In contrast to the idea of a specific separation between the state, the market, civil society and the private that is prevalent in U.S. traditions, neither Chinese philosophy nor practice has posited these separations. Confucian philosophy lays down the principles for building a harmonious society through individual daily lives and does not see a separation between politics and family or daily life. In Confucian China, the family was the basic unit of society and the Emperor was seen as the father to a multitude of children. A father's responsibility is not one that is codified but rather emerges from virtue and kindness, based on the principle that man is inherently good (Pott, 1981). Thus in Confucian China, the primary role of the state was to ensure the welfare of its citizens and provide

socioeconomic security grounded in these fatherly virtues (Perry, 2008). The greater focus of the Chinese state and political system on welfare rights as opposed to the focus in the U.S. and Western traditions on civil rights is often mentioned as a reason for the different political systems in China and the U.S. (Perry, 2008; D. X. Zhou, 2010). However, these arguments are also used by the Chinese Communist Party to justify its approach to governance, so care should be taken with arguments of Chinese distinctiveness (Kennedy, 2011).

Similarly, some commentators have argued that the concept of a state (Chen, 2012) and the idea of civil society, grounded in a tension between the state and the people, are not relevant in China (P. C. Huang, 1993). However, this thesis, in its comparative approach, must simultaneously find a common language across national contexts and locate this language in a grounded way that respects equally the contexts of comparison, which this section attempts through a comparison of the forms of power and knowledge that underlie ideas about political speech in both contexts.

However, despite taking a paternalistic approach and placing great stock in deference to authority, Confucian philosophy includes both theoretical and practical traditions of citizen input into governmental processes. The concept of Minben (民本) represents the idea that citizens are the root of the state's authority. There was a long tradition of people's petitions in Confucian China and of traveling to the capital to make one's case to the Emperor. However while Confucian philosophy recognised that the will of the people ought to be respected, it did not provide structures that could help realise this ideal (B. He, 2010).

This lack of formal mechanisms forced discontentment into extra-institutional channels (Hung, 2011). Indeed, the political philosophy of Confucian China justified extra-institutional actions under the concept of the Mandate of Heaven (天命). Rebellion was seen as "heaven's way of removing the mantle of leadership from immoral rulers and bestowing it instead upon those who were virtuous enough to replace them" (Perry, 2008a, p. 39), an idea that bears similarity to the emphasis

by the U.S. founding fathers on the need for an armed militia to provide a society-derived check on governmental power.

In dynastic China, the distancing of the general public from the political process contrasts with that of the intellectual class (士大夫) chosen by imperial examination based on the Confucian classics, who occupied a privileged position in society and had an opportunity to influence social change. However, the position of the intellectual class, who were also extremely influential during the short-lived Republican period, changed dramatically after the Communist revolution (Coase & Wang, 2012).

Communist philosophies see the interests of the common people as inevitably in conflict with that of the landowners and bourgeoisie. However, given the difficulty of establishing methods that would allow Chinese peasants to feed their opinions into government policy, Maoist policies “emphasised learning from the people through direct engagement with their conditions and struggles” (B. He & Warren, 2011, p. 276). Following this model of state-citizen interaction, peasants did not need to do anything in order for their input to be realised, they simply had to continue with their daily lives and this would (re-)educate the elite as to what the government needed to do.

However, many initiatives during the Maoist period encouraged political speech in order to create an ideological consciousness among Chinese peasants and to mobilise and “give voice to those who by tradition had shown submissive obedience” (R. H. Solomon, 1971, p. 195). These practices included that of speaking bitterness (诉苦), which was used during the Civil War and later adapted into the process of land reform, and writing big character posters (大字报), which were particularly encouraged during the Cultural Revolution as a tool to motivate young people into revolutionary political involvement.

Despite these outlets for citizen opinion, the majority of state-citizen interactions in Maoist China remained top-down and for the people rather than by the people. The state’s interpretation of the will of the people still took precedence, with

political communication characterised by ideological indoctrination, centralised state control, Party pronouncements broadcast by loudspeaker in public places and policies communicated via editorials in party publications. Citizens were afforded a greater opportunity to exercise their political voice in Communist China than in Confucian China, with highly formalised and structured channels for engagement; however, acceptable speech was highly prescribed and allowed only within the confines of Party dominance of both political power and the political agenda.

China's current approach to theories of ideal political speech is opaque and is the result of a combination of ancient, communist, pragmatic and Western theories and traditions. There is a great deal of uncertainty in modern China about what is appropriate or sanctioned political speech that both benefits the state in solidifying its power and allows a collaboration between the state and the people in terms of what is an accepted form of political speech (Stern & Hassid, 2012). In particular due to this lack of underlying clear theory about how individuals should act as political speakers in China, it is important to consider in detail the way in which state actors present how online commercial spaces (that have been seen as potential venues for political speech) should be used by Chinese citizens.

It is clear in the materials examined in this structural discourse analysis that the Chinese state is actively engaged in a process of shaping language and ideas about political speech to adapt to the Internet and the rise of online commercial platforms. Each new Chinese regime introduces and defines its own terminology. The structural discourse analysis of the materials examined in this section identifies some of the key terms of the Xi administration, with respect to Internet governance, as "building the Chinese dream", "deepening reforms", "public opinion struggle" and "positive energy". The idea of a public opinion struggle marks a key change between the Xi regime and those of his predecessors Jiang Zemin, whose key term was "public opinion guidance" and Hu who spoke frequently of "public opinion channelling"; this marks a transition to a much greater level of control over online discourse (Qian, 2013).

Official pronouncements note the importance of big data analysis of social media (Long, 2016). However, this is different from either the surveillance for the purposes of law enforcement or response to online political acts engaged in by the U.S. State. Chinese discourse on this issue notes that the Internet has challenged existing practices of information control and presents the monitoring and analysis of online data as a way to control these effects. The state is presented as a “large computer” that governs more efficiently and provides a better life for all based on an analysis of online data (Song, 2015). Chinese state discourse mentions much more frequently than U.S. materials the use of the Internet as a venue for political communications both from the state to civil society and citizens to the state. However, it is important to remember that speech acts being encouraged are only those that fit within those limits proscribed by the state and support the ‘common goal’ of the state-proscribed ideology. The agenda-setting power of these discourses constructs individuals as having a responsibility to produce only the data that assists in the achievement of these goals.

This derives from a different underlying orientation towards the media in China, compared to the U.S. The Chinese model is based on a theory of the press in which the media should serve the needs of the state, which take precedence over truthful and diverse reporting (Wilson, 1993; Xinhua, 2016). These ideas have been extended to online social media in China. The crackdown on Weibo Big V’s (celebrity accounts and popular blogs), in which some online opinion leaders were “invited for tea” with state officials and a prominent online investor was arrested on prostitution charges, explicitly extended these ideas to these online opinion leaders (China Media Project, 2013; Ren, 2014; D. Wu, 2013). The move toward seeing individuals as online data producers extends this responsibility to all Internet users (S. Huang & Liu, 2014). The Chinese state constructs and positions all Internet users as potential political speakers and, based on this, then works to nudge these individuals toward particular kinds of political speech acts.

In addition to the truth claim that the state, society and businesses in China must work together to achieve common goals (defined by the state), another claim runs

through these communications: threat. The materials analysed as part of this structural discourse analysis found that China's ability to pursue and achieve these goals is presented as being threatened by foreign countries that seek to utilise the Internet as a tool for their own ends (Bandurski, 2013; Lu, 2014) and to import Western concepts to China that undermine the achievement of these goals (General Office of the Communist Party of China, 2012). These materials also present this ability as undermined by the use of the Internet by commercial interests for individual gain (Lü, Li & Zhu, 2013). This accords with a key contradiction of Leninism that its success renders itself superfluous, which necessitates "pathological need for an enemy to fight" (Creemers, 2015). This is the likely reason for the contradiction that is present in Chinese state discourse about the Internet, which sometimes sees commercial companies as integral contributors to achieving state-set goals and sometimes as a threat to these goals.

In contrast, U.S. state discourse focuses on the economic, rather than political possibilities of this technology, reiterating the truth claim identified in the analysis of legislation that the state has a responsibility to fund development and provide access to Internet technologies because "they are good for business, they are good for communities, they are good for schools and they are good for the marketplace" (The White House, 2015). This sets an agenda for Internet use that is tilted toward market functions. The communications of the state endorse (but do not encourage) the use of the technology as a political tool. For instance, President Obama sent responses to individuals who signed a petition regarding the issue of "net neutrality" saying "this is a victory for the millions of Americans like you who made your voices heard in support of a fair and free Internet - who petitioned your government, spoke out on social media and stood up for what you believe" (The White House, 2016).

Individual politicians and the U.S. state have also utilised social media as a part of their campaigns and to bring the state closer to the people through the 'transparency' of publishing increased online information about state actions and actors (Obama, 2009). While the language used by the U.S. state does not actively

construct the Internet as a technology for political speech, it does implicitly respond to and endorse commercial social networking sites as offering a venue for political speech by engaging with and responding to this speech and by utilising these venues itself for political purposes.

This issue of net neutrality is one example in which two key themes of U.S. discourses about Internet use - freedom and equality – come to the fore. In April 2014, the FCC announced a draft law that would allow ISPs to provide preferential services to certain content. This proposal would have undermined what was seen as a central principle of the Internet – that all information is treated equally by the system – and generated a huge amount of public interest (more than 3.7 million comments to the FCC) (NPR, 2014). In February 2015, the FCC ruled in favour of net neutrality and classified broadband Internet as a common carrier, reiterating the theme that this technology is one of national importance to the state and one to which all citizens should have access and reinforcing the key theme of equality.

This case is also part of a wider discourse of freedom in the U.S. context identified in this structural discourse analysis. Freedom is the bottom line, whether stated or unstated, of most arguments. Freedom is presented as the ultimate, universal desire and the reason that needs no further justification (The White House, 2009, 2012c). In reference to the Internet, the word freedom is most often associated in the examined materials with freedom of expression and freedom of information; cyber security threats, mostly from foreign nationals and states, are presented as the biggest threats to this fundamental right (e.g. The White House, 2012a, 2014).

However, unlike in legislation where the role of the state to protect was prominent, this aspect is rarely mentioned in official communication about the power of the state over the Internet. There is a lack of official discourse (at least in the materials presented by the state) on the state's role in online surveillance for the stated purposes of protection. This discourse is marginalised rather than addressed by state published and promoted materials, with the state setting an agenda for

citizen use of the Internet that focuses on freedom, equality and the use of the technology for the development of the market.

Both the U.S. and Chinese states do agree on one thing in their discourse: regulating the Internet is challenging. Both claim that the rapid advancement of these technologies is difficult for the state to keep pace with and that the Internet complicates the established balance between different priorities. However, they differ in what about the Internet seems to pose such a challenge. In the U.S., it is the privacy and security of the people that is threatened by commercial companies and terrorist organisations and the state must struggle to keep pace in its role as a protector (The White House, 2012b). For China it is the people themselves, the undirected masses, that pose the threat because the diversification of information confuses the masses ideologies and the rapid transmission of information challenges hierarchical management (Song, 2015).

Thus, both states promote the idea that they should act to advance economic prosperity and that the Internet can be a tool in this endeavour. However, there is a significant difference between the underlying forms of power and knowledge that set the agenda for political speech on the Internet. The key truth claim of the authoritarian state is that it is the voice of the people and that the people, civil society and the market should work together to achieve state-set goals (absent the idea that speaking against the state might be evidence that the goals as set or the system itself should be revised). Threats of intimidation and force hang over those who might be found to not be working in harmony to achieve these goals.

The democratic state also asks citizens to trust it to represent its interests in terms of law enforcement but the overall goal, as presented, is different, focusing on freedom instead of stability and equality instead of hierarchy and centralisation. These two ideologies are indicative of two different approaches to Internet governance – which nevertheless share common characteristics: namely that the technology is used by the state to further its power and that this power is based on the online data production of Internet users. The U.S. state says little about the use

of the Internet for political speech, directing attention toward its use for economic purposes. In contrast, the Chinese state speaks frequently about the use of the Internet for political speech, but acts to actively prescribe the speech acts that are permissible.

4.4.3. Media discourses about state constraints

This section considers how the practical technologies and forms of power and knowledge underlying state constraints are presented in the media of both countries. The search for these materials focused on articles containing the keyword “Internet governance”. This phrase was chosen in preference to other potential terms after preliminary analyses of the material returned based on different search terms because the idea of Internet governance in both English and Chinese corresponded the most strongly with discussions of normative ideals about state regulation of online spaces and overarching politics rather than specific instances of laws.

Examining the spread of newspaper articles that were published in the U.S. and China that contain this keyword, several key themes are immediately apparent. The most common theme of U.S. articles is freedom, which is seen as synonymous with openness or neutrality. Across the 306 articles published in the Factiva Newspaper Database published in the U.S. in the past five years with Internet governance as a keyword, the word free or freedom was mentioned 426 times, open or openness 437 times and neutral or neutrality 95 times; other key themes included issues of privacy and surveillance and Internet governance as an international foreign policy issue and power play between the respective stances and priorities of different governments. In contrast, most Chinese articles fell somewhere within an overarching theme of the threat and chaos posed by the Internet and the efforts or success of the government or necessity of citizens to take responsibility for countering this threat. Of the 384 articles published since 2012 that had keywords of both Internet and governance in the China Core

Newspaper Database, 218 (57%) contained the word security (安全), 72 the word rumour (谣言), 60 the word threat (威胁) and 21 the word fraud (诈骗).

These overall themes point to a key difference in the media discourses regarding the construction of the meaning of online spaces. A major theme of U.S. articles was the need to balance security with freedom or privacy. However, the Chinese articles presented a different discourse of needing to balance security and development (Bai, 2014; Jin & Wu, 2015). This accords ideas about the different goals that underlie state legitimacy, with the U.S. focusing on civic and individual rights and China on welfare rights (Perry, 2008; D. X. Zhou, 2010).

However, the dichotomies presented in these media discourses also highlight an aspect not before considered: namely, that both governments promote the need to maintain security as an important consideration against which their goals of protecting and furthering the welfare and/or civic rights of their citizens must be balanced. The discourse of security and threat is used in both contexts as the underlying justification for the exercise of state power over online spaces. Both countries focus on external threats to their populace of Internet users, acting to construct users as vulnerable and in need of state protection.

Chinese media articles place great emphasis on the scale of these online threats, the economic and social impact of these threats, the scale of the state's response and the number of arrests made. For instance, one 2016 article touts a 7.8% fall in fraud in the city of Xi'an after a concerted increase in policing that led to the arrest of 91 suspects and the restoration of economic losses of more than 230 million Yuan (approximately £27 million) (Fan, 2016).

Overall, this serves to create the impression of the Internet as a chaotic and lawless place (words that are used frequently in media discourse about the Internet) and create confidence and pride in the government's efforts to tackle this issue. This is in contrast to U.S. discourse about the Internet that sees these same properties of chaos and lawlessness as empowering, equalising and diversifying. The emphasis in Chinese media on the scale of the state's efforts to regulate the Internet would

likely serve to create a climate of fear among those who might wish to challenge state priorities.

It is important to note the difference in the way that the Internet is presented in Chinese articles about Internet governance and the way in which Weibo was presented in the media articles examined in the previous section. Articles about the Internet in general focus on the key themes of rumours, threat and the need to control online spaces, whereas articles about Weibo focus on the platform as a commercial company and the useful potential of this space for political speech. The truth claim underlying these discourses seems to be that Weibo is an ideal online space and that it should avoid the commercialisation (specifically exposure to advertisements and unwanted commercial content) that would drive away users from the valuable political functions of the space. In contrast, the Internet as a whole is a lawless and chaotic place in need both of state governance and citizen vigilance. This difference supports the idea that Weibo as a platform is unusually close to the Chinese state and state needs and goals compared to other commercial online spaces (Benney, 2014).

U.S. discourses about Internet governance also focus on external threats to their populace of Internet users as a justification for state protective action. The metaphors of a digital cold war or an iron curtain of censorship are used in articles about international meetings on Internet governance (Crovitz, 2012; Pfanner, 2012) and an U.S. newspaper article about President Xi's first visit to the U.S. claims that "over the last few years... (the two countries) have been engaged in a sort of technological Cold War" (Mozur & Perlez, 2015). This evokes a discourse of a binary struggle over the Internet that embodies key U.S. values and one in which American freedoms will triumph (Crovitz, 2012). Those countries that do not fall on the U.S. side are seen as opposing all that the country stands for. For instance, one article describes Brazil's reaction to the revelations in the Snowden leak of announcing plans to lay a new undersea fibre optic cable to circumvent U.S.-controlled portions of the Internet as sounding "ominously familiar" to Iran's attempt to build a "'halal' Internet that's segregated from the Western version"

(Fung, 2013). Thus, these media discourses present the maintenance of security (through surveillance) as necessary to maintain freedom and human rights.

This is an example of the key truth claim in U.S. discourse that the country both stands for the universal value of and controls the meaning of freedom and that the Internet is an American invention and thus a product of and tool for this freedom. This freedom comes not only from the state but also from the structure of the technology and the values of the U.S.-based companies that provide many of the most popular platforms across the world (e.g. Brooks, 2012; Pfanner, 2011). Maintaining the status quo concerning Internet governance is presented as synonymous with keeping the Internet free and open and with maintaining the U.S. values that ensured the success of the technology to date; change is essentially always seen as negative (Fung, 2016).

This perspective comes to the fore in debates over global Internet governance. The U.S. system is presented as one of multi-stakeholder governance of the Internet, in which states, the business sector and representatives of societal groups are all involved (McDowell, 2014; Pfanner, 2012; Tsukayama, 2012). Interestingly, it is U.S. companies such as Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Twitter (more so than the U.S. state) that are seen as upholding these key U.S. values and championing online freedoms (Fung, 2013; Pfanner, 2011; Tsukayama, 2012) because “unlike governments, which tend to prioritise their own political interests when making policy, the groups involved (in multi-stakeholder governance of the Internet) share a general commitment to maintaining the technical efficiency of the Internet” (Brooks, 2012).

Absent from most of this discussion, however, is the possibility that companies also pursue their own economic, social and political objectives and the trade-off between user privacy and the value of users’ data to these companies is rarely mentioned in the U.S. context (although it is mentioned when discussing the tension between the U.S. and Europe over Internet regulation (Chertoff, 2012; Kakutani, 2013)). Also absent is the idea that another type of balance between

these power holders over Internet governance would be more appropriate or might be seen as more appropriate in different national contexts.

However, the Chinese media, although it is much less concerned with international governance of the Internet than the U.S., puts forward this idea of a change in the status quo. A key theme that runs through Chinese coverage is the idea of the country taking, somewhat belatedly, its rightful place as a leader in shaping the global Internet (Bai, 2014; C. Lu, 2013; Xu, 2015). The overwhelming discourse, which runs in contrast to the U.S. perspective, is that the state should be able to take control of the Internet within its national boundaries according to its national priorities. The properties of the Western-developed Internet of openness, anonymity and freedom of speech are presented as leading to violence that threatens Chinese users (Bandurski, 2013; B. Wang, 2013; Yang, 2012). These threats come from both outside and within the country, as in line with the official discourse identified in the previous section of the Internet undermining established forms of governance, the very structure of the Internet and, in particular, social media leads to chaos, violence and rumours that necessitates individual vigilance and state guidance to maintain key values (Bai, 2014; B. Wang, 2013).

However, one key contradiction in the Chinese discourse is that one of the things the state is protecting 'netizens' from is themselves or more specifically the incorrectness of mass opinions and the fallacy of individual thought. That the government could listen as well as guide is notably absent from much discourse on Internet regulation and the exclusion of many voices from these discourses is a key aspect that must be remembered in an analysis of them. Although this was a key part of Internet governance under President Hu Jintao (between 2002 and 2012) as part of policies such as the Three Closenesses, this discourse has fundamentally changed under his successor Xi whose politics emphasise the need for violent struggle against online threats. Another key area of contradiction that runs through these articles is whether the state, the market and the people in China are

working together (with the state's guidance role primary) or are in an adversarial relationship (with the state the arbiter of correctness).

4.5. Summary: Key structuring discourses

This chapter has examined the how the key structures of political context and site architecture may act to constrain individual actions with respect to online political speech in the two political systems of the U.S. and China, as examples of democratic and authoritarian states, and the key platforms of Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China. This analysis identified four key structuring discourses, which are summarised briefly in this section.

4.5.1. Information abundance in the U.S. and ideological correctness in China

In the U.S., Twitter both emerges from and furthers an underlying truth claim about the desirability of information abundance. This idea is based on and associated with the idea of free speech, which forms a cornerstone of the idea of the political in the U.S. An important underlying assumption about the desirability of free speech is that in a system of free speech, in which all opinions and beliefs are aired, those opinions and beliefs that are incorrect or inappropriate will be shown as such due to the inherent challenge of the rationally posed, freely spoken dissenting view. This justification of freedom of speech is based on the idea of a marketplace for ideas (Mill, 1966; Milton, 1973). These ideas explicitly apply market logic to political speech and are predicated on ideas of information abundance and the existence of mechanisms that will allow 'correct' ideas to rise to the top in this information marketplace.

This idea of information abundance forms a cornerstone of the idea of the political in the U.S. and is also reflected in the structure of Twitter. This discourse is presented as neutral and natural by both the state and the platform. Individuals are encouraged to speak with little thought for the content or consequences; through a free market for information, managed by the structures and algorithms of online spaces, correct information rises to the top. Trending topics, retweets and followers are the quantified mechanisms of this online marketplace of ideas but

this marketplace is more commercialised than previous incarnations in that not only is the space of speech commercial and this speech competing in a marketplace but this speech itself is commercialised, as user data supports the economic models of these online platforms. The roles of citizen and consumer are merged on Twitter, with political speech a commercial product and individuals as consumers of this political information.

The discourses about political information in which Chinese Weibo users are embedded are very different. Information abundance and freedom are presented as dangerous, distracting from appropriate speech, providing opportunities for those who cause ills for their own gain and undermining the progress of society (as directed by the state). Rather than being encouraged to speak freely, individuals are encouraged by state discourses to think carefully about the effects of their speech and to be vigilant and active in promoting correct speech and the common goals set by the state.

This discourse of ideological correctness creates a dilemma for the commercial site, whose business models are built on the processing and presenting abundant information. China has a free market for businesses but not a free market for information (particularly political information) and Weibo, whose business model is information, must therefore balance these needs and more actively shape online user speech and action in order to achieve this.

These two approaches to online political speech have very different meanings for what it means to be a 'netizen'. The place of a 'netizen' in the information abundance discourse aligns most closely with the idea of a monitorial citizen (Schudson, 2002) and, on the technological platform of microblogs, tends towards a culture of publication of individual experience and documentation and a reliance on the opaque structure and architecture of the platform to provide the appropriate market mechanisms to realise the marketplace of ideas. The normative idea of a 'netizen' on Twitter as engendered by this approach to information is to (a) stay abreast of information that is published and particularly

that which appears to have risen to the top through the networked, endorsement effects of the platform and to (b) contribute as much information oneself to the platform, regardless of content or effect.

This placement significantly contrasts with that of the ideal citizen under the discourse of ideological correctness. An ideal citizen under this discourse (a) acts to support correct information and guard against incorrect information, (b) based on knowledge of the underlying/overarching societal ideology. Rather than being information-orientated (in terms of producing and consuming information), this normative conception of a citizen is action-orientated, with the individual taking steps, in particular, to replicate correct discourse and guard against incorrect discourse and to evaluate the moral and practical implications of information publication before speaking.

4.5.2. Equality in the U.S. and hierarchy in China

Discourse about users of Twitter overwhelmingly focuses on ideas of equality and individualisation, which is presented as a means to facilitate political speech. The idea of equality of speakers is inextricably linked with the information freedom discourse, because information is treated as a commodity based on its content and can be evaluated independently of the speaker and the context. This aligns with key ideas of political speech under the theory of the public sphere, in which speech should be reasoned and reflexive and spaces characterised by discursive inclusion and equality (Dahlberg, 2001).

However, what Twitter provides is not so much a public sphere that facilitates equality but a commercial space that provides the user with the illusion of the public sphere that dominant discourses hold to be important. This space is more comfortable than this normative ideal of a public sphere because users are predominantly exposed to information that matches their existing opinions (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015) and because the political is mixed with the personal and with social and entertainment content (Papacharissi, 2010).

In contrast, Weibo creates a variety of complex hierarchies between users through the level system, various types of user verification, greater emphasis on celebrities and official information and the discourse of hotness. This hierarchy of individuals as citizens and political speakers is presented as a crucial aspect of maintaining ideological correctness and the role of the users within this system is to remain cognisant of the providence of information they receive, to be aware of their place within the system and to play the game of hotness to rise up within system's hierarchy.

Although Twitter is structured around discourses of apparent (although not actual) equality and Weibo around discourses of hierarchy, they have both positioned themselves as key public spaces that can be used for political speech. However, rather than (ostensibly) providing a free and neutral space for equal speech, Weibo is an arbiter of the data that is necessary to create these strict hierarchies of users and a conduit in distributing the messages of those higher up this hierarchy (whose speech is almost by definition ideologically correct) to the masses. Despite these very different political systems, in both cases the commercial social networking sites have adapted themselves to and made themselves an integral part of the promotion and maintenance of these existing systems of political speech and social organisation.

4.5.3. The user as an individualised data producer and consumer

On both sites, users are constructed as data producers (pushed toward continually producing data through posting content, interacting with posts and building ever expanding social networks) and as consumers of self- and platform-curated data (through the news feed, sponsored content, highlights of recent posts and trending topics). This is the service that these commercial sites provide, to both users and advertisers, and thus these actions necessarily become commercialised. However, due to the different approaches to information (abundance versus correctness) in the two contexts, Twitter tends more toward the commercialisation of speech and Weibo toward the commercialisation of action.

This is a subtle difference but potentially an important one for understanding how the commercialisation of online platforms affects their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political system because this evaluation depends on how speech is defined and understood. This thesis, seeking not to exclude political acts based on a narrow definition, defined political speech as any communicative act that seeks to affect or affects the balance of power in society. In both cases the kinds of political speech that are found online reflect their offline political context and this means the commercialisation of these platforms affects this speech in different ways.

When political speech favours the information freedom and discursive ideals (as in the U.S.), an ideal space for online speech would facilitate these functions. Twitter contributes to the first but does not achieve it (in part because its commercial status requires that users are not equal and encourages the creation of personal rather than public content and connections). In contrast, where political speech favours a hierarchical, ideologically correct, action-orientated ideal, an ideal platform for this type of speech would create the conditions that would favour this speech, which Weibo arguably does well with its level and credit systems, promotion of state and verified voices and provision of inbuilt options for action-orientated political speech.

A key question, however, is whether political speech (i.e. that which aims to affect or affects the balance of power in society) takes place under conditions of hierarchy and ideological correctness and whether the political speech on these two commercialised social media sites, embedded in their respective political, social and economic contexts, is substantively or qualitatively different, questions that will be addressed in Chapter Six based on a random sample of user posts on both platforms.

4.5.4. The necessity of the protection of the state

In the U.S., Twitter stands for the key political discourse of information abundance, which is juxtaposed against the state's role in surveillance, law enforcement and

protection of citizens (particularly from foreign threats). In China, the state takes an active role in promoting the use of the site for (ideologically correct) political functions and the site subtly pushes users toward commercial actions online because ideologically correct state functions are not trusted by users and political speech on the platform puts them in the difficult position of needing to ensure the correctness of this speech.

However, in both cases the state presents its role in restricting commercial media sites as one of protection. These functions of protection are remarkably similar in both political contexts and, in both contexts, this places the commercial sites in a somewhat adversarial relationship with the state with respect to political speech. In the U.S., Twitter fights to maintain user privacy, modelling its business niche on the key political discourse of freedom. In China, Weibo must maintain the commercial content that state discourse sometimes promotes and sometimes attacks, as part of its “pathological need for an enemy to fight” (Creemers, 2015) and potentially allow itself to become a venue for political speech in order that users continue to return to the site. In both cases these sites stand as potential conduits for political speech between civil society and the state; however, the way in which the state has responded to these opportunities and the way in which site architectures have responded to state and user needs is quite different, despite similar underlying commercial models.

Taken together, these four discourses suggest that the commercialisation of online spaces might have very different effects in the two political systems under examination. In the U.S., neither the state nor the media places emphasis on questioning either, normatively, what online spaces should be or, practically, the effects of their structures and how they could be made better. In this absence of attention to the political potential of online spaces, the spaces themselves fill the discursive void. Twitter markets itself as a place for equal and free political speech in which ‘correct’ information will rise to the top under conditions of information abundance. However, as this analysis has shown, this is largely an illusion, resting on historical ideas about freedom of speech that are held by U.S. citizens. The

commercialisation of online spaces in the U.S. means that power over discourses governing political speech in the country has been given to the commercial providers of the spaces in which this speech occurs who, inevitably, present themselves as ideal and sufficient spaces for political speech.

In contrast, in China, the state has maintained active control over the discourse of what it means to be a political speaker, despite a rapid and deep process of commercialisation. Commercial providers of online spaces in China appear to be inhabiting a space in-between the state and the people, responding to state demands for control but also civil society demands to provide spaces for political speech. The architecture of Weibo provides greater affordances for political speech (such as through inline commenting and the Gongyi platform) but only within the boundaries set by the state. Under these conditions it may, indeed, be the case that commercialisation is positive for political speech because these commercial companies provide a new type of conduit for the political speech between the state and a, newly developing, civil society in China.

However, this examination has not yet considered actual instances of political speech, or their lack thereof, only the context of their production and reading. This deep understanding of the technologies and configurations of power and knowledge underlying the use of social networking sites in each context is an important first step in answering the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems. It can tell us what discourses about commercialisation and political speech are communicated to users but it cannot tell us about these users themselves or how they might respond as individuals within these institutions that were heralded as a democratising force but which, thus far, have seemed to provide, at best, a limited space for political speech.

Commercialisation, representation and individual speech acts on microblogs in the U.S. and China

5.1. Chapter overview

The previous chapter analysed the discourses relevant to the use of social networking sites for political speech in the two political systems under consideration and, in particular, the two key online platforms of Twitter and Weibo. This structural discourse analysis was concerned with the way in which the users of these sites are constructed as a particular type of audience and the way in which site use might be constrained by practical technologies and structures of power and knowledge.

In contrast to the macro, qualitative focus of the previous chapter, this chapter undertakes a micro, quantitative analysis of commercialisation and political speech based on a random sample of users and their posts on the two key microblogging platforms of Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China. This analysis finds that the percentage of commercial user accounts is higher on Twitter but that the percentage of commercial speech is higher on Weibo. The percentage of individual speech that is political is higher on Weibo, although not significantly so. What is clear, however, is that political speech is no lower on Weibo, despite its greater frequency of commercial speech and authoritarian context. This provides evidence for the arguments that commercialisation might be positive for political speech (at least in terms of its quantity) and aligns with the greater emphasis put on the use of commercial online spaces for political speech in China identified in the previous chapter.

5.2. Theoretical and methodological overview

This thesis utilises a mixed-methods research design to address the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems. The structural discourse analysis of the previous chapter served as an ideal starting point for this investigation because it provided a broad and deep overview of both the national

contexts in which commercial online platforms and their users are embedded and also the structural and discursive context of these platforms in which users are embedded. However, this methodology was concerned only with the dominant messages from key actors (the state and state actors, the site and site actors and media discourses) about how users could and should act on these sites, particularly with respect to political speech. A structural discourse analysis cannot speak to how these messages are interpreted or responded to by site users or the actual conditions of speech on these sites.

Indeed, until now, no research has been able to provide a picture of the actual nature of individual speech acts on social networking sites. Existing literature has focused only on trending topics, keywords, case studies of particular events or key users such as media organisations or opinion leaders¹⁴. These studies provide useful insight into some aspects of speech (political or otherwise) on these sites but they will always be limited in that they cannot speak to the overall nature of speech on these sites and have preselected for certain types of political speech. Only studies based on random samples of user accounts can speak to the actual nature of user representation and levels of commercialisation and political speech on these sites in general, rather than how they are used in specific cases or instances.

In order to provide a picture of the nature of speakers and speech on these commercial platforms, this study utilises a random sample of monthly-active, non-private user accounts on both platforms located in the country of interest, analysing these accounts as to the type of voice represented (individuals, market entities, state entities or civil society organisations). The second portion of this chapter presents an analysis of a random selection of posts by individual users over a month-long period to answer the question of how much speech on these

¹⁴ To the knowledge of the author only one existing study has utilised a random sample of user accounts on a social networking site. Fu and Chau analysed a random sample of 29,998 Weibo accounts. However, their analysis was based only on the returned quantitative data (number of friends, followers and posts, date created, gender and location) and could, thus, not speak to the actual content of these accounts, either in terms of account type or to the topics or issues that these accounts post about.

platforms is commercial, how much is political and provide a picture of the levels of user interaction with political and commercial content as well as the interaction between political and commercial content. This chapter analyses the quantitative aspects of this data, with the next chapter considering, qualitatively, the content of the posts in this random sample.

5.3. The representation of different voices in commercial online spaces

A key critique of the process commercialisation of online spaces has been the colonisation of these spaces by existing elites and the appropriation of spaces and discourse within these spaces by commercial voices (Cammaerts, 2008; Dahlberg, 2005; Deuze, 2008). For this reason, it is important to establish what types of voices exist on these online platforms. These data can also offer evidence regarding the key arguments of whether commercialised spaces come to be dominated by existing elites and/or provide spaces for minority voices.

A content analysis of the randomly selected, monthly-active, non-private U.S.-based accounts on Twitter and mainland China-based accounts on Weibo was conducted, to ascertain the representation of different voices on these two platforms. In line with standard practice, robot accounts were excluded from the dataset.

Twitter, as a more developed medium (launched over three years before Weibo), being studied in a context of greater economic development (with an economy more reliant on industry and services) and in a country with a larger, more developed civil society presence, unsurprisingly has a higher proportion of both commercial and civil society accounts. On Twitter, 11% of non-robot accounts belong to a market sphere entity and 7% to a civic entity. In comparison, less than one percent of active, mainland China Weibo accounts belong to either a market sphere or civic entity, with 99% of accounts belonging to single users (individuals, public individuals or celebrities) (Table 5.1.)¹⁵.

¹⁵ Intercoder percentage agreement for account type on Twitter is 82% with an alpha of 0.6. The calculated intercoder percentage agreement for account type on Weibo is 87% with an alpha of 0.34. The low alpha for account type on Weibo, despite a high percentage agreement, is due to the

Table 5.1. User account types

	Weibo		Twitter	
	Number	Percentage of non-robot accounts	Number	Percentage of non-robot accounts
Single person accounts				
Individual	569	98.10%	552	80.50%
Public individual	3	0.52%	7	1.18%
Celebrity	2	0.34%	2	0.34%
Market sphere accounts				
Business (more than 50 employees)	2	0.34%	21	3.54%
Small business (up to 50 employees)	0	0	38	6.41%
Individual business people or small groups of individuals	0	0	15	2.53%
Civil society sphere accounts				
Media outlet	0	0	2	0.34%
Blog, forum or online directory	3	0.52%	16	2.70%
Civic group	0	0	19	3.20%
Non-profit, charity or professional advocacy organisation	0	0	7	1.18%
University, school or official university of school organisation	0	0	4	0.67%
State sphere accounts				
Government department or publically run entity	1	0.17%	3	0.51%
Total accounts	580		686	

While one might expect that a greater proportion of accounts on Twitter would belong to civic groups, given the much stronger civil society in the U.S., the dearth of market-sphere accounts on Weibo is relatively surprising, particularly given that many of the market-sphere accounts on Twitter belong to small businesses or individual business people. A large proportion of Chinese individuals are self-employed and the Internet is often framed in China in terms of its ability to spur

predominance of individual accounts on Weibo. This issue was discussed in more depth in the appropriate section of the methodology chapter.

economic development. However, businesses and individual business people do not appear to be using Weibo as a tool for promotion and communication in the same way as Twitter has been used in the U.S. It is possible that this demographic in China utilises other online platforms such as Taobao or Douban or that, given more recent Internet adoption and lower penetration, these businesses are yet to move online in China.

Although the majority (80.5%) of accounts on Twitter belong to individual users, there are 10 times as many accounts on Twitter that are non-individual accounts: 19.5% on Twitter compared to only 1.9% on Weibo. This finding provides an indication that Twitter in the U.S. has, to a much greater extent than Weibo in China, been incorporated into existing power structures and modes of daily life. As part of this process, existing power holders have moved onto Twitter, much more so than on Weibo, which, based on its spread of account types on the platform, appears to still be primarily a venue for individual voices. However, it should be remembered that the existence of individual accounts on Weibo (i.e. having the potential to speak) does not necessarily correlate with being heard and that, as a relatively newer platform, the percentage of individual accounts on Weibo may decline in the future.

However, these figures belie a different manifestation of commercialisation on Weibo, as, following conventional practice, robot accounts were excluded from this analysis. Out of the initial sample of 627 randomly selected, monthly active, mainland China-based Weibo accounts included in this content analysis, 20 (3.19%) were marked as accounts that existed entirely for the purposes of manipulating site statistics¹⁶. This is a higher percentage than that 1.08% that was found by previous research that relied on account deletion as a flag for identifying robot accounts (Yu, Asur, & Huberman, 2012).

¹⁶ Fifteen of these 627 accounts were excluded because their profiles consisted entirely of automated content, three were excluded because their profiles had no posts at the time of analysis (these accounts had posted during the month-long period of analysis but these posts were later deleted) and a further nine accounts were deleted after data collection but prior to the content analysis.

The results of this analysis suggest that the actual number of robot accounts on Weibo may be much higher. Numerous accounts were deleted between the initial querying of random potential user numbers and the data collection phase, nine accounts were deleted during the data collection phase (1.41% of the original sample) and the pre-tests on Weibo showed that some accounts that appeared to have been flagged as spam accounts were excluded from the user timeline and, thus, their posts were not included in the scripts used to collect this dataset; 364 accounts in the initial random selection of 1,057 users accounts that had posted in the month preceding data collection did not post any statuses that were captured by the data collection script over the four-week data collection period and it is possible that some of these accounts did in fact post statuses but were excluded from the user timeline as potential spam accounts. This suggests that the actual number of robot accounts on Weibo is close to or even potentially exceeds five percent of monthly-active accounts, making them much more prevalent than previously thought. While this figure still means that the percentage of commercially orientated accounts on Weibo is less than half that of Twitter, the manifestation of commercial voices as part of speech on the platforms appears to be very different.

The commercialisation of Weibo's voices is occurring in contravention of the policies of the commercial site administrators, who attempt to prevent this kind of activity because it undermines the value of their platform to the users who they wish to attract and the service of advertising to their user base is something that the platform wishes to provide itself for as part of its business model. In contrast on Twitter, existing commercial entities create and manage individual business-focused accounts and this practice seems particularly prominent for small businesses. This means that on Twitter commercial messages may be more likely to originate from a commercial account, which appears to exist on an equal footing to ordinary user accounts and which can be followed as if it was an individual user. In contrast, on Weibo, commercial messages may be more likely to originate from robot accounts, whose existence may be fleeting and providence is, likely, highly

opaque. This means that, in line with the findings of the previous chapter, Twitter users may be constructed and perceive themselves as more agentic actors with respect to their consumption of advertising and commercial content, in a way that conflates commercial, personal and public content. Thus, there is a commercialisation of voices on both platforms that results in greater user exposure to commercialisation messages. However, it appears both that the extent of commercialisation of voices is higher on Twitter (with a larger percentage of accounts belonging to market sphere entities) and that the pattern of commercialisation on Twitter that makes users complicit in their own commodification might be more likely to result in a reconstitution of individual users as consumers.

However, assessing the commercialisation of voices on microblogging platforms and potential domination by existing elites is not simply a question of how many accounts are owned by commercial entities or offline power holders but also what types of individual users are present on the platform. This is an important issue because it can shed light on the differences between the offline population, the Internet using population and the microblog using population that are crucial in evaluating the wider significance of the results of this investigation and also speak to issues related to whether these platforms appear to be offering spaces for marginalised voices and of the relative extent of commercialisation of individual microblog users based on their demographic characteristics.

This analysis finds that dominant groups of individuals in both countries appear to be overrepresented on microblogs. On both platforms, individual users in regions of above average affluence are overrepresented compared to both the national population and the population of Internet users (Table 5.2.). In contrast, individuals in regions of below average affluence are less well represented online. However, the extent of this overrepresentation is larger and more significant in China than in the U.S. In the most affluent regions of China (Shanghai, Beijing, Zhejiang and Tianjin where average per capita income is more than 140% of the national average), there are more than 250% as many Weibo users than would be

expected based on the distribution of population within the country¹⁷. These individuals located in affluent regions of China are also overrepresented compared to the distribution of Internet users, with almost twice as many individual microblog users in these areas than would be expected.

A similar pattern is seen in the distribution of Twitter users but the extent of the overrepresentation of users in more affluent areas is less pronounced. Unlike China where the skew of user distribution toward affluent areas of the country is highly statistically significant, this difference is significant only at the 90% confidence level on Twitter and only when compared to the distribution of population within the country (not to the distribution of Internet users). Thus, unlike Weibo, the distribution of Twitter users across regions of the U.S. of difference relative affluence levels roughly accords with that of the national population of Internet users. However, the distribution of Twitter users is likely somewhat skewed toward more affluent regions relative to the U.S. population (likely because Internet use itself is skewed toward more affluent regions). Users in the most affluent regions of the U.S. are slightly overrepresented on Twitter, with 115% as many users as would be expected based on the national population. However, those in the least affluent areas of the U.S. (where average per capita disposable income is less than 90% of the national average) are still very underrepresented on Twitter, with only 70% of the number of user accounts that would be expected based on their population. This, again, suggests that Twitter, as a platform, aligns much more strongly with existing power hierarchies and structures of daily life in the U.S. compared to Weibo in China.

¹⁷ It is difficult to determine the exact geographic distribution of individuals in China where there are a large number of migrant laborers who remain registered in their home region due to the Hukou system that restricts movement and access to public services. However, these figures are drawn from the 2010 census that was chosen despite being somewhat old because it accounted for the resident population of these areas rather than the more commonly published figures based on Hukou registrations.

Table 5.2. Representation of individual users by relative geographic affluence¹⁸

Twitter							
		Percentage of population ¹⁹	Percentage of Internet users ²⁰	Percentage of active microblog users	Expected number based on population	Expected number based on Internet users	Number observed
Most affluent regions	Average per capita income greater than 110% of national average	15.3%	15.85%	17.54%	78.6	81.2	90
Above average regions	Average per capita income between 100% and 110% of national average	31.5%	32.18%	35.09%	161.6	165.1	180
Below average regions	Average per capita income between 90% and 100% of national average	25.5%	24.82%	22.61%	130.8	127.3	116
Least affluent regions	Average per capita income less than 90% of national average	27.68%	27.17%	24.76%	142.0	139.4	127
	Significance of difference between expected and observed distributions				p = 0.07 (Chi2)	p = 0.219 (Chi2)	
Weibo							
		Percentage of population ²¹	Percentage of Internet using population ²²	Percentage of active microblog users	Expected number based on population	Expected number based on Internet users	Number observed
Most affluent regions	Average per capita income greater than 140% of national average	8.21%	12.04%	21.79%	47.0	68.5	124
Above average regions	Average per capita income between 100% and 140% of national average	28.67%	34.59%	36.03%	164.0	196.8	205
Below average regions	Average per capita income between 80% and 100% of national average	32.68%	29.21%	21.27%	164.0	196.8	121
Least affluent regions	Average per capita income less than 80% of national average	29.92%	24.15%	20.91%	171.1	137.4	119
	Significance of difference between expected and observed distributions				p < 0.0000 (Chi2)	p < 0.0000 (Chi2)	

¹⁸ Given the different distributions of wealth in both countries different, i.e. the disparity between the richest and the poorest regions is much greater in China, different brackets are chosen in both countries since this analysis is based on wealth distribution relative to the national population.

¹⁹ Based on July 2015 census bureau estimate

²⁰ Based on a combination of census estimates for July 2015 and census bureau Internet use figures from 2012

²¹ Based on the 2010 census

²² Based on a combination of the 33rd Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, January 2014 and the 2010 census.

This result provides evidence for the argument that offline power hierarchies are maintained on online platforms and against the argument that these platforms offer a substantive place for minority groups to convene counterpublics. The argument that commercial online platforms provide diverse information and spaces for minority groups rests on the assumption that these sites wish to cater to these user populations; this may be true for some minority groups and subordinate discourses that are economically profitable but groups who are more economically affluent will almost always be the more attractive market for commercial organisations until that market is saturated.

This conclusion is also supported by the predominance of English on Twitter and simplified Mandarin on Weibo. The latest U.S. census reports that 17.4% of the U.S. population are Hispanic, a figure that likely, if anything, understates the true number because it is unlikely to include undocumented migrants. However, 97.5% of profiles on Twitter use English as their platform language, with only 2% using Spanish, and of the tweets posted by individual users 93.8% of tweets are English and only 5.4% Spanish²³. This means that even if Spanish speakers are using the platform at the same rate as English speakers in the U.S., they are not doing so in their native language, evidence either of underrepresentation of this traditionally minority group or that users from this group interact online according to the terms and in the language of the majority group. Similarly, 97.2% of posts by individual users on Weibo were in simplified Mandarin and no evidence was found of the other languages spoken in China, such as Tibetan, Uyghur or Mongol²⁴.

These results show that both Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China appear to be dominated by the majority language in both countries and that Weibo use in China is significantly skewed toward affluent populations both in terms of the population Internet users and the wider national population. However, while they provide useful quantitative background for understanding the extent to which these platforms provide spaces for marginalised voices or are dominated by existing

²³ Intercoder percentage agreement for tweet language on Twitter is 100%.

²⁴ Intercoder percentage agreement for post language on Weibo is 99.00% with an alpha of 0.66.

power holders, these results cannot speak to the actual content of speech acts on the platform, an identification of which is at the heart of this thesis question.

5.4. Commercial and political speech on microblogs

This thesis is particularly interested in the speech acts of individual Internet users in commercial online spaces. Thus, the posts of individual user accounts within this random sample over the four-week long period from 8 October to 4 November 2014 was examined. On Twitter, the average individual user posted 22 statuses per month, whereas the average Weibo user posted less than five (Table 5.3.). This finding accords with the discourses of information abundance in the U.S. and ideologically correctness in China identified in the previous chapter. Furthermore, a much larger number of posts by individuals on Weibo were forwards (59% compared to 39% retweets on Twitter), which accords with previous research on the platform. This suggests that Twitter is used more frequently for individual speech acts but Weibo for information dissemination.

The voices of verified users appeared to be far more prominent on Weibo with 29.5% of all posts by individual users being forwards of weibos originally posted by verified users. Just over half of all forwards by individual users were originally posted by verified users. This figure is perhaps not very surprising given that the percentage of accounts that are verified is much higher on Weibo, with 16 of the 627 randomly selected profiles on Weibo (2.6%) belonging to verified users, compared to none of the 717 Twitter profiles. This suggests that less than 0.14% of Twitter users are verified (this number may be much lower but the size of this sample is not large enough to establish the percentage of verified accounts given that none were found in the random sample). However, eight percent of all posts by individual users on Twitter (20.6% of retweets) were retweets of posts originally posted by verified users. This data suggests that elite (i.e. verified) users, who often also are prominent offline, have undue influence in setting agendas and discourse on these platforms for individual users.

Table 5.3. Summary of posts by individuals on Twitter and Weibo over a four-week period

	Twitter	Weibo
Number of users who posted at least once in the time period	551 ²⁵	569
Number of posts	48,698	10,462
Average number of posts per individual per week	22	5
Number of retweets/forwards	19,140	6,148
Percentage of posts that are retweets/forwards	39.3%	58.8%
Number of retweets/forwards from verified accounts	3,941	3,099
Percentage of individual users' posts that are retweets/forwards from verified accounts	8.06%	29.6%
Percentage of retweets/forwards that were originally posted by verified users	20.59%	50.41%

These quantitative data speak to the frequency of individual speech acts and the dominance of these speech acts by existing power holders. However, they cannot distinguish the frequency of commercial and political speech by individual platform users. In order to address the question of the different types of speech that individual microblog users engage in, a random sample of 500 posts on each platform from the randomly selected individual users identified in the previous section were coded as to the type of speech: personal, commercial, informational, political or spam.

Very little data exists concerning the nature of discourse on social networking sites in general or of online political speech in China. Given the difficulty of constructing a representative sample of users of these platforms, most research has focused on either trending topics or isolated case studies, which are interesting but not generalisable. Additionally, while studies, such as those conducted by the PEW

²⁵ One Twitter user posted during the data collection time but not during the four-week period that was chosen for analysis as data was collected during a buffer period of several days around the period chosen for analysis. This is the reason why there were 552 individual Twitter users in the random sample discussed in the previous section but only 551 who posted tweets during the four-week period of analysis.

Center, have yielded data on the level and nature of online political participation in the U.S., no such data exists in China where political speech is both more regulated and less well defined.

Based on existing research on Weibo trending topics such as that of Asur, Yu and Huberman (2011), it might be expected that levels of commercial speech would be higher on Weibo than on Twitter, which has been found, again based on the study of trending topics, to be primarily a news medium (Kwak et al., 2010a). What would be expected for levels of political speech is less clear. Many commentators expect that China's authoritarian context will lead to a curtailment of political speech online, particularly after the crackdown on online discourse that began in 2013 (S. Li, 2010; M. Moore, 2014). However, other studies have suggested that individuals in both contexts shy away from politics speech online (Xie & Jaeger, 2007). Additionally, the results of the previous chapter suggest that the emphasis on the use of social networking sites for political speech acts is actually stronger in China, as long as that speech occurs within the prescribed limits of the state-set common goal.

Whatever is the case, however, political speech would be predicted to make up only a small fraction of discourse online; Hindman (2009) found that only 0.12% of traffic went to political websites and, however hopeful research based on isolated case studies has made it seem, this idea that digital democracy is a myth due to its relatively low prevalence as a proportion of all online activities has become lore.

The results of the content analysis conducted on the random sample of individual posts on Twitter and Weibo largely accord with the above predictions with some notable differences. Commercial speech was found to be much more common among individual Chinese Weibo users, making up over one third of posts, compared to Twitter where commercial topics accounted for just under a quarter of individual speech acts by U.S. users (Table 5.4.)²⁶. However, the results for levels

²⁶ Intercoder percentage agreement for tweet topic under these broad categorisations is 80% on both Twitter and Weibo, with an alpha of 0.68 on Twitter and 0.72 on Weibo.

of political speech were quite surprising. Political speech makes up almost one in ten posts by individual Chinese Weibo users (9.4%), higher than on Twitter where political speech accounted for 6.8% of posts by U.S.-based users.

Table 5.4. Frequencies of different types of speech act by individual microblog users

	Twitter		Weibo		P-value of difference in speech rates [Fisher's exact test, two-tailed]
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	
Personal: Sharing information about the self, sending personal messages to other users	252	50.4%	106	21.2%	p < 0.0001
Commercial: Sharing information or opinions on entertainment, products and services or employment	121	24.2%	176	35.2%	p = 0.0002
Informational: Sharing non-political content including jokes, sayings, life hacks, information on daily life	92	18.4%	169	33.8%	p < 0.0001
Political: Expressing an opinion, sharing information or commenting on society, social practices, the format political process, current affairs or political events or attempting to exert influence on states, companies or organisations	34	6.8%	47	9.4%	p = 0.1639
Spam	1	0.2%	2	0.4%	p = 1
Total	500	100%	500	100%	

This result is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, political speech on both platforms is higher than might have been expected, based on Hindman's research (which was conducted before the rise of social networking sites) or on studies of trending topics on both platforms such as that by Asur et al.. However, it is not necessarily prudent to compare these percentages with previous research because the definitions used for political speech may be different; however, these results are valuable for their internal consistency (i.e. that the same definition for political speech was applied in two very different political systems).

Although the size of the difference between the percentage of individual speech acts that concern political topics on both platforms is not statistically significant in this sample, what the results of this analysis do show is that individual political

speech acts are no lower on Weibo than on Twitter despite much higher levels of commercial speech and an authoritarian political system.

Two other major differences are found between the types of speech acts that individual users in the U.S. and China engage in on microblogs. Firstly, in line with general ideas about the U.S. as a much more individualised society, the sharing of personal information was more than twice as prevalent on Twitter than on Weibo. Although Twitter is a public medium (or is at least public for all the accounts included in this sample), half of all individual tweets share personal information directed at a limited audience. While this practice also occurs on Weibo, it is much less frequent. This is evidence of a much greater conflation of personal and public/political spheres on Twitter than on Weibo.

In contrast, Weibo is used much more frequently to share informational non-political content, which includes the kinds of jokes and viral content that Asur et al. (2011) found to be prevalent on Weibo in their study of trending topics but also general informational content concerning daily practices, such as exercise, food or family life. Taken together these differences are evidence of a greater public orientation in discourse on Weibo.

These findings provide further evidence against the hypothesis that commercialisation is negative for rates political speech in that the platform with higher levels of commercial speech (Weibo) had no lower and perhaps even higher levels of political speech. The high level of commercial speech found on Weibo and the greater space devoted to commercial content on the platform described in the previous chapter, do not appear to detract from rates of political speech. Powerful state and societal discourses in China about the potential for these spaces to act as venues for political speech, the greater lack of offline spaces for political speech and the greater communal orientation evidenced in the content of user posts, may mitigate the hypothesised distracting effects of commercial forces, content and messages on the frequency of individual political speech acts on Weibo.

5.5. User interactions with commercial and political speech

The frequency of different types of individual speech acts is only part of the story of political speech on microblogs, as it does not take into account the important functionalities of social networking sites that allow users to interact with published information and the existence of users as part of an online social network. These aspects of speech on microblogs are important because, in particular, there is a big difference between what is said and what is heard online. The previous section looked at what is said but an analysis of following and interaction data can shed light on what is heard.

In order to address this question, two aspects of the data are analysed. Firstly, interaction data (on retweeting, forwarding, commenting and favouriting) was collected on each of the 1000 coded posts (several months after posting to ensure that potential interactions with the information had already terminated)²⁷. Additionally, quantitative data concerning the friendship and following connections of the individuals who posted one of the posts in the random sample are examined.

On both platforms, individuals who posted political statuses within the random sample had fewer followers than average compared to all accounts that posted statuses in the random sample, with this difference more dramatic on Twitter. However, there is no significant difference between the number of accounts followed or the number of followers of those who were found to post political or commercial statuses and the average for all users who posted statuses in the random sample (Table 5.5.)²⁸.

²⁷ This interaction data was available for all 500 of the coded Weibo posts but by the time that this data was collected 100 (20%) of the Twitter posts were no longer available: for five the originally posting user had been suspended, for 19 the user had apparently converted their profile to private in the (relatively long) time since data collection and for 77 the status had been deleted either by the user or because the user had deleted their profile.

²⁸ When comparing friends and followers of those who posted about politics to the site average, users who posted commercial or political posts in the random selection are compared to the average for all users whose posts were in the random sample rather than the original list of randomly selected users because users who post more frequently are, by default, overrepresented when examining a random selection of posts.

Table 5.5. Average number of friends and followers of users who post about political and commercial topics compared to the platform average

	Twitter		Weibo	
	Number accounts followed	Number of followers	Number accounts followed	Number of followers
Average of all users whose posts were in the random sample	506	574	230	298
Average of all users who posted about commercial topics in the random sample	625	494	249	254
p-value of difference [two-tailed t-test]	0.93	0.80	0.58	0.54
Average of all users who posted about political topics in the random sample	400	321	206	262
p-value of difference [two-tailed t-test]	0.57	0.37	0.78	0.59

In terms of user interaction with posts, individual user posts (i.e. not retweets) that concerned political content had a higher than average number of retweets on both platforms (Table 5.6.). However, none of the differences between levels of retweeting and forwarding on original posts of different types were statistically significant. In terms of user interaction with the original retweeted and forwarded posts that individual users in the random sample retweeted or forwarded, on Twitter both political and commercial retweeted posts had lower levels of retweeting than average and on Weibo both political and commercial forwarded posts had higher levels of forwarding than average. However within these results only the difference between levels of forwarding of commercial and non-commercial posts on Weibo is statistically significant, which is likely associated with the frequency of competitions that encourage users to forward commercial posts in order to potentially win a prize. This pattern of commercial speech is discussed further in later sections.

Table 5.6. User interaction with different types of posts

	Average number of retweets/forwards of individual users' posts		Average number of retweets/forwards of originals of retweeted/forwarded posts	
	Twitter	Weibo	Twitter	Weibo
Average across all posts in random sample	0.21 (n=266)	0.03 (n=198)	2431 (n=133)	19654 (n=302)
Average across all political posts	0.23 (n=13)	0.13 (n=9)	1185 (n=16)	22602 (n=38)
Average across all commercial posts	0.13 (n=53)	0.02 (n=54)	1174 (n=39)	28949 (n=122)

This analysis of user interactions with individual accounts that post about commercial and political topics and individual posts about political and commercial topics has shown little significant within platform differences. However, one important thing to note about these results is the magnitude of the difference between the levels of user interaction on Twitter and Weibo. The average retweeted post on Twitter had 2,400 retweets compared to 19,600 for forwards on Weibo, demonstrating that posts on Weibo appear to reach a much larger audience than on Twitter. This accords with previous research that compared forwarding networks of news stories on Weibo with those previously found on Twitter (Bolsover, 2013).

However, these numbers are reversed in the original posts, with the average number of retweets 0.21 on Twitter and 0.03 on Weibo. These results align with the idea of a more communitarian style of interaction (focused around hot/popular topics and an overall (presumed) shared goal) on Weibo where users more frequently participate in forwarding popular messages. This contrasts with the more individual style of interaction on Twitter where users more frequently post original content and, when they retweet, retweet original states posted by other individuals more frequently than Weibo users.

5.6. The interaction between affluence and political speech among individual microblog users

One way of operationalising the difficult issue of representation and commercialisation online is to compare the relative affluence of the geographic

locations in which the offline microblog user lives, a strategy that allows within-country comparisons to be made between users. Users in more affluent areas of both countries could be expected to have greater levels of exposure to commercial forces and to spend more time in commercial spaces. Both the U.S. and China are large and diverse countries (one of the reasons that they were chosen as cases of comparison) with significant regional differences, including the extent and nature of commercialisation. If it is the case that commercialisation is negative for political speech, then it would be expected that levels of political speech would be lower in more affluent areas of a particular country (and that rates of commercial speech would be higher). If it is the case that commercialisation was less negative, perhaps even positive, in authoritarian countries, then it would be expected that the differences in levels of political speech between more and less affluent areas would be less pronounced in China than in the U.S. This would contrast with the resource view of political participation (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995), which sees political participation and affluence as correlated because a certain number of resources (education, free time, information etc.) are necessary to participate in the political process. However, the Internet was potentially seen as lowering barriers to participation and allowing individuals with fewer resources to participate (more equally) in politics; a hypothesis that has been backed up by some research in the U.S. context (Krueger, 2002).

An analysis of the data collected in this thesis appears to broadly accord with the resource view. The percentage of microblog posts that concern political topics are above average in areas of above average affluence and below average in areas of below average affluence in both the U.S. and China (Table 5.7.). However, these differences are not statistically significant. This means that although it cannot be concluded that posting about politics online is more common among users located in more affluent areas, it is clear that the level of political posting is no lower in more affluent areas; this provides evidence against the hypothesis that higher levels of affluence (which could be seen as an indicator of higher levels of

commercialisation in terms of individuals exposure to commercial forces and time spent in commercial spaces) is negative for rates of political speech.

Table 5.7. Rates of commercial and political speech on Twitter and Weibo by relative regional affluence

		Twitter									
		Num. of users	Num. of posts over month	Number of retweets/ forwards over month	Num. posts per user	Percentage of posts	Expected number of posts in random sample of 500	Expected number of political posts based on platform average	Observed number of political posts	Expected number of commercial posts based on platform average	Observed number of commercial posts
Most affluent regions	Average per capita income greater than 110% of national average	90	10990	6017	122.11	22.54%	113	8	10	27	46
Above average regions	Average per capita income between 100% and 110% of national average	180	11229	4208	62.38	23.03%	115	8	9	28	20
Below average regions	Average per capita income between 90% and 100% of national average	116	9636	3277	83.07	19.77%	99	7	10	24	21
Less affluent regions	Average per capita income less than 90% of national average	127	8005	2770	63.03	16.42%	82	6	1	20	17
Cannot identify state		39	8889	2868	227.92	18.23%	91	6	4	22	17
TOTAL		552	48749	19140			500	34	34	121	121
								P-value (Chi2 test)	0.15004834	P-value (Chi2 test)	0.00146566
		Weibo									
Most affluent regions	Average per capita income greater than 140% of national average	124	1699	837	13.70	16.24%	81	8	9	29	23
Above average regions	Average per capita income between 100% and 140% of national average	205	3343	1953	16.31	31.95%	160	15	18	56	48
Below average regions	Average per capita income between 80% and 100% of national average	121	2446	1527	20.21	23.38%	117	11	9	41	41
Less affluent regions	Average per capita income less than 80% of national average	119	2974	1831	24.99	28.43%	142	13	11	50	64
TOTAL		569	10462	6148			500	47	47	176	176
								P-value (Chi2 test)	0.70639554	P-value (Chi2 test)	0.09771103

An interesting and statistically significant pattern is found when the proportion of posts that are commercial relative to the platform average are examined for different groups of users based on the affluence of the area in which they are located. On Twitter, users in the most affluent areas post more about commercial topics and users in less affluent areas post less about commercial topics. Individual, monthly-active, U.S.-based Twitter users located in the most affluent areas of the country (where per capita disposable income exceeds 110% of the national average) post almost 75% more frequently about commercial topics than average and users in the least affluent areas (where per capita income is less than 90% of the national average) post 25% less frequently about commercial topics than average.

On Weibo, the opposite is true. Users in the least affluent areas post more about commercial topics and users in the most affluent areas post less (as a proportion of all their posts). (Although the significance level of this result is less than for the Twitter sample, it is still significant at the 90% level). This difference is likely associated with the different manifestations of commercial speech between the two platforms that are discussed in the next chapter, in which commercial messages on Weibo are predominantly competitions. Users in the least affluent areas of China might be more likely than those in affluent areas to participate in the practice of forwarding commercial messages in order to be in with a chance of winning a prize. In contrast, commercial speech on Twitter is more commonly an original post in which the user is constructing a self-identity through their commercial choices. Users in more affluent areas might be more ready and able to engage in this kind of commercial speech as part of a construction of individual online identities on Twitter that aligns more strongly with consumer positions.

These data provide little evidence for the hypothesis that commercialisation is negative for rates of online political speech, when that commercialisation is operationalised based on the general affluence of the area in which that user is located. Users in more affluent areas of both countries posted no less frequently about political topics and perhaps even more frequently than users in less affluent

areas. This result aligns with the resource theory of participation in politics in which access to resources and intermediate variables, such as level of education and social class, are seen as influencing a person's ability to participate in the political process. While this chapter cannot address this aspect of the link between affluence, commercialisation and political speech, these demographic variables will be considered in the analysis based on the survey of Internet users presented in Chapter Seven.

5.7. Summary: Commercialisation, representation and individual speech on microblogs

This chapter has presented data concerning the levels and nature of commercialisation and political speech on microblogs in different political systems based on a random sample of monthly-active, U.S.-based Twitter users and of monthly-active mainland China-based Weibo users and their posts over a four-week period. In terms of addressing the overall research question of how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems, this chapter makes several key contributions. Firstly, it provides the first ever (to the knowledge of the author) assessment of the frequency of political speech by individual users on either Twitter or Weibo, since it is based on a random sample of user accounts rather than an analysis of trending topics or case studies of isolated incidents. This analysis finds that levels of political speech are higher than might be expected on both platforms and that levels of political speech are higher (although not significantly so) on Weibo than on Twitter. This is a surprising finding that supports the hypothesis that commercial social networking sites might be more positive for political speech in authoritarian than democratic contexts. However, the actual content of these speech acts (and how they align with dominant discourses and normative theories of political speech) is an important addition to these quantitative findings that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Additionally, this analysis has suggested that the nature of commercialisation in these two contexts might be very different. This is a relatively surprising finding

given the conclusions of the previous chapter that the way in which users were constructed with respect to their position as consumer by the two platforms' discourses and affordances was relatively similar. Rates of commercial speech were significantly higher on Weibo than on Twitter. Furthermore, users in less affluent areas of China posted commercial tweets significantly more frequently on Weibo while, in contrast, users in the most affluent areas of the U.S. posted more about commercial topics on Twitter.

The analysis of the entities represented on these platforms points to a different user base. On Twitter, almost one fifth of accounts are owned by commercial or civic entities and the distribution of individual account holders mirrors the population of Internet users. In contrast on Weibo, 99% of accounts are owned by individual users, who are concentrated in the most affluent areas of the country.

When these findings about the quantitative distribution of both account holders and speech topics are taken together, they paint a picture of Twitter as a space that mirrors the offline contours of power and discourse in the U.S. and in which the majority of speech by individual users is personal. In contrast, the predominance of individual accounts on Weibo is not so much indicative of an individualised platform as a public platform in which certain types of users come together to engage in more socially orientated speech, as evidenced by much larger forwarding networks, lower rates of personal speech and higher rates of informational (and potentially also political) speech. This appears less likely to mirror offline power structures in China and may this provide a more substantive venue for speech that might seek to affect or affect the balance of power in society, despite and even potentially because of higher levels of commercial speech.

These results are particularly important because they are based on a random sample and thus can be generalised to the underlying population of active, non-private platform users in both countries during the period of study. However, the actual nature of these speech acts (and particularly the extent to which the speech acts categorised as political might affect or seek to affect the balance of power in

society and accord with existing theories of political speech) cannot be addressed using these quantitative methodologies. The next chapter extends this inquiry by qualitatively analysing the content of different types of speech acts, examined quantitatively in this chapter, to provide a description and explanation of the actual nature of speech by individual users on both platforms based on this random sample of users and their posts.

The landscape of individual online speech acts

6.1. Chapter overview

The previous chapter presented a quantitative analysis of a random selection of users and their posts on Twitter and Weibo, finding that levels of commercial speech are significantly higher on the Chinese microblog. Levels of political speech are higher but not significantly so, indicating that the commercial and authoritarian context in which Weibo is embedded does not appear to have a negative effect on rates of political speech.

However, this analysis was unable to differentiate between different types of commercial and political speech or speak to the content of these speech acts. This chapter, thus, undertakes a qualitative analysis of the content of the individual speech acts in this random sample, in particular, evaluating the content of commercial speech acts to illuminate the nature of commercialisation on these platforms and comparing the content of political speech acts to existing typologies of and theories about the nature of political speech in the two contexts under consideration.

This chapter finds that, although the frequency of political speech on these two platforms is similar, there is a large difference in the actual nature of this speech. Posts on Weibo have an active-orientation, point to the development of an online civil society, challenge dominant discourses, engage in discussion about the structure and contours of the existing political system and provide and disseminate new information that might not otherwise be available. In contrast, political speech on Twitter is dominated by individual, symbolic speech acts or retweets of information from established providers. This speech may have the potential to affect the balance of power in society through symbolic acts of ‘voice’ and in contributing to setting an agenda for online attention and discussion; however, political speech on Twitter shows little intention of actively seeking to do so and it does not align with normative ideas about how (online) political speech should look.

6.2. Theoretical and methodological overview

The previous chapter presented a quantitative picture of microblog use in the U.S. and China and provided two pieces of data that are key to answering the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems: namely, the representation of different types of speakers and the frequency of different types of speech acts on these platforms. Both of these data were based on content analyses, firstly, of a random selection of monthly-active user accounts and, secondly, of a random selection of posts by individual users.

The previous chapter divided the content of these posts into five categories (personal, commercial, informational, political and spam). These broad categories were useful for conducting quantitative analyses of speech on these platforms (for instance in comparing the association between or levels of user interaction with commercial and political posts). However, an analysis of the actual content of these posts necessitates a more detailed categorisation, in which each of these categories is divided into several subtypes (Table 6.1.)²⁹. These quantitative findings regarding the nature of individual speech on Twitter and Weibo are used to structure and support the qualitative analysis in this chapter, which focuses on two key questions about speech on microblogs: who is speaking and what is being said?

An understanding of who is speaking is important in terms of assessing the extent to which these commercial platforms might redistribute power over agendas and discourses to networked individuals and provide spaces for minority voices or, conversely, whether discourse on these platforms is dominated by particular interests. Arguments have been made in both directions regarding this point, with some arguing that the commercialisation of online spaces leads to dominance by established power holders (Dahlberg, 2005; Hindman, 2009), while others find that, particularly in authoritarian contexts, commercial platforms can provide

²⁹ These, more detailed, categories of post topic were verified by a second coder (a native Chinese speaker who speaks fluent English and is familiar with both political contexts). The percentage agreement for these categories was 71% on Twitter and 68% on Weibo, with a Krippendorff's alpha of 0.66 on both platforms.

spaces for minority voices and foster the emergence of an online public sphere (Howard et al., 2011; Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Yang, 2009). In order to assess the types of voices represented in online speech, a content analysis was conducted on the original authors of all of the posts in this random sample, based on the same categories that were used for account type in the previous chapter.

Table 6.1. A more nuanced picture of post content on Twitter and Weibo

	Twitter		Weibo	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Personal (of which):	252	50.4%	106	21.2%
Sharing information about the self	145	29%	96	19.2%
Personal message to another	108	21.6%	10	2%
Commercial (of which):	121	24.2%	176	35.2%
Entertainment	82	16.4%	79	15.8%
Products and services	34	6.8%	97	19.4%
Employment	5	1%	0	0%
Informational (of which):	92	18.4%	169	33.8%
Sayings or visuals, inspirational or philosophical content, astrology or random/helpful facts (life hacks etc.)	28	5.6%	99	19.8%
Viral video, joke or meme (not otherwise in economic, political/social or sports/entertainment categories)	44	8.8%	46	9.2%
Sharing general, offsite non-political information – blog posts etc.	19	3.8%	24	4.8%
Political (of which):	34	6.8%	47	9.4%
Expressing an opinion or commenting on society or social practices	16	3.2%	15	3.0%
Sharing news or information or expressing an opinion about current affairs or political events	15	3.0%	14	2.8%
Expressing an opinion on formal political processes	2	0.4%	6	1.2%
Attempting to exert influence on states, companies, organisations or individuals	0	0.0%	11	2.2%
Political humour	1	0.2%	3	0.6%
Spam	1	0.2%	2	0.4%
Total	500	100%	500	100%

An understanding of what is being said by individual users of these platforms is one of the most crucial components in answering the question of how the commercialisation of online platforms might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech, because this is the only way in which a picture of what political

speech is actually occurring in commercial online spaces can be elucidated. Many scholars have critiqued the nature of political speech (or lack thereof) in commercial online spaces (Asur, Yu & Huberman, 2011; Dahlberg, 2001; Morozov, 2013) and others have argued that the definitions and theories of political speech need to be updated to account for the new forms of political speech emerging in these commercial online spaces (Fox, 2013; Papacharissi, 2010; Zuckerman, 2013b). However, these efforts are somewhat premature until a picture of the nature of actually occurring speech on microblogs has been established, based on a random sample of user posts.

Thus, this chapter analyses the nature of the individual online political speech acts identified in this random sample of user posts on Twitter and Weibo under existing debates about how to characterise political speech. These arguments are broken into four categories: the symbolic or instrumental nature of this speech, the impetuses behind this speech (as voluntary, mobilised, forced, legal or illegal), the nature of intention and effects of this speech and the speakers and targets of these political speech acts.

This description of the actual nature of political speech in commercial online spaces in the U.S. and China is the final step for which much of the preceding analysis has been laying the groundwork. However, it is important, before considering the nature of the political speech acts in these commercial online spaces, to examine, briefly, the nature of the other types of individual speech act on these platforms, which provide an illustration of the commercial and social context in which these political speech acts are embedded.

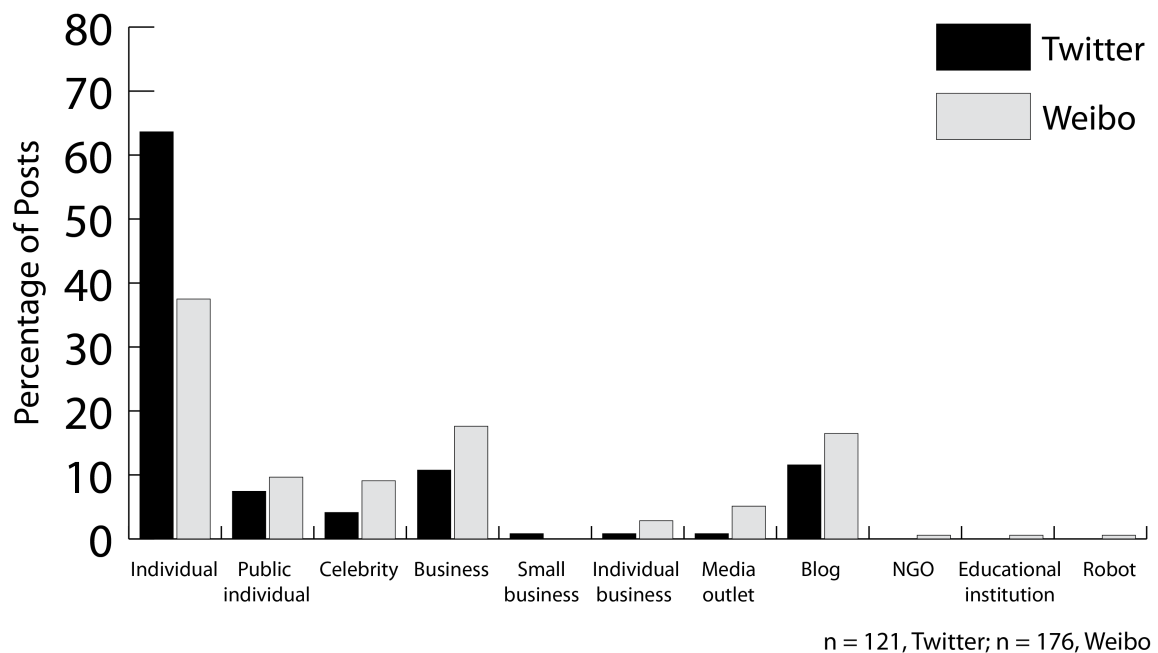
6.3. Personal content versus competitions: the differences in the nature of commercial speech on Twitter and Weibo

The previous chapter found that commercial speech was significantly higher on Weibo: 35% of individual speech acts compared to 24% on Twitter. Within the category of commercial speech, Twitter and Weibo users post about entertainment topics with about the same frequency. However, the difference in the frequency of

commercial speech on these two platforms is due to the difference in the rates of posting about products or services, which also takes a very different form, on the two platforms.

On Weibo, almost one in five posts concern products or services (19%) while on Twitter this figure is one in fifteen (7%). Additionally, a much greater percentage of the commercial posts on Twitter are original (rather than retweets); 63% of the commercial posts and 73% of the posts about products and services on Twitter were originally written by individual users. In contrast, only 37% of the commercial posts and 35% of the posts about products and services on Weibo were originally written by the posting user (Figures 6.1. and 6.2.).

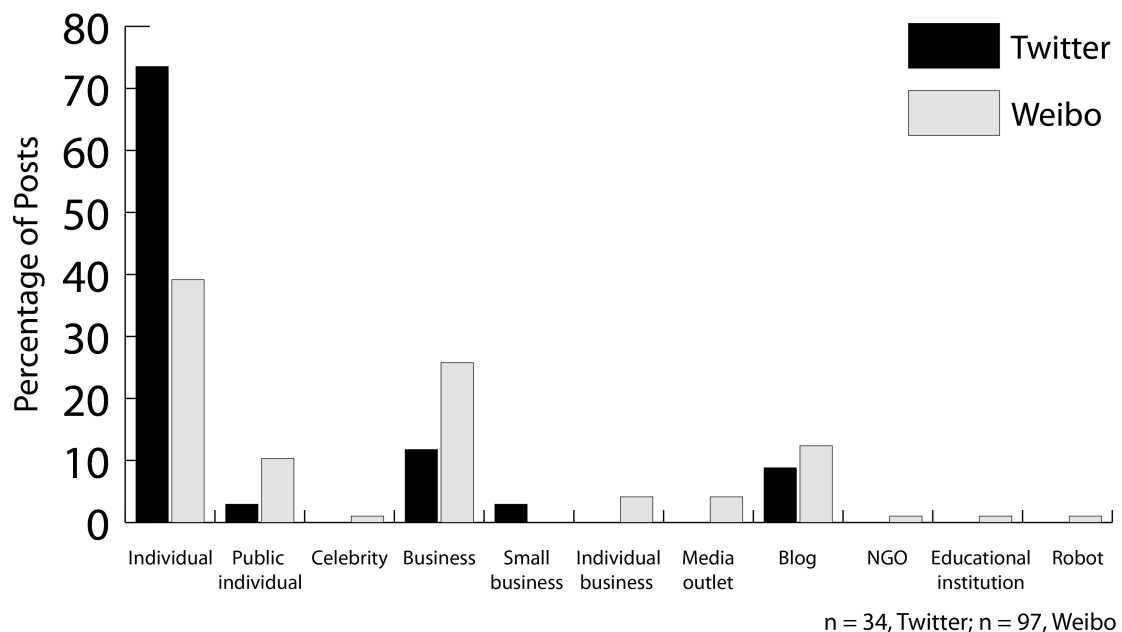
Figure 6.1. Original authors of individual posts about commercial topics on Twitter and Weibo



In the posts about products and services on Twitter, individual users tended to speak about themselves as consumers, shaping their identities and lives through their consumptive choices. For instance, several original posts specifically spoke about branded products and about how these products were integrated into the daily lives of the individual speakers. In two cases, the brand name could be deleted or replaced by a more generic alternative and the only thing lost would be the additional layer of meaning imparted by the branded image conjured by the

social signals of the underlying brand name. For instance, the tweet “Olive Garden with my mom [smiley face with red cheeks]” puts the emphasis of the communication on the idea that the author and their mother were in a particular commercial establishment. Similarly, the tweet “Only bought Addidas shoes tomrw were getting more clothing ;)” puts the emphasis on the brand of shoes purchased, which when brand is being fore fronted, colours the interpretation of the shopping experience³⁰.

Figure 6.2. Original authors of individual posts about products and services on Twitter and Weibo



What is important about the inclusion of brands in these tweets is that the authors are choosing to define their online communications and their communications about their daily lives in terms of branded experiences. This practice of mentioning brand names is also important to understand from the point of view of the structure of these platforms, outlined in Chapter Four, in which Twitter benefits from collecting commercially valuable data about consumer opinions and sells this data to companies as a way of monitoring consumer opinion. Data about user posts

³⁰ The content of all of the user posts quoted in this chapter are paraphrased in a way that preserves the original meaning of the post in order to protect the anonymity of site users.

concerning specific brands are much more valuable to the platform than data about the general category of product or service into which these brands fall.

Several other tweets explicitly spoke about how the identity of the author or of individuals in general could be built through their consumptive choices. For instance, one user posted “Taking my cinnamon broom to bed with me tonight because it makes me feel like a real wytch [emoji of smiling face]”, indicating, albeit jokingly, that the use and consumption of particular products were important in their self-image. Similarly, another user posted “You can’t buy class but you can buy @CountessLuAnn's secondhand items #RHONY” (Countess Luann Lesseps is a television personality in the reality show *Real Housewives of New York* who had also launched a clothing collection). This tweet references this idea that consumption is thought of but cannot actually achieve certain outcomes in terms of self-identity but that it can achieve other non-distinct outcomes in terms of aligning oneself with not only the style of a particular subgroup but the distillation of that subgroup through first a reality TV show and then a spinoff clothing line. This post signals that it knows of the adage that money can’t buy happiness but pokes fun at this in saying it can still buy a great deal.

The nature of posts about products and services on Weibo show a very different orientation toward individual consumer roles. Of the 97 posts on Weibo that concerned products and services, 63 were retweets, 20 were original and 14 were automated. Thus, unlike on Twitter where more than two thirds of posts about products and services were originally penned by that user, only one in five of the posts on Weibo were. When the content of posts on the platforms are considered, the difference in frequency of posts about commercial topics on the two platforms appears mostly due to the very common practice of businesses offering random prize drawings to users who forward (and sometimes also follow and tag friends in) promotional messages. Of the 63 forwarded Weibo posts, 41 were of the form of a competition that required users to forward the post in order to be entered in a competition, unusually with the prize of an iPhone. Eight percent of the total number of statuses posted by individual users are competitions of this form. This is

a relatively surprising finding given the small number of business accounts on Weibo (approximately one in three hundred monthly active, non-robot accounts), which suggests that commercial activity on Weibo may be concentrated in a small number of companies.

The prevalence of these online competitions may explain the finding in the previous chapter that commercial speech is more common among platform users in less affluent regions of China (compared to Twitter where commercial speech is more common among users in more affluent regions); Weibo users who do not already own these high-status items, such as iPhones, may be more likely to participate in these competitions. This practice is reflected in the structure of Weibo; the platform provides the functionality, through the Weibo wallet and a platform-internal currency, for companies to easily administer these competitions. This is further evidence of a much more gamefied experience on Weibo that focuses on quantity, hotness and mass. Individuals who participate in these competitions tend either to include the smallest amount of information possible in their forward (either the default message (转发微博) or simply tagging the requisite number of others) or to express the sentiment that they would like to own the product being offered as the prize.

When the content of those 20 weibos about products and services that were original (i.e. that were not either retweets or automated) were considered, five of them were actually posts as part the kinds competitions described above (that were tracked via hashtag rather than repost). This means that in total 9.2% of individual posts on Weibo are made as part of competitions, which accounts for the difference in the frequency of posts about commercial topics on these platforms.

The internalisation of consumer roles that is present in the Twitter posts and the presentation of consumptive choices as part of a user's self-identity is not present on Weibo. Of 15 original weibos about products and services that were not competitions, ten were links or directions to a specific product or service, with little added personal content. In contrast to the public, performative nature of

posts about the consumption of products and services on Twitter, Weibo users focused on the individual and personal aspects of consumption³¹. For instance, one Weibo user posted three pictures of what appear to be handmade pizzas and wrote “guess which one is mine” and another wrote “The seafood cakes were incredibly fresh [emoji for gluttony]. I love the cook who made them [emoji for love you]” along with six pictures of the food at an unnamed restaurant. This post provides an interesting contrast with the Twitter post stating that the user was having dinner with her mother at Olive Garden. The Twitter post focuses on the nationwide brand; the Weibo posts focuses experience of consuming the food items and the individual cook that made them.

Overall this suggests a very different nature of commercialisation on the two platforms. Within the individual users posts about products and services in this random sample, the posts on Twitter suggest that these users have internalised consumer identities to a much greater extent than those on Weibo and use the consumption of specific branded products to perform these identities online (something that is extremely economically valuable for the platform). Although this finding is based on a relatively small (albeit representative) sample, this aligns with the practice, identified in Chapter Four, of Twitter users being made complicit in their own commodification and afforded a choice of how they are marketed to (but not ultimately to opt out of this process). This position of the user on Twitter aligns with Habermas’ critiques of commercialisation in that the individual is reconstituted as a consumer within these commercial spaces dominated by commercial discourses and that there is no physical or conceptual separation between the commercial sphere and the spaces in which it might be hoped that an online public sphere might develop.

In contrast, most (68%) of commercial speech on Weibo takes the form of participation in competitions. This aligns with the idea of hierarchy identified in

³¹ This individual and personal approach to consumption on Weibo contrasts with a public, performative approach to consumption on Twitter that is even more interesting given the overall greater focus on the individual and personal on Twitter compared to the focus on public and society on Weibo, which is discussed in the next section.

Chapter Four (compared to ideas of equality and individuality that underlie the Twitter posts). When Weibo users post about products and services they mostly do so from a position of lower power (participating in competitions or posting a link to a products) and when they do choose to create unsolicited, original posts about products and services these posts do not focus on a particular brand. On Weibo, the commercial sphere is more separated from the private sphere and consumption is less often seen as a performance of self-identify. Although the content of political speech acts has not yet been considered, this position of commercial entities on Weibo might still be compatible with ideas of an online public sphere and the development of civil society online, given that the Weibo users in this random sample do not seem, despite the affordances of the platform that would facilitate this, to be adopting individualised, commercial constructions within this commercial space.

6.4. Individuality versus community: the different orientations of Twitter and Weibo users

While users on Twitter often express their identity through their consumptive choices, users on Weibo tend to express their identity through sayings. This means of self-expression is general (a fact enhanced by the lack of use of personal pronouns on Weibo (Bolsover, 2016)), draws from historical and cultural understandings and demonstrates a greater level of identification of the self as a member of society (rather than an individual or consumer). This difference can be seen in the difference between two common forms of online speech on the two platforms, which is personal and individual on Twitter and general on Weibo.

Half of individual user posts on Twitter concerned personal content, either sharing information about the self or sending a message to another user. This type of speech was much less frequent on Weibo, constituting only 21% of individual user posts (compared to 50% on Twitter). In contrast, public speech orientated toward a wider society (sayings, inspirational or philosophical content, random helpful facts etc.) was much more common on Weibo, constituting 20% of individual user posts compared to only 6% on Twitter.

Of the 99 posts that fell into this category on Weibo, 62 (63%) were forwards and 36 original (one was automated). Typical forwarded posts of this form were general, inspirational statements that focused on hopefulness, emotion, love, purpose in life and strength in hardship. This manner of speaking in positive, generalities was replicated by original user posts in this category, i.e. as well as commonly forwarding messages aimed at a general readership, Weibo users also choose to speak about their daily lives and personal emotions using this collectively orientated frame (Table 6.2.)

Table 6.2. Examples of sayings, inspirational or philosophical content on Weibo (20% of individual posts on the platform)

Forward: Everything will be fine, if not today, then that day will come.
Original post: Life • is just finding a little pleasure everyday • amusing yourself • goodnight • sweet dreams [laughing emoji]
Forward: A person may set loose requirements for themselves. Every day they might choose the comfortable life but they cannot be comfortable in the long term. For instance, every day they might eat to their heart's content, but in the long term they will become fat and not be able to wear beautiful clothes. Do you want long-term comfort or short-term comfort? This is your choice.
Original post: Isn't great talent the biggest liar? Every time a commitment is given, a variety of reasons are given to delay. You knew that you were being tricked but there was a glimmer of hope "but what is this is realised?" Betrayed by peers behind their back and still just saying forget it; having known each other so long and yet still cannot truly understand the other; adults are their own closest friends but is this really OK?
Forward: There will always be someone who can easily achieve what you have worked very hard for for a long time.

Previous research comparing trending topics on microblogs concluded that Weibo is dominated by frivolous content compared to Twitter that is more of a news medium (Asur et al., 2011). However, the analysis of a random selection of individual speech acts on these platforms does not support this conclusion. The percentage of posts that are viral or memetic content are roughly similar on both platforms, as are the percentage of posts that are political and the percentage of posts that share information about political or current events. There may be a difference in trending topics, perhaps driven by mass competitions on Weibo, but

this is not actually reflected in differences in what individual users use the platform to speak about.

Similarly, these data do not support previous research on Twitter based on trending topics that concluded that the platform was a news media rather than a social network (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010). Although it may be the case that Twitter trending topics are dominated by news and current events content, individual users primarily use Twitter as a social media, publishing personal information about themselves or sending personal messages to other users.

It appears that there might be a cultural dimension to how sentiments about everyday life are expressed that aligns with individual versus collective societal orientations. Of the 26 posts on Twitter coded as sayings, inspirational content or general information, nine (35%) were in Spanish, which is far above the platform average of 5% Spanish language posts by monthly-active, U.S.-based individual users. Both China and central American Spanish speaking countries are seen as collectively orientated societies, while the U.S. is seen as an individually orientated society (Hofstede, no date). Communications about daily life were more commonly expressed (in English) on Twitter in personal messages that named other users (Table 6.3.).

Table 6.3. Examples of personal messages to other users on Twitter (21% of individual posts on the platform)

Original post: @NathanSmith hehehe you only have one life yeah
Original post: @MTSmith1234 Mom? She’s just angry all of the time which makes it difficult for her to think clearly. That’s just the way things are.
Original post: @jaydenjames tell your mom i ain’t shy i just don’t like other guys around my woman lol dont tell her

This difference in the way of speaking about the self and dally life aligns with and extends the ideas of equality and hierarchy identified, in Chapter Four, in discourses about ideal spaces for speech. On Twitter, individual U.S. users most frequently use the platform to send personal messages about non-public matters that are very individualised. Although Twitter markets itself as a site for public, political speech, this does not align with its interests as a commercial entity. The

content of individual U.S. user's posts on Twitter shows that the platform is a space for communicatory acts of self-definition and personal communication rather than for publically orientated speech.

In contrast, Weibo users send very few statuses that appear to concern private matters; when daily life is described it is done in general terms that make this speech seem part of a wider society, typified by hope, emotion, hard work and shared goals. Although this speech is not political in content, it is of relevance to understanding the nature of political speech on Weibo because it speaks to assumptions about the population of platform users as members of society with shared goals and life experiences (in line with the discourse of shared goals and overall societal ideological direction identified in Chapter Four).

6.5. Symbolic versus instrumental: the active-orientation of political speech on Weibo

The distinction between symbolic and instrumental political speech and debates over the value of symbolic political speech are particularly relevant to the study of online spaces. Many definitions of what would constitute political participation require that this have an active orientation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Conge, 1988; Parry, Moyser & Day, 1992; Verba & Nie, 1987). However, likely associated with the linguistic turn in politics, some have argued that passively holding attitudes, values or opinions on certain topics should also be understood as constituting a form of political participation (Conway, 2000; Krueger, 2002; Schudson, 2002) and that the symbolic expression of these opinions, such as through changing one's profile picture in support of a particular cause, constitute important forms of political speech (Zuckerman, 2013b). Critics of the negative effects of commercialisation have argued that the commercialisation of online spaces leads to symbolic, 'slacktivist' acts replacing instrumental political action (Morozov, 2013). However, others have argued that political speech in these spaces facilitates instrumental offline actions (González-Bailón, Borge-Holthoefer, Rivero & Moreno, 2011; Howard et al., 2011).

The content analysis of a random sample of political speech on Twitter and Weibo shows that a significantly higher percentage of individual speech acts on Weibo are associated with instrumental political action [$p = 0.0009$, two-tailed Fishers exact test]. More than one in every fifty individual user posts on Weibo encourages others to take some form of political action (2.2% of total posts on the platform) (Table 6.4.). In contrast, no posts that attempted to exert influence on states, companies, organisations or individuals were found in the random sample of 500 individual users posts on Twitter. This accords with the greater emphasis on action as a form of political speech in China identified in Chapter Four as opposed to the information-based, informed citizen discourse in the U.S.

These posts also show, perhaps surprisingly given China's less developed civil society and the lower number of civil society organisations on Weibo, relatively high levels of interaction between individual users who address others as members of a common civil society and between users and civil society organisations (such as media outlets and NGOs).

The author of the post about the earthquake (the final weibo in Table 6.4.) clearly sees publication on Weibo as a means to raise awareness about issues that might not otherwise be covered. He posts photos of the damage to his home, reports of neglect and corruption in the area affected by the earthquake and reaches out to both other Weibo users and regional media organisations in an attempt to make them aware of this issue. This posting of photos, facilitated by Weibo's greater multimedia integration, is part of an apparent culture of providing evidence on Weibo. This was also common on the Gongyi Platform on which users requesting donations would often include a great deal of documentary evidence of need, such as photos of hospital bills, children's school reports or the living conditions of impoverished elderly. This practice seems associated with the idea that online speech and action on Weibo is linked more strongly with offline identities and realities than on Twitter and is also evidence that this information on Weibo may not be available in other media.

Table 6.4. Examples of action orientated political posts on Weibo (2.2% of individual posts on the platform)

Forward: To all kind men and women! If you see underage people homeless and begging in our streets, please don't give them money, take the time to use your cell phone camera to snap a picture and send the photo and the location where you saw the child to the Returning Babies Home Network. It is possible that these children have been abducted! Your little acts of kindness could help speed the process of reuniting abducted children with their parents! These tiny acts can put these children on the path back to their families! Don't like this post, please forward it. (An attached gallery of six photos shows children begging on the streets and children being reunited with their parents.) Forwarding user added comment: Retweet "@Lauren"
Forward: [It is suspected that someone stuffed firecrackers in the mouth of a stray dog, blowing away its entire jaw] Recently a netizen (网友 - "Internet friend") "@grey grandmother" in Tongzhou, Beijing discovered an injured stray dog. It is suspected that someone stuffed his mouth with firecrackers. The dog's whole mouth and nasal cavity have been blown away and his lower jaw is broken so that he cannot eat. This is appalling! The majority of his nerves have been damaged due to infection. It is very hard to perform surgery and it is very difficult to control this infection. The doctor has suggested euthanasia but "@grey grandmother" does not want to give up. Please be kind and help this netizen (博友 - "blog friend) help this poor dog. [emoji for microphone] (An attached photo gallery of six photos show the dog when found, being looked after at a house and undergoing surgery.) Forwarding user added comment: very chilling
Original Post: Do you know that many children do not have enough to eat and live in hunger every day? Today I joined the ranks of #ExperienceHunger#. This experience is also a reminder to myself that in my actions of not wasting food, I can pay attention to the necessity of helping these children. We should work with #Children's Benefit# to donate our lunch money to these children? Lets do it! (A single attached photo shows poor-looking children eating together).
Forward: #Jinggu 6.6 magnitude earthquake# Banpo Village People's Government: on the night of the earthquake, there were just a few sloppy groups looking at state housing. The houses belonging to regular people were ignored. The third day after the earthquake, still no relevant personnel have paid a visit. We are 40 kilometres from the epicentre of the earthquake. "@ Yunnan Radio and TV" "@Urban barcode" "@Yunnan People's Livelihood Channel" "@Phoenix Weibo News" "@Spring City Evening News" "@Phoenix Television" (The user tags six regional media outlets and attaches a photo gallery of eight photos shows the damage that the earthquake has done to their house). Forwarding user added comment: #Jinggu Earthquake# No one is paying attention to the people on the streets. No one has come to help. There are no tents. My neighbour is pregnant and the whole family is sleeping outside. Temperatures are lower in the countryside. The only people who have tents are those who work at the school. Other people are sleeping outside. The government must help the people (为人民服务 - a CCP political slogan) "@Yunnan People's Livelihood Channel" "@Urban barcode"

The emoji of a microphone is often used in Weibo posts that attempt to raise awareness of particular issues, indicating that posting is seen as a ‘microphone for the masses’. Not only do these posts indicate that individual users believe that Weibo is valuable for raising awareness of uncovered issues and encouraging user action to help vulnerable others, there is evidence from the interaction data of these tweets that action is taken in response to these posts. Weibo posts that attempted to influence behaviour were retweeted more frequently than the platform average (a finding that is significant at the 90% confidence level [$p = 0.075328$, two-tailed t-test]). This is particularly notable given that these posts are competing against competitions that offer prizes for retweeting information (Table 6.5.).

Table 6.5. User interactions with different types of political speech (both individual and retweeted) on Twitter and Weibo

	Twitter	Weibo	
	Retweets	Forwards	Comments
Platform average across all posts	811	11,872	5264
Average across all political posts	654	18,275	4401
Average for all political posts expressing an opinion or commenting on society or social practices	442	17,295	7347
Average for all political posts sharing news or information or expressing an opinion about current affairs or political events	850	7938	1857
Average for all political posts expressing an opinion on formal political processes	2	1,757	535
Average for all political posts attempting to exert influence on states, companies, organisations or individuals	N/A	39,533	5064
Political humour	1315	19,605	5149

This finding accords with previous research, based on case studies, on Weibo that found that posts on the platform raised awareness in specific cases and resulted in offline actions (Herold, 2008; Zong, 2011); however, as these findings were based on isolated case studies it was not known whether these represented only a small number of issues that gained an audience on the platform. This analysis, based on a random sample of individual user posts, shows that these are not isolated cases

and that the platform is used frequently to raise awareness of the plight of vulnerable individuals and to encourage action by platform users.

This high level of interaction with action-oriented posts on Weibo suggests that not only do users attempt to get others take political actions on the platform but also that they are successful in getting others to, at least, engage in the actions of and commenting in response to these posts. In contrast, none of the political speech acts in this random sample on Twitter were instrumental; instead they fell into the category of symbolic speech, mostly constituting either the publication of specific, individual opinions on political and social issues or the publication of information that passively aimed to affect agendas (Table 6.6.)

Table 6.6. Examples of political posts on Twitter that shared news or information or expressed an opinion about current affairs or political events or that expressed an opinion or commenting on society or social practices (6.2% of individual posts on the platform)

Retweet: RT @AdultRaverProbs: For those of you who still think alcohol is somehow better for you than drugs: actual facts say no fucking way http://...
Retweet: RT @usacsmret: 50 million on food stamps. 12 million on unemployment. 5 million on welfare. Obama's "recovery" is worse than Bush's reces...
Retweet: RT @LaurentSim: Pro-life, where a white embryo is more important than the lives of black children and young people
Original post: Do We Need To Prepare For SWAT Style Surprise Raids On Our Homes By Code Enforcement Officers? (two links to pictures showing police officers wearing riot gear stating that they spent 10 hours raiding an organic farm to confiscate blackberry and okra bushes (presumably believing them to be marijuana))

Most of these tweets include images, graphs or links to offline information sources and, as such, can be seen as attempts to set the agenda for discussion or provide new information to an established (dormant) debate, rather than contributing to discourse on an existing political issue. However, the style and content of these posts suggests that Twitter appears to be a platform that is mostly used for airing personal opinions and users showed little expectation that action would be taken or minds would be changed as a result of their political speech acts. The content of these political tweets is also relatively polarised and focuses more on individual

expressions of anger compared to Weibo, where many posts were directed at encouraging the general population of users to engage in political actions.

6.6. Voluntary versus mobilised, legal versus illegal: Political speech on Weibo as pushing at the margins of dominant discourses

Some definitions of political participation emphasise that this participation must be voluntary (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, 2004); however, others have argued that the boundary between activity taken voluntarily and activity that was manipulated is indistinct (Nelson, 1979). A similar group of arguments about political speech focuses on whether this speech is legal or illegal, conventional or unconventional. Some analyses of political activity only include those activities that were formally built into the existing political process, such as voting, campaign activities and group organisation by citizens (Verba & Nie, 1987); however, others have argued that activities that are not formally built into the political process and those that attempt to change the structure of the political process should not be excluded as they make up a just as, if not more so, important aspect of political participation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Conge, 1988; Nelson, 1979; Parry et al., 1992).

These arguments are particularly important for this thesis to address because many argue that the Internet and the rise of commercialised spaces of political speech not only can act as a tool as part of established repertoires of political speech but also can change the boundaries of conventional political acts (Fox, 2013; Papacharissi, 2010; Zuckerman, 2013b).

It is also the case that many references to political participation in China and other authoritarian states privilege illegal political activity that would attempt to significantly transform the structure (rather than the content) of the political process (Lei, 2011; S. Li, 2010; Zhou, Chan & Peng, 2008). However, despite the focus on structural changes in the political process in China, many have found that change appears to be happening mostly at the margins and that the boundaries between what is legal and illegal political speech is uncertain (Stern & Hassid, 2012; Yang, 2009). Theories of authoritarian deliberation posit the development of a new

form of political speech in China in which deliberative speech occurs within the general boundaries of state control (B. He & Warren, 2011; Jiang, 2009).

These two groups of arguments point to the importance of examining political speech acts with reference to how they are positioned within the existing power structures in society.

As has already been discussed in Chapter Four, both platforms (and particularly Weibo) push users toward engaging in certain types of actions that are of benefit to platform advertisers, such as contributing data about certain products or topics or interacting with promoted content. The preceding discussion of political speech on Weibo has also indicated that much of the political participation the platform is indeed mobilised, in the sense that users are encouraged to and do take action as a result of political posts.

This suggests that mobilisation is a necessary aspect of political speech. However, it is important to consider the forces and discourses that might be mobilising these speech acts and whether this mobilisation aligns with the interests of the state, the market or particular groups of power holders, i.e. the extent to which the political speech acts identified in this random sample align with or challenge the dominant discourses about acceptable topics and forms of political speech. This is part of the second and third aspects of this debate about the nature of political speech: namely, whether this speech is illegal or illegal and conventional or unconventional.

The content of political speech acts shows a much greater challenge to dominant discourses on Weibo than on Twitter but on neither platform did speech acts fall outside the bounds of legality. This would be expected in this dataset given the relatively small sample size and the rapidity with which these platforms aim to remove illegal speech acts from circulation. However, on Weibo, individual users were found to be challenging and attempting to contribute to a discussion about what is understood as ideologically correct, i.e. the structure of the political system not just its content. In the Weibo sample, there were two posts about the 18th CCP Fourth Plenary Session published by users high in the socio-political hierarchy, in

one case a professor of constitutional law and in another case a CCP mouthpiece journal. There were almost 3,000 comments on the Red Flag Journal post (which was forwarded more than 8,000 times) and 64 comments and 132 forwards on the post by the law professor. It appears that a large proportion of the users who saw these posts also made a comment on the post as part of the threaded comments stream (which is recorded separately to the content added when a post is forwarded). This suggests that Weibo may be providing a venue to engage in discussion about ideological issues and the structure of the political system in China, as well as simply distributing information (a finding that accords with the state discourses about how these sites should be used that were discussed in Chapter Four). In another case, users used the forwarding functionality on Weibo in an attempt to mobilise other users to correct what they suspected was incorrect information published about the number of banks in the country (Table 6.7.).

In addition to these posts that specifically challenged dominant discourses, existing power structures or published information, many of the action-oriented posts discussed in the previous section implicitly pointed to the limits of state-provided welfare and protection. For instance, the tweet from the man in the area affected by the earthquake explicitly accused the state of corruption and not fulfilling its stated obligation of providing for the welfare of its citizens.

It should be noted that certainly there are many online challenges to dominant discourses in China that are censored and restricted and that the state expends a great deal of resources to attempt to control online opinion and prevent certain political mobilisations (King et al., 2012, 2016). However, while a great deal of work on political speech in China has focused on censored speech, much less has focused on the political speech acts that regular individuals engage in and which might be commonly found on in these online spaces. An analysis of the content of this random selection of posts by individuals on Weibo supports the idea that these commercial online platforms are allowing greater negotiation at the margins of acceptable political discourse (Stern & Hassid, 2012; Yang, 2009).

Table 6.7. Examples of political posts on Weibo that challenge or engage in debate about dominant discourses, existing power structures or published information

Forward (made by a professor of constitutional law): I believe that after the 18th CCP Fourth Plenary Session, the process of constructing the Constitutional Supervision System will definitely experience substantial progress because now the country's highest leadership has emphasised the importance of forcefully tackling difficult problems (踏石留印抓铁有痕- “tread stone, leave mark; grab iron, leave scar”) to achieve practical results. Achieving practical progress in this vein must begin by tackling two problems: formulating a constitution to control procedural law and setting up constitutional supervision of specialised agencies. Even if a temporary constitutional court is not established, at least a guardian council could be set up inside the National People’s Congress. Forwarding user added comment: A theoretical breakthrough, we need great wisdom!
Forward: [Do you know how many domestic banks there are in China! (the most complete list of financial institutions)] 68 trusts, 91 investment funds, 67 foundations, 111 securities companies, 832 banks, 115 finance services companies, 40 financial lenders, 265 financial management companies. Forwarding user added comment: This data is too old, 184 financial services companies have been approved. "@Professor Lu Mintai" The statistics on financial lenders must be incorrect; who can help? "@Zhang Shaoxin" retweeted status.
Forward: [《Red Flag Journal》 : The rule of law must not replace the People's Democratic Dictatorship】 The People's Democratic Dictatorship must be realised rather than replaced with the rule of law. If the rule of law is used to negate and replace the People's Democratic Dictatorship, a state of universal value will be arrived at and the rule of law will sour; the result will be that vested interests of international and domestic capital will have the advantage and a large proportion of the people will suffer. http://t.cn/R7PLgWY Forwarding user added comment: “@Grassroots Saming”: Since we are raising the topic of dictatorship, you might as well just allow a real proletariat dictatorship, again dividing up everyone’s social status based on property ownership, ancestors, do you dare?

In contrast, on Twitter individual political speech acts showed little evidence of challenging dominant discourses or established power structures or power holders. Tweets expressed personal opinions in line with ideas that Twitter provides an equality of voice and that the sharing of this information would allow ‘correct’ opinions and information to rise to the top. Some tweets did challenge particular practices but were generally individual expressions of dissatisfaction that challenged the content rather than the structure of the political system (Table 6.8.).

This may be because the dominant discourse concerning the political system in the U.S. is that it is already achieved an ideal state of a marketplace of ideas so that criticism or questioning of the system is not necessary. In contrast, as outlined in Chapter Four, the structure of the political system and the boundaries of ‘correct’ political speech are under much more active negotiation in China.

Table 6.8. Examples of political posts on Twitter that challenge the content but not the structure of the system

Original post: I’ll be angry about this election for ages
Original post: Peaceful Student Choked by Thug Policeman in Tennessee (two links to bystander pictures of white student being choked by one policeman while being handcuffed by another with a third standing by)
Original post: Today I read that ISIS is on the outskirts of Bagdad. What we and our allies are doing is failing.
Retweet: RT @HelloJamesDean This whole election process would be much better if we changed to a “Hunger Games” format

The only post on Twitter that addressed the structure of the system did so in a joking way that could not be expected to be taken seriously. Authored by an individual blogger who posts frequent, humorous commentary on political and social issues, has more than 55,000 followers and describes himself as a “Christian dude”, this tweet states that the election would be more exciting if it was conducted in the format of *The Hunger Games*, a popular series of books and subsequent Hollywood movies in which contestants selected from each area of a civilisation fight in a televised spectacle until only one is left alive. This statement can be seen as an example of widespread boredom with the U.S. electoral process but also demonstrates how popular cultural products that are themselves considered commercialised entertainment both reflect and are used to describe politics in the U.S. The genre of science fiction, into which the franchise in question falls, is often used to engage in thought experiments about potential future of human civilisation or alternative scenarios and, as such, are often examples of commercialised political and social commentary.

Notably, however, neither platform showed challenges to the commercialisation-led discourse of the individual as a data producer and consumer. On Twitter,

individuals voluntarily spoke about branded products, constructing their self-identities through consumption and generating valuable data for the platform; on Weibo, many individuals participated in the competitions that the platform facilitates. Both of these actions are instances of mobilised commercial activity. However, on Weibo there is a much greater separation between these commercial and public activities. On Twitter, there is a conflation between the roles of the user as an individualised citizen and as an individualised consumer in that personally orientated speech acts align with dominant state and commercial discourses and do not appear substantially more voluntary, even perhaps less so, than political discourse on Weibo.

This links to the second aspect of the orientation of these posts toward existing power structures in society: namely, whether they fall into conventional or unconventional repertoires of political speech. The content of the posts in this random sample, combined with the insights of the structural discourse analysis presented in Chapter Four, support the perspective that the Internet may be allowing a negotiation and gradual change in understandings of what constitutes conventional and legal participation in China. As discussed above, Weibo users are challenging dominant discourses of ideological correctness and the effectiveness of state's stated aims of welfare provision and protection.

Not only do these individuals sometimes engage in challenging these dominant discourses but also these posts appear to be moving toward a marketplace of ideas (resembling that of U.S. discourse) with individuals publishing information that might not otherwise receive coverage. Additionally, these posts appear to achieve their aims of disseminating this information to a wider audience and inciting action. In contrast, in the Twitter sample, there is much less evidence that users post information that would challenge dominant discourses or change the structure of what is considered political action. These posts show a marked difference from normative theories of what would constitute ideal political speech in the U.S. (such as a public sphere or Almond and Verba's typology of political participation). However, these tweets align with the discourses about what constitutes online

political speech outlined in Chapter Four that are driven by a hands-off approach of the state and a dominance of the commercial platforms in shaping ideas about what kinds of political speech might occur within them. In short, Twitter appears to be simply a tool that can be used as part of established repertoires of political action in the U.S. whereas Weibo may actually be providing a space in which new repertoires of political speech can develop in China.

Both on Twitter and Weibo, political humour has been heralded as an unconventional form of political participation that social media might enable (Sharbaugh & Nguyen, 2014; Tang & Yang, 2011). However, in the political speech in this sample political humour does not appear to be challenging established political processes (Tables 6.9. and 6.10.).

Table 6.9. Examples of political humour on Weibo

Forward: After looking at North Korea’s fat boy leader... [emoji for tears rolling down face] http://t.cn/Rhsoh82 (links to a humorous story of a round-based battle between major countries) (the phrase used in this tweet 三胖, literally three fat, is commonly used by Chinese netizens to refer to Kim Jong-un the third in the line of heredity leaders of North Korea who are seen as notable for being overweight in a country in which the majority of people suffer from hunger and malnutrition) Forwarding user added comment: It’s the era of the ambitious and ruthless Korean Kim Jong-un (the user again uses the name 三胖, the third fat one, to refer to the North Korean leader) “@writer Zhang Weihuo” [laughing emoji] [laughing emoji] [laughing emoji] [emoji of English word good]
Forward: It’s very rare to see someone take a group photo that is able to capture a lively expression (with an attached photo of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un surrounded by adoring, military clad women) Forwarding user added comment: In the toilet dying of laughter over the fat cats “@ancient books” ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha “@me and a melodramatic slut” ha ha ha ha ha ha “@normal people don’t do this” ha ha ha ha “@this weibo makes me die laughing” ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

Table 6.10. Example of political humour on Twitter

Retweet: RT @TedOfficialPage: Freshmen year vs senior year. (attached photo shows then U.S. president Obama’s looking young and excited at the start of his term and older and worried at the end of his term)
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However, a much subtler form of unconventional political activity is shown to be present on Weibo, with the platform facilitating the distribution of information

that might not otherwise have been published, affording users a space in which individual political action to address certain issues can be organised and providing a space in which individuals can engage with the state and established power holders concerning political priorities. With the new functionalities provided by this commercial platform in China, it appears that previously unconventional political actions are now becoming conventional.

6.7. Intention and effect: the sham public sphere of Twitter

The third key debate concerning the boundaries of political speech centres on the intentions of the speaker and the effects of the action; some see only speech acts that are intended to have an effect and/or those that succeed in their intended aims as truly political. The definition of political speech used in this thesis encompasses both unintended effects and intention to affect the balance of power in society that did not achieve its aims. However, it is still important to assess the extent to which the content of these political speech acts would align with more traditional understandings.

In the difference between instrumental (action-orientated) posts on Weibo and symbolic, informational posts on Twitter, it is clear that not only are posts on Weibo more likely to attempt to influence others but there is evidence that they do have influence over their targets. In contrast, the passive, symbolic political speech that is prominent on Twitter shows little intention of exerting influence. As part of the information marketplace discourse, it seems that speaking alone (rather than being heard or having actions taken as a result of that speech) is seen as a sufficient form of online political participation. This is not, of course, to say that there are no instances in which political speech on Twitter has a target and achieves its objectives of influencing this target but this does show that this form of political speech is rare on Twitter and that it is much more common on Weibo, despite, or potentially because of, the authoritarian political system in which Weibo users live.

In this analysis, individual Weibo users have been shown to be engaging in action orientated speech that intends to bring together groups within the sphere of civil society, raises awareness about certain political issues, attempts to get others to take action and negotiates the boundaries of ideological correctness and 'correct' political speech within the country. These speech acts do not attempt to affect major changes in the balance of power in society but to take aim at small changes in power structures within the existing system.

Previous research based on large-scale data collection has shown that speech acts on Weibo that would result in offline protests that could significantly change the balance of power in society are heavily censored (King et al., 2012) so it would not be expected that these would be found within this dataset; however, that a sizeable proportion of political speech still exists within this system is itself notable, in that, far from withdrawing from the political process due to low levels political efficacy or uncertainty about permissible speech, individuals on Weibo are engaging in active, instrumental, voluntary and intentional political speech on the platform that shows evidence not only of achieving its apparent aims but of pushing the boundaries of repertoires of political speech by moving toward a situation of greater information freedom and of individual and civil society action.

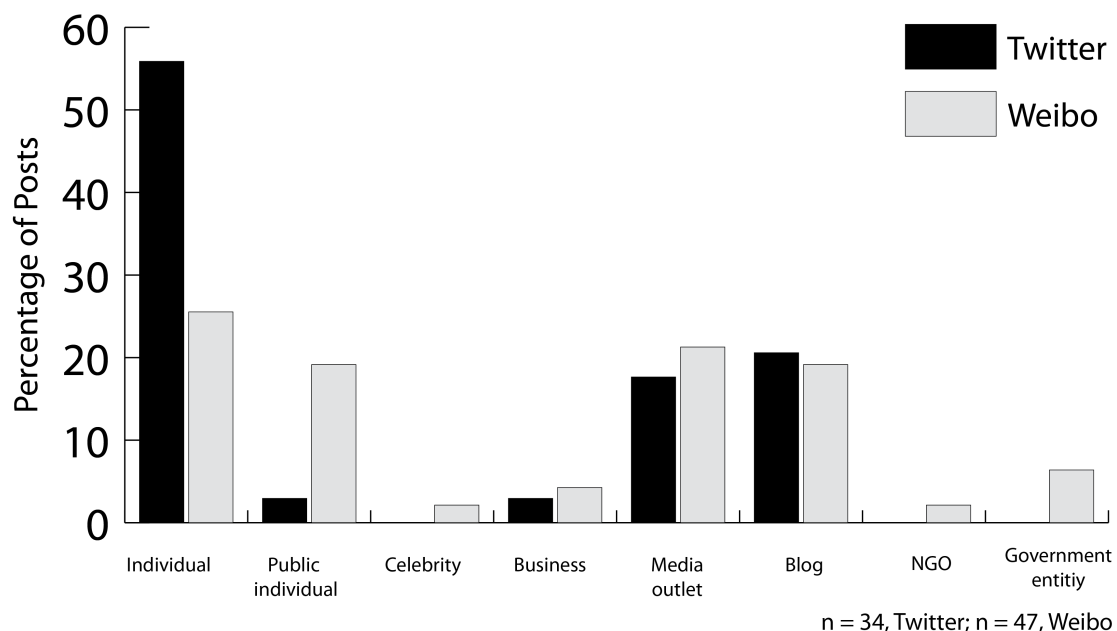
On Twitter, political speech is less diverse in terms of the information it provides and is passive and individualised. In many cases, it does not seem even appropriate to consider the success or failure of political speech acts on Twitter because these speech acts do not show intentionality. Rather than being an integral part of the political process, the kinds of political speech acts found on Twitter can only be considered so under the broadest definitions of the term. This is not to say that more active and goal-orientated forms of political speech do not exist in other spaces (commercial or otherwise and online or offline) in the U.S. context or that they might exist on Twitter but what this does show is that Twitter does not appear to be regularly providing a venue for political speech as most political commentators understand it.

6.8. The speakers and targets of political speech: a civil society emerging on Weibo?

The final key aspect of the nature of political speech on these two commercial online platforms concerns the identities of the speakers and the targets of these speech acts. Considering the identities of the speakers is important in that it can provide evidence of whether online discourse is dominated by existing elite, a new group of online opinion leaders or whether commercial online space provide equal opportunities to all users be heard.

Over half the political posts on Twitter were originally written by individual users compared to only one quarter of political posts on Weibo (Figure 6.3.). In some senses, this could be seen as evidence of greater individual empowerment on Twitter; however, as discussed in previous sections, posts on Twitter tend to be individualised, symbolic speech acts that have little intention to affect the balance of power in society.

Figure 6.3. Authors of political posts on Twitter and Weibo



Furthermore, 38% of the political posts on Twitter were originally written by either established media outlets or blogs, suggesting (in line with the findings of previous sections) that when political speech acts on Twitter are not individual,

symbolic acts they are retweets of information from established providers of political information rather than providing new information that might not otherwise be published. While the individual action of retweeting information could be seen as part of a marketplace of ideas discourse, the landscape of political speech on Twitter, dominated by individual, symbolic acts and retweets from established providers, actually runs counter to this discourse, in that the information available in this marketplace does not fulfil the requirements of a free and equal market for information.

The landscape of political speech on Weibo is quite different. Individual posts make up only a quarter of political speech acts and approximately a quarter of individual political speech acts are attempts at instrumental action. Media outlets and blogs account for 40% of political speech acts on Weibo (roughly the same percentage as on Twitter). However, public individuals (whose profiles are orientated toward their offline position such as individual journalists, business people and academics) and celebrities were active in shaping political discourse on Weibo, with more than one in five individual political posts being retweets of material originally written by either a public individual or a celebrity. This accords with findings from previous research that have singled out public individuals and bloggers as important opinion leaders on Chinese social media (Bolsover, 2013; Fu & Chau, 2014; J. Liu, 2011; M. Wang, 2011; Z. Zhang, 2011; Zong, 2011).

Despite more than 98% of active profiles on Weibo belonging to individual users, only a quarter of the original political tweets on the platform were originally written by individual users. This is in contrast to Twitter where almost one fifth of accounts belonged to non-individuals, such as civic groups, media organisations and institutions, but where these groups have far less representation within the political speech acts of individual users.

This finding is in line with the difference between the emphasis on equality on Twitter compared to the emphasis on hierarchy on Weibo and of privilege in political speech being given to those with established political positions in setting

the overall agenda for political action and discussion. This suggests, in line with the greater emphasis on hierarchy, that opinion leaders are important in setting political agendas on Weibo but that the influence of these individuals (seen as particularly important in ideas of political opinion transmission in the pre-Internet (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1970)) may have declined on Twitter where the discursive emphasis is on equality.

However, political speech on Weibo does not appear to simply resemble offline power structures but instead points to the development of what might be termed an online civil society. Much of the political action on Weibo focus on individual action to influence individual circumstances (typified by the Gongyi platform that raises money for specific individuals or small-scale organisations) but these actions are situated within a discourse of the individual as a member of society united by common goals, as shown both in the content of individual tweets and in the difference between the personal/private posts that predominate on Twitter and the general/group level posts that are more common on Weibo. This is also shown by the use of terms on Weibo such as Internet friend (网友) and blog friend (博友) that speak to the idea of an online community.

In contrast, on Twitter, users are airing individual ideas in a free market for information but there is no expectation of or orientation toward group action based on these political speech acts. Indeed, the content of these speech acts suggests a high level of polarisation on the platform. What this seems to suggest is that it is not the technology of the Internet itself and the structure of commercial social networking platforms that necessarily lead toward more individualised forms of political action but rather the underlying context. In China, where the state has much greater power over discourses of Internet use and encourages their use for state-sanctioned political purposes and in a more communally orientated society, these more communal forms of political speech are prominent online. On Twitter, where commercial forces have much more power over user constructions and in a more individualised society, this communal, civic-orientated form of

political speech that has traditionally been seen as the ideal is not present in these commercial online spaces.

The counterpart to this consideration of the orientation of political speech toward state, market, civil society and individual entities is a consideration of the targets of these political speech acts. Traditional concepts of political participation have confined political participation to state or government targets (Almond & Verba, 1963; Verba & Nie, 1987); however, others have extended this definition to include issues related to the allocation of public goods by non-state actors (Conge, 1988; Nelson, 1979; Pattie et al., 2004) or to influencing supranational organisations, institutions and engaging with other individuals about political topics, such as encouraging people to vote or trying to influence their political opinions (Parry et al., 1992; Whiteley, 2012). More recently it has been argued that the acceleration of commercialisation and globalisation in the 21st Century may have extended legitimate political targets to include non-state and non-public actors, such as trans-national commercial companies who now hold increasing amounts of power in comparison to weakening nation states (Fox, 2013).

This comparison of the nature political speech acts on Twitter and Weibo has already indicated the different targets of these speech acts. In addition to the fact that political speech on Twitter tends to be passive, symbolic and lacking in intention to influence, the targets of these speech acts are also quite different. On Twitter, political tweets tend to be orientated toward either individual politicians; the police, military or terrorist groups; or the general mass of individuals in society whose opinions and behaviours the user might passively wish to affect by publishing their opinion or information that supports their opinion (Table 6.11.). In contrast, the main targets of political speech acts on Weibo were the boundaries of ideological correctness itself, specific political policies or the actions of other individuals or organisations as part of civil society (Table 6.12.).

Table 6.11. Examples of the political and commercial targets of political speech acts on Twitter

Retweet: RT @l5asemen0: Bachmann looks to build support with Iowa announcement - TheHill.com
Retweet: RT @ashk4n: When banks say 'This call will be monitored or recorded' what they mean is 'we are identifying you by your voiceprint http://t...

Table 6.12. Examples political targets of political speech acts on Weibo

Forward: [[emoji of microphone] Just been rescued! #11 babies are seeking their parents# disseminate rapidly] According to CCTV, today Kunming Railway Public Security Department announced that police in Shandong, Henan, Fujian and Yunnan Provinces (covering four provinces, nine cities and more than 30,000 kilometres) had destroyed an infant trafficking gang, arresting 32 people, verifying that the gang had trafficked 21 children and rescuing 11 children. Police are trying to find these infants' parents. If you recognize the children in the attached photos, please contact Kaiyuan Railway Police Department: 0873-3132158. Please spread this message! (An attached photo gallery of nine photos, some of them composites, show photos of the rescued children all with the message that if the viewer recognizes the child then they should contact the Kaiyuan Railway Police Department at the listed number).
Forward: Officials are allocated welfare housing, so they say house prices are not high; officials have specially supplied food, so they say that food is safe; officials have the world's best healthcare, so they don't worry about eating medicine made from old shoe leather; official's children are educated at foreign schools, so they spoil the country's education system. China's dual system is not a rural-urban system, it is an officials-citizens system. If this system is not broken, China cannot become a modern society, a civilised state cannot be established. (Ma Guangyuan ³²)

In only one case were commercial organisations the target of political speech acts on either platform. While the definition of political speech and the coding frame used for these posts was crafted such as to be able to identify critiques of market-sphere targets (as well as those of the state and civil societal spheres), political speech on these commercial platforms shows a notable lack of these topics. Within the set of posts coded as commercial there are few critiques of commercial products or processes, although there are plenty of critiques of society or specific individuals within the group of personal posts on Twitter and societally orientated posts on Weibo. This accords with the idea that commercial spaces might provide

³² Ma Guangyuan is a prominent economist, a member of several economy related state organisations and committees and a financial commentator on the state television channel.

venues for certain political speech but would preclude speech that would seek to criticise or change the commercial system in which they were embedded (Hintz, 2016; McChesney, 1996).

6.9. Summary: The landscape of political speech on Twitter and Weibo

This chapter has provided a picture of the nature of speech by individual users on Twitter and Weibo based on a random sample of posts by individual users. These posts were broken down into a more detailed set of categories than those of the previous chapter that were then used to inform a discussion of the specific content of these posts, particularly focusing on the way in which users spoke about commercial topics, the orientation and intended audience of these posts, and the nature of the political speech occurring on the platform.

This analysis finds little similarity between the types of speech acts that individuals engage in on these platforms. Commercial speech in the Twitter sample was most frequently personal and unsolicited and users appear to be defining and presenting themselves based on their commercial choices. In contrast, in the Weibo sample the majority of commercial speech, although more frequent, consists of participation in competitions, in which users do not self-construct as consumers.

The majority of individual speech acts in the Twitter sample are personal and directed at a private audience; in contrast, posts in the Weibo sample are typified by a more communal, societal orientation, both in general and in relation to political speech. In terms of political speech, Weibo users appear to be significantly more action-orientated. They also appear to be challenging dominant discourses in society and engaging in speech acts online that change established repertoires of conventional political action in the country. In contrast, political speech on Twitter seems to be predominantly passive and symbolic, having no obvious target or metric for success and does not aim at changing the balance of power in society.

This chapter has focused on what is said on these two platforms but what is not said is also important. On Weibo, political speech, when it is action-orientated,

focuses on providing aid and assistance for vulnerable individuals in society or, occasionally, in debating theoretical aspects of the formal political process. None of this speech falls under the rubric of revolutionary or regime changing. However, it works at the margins to make small and incremental changes in the balance of power in society.

However, speech on Twitter seems to have even less potential to affect the balance of power in society. Unlike when speaking about commercial issues, Twitter users rarely speak with their own voice in their online political speech and when they do so they give isolated opinions rather than participating in a public sphere debate or linking with other individuals as members of a civil society. No posts in the Twitter sample appear to be publishing information that would not have been accessible elsewhere or attempting to induce action.

Additionally, users on neither platform engaged in political criticism of commercial actors. Based on the analysis of this random sample of individual user posts, it does not seem likely that the commercial system in which these sites are embedded is a target for online political speech. In both cases, users participate without criticism in commercial speech acts encouraged by the platform.

The existence of active, community-orientated political speech on Weibo seems to be occurring because the influence of the state in constraining the commercial imperatives of these online platforms rather than because these platforms provide a space for speech separate from the state. On Twitter where market entities are less constrained by national political ideologies, the platform markets itself as a place for accessing new political information but in reality appears to be rarely used as such and provides a space that commercially fulfils individual desires to express an opinion but which has little intended or actual political effect.

However, it is important to remember what the data presented in this chapter can and cannot speak to. Based on a random sample of speech acts by individual users on two key platforms over a four-week long period that included major political events in both countries, this data is unique in that it can provide a comparable,

generalisable picture of the nature of individual speech acts on commercial online platforms in these two countries. However, it remains to be shown whether the insights of this chapter can be generalised to other Internet platforms or over a longer time frame. This data is also based on a relatively small sample that, although representative, is limited in this regard in that it contains only a small number of political speech acts and speakers. Additionally, the data analysis up to this point has been unable to separate issues of political speech and commercialisation from other contextual factors such as Internet users' demographics and the resources necessary to participate in politics (with Weibo users much more skewed toward affluent populations than Twitter users). The next chapter will address these questions based on a worldwide survey of Internet users to build models of the effects of commercialisation on the frequency of online political speech in different political systems.

Modelling the effects of commercialisation on political speech

7.1. Chapter overview

This fourth, and final, data chapter attempts to address the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces affects their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems based on an analysis of an online survey of Internet users in more than 60 countries. Previous chapters have concluded that discourses about ideal speech in the U.S. focus on freedom and equality whereas discourses in China focus on ideological correctness and hierarchy but that in both contexts the state constructs itself as a protector and commercial social networking sites construct their users as data producers and consumers.

Further case studies of Twitter and Weibo found that Weibo is used much more frequently as a venue for political speech, as it is traditionally understood, with Twitter users overwhelmingly engaging in passive, symbolic speech acts. While Weibo users engaged more frequently in commercial speech acts about products and services, these were almost entirely in the form of competitions. In contrast, on Twitter, users posted less frequently about products and services but when they did they did so in a way that aligns with ideas about how commercialisation might create problematic constructions of citizens as consumers, doing so apparently voluntarily and linking consumptive choices with personal identities.

The results of the analysis of survey data back up the conclusions of the previous chapters. Across all survey respondents, measures of the commercialisation of an individuals' online experience are associated with a higher frequency of self-reported online political speech. The more authoritarian the political system in which an Internet user lives the more likely that they more frequently engage in online political speech. Chinese Internet users report engaging much more frequently in online political speech (both symbolic and instrumental) than U.S. Internet users.

Among Chinese Internet users, an individual's political beliefs and concerns about potential negative repercussions of their online speech acts are not related to rates of online political speech. Thus, it is not the case that those who disagree with Chinese state monitoring and data collection are less likely to engage in online political speech. However, in the U.S., those who do not feel free to say things others disagree with online post about politics less frequently and those who post more frequently are more concerned about their online opinions being censored. This suggests, in accordance with the results of the previous chapter, a relatively polarised and polemic tone of political speech in U.S. online spaces.

7.2. Theoretical and methodological overview

This chapter presents a quantitative, macro approach to addressing the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech. These analyses are based on data from a worldwide survey of Internet users conducted in 2012. This allows models to be built that explore the association between commercialisation and self-reported rates of political speech, taking into account a variety of different variables including political system, demographic variables and opinions about the state, politics and Internet use. A limitation of the methodologies presented in previous chapters is that they cannot account for demographic population differences or provide a picture of political speech across the Internet (rather than specific platforms) and across longer time frames. An analysis of this survey data can, thus, help mitigate these limitations.

The survey data analysed here are part of the World Internet Values project³³. Survey respondents were recruited from existing panels of two survey research

³³ I worked on this project as a research assistant between 2012 and 2014 under Professor William Dutton. This research project produced a report for one of its major funders, the World Economic Forum, which focused on descriptive statistics and divided respondents into one of four groups based on Internet penetration rates (Dutton et al., 2014). I also worked as the first author for a conference paper and subsequent book chapter that compared the survey results for U.S. and Chinese Internet users (Bolsover, Dutton, Law, & Dutta, 2013, 2014). One of the surprising findings of this chapter was that Internet users in China reported engaging in online political speech much more frequently than U.S. users and that, in general, levels of online political speech were lowest in developed, Western countries. A tentative hypothesis was put forward at the time, in line with dominant ideas about commercialisation in China, that the extension of commercial social

firms – Toluna and comScore - with the intention of representing the Internet population in each country of interest. A total of 11,225 cases were retained from users in 63 countries; 3147 of which lived in 13 different democratic countries and 2942 in 13 authoritarian states (the remaining respondents lived in countries that are categorised as either flawed democracies or hybrid regimes)³⁴. Eight hundred survey respondents lived in the U.S. and 527 in China.

This thesis defines political speech as any communicative act that affects or seeks to affect the balance of power in society. However, the breath of this definition would be impossible to capture with survey data. Surveys are a strong methodology for assessing how people report their own actions and beliefs in the present moment. They are also extremely valuable for their ability to reduce complex phenomenon to quantifiable data so that a large number of variables can be examined in statistical models. However, the complexity of the original concept often must be simplified o translate it into quantifiable questions. Within this survey, the operationalisation of political speech is narrowed to focus on one instance of symbolic and one instance of instrumental online political speech

Survey respondents were asked how frequently they posted an opinion about politics online (daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly or never) and how frequently they signed online petitions (daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly or never). These responses are used as the dependent variables to analyse the effects of commercialisation on rates of both symbolic (posting a political opinion) and instrumental (signing a petition) online political speech.

Three measures of commercialisation are analysed within these models. These measures correspond to the three individual-level types of commercialisation

networking platforms was bolstering rates of political speech by providing spaces over which the state had less control. However, these ideas conflicted with my understanding of the theoretically grounded critique of the effects of commercialisation on political speech (again in line with dominant discourses). The desire to further investigate this surprising finding and apparent contradiction in understanding about the effects of the commercialisation of the Internet in different political systems was a major impetus for this thesis.

³⁴ The 2015 Democracy Index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit was used to assess government type for survey respondents.

identified in Chapter Two (with the first two types of commercialisation being system-level factors that cannot be measured by surveys of individual Internet users). Exposure to commercial forces is operationalised as the frequency of online purchases (taking into account time spent online per week). The extent of individualisation of consumer roles is operationalised as agreement with the commercial paradigm of collection of user data in order to provide tailored content. Movement into commercial spaces and, in particular, the type of commercial platforms of interest in this thesis is operationalised as the frequency of posting to a social networking site (taking into account time spent online per week). Taking into account other factors that might affect rates of online political speech such as demographics, Internet use and skills and political beliefs, models can be constructed that show the association between commercialisation, political system and rates of online political speech.

7.3. A general model of the association between commercialisation and online political speech in different political systems

This analysis begins at the simplest and widest level of this phenomenon by constructing a model that examines the association between symbolic and instrumental political speech and commercialisation across all survey respondents (Table 7.1.).

This shows that, seemingly contrary to the hypothesis derived from existing literature, there is a strong positive association between commercialisation and the frequency of online political speech. Individuals who engage more frequently in online commercial activities and spend more time in online commercial spaces (taking into account time spent online) and who agree more strongly with commercial constructions of Internet users as consumers report engaging more frequently in both symbolic and instrumental speech online. These data provide strong evidence against the first hypothesis of this thesis that commercialisation is negative for political speech (at least in terms its frequency).

Table 7.1. The association between rates of commercialisation and online political speech among Internet users

		Frequency of posting an opinion about politics online	Frequency of signing an online petition
Control variables	Time spent online per week	-0.017	-0.040***
Measures of commercialisation	Frequency of online purchases	0.260***	0.326***
	View on online companies collecting user data in order to provide customised content	0.066***	0.062***
	Frequency of posting a message to a social networking site	0.396***	0.319***
Constant		0.102	0.193***
Adjusted R-squared		0.272	0.271
N		8714	8601

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

However, the second hypothesis of this thesis, derived from existing literature, is that commercialisation is less negative and even perhaps positive in authoritarian, as opposed to democratic, contexts. The model presented in Table 7.2. includes the political system as a variable (1: full democracies, 2: flawed democracies, 3: hybrid regimens and 4: authoritarian states).

For both symbolic and instrumental speech, the political system is significantly associated with the frequency of online political speech. The less democratic the political system in which the Internet user lives the more likely they are to more frequently engage in online political speech, with size of this effect more than three times as large for symbolic than for instrumental speech. However, all three measures of commercialisation remain positively associated with political speech, with the actions of making online purchases and posting a message to a social networking site having larger effect sizes than self-reported agreement with the corporate collection of user data.

Table 7.2. The association between rates of commercialisation and online political speech among Internet users in different political systems

		Frequency of posting an opinion about politics online	Frequency of signing an online petition
Political system	Level of authoritarianism of political system	0.179***	0.052***
Control variables	Time spent online per week	-0.023*	-0.042***
Measures of commercialisation	Frequency of online purchases	0.261***	0.327***
	View on online companies collecting user data in order to provide customised content	0.064***	0.062***
	Frequency of posting a message to a social networking site	0.368***	0.311***
Constant		-0.130*	0.126*
Adjusted R-squared		0.285	0.272
N		8714	8601

Notes: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

These models provide evidence against both of the hypotheses derived from existing literature: commercialisation seems to be positive for rates of political speech regardless of the political system. However, there are many underlying variables that could be associated with political systems. In particular, most democratic countries have high levels of Internet penetration whereas the Internet using population in authoritarian countries is more often skewed toward younger, more affluent, more educated individuals. The demographic variables of age, education, income and gender have often been found to be associated with participation in politics (Brady, Verba & Schlozman, 1995). Although, some argue that commercial online spaces, and in particular social networking sites, reduce the influence of these demographic variables (Krueger, 2002). For this reason, a further model is constructed that includes these demographic variables, as well as two measures of Internet access (self-rated skills and having a computer at home) that potentially could be intermediate variables between demographics and online actions (Table 7.3.).

Table 7.3. The association between commercialisation and online political speech taking into account demographics and political system

		Frequency of posting an opinion about politics online	Frequency of signing an online petition
Political system	Level of authoritarianism of political system	0.106***	-0.020
Demographic and control variables	Age	-0.004**	-0.008***
	Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)	-0.430***	-0.204***
	Income	0.073***	0.085***
	Education	0.032***	0.009
	Self-rated skill using the Internet	0.047***	0.004
	Internet connection at home (1 = no, 2 = yes)	0.213**	0.034
	Time spent online per week	-0.035**	-0.043***
Measures of commercialisation	Frequency of online purchases	0.249***	0.322***
	View on online companies collecting user data in order to provide customised content	0.066***	0.059***
	Frequency of posting a message to a social networking site	0.343***	0.282***
Constant		-0.036	0.710***
Adjusted R-squared		0.317	0.288
N		7825	7725

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

When demographic variables are taken into account the measures of commercialisation remain strongly positively associated with the frequency of online political speech. Younger people, males and those with higher income report more frequently engaging in online political speech. Those with higher levels of education, higher self-rated skills using the Internet and those with a computer at home more frequently post opinions about politics online. The political system is associated with the frequency of posting an opinion about politics online (with individuals in less democratic contexts posting online more frequently). However, political system is no longer significantly associated with the frequency of signing online petitions.

While the results of these initial models suggest that commercialisation is positive for rates of political speech regardless of context (both political and developmental), the interpretation of these models raise several questions. Firstly,

and something that cannot be answered using this data, are the types of political speech and, indeed, the understandings of political speech in these political systems the same? The results of the previous chapters have suggested that this is not the case with understandings of what is political influenced by historical and cultural context and the constraining influence of state and platform discourses.

The results of the previous chapter showed that there was a significant difference between political speech on microblogs in the U.S. and China, not so much in its frequency (which was higher on Weibo but not significantly so), but in its content. These differences were hypothesised to derive from the greater emphasis of state discourses on promoting the use of these commercial platforms for political speech in China and the greater affordances that these platforms provide in authoritarian countries compared to offline opportunities. It was hypothesised that the more instrumental form of political speech that was prominent in China was due to the emphasis that the state placed on using these platforms for political speech, compared to a market dominance of what political speech means in the U.S. (Although the previous chapter found that online political speech in China did challenge dominant discourses.) For this reason, it is important to consider the influence of state discourses and the constraining force of state and civil society over online political speech (Table 7.4.).

This model adds variables that represent the extent to which the individual agrees with state power over online spaces (in terms of monitoring online content and obtaining online information in order to protect national security) and the extent of concern that that individual has of negative repercussions for their online activities (in terms of whether they feel free to say things online that others might disagree with and whether they are concerned about their online opinions being censored). Although the inclusion of these variables does not change the interpretation of the previous models, it provides insight into how the (general) dependent variable of political system of this thesis might affect the relationship between commercialisation and political speech. Those individuals who reject the idea that the state should be able to obtain any information online to protect

national security more frequently engage in both symbolic and instrumental political speech online. However, those who agree that the government should monitor online content are more likely to more frequently sign online petitions.

Table 7.4. The association between commercialisation and online political speech taking into account demographics, political opinions and political system

		Frequency of posting an opinion about politics online	Frequency of signing an online petition
Political system	Level of authoritarianism of political system	0.100***	-0.030
Demographic and control variables	Age	-0.004**	-0.009***
	Gender (1 = male, 2 = Female)	-0.412***	-0.194***
	Income	0.072**	0.084***
	Education	0.028**	0.007
	Self-rated skill using the Internet	0.037**	-0.002
	Internet connection at home (1 = no, 2 = yes)	0.205*	0.035
	Time spent online per week	-0.041***	-0.042***
Political beliefs	Agree that the government should be able to monitor content posted on the Internet	0.012	0.017*
	Agree that the government should be able to obtain any information online to protect national security	-0.027**	-0.021*
	Extent of feeling not free to say things online that others might disagree with	-0.058***	-0.010
	Extent of concern about one's online opinions being censored	0.035***	0.023**
Measures of commercialisation	Frequency of online purchases	0.248***	0.323***
	View on online companies collecting user data in order to provide customised content	0.062***	0.057***
	Frequency of posting a message to a social networking site	0.334***	0.282***
Constant		0.228	0.737***
Adjusted R-squared		0.318	0.286
N		7254	7169

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Those who feel freer to say things online that others might disagree with post their opinions more frequently. This suggests that there may be Internet users who do not engage in political speech online because they fear the negative reactions of

other Internet users, which indicates that these spaces do not mirror the inclusive, respectful listening that would be associated with an online public sphere.

Those individuals who are more concerned about their opinion being censored online are more likely to more frequently engage in both symbolic and instrumental political speech. However, the direction of this association cannot be elucidated from survey data. Indeed, it might be possible that the explanation for this would be different in different contexts. In democratic states where there was little online censorship, it might be concern about censorship and disagreement with state action that encouraged political participation; in authoritarian states, where there was an existing pattern of frequent censorship, it might be those who are already participating in political speech who are most concerned because their speech put them at higher risk of censorship.

This highlights the importance of understanding these issues with respect to their specific contexts. The preceding analysis has shown that commercialisation appears to be positive for rates of online political speech regardless of the political system, user demographics, agreement with state discourses and worries about the possible repercussions of engaging in political speech. However, to investigate these issues further and investigate whether the process of commercialisation might have different effects in different political systems (as was suggested in previous chapters), the next sections will examine these issues with specific reference to the two countries compared in previous chapters of this thesis: the U.S. and China.

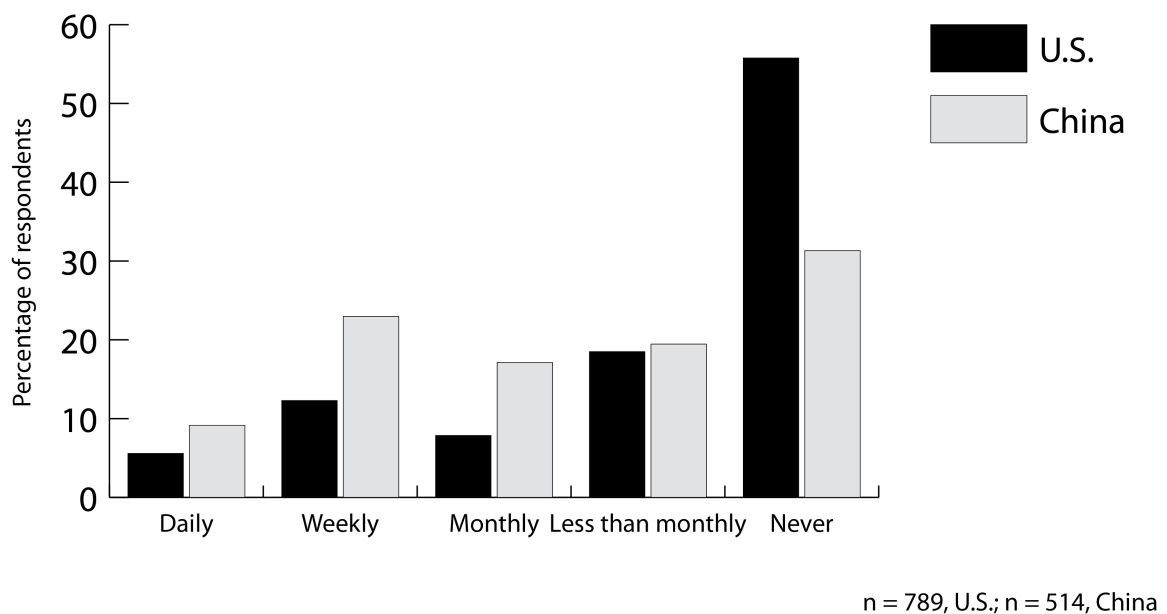
7.4. Levels of commercialisation and political speech in the U.S. and China

The analysis in the previous section found that users in less democratic countries more frequently posted political opinions online. This agrees with the results of previous chapters that found that political speech on microblogs (using a broad definition) was higher (although not significantly so) for Chinese Weibo users than for U.S. Twitter users; if more narrow and conventional definitions of political

speech had been used, then political speech would have been much higher on Weibo. The comparison of self-reported rates of both symbolic and instrumental political speech among U.S. and Chinese survey respondents support these conclusions.

Survey respondents in China report much more frequently using the Internet to express an opinion about politics than respondents in the U.S. [two tailed t-test: $p < 0.0001$]. Among U.S. respondents more than half report never engaging in symbolic political speech online. Only a quarter of U.S. respondents posted a political opinion online at least monthly compared to almost half of Chinese respondents (49.22%). A greater percentage of Chinese respondents were also very active in engaging in political speech online, with 9% posting daily and 23% weekly compared to a daily posting rate of 6% and a weekly posting rate of 12% in the U.S. (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1. How often do you use express an opinion about politics online?

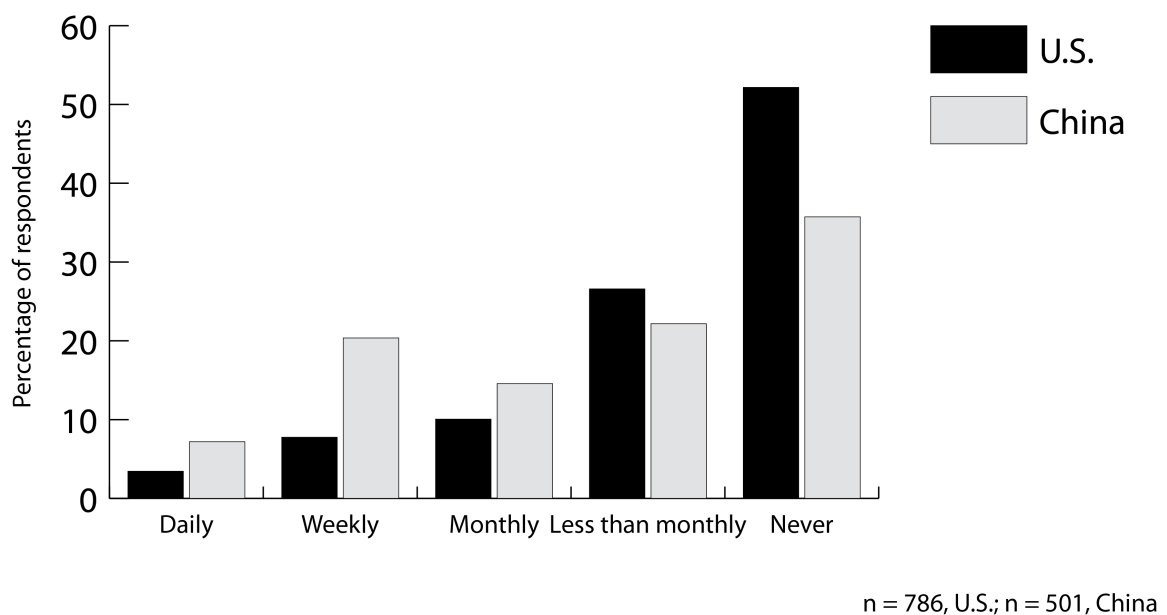


Chinese respondents also report signing online petitions significantly more frequently [two tailed t-test: $p < 0.0001$]. This is contrary to the results of the analysis of all survey respondents that found that political system is not associated with rates of signing of online petitions; however, it should be remembered that

the availability of online petitions may vary widely in different countries, whereas the availability of spaces within which a political opinion could be expressed is more consistent across different national populations of Internet users.

Among Chinese respondents, 42% report signing an online petition at least monthly. In comparison, only 21% of U.S. respondents report signing a petition at least once a month and more than half say that they have never signed an online petition (Figure 7.2). These results are important because they accord with the conclusions reached in the previous chapters and show that by their own definitions Chinese Internet users more frequently engage in online political speech (rather than simply having this definition applied to their speech acts by a researcher).

Figure 7.2. How often do you sign an online petition?



Similarly, the data in this survey also support the previous results that Chinese Internet users engage in more frequently online commercial actions (Figure 7.3.). These results also show that they seem to spend more time in online commercial spaces (Figure 7.5.), although time spent online per week is not accounted for in this graph. However, a comparison of the extent to which Internet users in the U.S. and China have internalised consumer discourses does not provide conclusive

answers (Figure 7.4.). Chinese Internet users express more polarised opinions about this issue than U.S. users, which is particularly notable given that Asian individuals have been found to be generally less likely to express support for the most extreme answers in surveys (R. Wang et al., 2008).

Figure 7.3. The frequency of making an online purchase

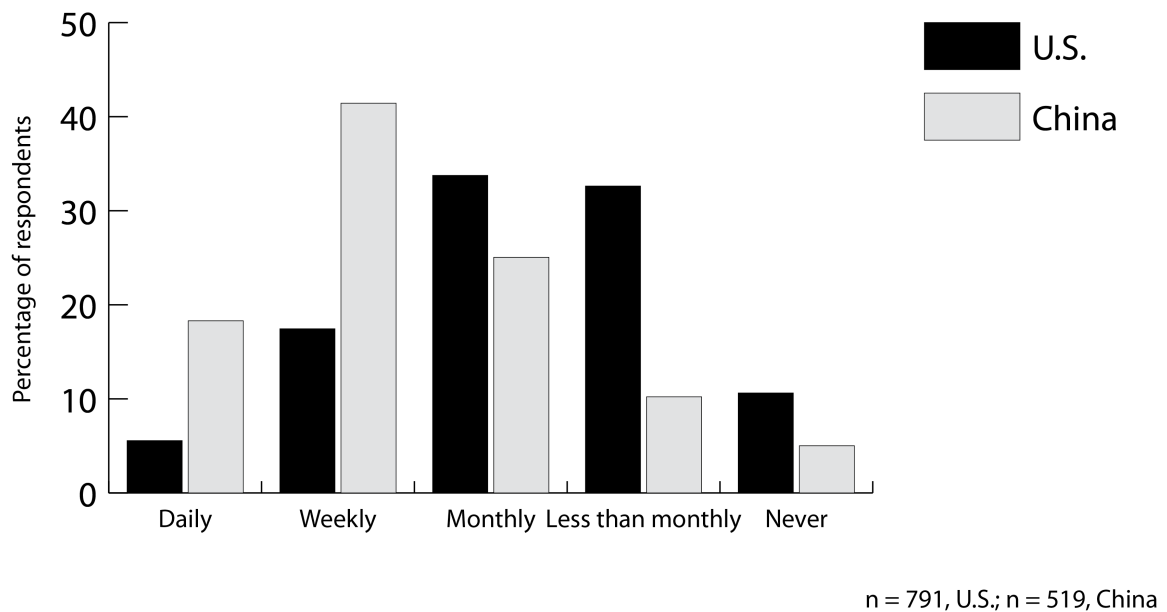


Figure 7.4. Agreement with commercial paradigms about data monitoring

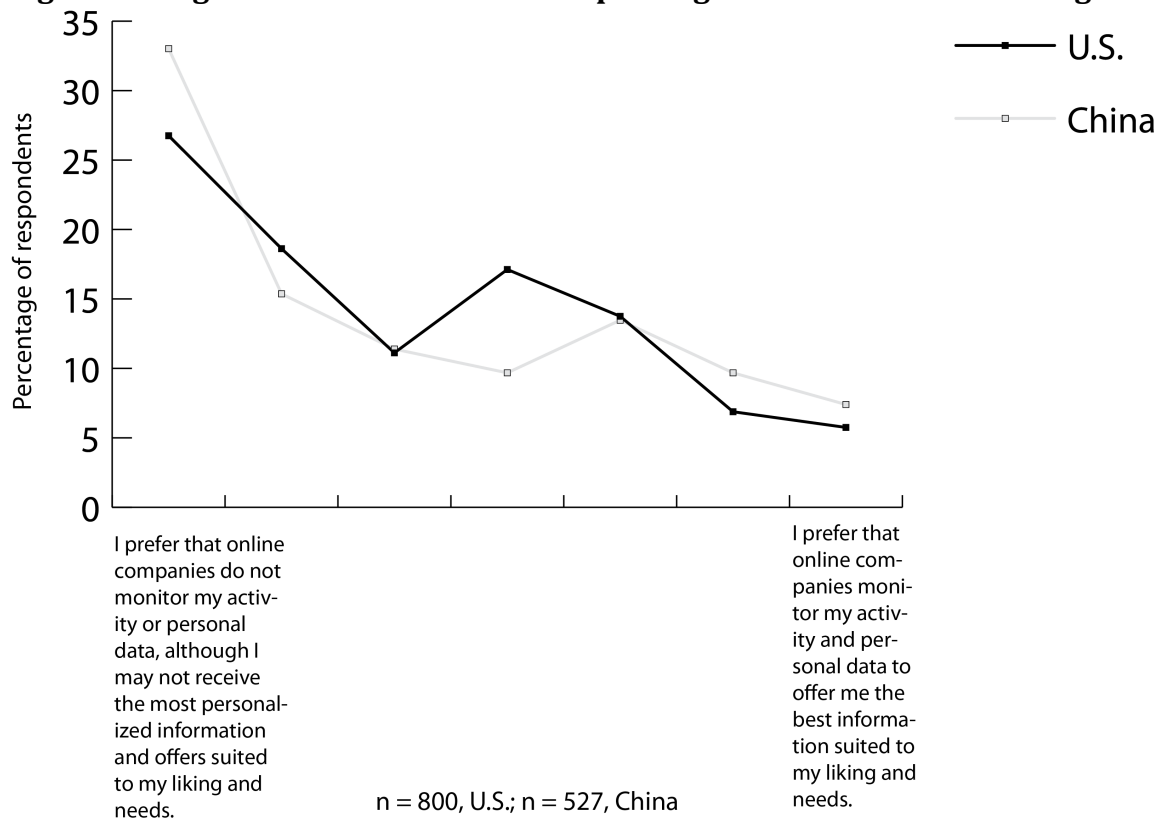
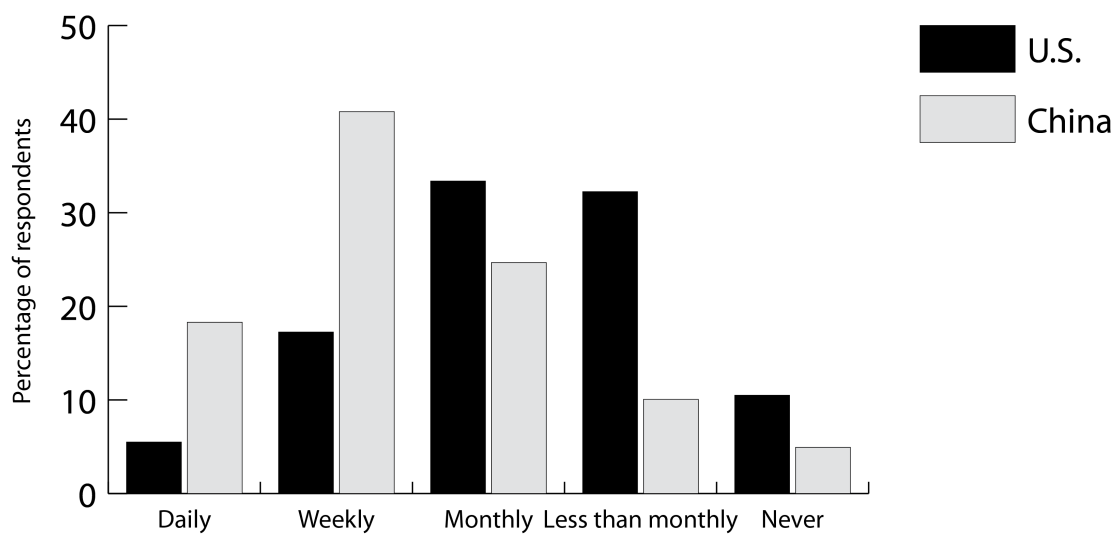


Figure 7.5. Frequency of making a post to a social networking site



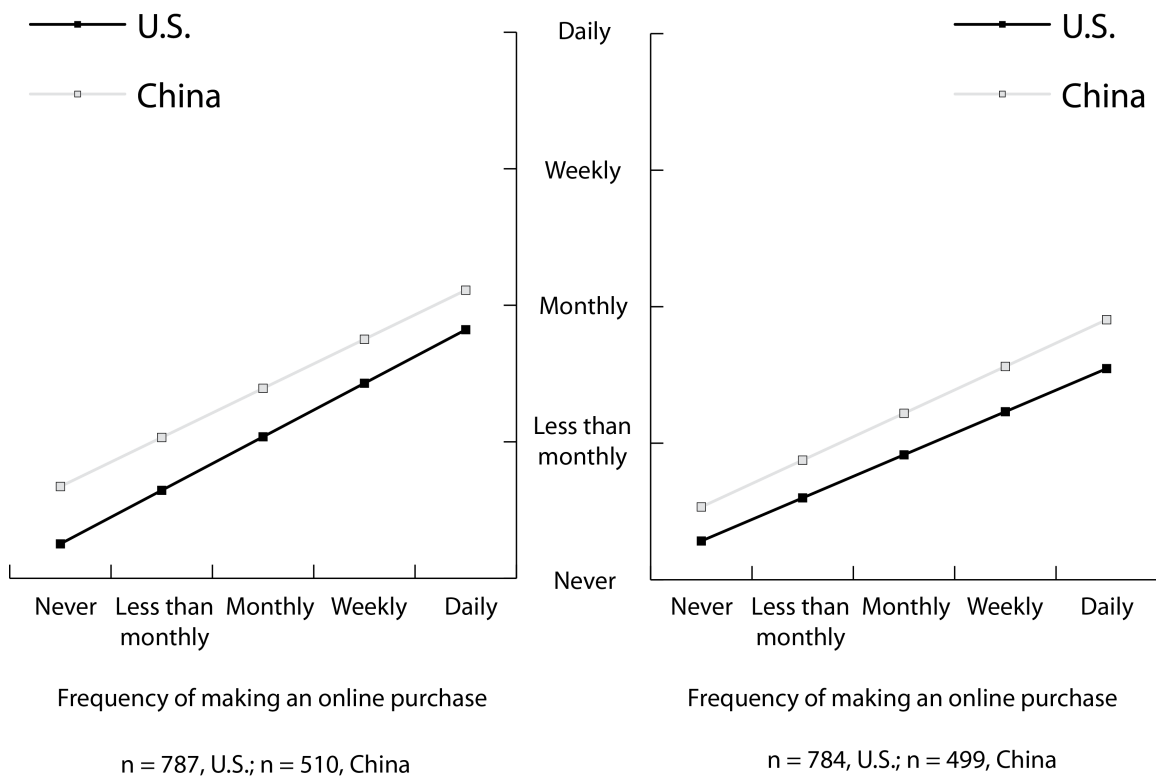
n = 791, U.S.; n = 519, China;

Given the results of the models built in the first section (that higher rates of commercialisation are associated with a greater frequency of online political speech), these results are not surprising; however, the central question of this thesis is not is commercialisation and political speech higher in China (although these, in and of themselves, would be interesting findings for an authoritarian, nominally Communist country) but rather is the relationship between commercialisation and political speech different in different political systems.

7.5. The relationship between commercialisation and political speech among U.S and Chinese Internet users

This section examines the association between the self-reported frequency of online political speech for Internet users in the U.S. and China and measures of commercialisation, agreement with state discourses concerning the control of online spaces and concerns about the repercussions of one's own online speech.

Figure 7.6. The association between the frequency of making an online purchase and the frequency of:
 (1) posting a political opinion online (2) signing an online petition



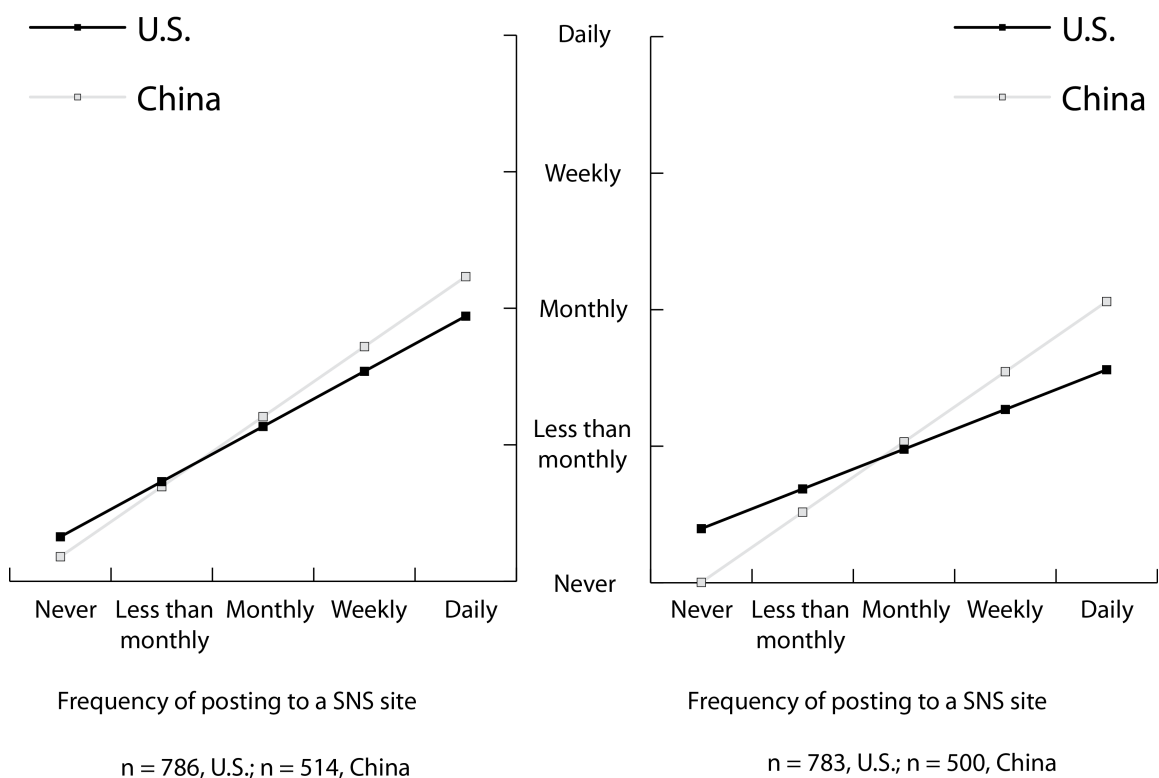
In both the U.S. and China, increased frequency of making online purchases (Figure 7.6.) and increased frequency of posting to social networking sites (Figure 7.7.) is positively associated with rates of online political speech. Given that social networking sites are understood as being one of the most important spaces for online political speech, this result is unsurprising. Even taking into account time spent online per week, those who post more frequently to social networking sites are more likely to post a political opinion online. This result, however, is important because it confirms these expectations about social networking sites as key venues for online political speech, which drove the decision of the previous chapters to focus on Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China to investigate the interaction between commercialisation and political speech on specific platforms. These results also suggest, however, that social networking site use, as a measure of time spent in this specific type of online commercial space, is associated with more frequent online political speech over and above the simple association between

more frequent posting and more frequent posting about politics. In both the U.S. and China, more frequently posting to social networking sites is associated with more frequently signing online petitions. The effect size of more frequent posting is larger in China, particularly with respect to online petitions, suggesting that these commercial platforms have made a more positive contribution to political speech in China than the U.S.

Figure 7.7. The association between the frequency of posting to social networking sites and the frequency of:

(1) posting a political opinion online

(2) signing an online petition



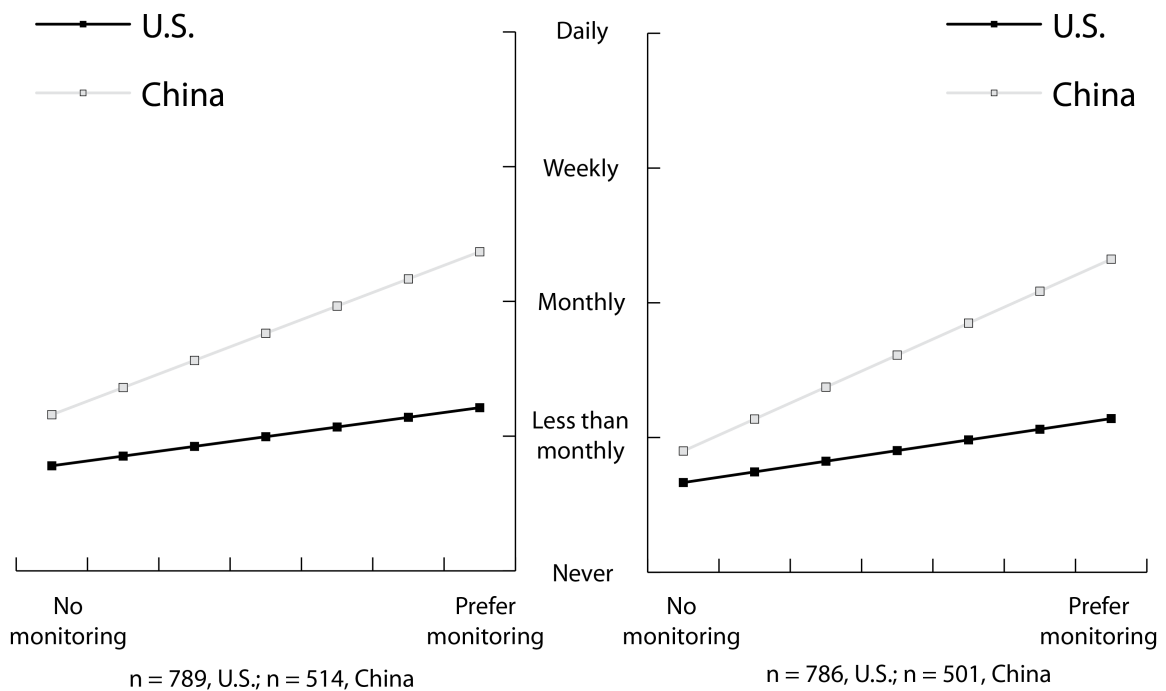
Although the effects of commercialisation on the frequency of political speech appear to be similar based on the first and third measures (and not taking into account time spent online), the association between the internalisation of market-led roles for Internet users as consumers (operationalised as the extent of agreement with the commercial practice of collecting data on Internet users for the purpose of providing tailored advertisements) is somewhat different in the two countries. While the association between agreement and the frequency of political

speech is positive in both the U.S. and China, the size of this effect is much larger in China (Figure 7.8.).

Figure 7.8. The association between agreement with the practice of data monitoring to provide tailored content and the frequency of:

(1) posting a political opinion online

(2) signing an online petition



This is an interesting finding in that it could possibly lend support to the idea that commercial spaces are positive for political speech in authoritarian contexts because they provide alternative spaces that are free from state control and alternative constructions of what it means to be an individual in society that are associated with market, as opposed to state, paradigms.

For this reason, the association between an individual Internet users' agreement with state discourses about the control of online spaces and the self-reported frequency of online political speech are examined. However, the results of this examination provide evidence against the idea that commercialisation in authoritarian countries provide spaces and constructions that are free from state control, leading to more political speech. In China, there is a positive association between agreement that the government should monitor content posted on the Internet (Figure 7.9) and agreement that the government should be able to obtain

any information online to protect national security (Figure 7.10.) and rates of self-reported online political speech.

However, in the U.S. the direction of association is opposite; there is a negative association between agreement with state data collection for the protection of national security and both symbolic and instrumental political speech and a negative association between agreement with state monitoring and online symbolic speech. (The association between agreement with state monitoring and signing online petitions in the U.S. is positive but has an almost negligible effect.)

Figure 7.9. The association between agreement with the government monitoring content posted on the Internet and the frequency of:
 (1) posting a political opinion online (2) signing an online petition

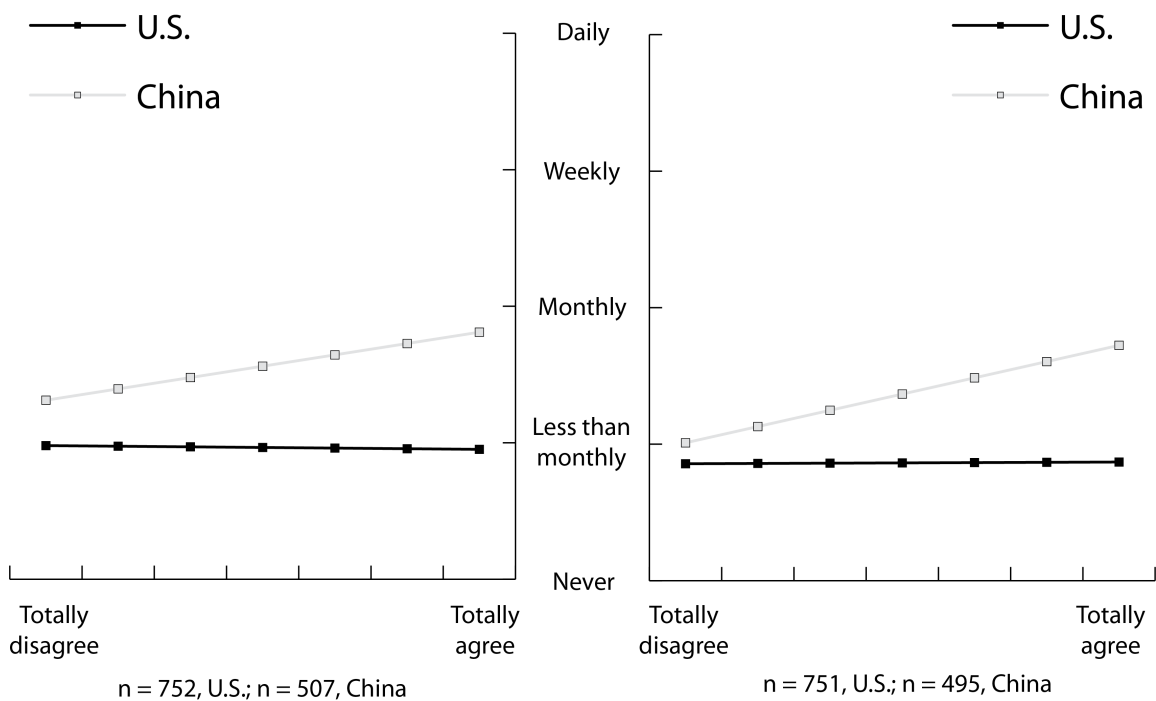
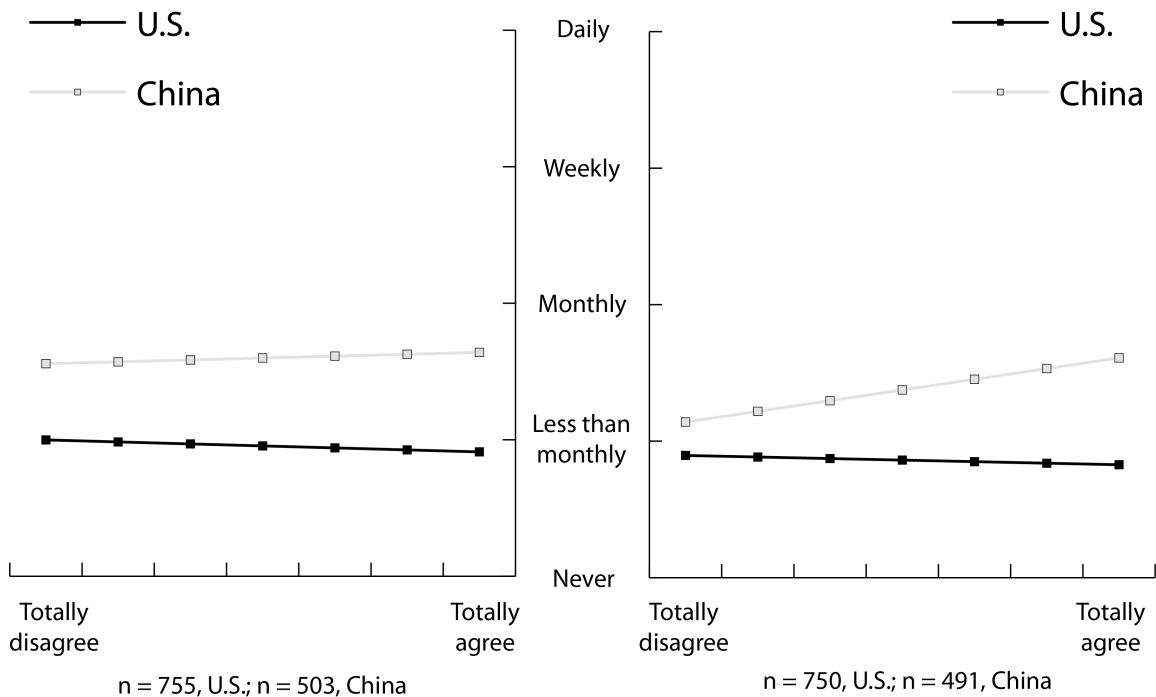


Figure 7.10. The association between agreement with the government obtaining any online information for the purposes of national security and the frequency of:

(1) posting a political opinion online

(2) signing an online petition



This suggests that for Internet users in democratic countries it may be dissatisfaction with state discourses that encourages higher levels of online political speech. This accords with work by Krueger who found that in the U.S. those who disagreed with the current government and who perceived that the government monitored their online actions participated in online politics at the highest rates (2005).

These results also suggest that it may be the case that users in authoritarian contexts who disagree with state discourses do not participate in politics online for fear of state repercussions (a result which would be contrary to the online political speech examined in the previous chapter). To investigate this, the associations between online political speech and feeling free to say things online that others might disagree with and concern that one's online opinion might be censored are compared.

These results provide evidence against the idea that Chinese Internet users who disagree with state discourses are silenced. In both the U.S. and China, users who do not feel free to say things online that others might disagree with participate less in online political speech; however, in terms of symbolic political speech the size of this effect is much stronger in the U.S. than in China (Figure 7.11.). Similarly, in both countries those who are more concerned about their online opinion being censored participate more frequently in online political speech; again, the size of this effect is larger in the U.S. (Figure 7.12.).

Figure 7.11. The association between agreement that they feel free to say things online that others might disagree with and the frequency of:
 (1) posting a political opinion online (2) signing an online petition

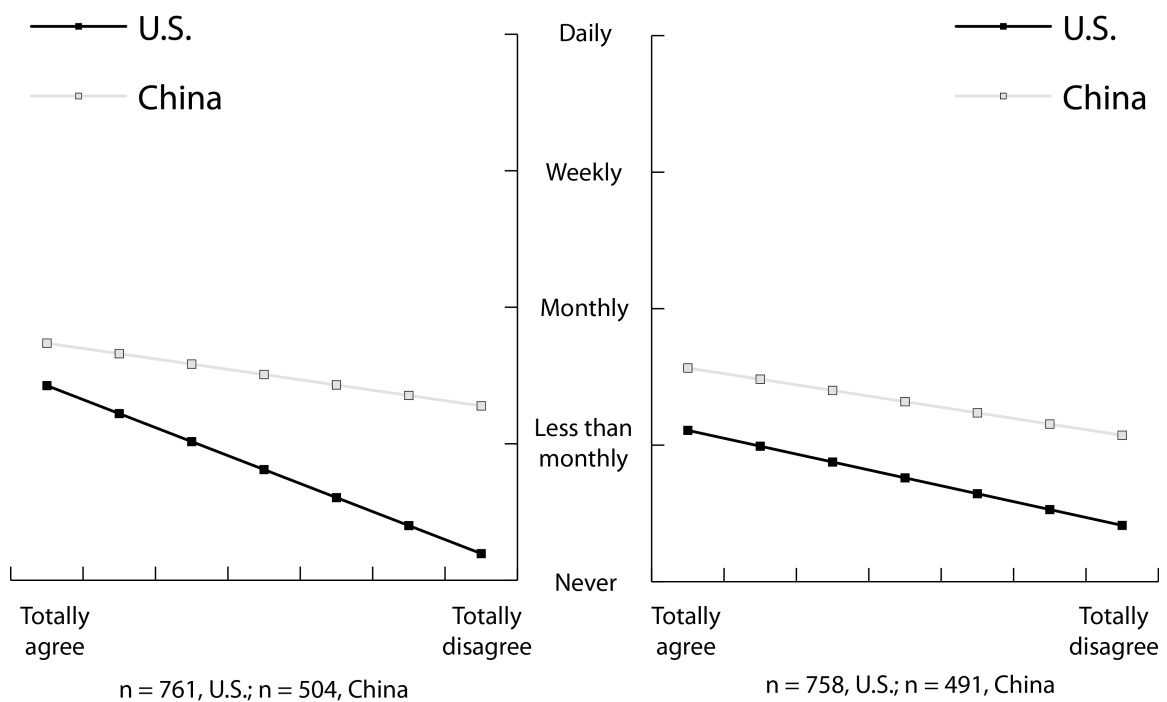
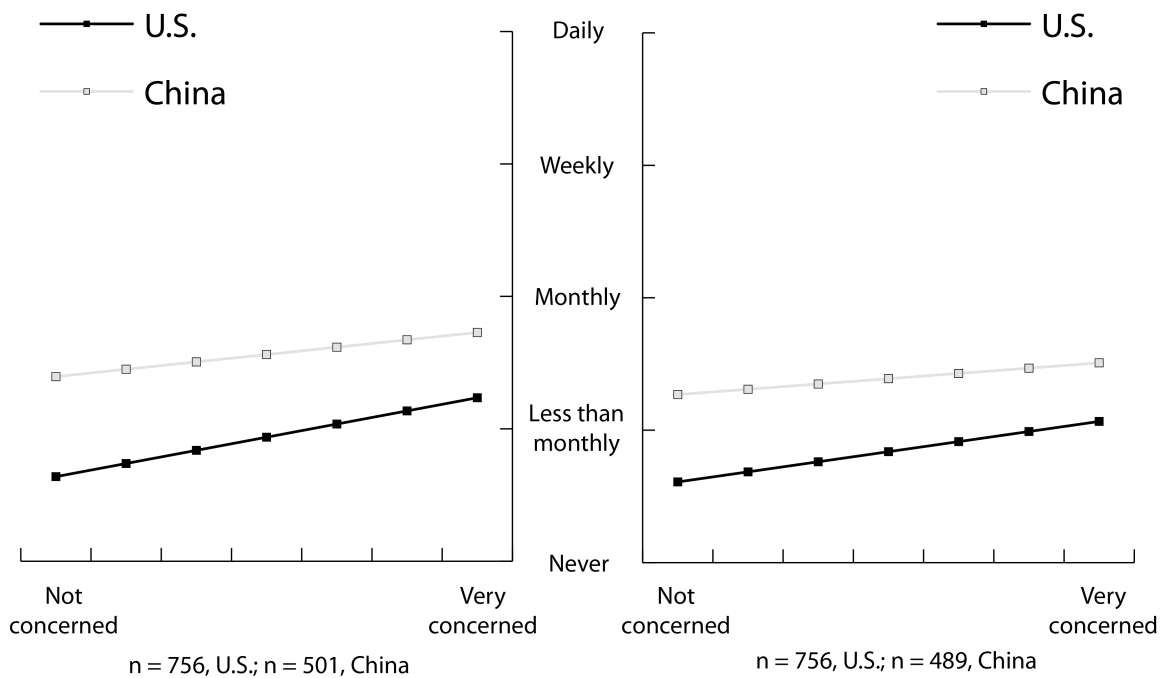


Figure 7.12. The association between concern about one's opinion posted online being censored and the frequency of:
 (1) posting a political opinion online (2) signing an online petition



In sum, these results suggest that in both the U.S. and China commercialisation is positively associated with self-reported frequencies of online political speech. In China, the internalisation of both market and state discourses are associated with higher rates of online political speech, suggesting (in line with the findings of previous chapters) that commercialisation does not undermine authoritarian states. However, rather than an online sphere in which anti-state views are silenced, fear of state and civil society reactions has a greater negative effect on political speech in the U.S. than in China. In the U.S., those who engage more frequently in political speech are more likely to disagree with state discourses about control of online spaces; in China, they are more likely to agree.

However, it is important to keep in mind what this data can and cannot speak to. These analyses are based only on self-reported frequencies of engaging in particular types of online political speech. The work of Almond and Verba in

attempting to empirically define the civic culture that contributes to well-functioning democracies should be remembered here. The authors found that in the U.S. and U.K. (the authors examples of well-functioning democracies) individuals both believed that people should participate frequently in politics and participated infrequently themselves and the authors conclude that this contradiction is a necessary part of a well-functioning democratic system (1963). Thus, it may be the case that, particularly in the democratic U.S., survey respondents are reporting the level of online political speech that they believe they should engage in rather than the level of online political speech that they actually do engage in.

Furthermore, the conclusion derived from this data that rates of commercialisation appear to be positive for rates of political speech should not be confused with the conclusion that commercialisation is positive for political speech. The analysis of a random sample of individual speech acts on Twitter and Weibo found that rates of political speech were not significantly different between the two platforms but that the content of this speech was very different and leads to very different conclusions when compared with existing theories about how political speech should be or should be defined.

7.6. Modelling the relationship between commercialisation and political speech in the U.S. and Chinese political systems

In order to account for the potential interactions between commercialisation, political system and individual opinions about politics, this section returns to the models built in the first section of this chapter. However, in order that the findings of these models might be considered in reference to the specifics of their political context, the individuals included are now restricted to those who are located either in the U.S. or China (Table 7.5.).

Contrary to the hypothesis that commercialisation is negative for political speech (again remembering that this survey measures only the self-reported frequency of online political speech) and the hypothesis that commercialisation would be less

negative and perhaps even positive in authoritarian contexts, these models suggest that commercialisation is positive for rates of political speech in both the U.S. and China. There is no apparent pattern of difference in the sizes of these effects.

Table 7.5. The association between commercialisation and online political speech taking into account demographics, political opinions and political system

		U.S.		China	
		Frequency of posting an opinion about politics online	Frequency of signing an online petition	Frequency of posting an opinion about politics online	Frequency of signing an online petition
Demographic and control variables	Age	0.001	-0.006	-0.001	-0.011
	Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)	-0.341***	-0.002	-0.384**	-0.336**
	Income	0.154*	-0.008	0.180*	0.154
	Education	0.014	0.018	0.075	0.007
	Self-rated skill using the Internet	0.014	-0.006	0.092	-0.012
	Internet connection at home (1 = no, 2 = yes)	0.118	0.356	0.492	0.556
	Time spent online per week	-0.024	-0.006	-0.017	-0.079
Political beliefs	Agree that the government should be able to monitor content posted on the Internet	-0.021	-0.017	0.052	0.072*
	Agree that the government should be able to obtain any information online to protect national security	-0.019	-0.008	-0.030	0.022
	Extent of feeling not free to say things online that others might disagree with	-0.112***	-0.046*	-0.012	-0.015
	Extent of concern about their online opinions being censored	0.078***	0.058**	0.066	0.060
Measures of commercialisation	Frequency of online purchases	0.235***	0.222***	0.164**	0.212***
	View on online companies collecting user data in order to provide customised content	0.027	0.050	0.131***	0.151***
	Frequency of posting a message to a social networking site	0.325***	0.218***	0.359***	0.392***
Constant		0.608	0.155	-1.713*	-1.189
Adjusted R-squared		0.322	0.2202	0.257	0.307
N		680	677	454	443

Notes: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

However, as was suggested in the analysis of the previous section, the effect of an individual's opinion on the practice of companies collecting user data to provide tailored content has a different association with political speech in the U.S. and China. In China, those that would prefer data collection and tailored content are significantly more likely to more frequently engage in online political speech. In contrast, in the U.S., an individual's opinion on this practice has no correlation with their frequency of political speech. This suggests that, in China, but not the U.S. the development of online consumer and online citizen roles goes hand-in-hand, rather than one undermining the other. This accords with the results of previous chapters that found that the Chinese state placed emphasis on the potential uses of these commercial platforms to develop and extend politics within the country and suggests that the development of consumer identities, far from undermining authoritarian control, may, in fact, bolster it.

Similarly, and unlike the models that included all Internet users surveyed, opinions about state control and surveillance of online spaces are not associated with rates of political speech in either the U.S. or China³⁵. Among U.S. Internet users neither of these opinions is correlated with an individual's self-reported rate of online political speech and among Chinese users those who agree that the government should monitor online content were more likely to more frequently sign petitions; however, the size of this effect is small and significant only at the 90% confidence level. This suggests that in neither the U.S. nor China is online political speech particularly dominated by pro- or anti-state voices. This accords with the results of the previous chapter, which found that speech that challenged dominant discourses was present on Weibo and that speech on Twitter was polemic in style but not leaning toward one or another political pole or leading to instrumental action.

³⁵ In the previous models that included all survey respondents, those who disagreed that the government should be able to obtain any information online to protect national security were more likely to engage in more frequent political speech both symbolic and instrumental. Additionally, in the previous models, those who agreed that the government should monitor online content more frequently signed online petitions.

This model also backs up this finding of a more polemic style of political speech on Twitter. Among U.S. Internet users, those who do not feel safe to express opinions that other's might disagree with online were significantly less likely to frequently engage in online political speech (both symbolic and instrumental). However, concern that others might disagree with their views had no association with rates of political speech among Chinese Internet users. This finding could possibly be explained by the greater emphasis on the Internet user as linked to their offline identity both as an individual and as a member of a community in the Chinese context and the greater extent of online community evidenced in Chinese online spaces.

Additionally, U.S. Internet users who were more concerned about their online opinions being censored were more likely to more frequently engage in online political speech. Concern about censorship was not related to online political speech in China. This is intuitively a surprising finding given that there are high rates of censorship in China and low rates of censorship in the U.S. Hypothesising the potential direction of causation of this association among U.S. but not Chinese Internet users is, however, difficult.

In the general model of all Internet users, the less democratic the context and the greater the concern about censorship, the higher the self-reported frequency of political speech. However, China does not appear to follow this pattern; despite being in an authoritarian country, concern over censorship is not associated with the frequency of online political speech. A potential reason for this might be that this survey was collected after the events of the Arab Spring but before the crackdown on online speech in China after Xi Jinping took office. This was, therefore, the time at which online political speech in China seemed the freest and it may be the case that this data would be different if collected today. However, it might also be the case that Chinese Internet users have internalised state discourses about the use of the Internet for political speech and respond to these calls to speak politically online, trusting that these online commercial spaces can provide positive contributions to the political process and that the state will

respond appropriately to online political speech. This is a conclusion that is supported by the results of the previous chapter and also by this survey data, in which a majority (albeit slim) of Chinese Internet users agreed that the government should monitor online content and that the government should be able to protect any information online to protect national security³⁶.

In contrast, the analysis of online political speech on the U.S. Internet has shown a relatively polemic style in which those who do not feel free to express opinions online that others might disagree with participate less in online political speech. It is potentially the case that this is linked to the association between concern about censorship and the frequency of political speech in that those who are engaging in polemic styles of performative political speech (rather than in political speech as a member of an offline civic to which the state is expected to be listening) might be airing more extreme views and, thus, might be more concerned about these ideas being censored.

7.7. Summary: The relationship between commercialisation and online political speech

The findings of this analysis of a worldwide survey of Internet users and a comparison of Internet users in the U.S. and China seems to provide evidence against the two hypotheses derived from existing literature; commercialisation appears to be positive for political speech regardless of the political system. However, it is important to remember that this chapter relied only on self-reported frequencies of online political speech. It can provide evidence about both symbolic and instrumental speech (with some arguing that the commercialisation of online spaces undermines instrumental political speech with ‘slacktivist’ acts); however, it cannot speak to the content, topic and, thus, implied quality of these political speech acts.

³⁶ Only 24% of Chinese Internet users disagreed that the government should be able to obtain any online information to protect national security and 30% disagreed that the government should monitor online content with the rest remaining neutral.

However, these analyses, when examined under the framework of understanding built across this thesis, accord with the results of previous data chapters. Commercialisation may not have a negative effect on the frequency of political speech in democratic states but it still may be true that it affects its content, tone and topic. These models show that those who engage in online political speech in the U.S. are concerned about the possibility of their opinions being censored and those who do not feel free to say things others disagree with online are less likely to engage in political speech. Despite apparently positive associations between exposure to consumer discourses and time spent in commercial spaces and political speech in the U.S., these data do not provide an indication of an ideal online sphere and suggest, when combined with insights from the previous chapters, that the commercialisation of online spaces in the U.S. likely results in a domination of performative, polemic speech acts that, while being considered as political by their speakers and by the broad definition of political speech employed at the outset of this thesis, do not align with contextually relevant normative theories of what would constitute ideal spaces or modes of political speech.

The analysis of the association between commercialisation and political speech in China also produces surprising findings; all three variables of commercialisation are positively associated with more frequent self-reported rates of political speech. In particular, an internalisation of consumer identities (operationalised as the agreement with the practice of collecting user data for the purposes of tailoring) is associated with more frequent political speech in China but not the U.S., suggesting, as was outlined in previous chapters, a concurrent development of both citizen and consumer identities in the Chinese online sphere. Notably, in China, agreement with state power over online spaces and concerns about negative repercussions of online speech acts have little relationship with the rate of political speech, suggesting, in accordance with the findings of the previous chapter, an online sphere that both aligns with contextually relevant normative ideas about political speech and works to negotiate new modes of political speech in commercial online spaces.

Commercialisation is, then, found not to be necessarily negative for political speech. In particular, the use of social networking sites is strongly correlated with online political speech across all political systems and user demographics. However, the political system does matter. The less democratic the country the more Internet users engage in online symbolic political speech. Indeed, Chinese Internet users engage significantly more frequently in both symbolic and instrumental political speech. The accordance between the results of this survey and the results of the analysis of a random selection of microblog posts in the previous chapter strengthen confidence in this conclusion.

The political system does matter but perhaps not necessarily in the way that was initially hypothesised. It may partially be the case that users in authoritarian countries engage more frequently in online political speech because commercial social networking sites offer greater affordances than offline spaces. However, this does not mean that these commercial platforms will undermine state control nor that those who seek an opportunity to oppose the state flock to them. Although a fear of censorship had no relation with the frequency of political speech among Chinese Internet users, in China (but not the U.S.) there was a correlation between an agreement with state monitoring and control of online spaces and rates of political speech. It seems that, rather than undermining authoritarian control, as might be believed, the commercialisation of online spaces in authoritarian systems (and, in particular, in China where the state has greater control over online spaces) is occurring hand-in-hand with a development of online political speech that is both within the bounds of state control and also seems to be a positive movement in terms of individual Internet users' ability to engage in speech acts that affect or seek to affect the balance of power in society (even though these power changes might be slight).

Discussion: Assessing the effects of the commercialisation of online spaces on their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems

8.1. Chapter overview

This thesis began by introducing the common idea that commercialisation and authoritarianism have undermined the potential of online spaces to provide venues for political speech. This introduction also highlighted the emergence of social networking sites and the expansion of Internet use to non-democratic contexts as key issues in understanding how the Internet might influence repertoires of political participation in authoritarian states.

The second chapter of this thesis considered the literature on the relationship between commercialisation and (online) political speech in different political systems. The perspective that commercialisation is negative for political speech is dominant in democratic systems, with a minority discourse that commercialisation is not negative or could even be positive. These perspectives appear to be reversed in authoritarian systems, where commercialisation is often seen as positive for political speech; the very same online spaces and actions that are seen as distracting and 'slacktivist' in democratic states are seen as valuable contributions to political repertoires. While it may, indeed, be the case that commercialisation is positive for political speech in authoritarian systems and negative in democratic systems, comparative research into the effects of commercialisation on political speech in different political systems is necessary in order to address this apparent contradiction.

The rest of this thesis laid out a methodological framework for examining the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems and presented data, based on a variety of research methodologies, that shed light on this question. This chapter returns to the existing arguments about the effects of the commercialisation of online spaces on political speech, drawing together the data presented in the previous four chapters to provide an empirically grounded

account of the relationship between the process of commercialisation of online spaces and their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems.

This analysis finds support for both of the hypotheses put forward in Chapter Two: that commercialisation is negative for political speech and that it is less negative or perhaps even positive for political speech in authoritarian political systems. However, these data suggest that the reason that commercialisation is less negative for political speech in authoritarian systems is not necessarily, as hypothesised in the literature, that commercialisation takes power away from a state regime that is detrimental to political speech. Instead, the mitigation of the negative effects of commercialisation on political speech in China appears to be due to the state's active role in promoting the use of these spaces for political speech, in negotiating and managing changing configurations of power between the state, the market and civil society in the country and in experimenting with new conceptions of ideal political speech rather than allowing power over political agendas and constructions to be transferred quietly and unquestioningly to commercial entities.

8.2. The commercialisation of the Internet

This thesis set out to address the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces affects their ability to provide a venue for political speech in different political systems. However, before this question can be addressed it is important to provide a clear picture of the nature and extent of the commercialisation of online spaces in the U.S. and China based on the empirical data presented in the previous four chapters of this thesis. Chapter Two broke down the definition of commercialisation into five sub-processes based on an analysis of literature. The preceding study of the Internet, commercialisation and political speech in the U.S. and China has demonstrated that online spaces in both countries have undergone a significant process of commercialisation, regardless of which of these sub-processes is considered.

The first way in which the term commercialisation is used is synonymous with privatisation: the transfer from public to private ownership of a particular good or service. While none of the online spaces under consideration in this thesis were originally state maintained and sold to private businesses, this argument is still relevant for two reasons. Firstly, the Internet was originally developed by the U.S. state. In both the U.S. and China, the technology was used by the state and by academics before it was extended to private individuals through commercial ISPs; many prominent early platforms were run by universities, volunteers and idealists with little commercial influence (Frischmann, 2000, 2000; S. Li, 2010; Lovink, 2011). Thus, although specific Internet platforms have not changed from public to private hands, it is important to consider the commercialisation of online spaces in terms of the extent to which the ownership and administration of online spaces in general, within these national contexts, might be being transferred into private hands. The second reason that this conception of commercialisation is relevant is that it may be the case that within these national contexts the service of maintaining places for political speech is increasingly being officially or unofficially outsourced to commercial companies. Both of these processes would fall under this understanding of what commercialisation means.

In terms of the first area, the data presented in the previous four chapters has shown that the provision of Internet technologies has been overwhelmingly transferred into private hands in both countries, albeit with state restrictions. The bulk of the most popular Internet platforms are commercial, although state mouthpiece media outlets do have a significant market share in China. Furthermore, state discourse about the control and use of the Internet outsources the responsibility for the provision of online spaces to commercial companies. The U.S. legislative regime positions the state as assisting in the development of new technologies and working to ensure equal access, but does not extend to the provision of these spaces. Similarly, the Chinese legislative framework formally outsources the administration of online spaces for political speech to commercial

entities. Thus, in both cases, there is a transfer of ownership and administration of online spaces to commercial entities.

There also appears to have been an outsourcing of the service of providing spaces for political speech to these commercial spaces. The analysis of survey data and of Twitter and Weibo have shown that social networking sites appear to be one of the most important contemporary venues for online political speech. Not only are these commercial platforms used for political speech but also new repertoires of political participation are developing in these commercial settings. In China, these forms of online speech challenge traditionally dominant discourses about ideal forms of political participation and the use of these commercial Internet platforms for political speech is higher in China than the U.S. In both cases, the state has responded by incorporating this online speech into its practices. The U.S. state responds to the exertions of public opinion evidenced online. However, gone are the references to the idea of the Internet as an online agora or a metaphor for democracy itself. It is, in fact, the commercial companies themselves, rather than the U.S. state, that are now the strongest voices in encouraging the use of these platforms for political speech, positioning themselves as bastions of freedom while the U.S. state monitors online discourse for the purposes of law enforcement. The Chinese state has gone much further in incorporating speech on commercial online platforms into their processes of governance, specifically encouraging the use of these platforms for political speech, using these platforms to communicate with citizens and actively monitoring online discourse as a barometer of public opinion. Thus, in both contexts the provision of spaces for political speech has been, at least in part, outsourced to online commercial platforms with the support of the state.

A second way in which the process of commercialisation is understood is as an introduction of market logic regardless of the nature of ownership of the space. The examination of online spaces and the case studies of Twitter and Weibo illustrated a dominance of market logic in both the U.S. and China. Users in both countries think of and use the Internet as a space for commercial activity and agree with and adhere to commercial paradigms about Internet use. In China, Internet

users engage in higher levels of commercial activity and this introduction of market logic seems borne out in a hierarchical way (with greater trust in commercial entities, willingness to share personal information for access to content and participation in furthering commercial messages in order to be in with a chance of winning a prize). The introduction of a centralised social credit system in China shows a vast incorporation of market logic and commercial data into state-administered systems. However, there is a much greater emphasis in discourse in China (compared to the U.S.) concerning the need to control the power of the market, which is presented as resulting in rumours, abuses of power and mistreatment of vulnerable individuals.

The case studies of Twitter and Weibo provide a detailed picture of the nature and influence of market logic on these two key platforms. Discourse about Twitter from site actors emphasises its origins as a non-commercial platform and its status as a potential venue for political speech; however, these stated functions rest on a discourse of information abundance and a marketplace of ideas. Trending topics, hotness and popular content dominate on both Twitter and Weibo and both have similar revenue models that are based on the construction of users as data producers and consumers. Weibo includes an integrated level system and even gamifies public service on the Gongyi platform. In both cases, these platforms are dominated by market logic. However, this logic seems to have been internalised to a greater extent by Twitter users who are made complicit in their own commodification and who live in a society that grants much more freedom to the market. In contrast, although there is greater space devoted to and affordances provided for hot and popular content on Weibo, this is juxtaposed against discourse from the state and media about the danger of the ‘unguided masses’ and the problems associated with commercialisation.

The third way in which commercialisation is generally understood is in terms of greater individual exposure to commercial forces and messages. The data presented in the previous four chapters have shown high levels of exposure to commercial messages and forces for Internet users in both the U.S. and China.

Users in both countries engage frequently in online commerce and the case studies of Twitter and Weibo show that users are frequently exposed to commercial messages and post about commercial topics. However, these commercial forces and messages are constituted very differently on the two platforms. Although both platforms promote sponsored content, there is far more sponsored and hot content promotion and far more banner advertising on Weibo. Individual users also engage more frequently in retweeting commercial messages about products and services that might enable them to win prizes. On Twitter, these commercial messages are integrated much more seamlessly into the user experience; ten percent of the accounts on Twitter belong to commercial entities and the platform frames its practice of presenting tailored commercial messages to users as one of the services it provides. The tension presented in the Chinese media that commercialisation drives away users and leads to rumours and exploitative practices is not present in discourse about Twitter where the place of these commercial messages appears to be both unquestioned and consciously presented by the platform as natural.

This practice relates to the fourth way in which commercialisation is understood: as the construction of the role of the individual in society as a consumer, which is seen by critics as occurring at the expense of the idea of the individual as a citizen. The analysis of Twitter shows that the platform actively constructs users as citizen-consumers, presenting itself as a commercialised public sphere characterised by freedom and equality. However, the commercial nature of the site means that it rarely appears to act as an online public sphere or as the free and equal space that it presents itself as. Twitter users seem to have internalised these commercialised constructions, voluntarily posting about their consumptive choices, speaking about these choices as constitutive of their identity and approaching online political speech largely as an individualised, consumptive practice, either retweeting messages from established information providers or engaging in symbolic speech about personal opinions and preferences.

This aspect of commercialisation is one which appears very different on Weibo, where users are linked more strongly to their offline identities and for whom state,

civil society and platform discourse much more strongly emphasises the need for users to perform roles as citizens, engaging in active political speech and negotiating ideas of ideological correctness within society. In both cases, this research does not find a strict delineation between the roles of citizen and consumer but power over the social construction of these roles is very different in the two contexts. In the U.S. context, there is a citizen-consumer constructed primarily by commercial forces, with political speech taking place in commercial spaces and dominated by commercial logic. In contrast, the Chinese state, through much more active control of information and online spaces and based on different understanding of the role of the market in society, has, to a much greater extent, resisted increases in commercial power over the construction of ideas of citizenship. The identity position of Chinese Internet users in online commercial spaces aligns much more strongly with normative ideas of citizenship within the country and even works to negotiate the boundaries of the identity role the networked Chinese citizen from the position of members of civil society.

The fifth, and final, way in which commercialisation is often understood is as a movement of individuals into commercial spaces. The declining role of the state in administering online spaces and the outsourcing of the provision of spaces for political speech to market entities has already been discussed; however, this understanding of commercialisation concerns to the presence of individuals in commercial spaces as a proportion of their lived experiences. Internet users in both countries are spending ever-increasing amounts of time online and the majority of online spaces are commercial. The use of commercial social networking sites has peaked at and maintains a high level in the U.S. In China, the use of microblogs has dropped in the past couple of years, with a movement to private messaging services (which are also commercially owned). However, in both countries, these commercial sites, and in particular Twitter and Weibo, remain the major public online spaces that individuals could use for political speech. The trend toward spending more time in commercial online spaces seems likely to continue in both countries and in particular in China where almost half of the population is

still offline and, thus, Internet use has been less fully incorporated into existing patterns of everyday life.

Based on this summary of the extent and nature of commercialisation of the Internet in both the U.S. and China, the remainder of this chapter will assess the extent to which and the way in which this commercialisation of online spaces affects their ability to provide a venue for political speech based on the arguments outlined in Chapter Two (Table 8.1.).

Table 8.1. Summary of the arguments about the effects of commercialisation on political speech developed in Chapter Two

Commercialisation is negative for political speech	Commercialisation is positive for political speech
Commercialisation undermines the quality of political speech	Commercialisation is politically empowering
Commercialisation distracts, both from political topics and from more substantive forms of political speech	Commercialisation provides spaces for marginalised groups
Commercialisation leads to agenda setting, control and censorship	Commercialisation increases the diversity of information and facilitates offline action
Commercialisation leads to domination by offline elites	Commercialisation protects against government domination and inefficiency
Commercialisation leads to problematic constructions of citizens as consumers	Commercialised spaces are comfortable for users and are where people want to engage in political speech

8.3. Commercialisation and representation

The review of existing arguments about the effects of commercialisation on political speech highlighted two opposing (seemingly contradictory) arguments. On the one hand, critics argue that commercialisation leads to inequality, particularly in creating and exacerbating digital divides (Hindman, 2009; MacKinnon, 2012; Shirk, 2010; Zhao & Schiller, 2001) with concerted action by the state necessary to provide access and create inclusive online spaces (Iosifidis, 2011; Schmitz et al., 1995). On the other hand, a variety of research has found that

commercial online platforms have provided spaces for minority counter publics (Mitra, 1997; Nip, 2004; Orgad, 2006; Qiu, 2009; Radsch, 2012; Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Yang, 2009) and that resources are less important in online than offline political participation (Krueger, 2002).

The data presented in the previous four chapters suggests that there is some truth in both these perspectives. The commercial nature of these spaces favours the domination of elites in terms of being heard but can allow minority voices to speak (and be spoken about). These commercial sites base their business models on the collection of user data; the provision of services to additional users costs little extra while generating additional revenue. However, this does not mean that users are treated equally or offer the same value to the platform. Data about some users is more valuable to advertisers than data about others. Weibo, in particular, is skewed toward more affluent users, creates a hierarchical system of levels and actively courts, privileges and promotes established voices on the platform as part of its business strategy. Twitter markets itself as a space of equality but its business model of sponsored content and the push and pull forces exerted by existing elite, who are vastly better represented as a fraction of all user accounts than on Weibo, privileges these individuals in terms of being heard.

The tendency of these commercial spaces to privilege elites in terms of being heard while simultaneously providing potential spaces for minority voices to speak and/or be spoken about seems to have a different effect in the two different political systems considered. On Weibo, this political speech is (a) being made by existing elites but enabling regular users to respond to this speech and (b) is enabling public individuals, online opinion leaders and the generally more privileged population of Weibo users to promote the interests of more marginalised members of society, in line with discourses from the state, platform and civil society about the importance of community and social responsibility.

In contrast, the process of commercialisation leading to the dominance of elite voices in terms of being heard while still allowing minority individuals to speak

works differently in the U.S. context, due to the much greater commercial influence over constructions of the individual user as a citizen-consumer. On Twitter, there is (a) a predominance of personal messages and symbolic speech and (b) discourses of information abundance, freedom and equality that, less constrained by the state, end up privileging existing power holders. These discourses accord with the status quo in the U.S., as such the Internet has been largely incorporated into existing power structures and patterns of everyday life.

Similar to the Chinese models, demographic and offline resource-related variables (apart from the influence of gender in expressing an opinion about politics) are not related to the frequency of online political speech in the U.S. (i.e. minority voices have a chance to speak). However, when the content of a random selection of speech acts by individuals on Twitter was examined these tweets were skewed toward individual, symbolic political expressions (that are unlikely to be heard by many) or retweets of information published by dominant elites (either media or bloggers). The content of these messages did not exhibit the promotion of the interests of vulnerable minorities or critiques of dominant perspectives that were present in the political speech acts of individual Weibo users.

Thus, while the commercialisation of online spaces can provide spaces for marginalised individuals to speak, it tends to lead to the domination of existing elite in terms of being heard. In China, this commercialisation has resulted in a diversification of power over political speech with the empowerment of a new elite of online opinion leaders and a cultural and political focus on community that encourages these platforms to be used to speak for the interests of minority individuals. In the U.S. where there is less state control of either the market or civil society, this commercialisation has mostly resulted in an undermining of the participatory potential of the technology and the dominance of online elite voices in being heard, with the speech acts of individuals being encouraged for commercial (rather than political) purposes as part of a commercialised representation of a public sphere that, due to its commercial orientation, rarely results in the kind of political speech acts that align with normative ideals.

8.4. Commercialisation and information

A second key tension in arguments about the effects of commercialisation on political speech relates to the availability of information. On the one hand, critics of commercialisation have argued that it leads to passive and active agenda setting, control and censorship in the interests of both the state and market forces. In terms of the market, commentators have argued that commercialisation dumbs down existing content and focuses on diversionary content to the detriment of political topics and even changes the content of information to align with advertiser needs (Boczkowski, 2002; Dahlberg, 2005; Youmans & York, 2012).

Others have argued that the commercial need to provide value to consumers leads to 'echo chambers' and filter bubbles in which individuals are not exposed to content that would challenge their existing opinions (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Dahlberg, 2005; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Pariser, 2012; Tewksbury, 2005). In China, it has been argued that commercialisation can actively serve the reinforcement of state power by fragmenting potential publics, distracting from political issues and creating a false sense of freedom from political control (Stockmann, 2012; Zhao & Schiller, 2001). These arguments, in a slightly different form, may also apply in the U.S. context, in which there is a huge influence of market players in the political process and an increasing number of government functions are privatised, reducing transparency about state involvement (Friedersdorf, 2012; Lopez-de-Silanes, Shleifer & Vishny, 1995).

However, on the other hand, it has also been argued that commercialisation and these same forces that are seen as resulting in audience fragmentation lead to a greater diversity of information that undermines the control of existing power holders (both the market and the state) over political agendas (Corrado, 1996; Diamond, 2010; Gang & Bandurski, 2011; Shapiro, 2000). A variety of case studies both in the U.S. (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016; Cave & Oliver, 2015) and China (Kaiman, 2013; MacKinnon, 2012; Sullivan, 2014) have shown how citizen information posted on social media has undermined the agenda setting power of the state and commercial media.

The data presented in the previous four chapters show that the commercialisation of online spaces does significantly increase the agenda setting power of the small number of commercial platforms that dominate the online market. However, the results of this agenda setting on the content and diversity of information appears to depend on the offline context, in particular the offline information environment and the extent to which online spaces replicate offline power structures. In both political systems examined, commercialisation seems to protect against state censorship by assigning commercial spaces the responsibility of moderating between state regulation for the purposes of protection and civil society demands, to the extent they exist, for spaces for political speech.

Commercial online spaces do appear to have a huge agenda-setting role by default of their size and frequency of use as a space for political speech. This is enacted through a variety of overt mechanisms, including trending topics and sponsored content as well as through the affordances these platforms provide. Given the importance of these sites as venues for political speech, their architectural constraints can have significant effects. Twitter's affordances act to constrain political speech to either symbolic, personal opinion statements or links to offline information. Greater integration of multimedia content and the provision of inline commenting on Weibo encourage a more information-based form of political speech and greater discursive potential for the platform. These commercial online spaces have a huge power over political speech because this is where much modern political speech occurs; however, unlike in China where the way that the structure and governance of Weibo might affect its political speech potential is an open subject of discussion, the structural constitution of Twitter is accepted in media discourse in the U.S., with discussion largely focusing on content.

In addition to the power these commercial platforms have over online agendas, the affordances of these platforms act to give greater agenda setting power and control over discourse to existing elites and other market players, who have the resources to adopt a privileged place within this system. The reliance of these commercial platforms on advertising revenue gives these players an advantage in terms of

setting agendas on the platform, for instance through sponsored content and access to user data. The value of user data to the platform seems to lead to the encouragement of the creation of more valuable data, for instance through the provision and promotion of specific affordances for posting about media products. The properties of the data that are valuable to advertisers (individualised, categorised, product-orientated) rarely align with normative conceptions of ideal political speech acts, which represents a tension rather than an alignment of interests for the platform.

The extent to which the power structures within the platform replicate the offline situation appears to be related to online information diversity vis-à-vis the offline. The previous section concluded that commercialisation allows minorities to speak but favours offline elites in terms of being heard and that Twitter, in particular, mirrors offline power hierarchies. Weibo, potentially due to less diversified offline power hierarchies and stronger societal discourses about political participation and community or perhaps simply due to a newer online sphere, appears to have facilitated the development of a new group of online opinion leaders who challenge, at least within the platform, existing dominant discourses. This gives these individuals power over online agendas within the platform and the snowball effect in retweeting popular messages gives these individuals greater power over what information is heard online, with the influence of public individuals and levels of retweeting much greater on Weibo than Twitter.

The influence of commercialisation on the actual frequency and content of online political speech acts will be examined in the following sections; however, the influence of commercialisation on agenda setting on the availability of information, i.e. the critique that commercialisation distracts from political topics, is an important part of the group of arguments about the effects of commercialisation on information. In both the U.S. and China, there is no evidence that commercialisation distracts from the availability of political information per se. Both Twitter and Weibo position themselves as providers of political information as part of their business models and need to provide information that is of interest

to their users in order to encourage them to return to the site. However, like more traditional media, it seems that political and social information tends to be a vehicle for the consumption of and exposure to commercial material and the production of valuable user data. There is a great deal of information on these platforms of which a greater fraction than might have been predicted based on previous research is political. However, this does not necessarily mean that commercial content does not distract from this political content, given that commercial content is far more prevalent and site structures and affordances push users toward the production and consumption of commercial content.

Indeed, it is the abundance of information online that gives both elite users and the platform such agenda setting power. This information abundance is encouraged by both Twitter and Weibo within their platforms in order to generate individual user data to sell to advertisers; both platforms push users towards generating and consuming more content and then position themselves as the arbiters of this content. Similarly, online opinion leaders often position themselves as arbiters of online content, with endorsement by one of these leaders important in whether a particular message is heard. The influence of the discourse of ideological correctness in China (as compared to information abundance in the U.S.) may moderate the amount of online information with Weibo users posting far less frequently and push online political speech away from symbolic, individualist acts and toward more communal, action-orientated speech.

This relates to another aspect of information diversity, namely the extent of censorship in commercialised online spaces. The Chinese state maintains the most technologically sophisticated censorship system in the world, which allows significant criticism but silences attempts at collective action. Illegal speech on commercial public online platforms is curtailed through the threat (and execution) of state action (particularly since the start of 2013). Although some research has found a chilling effect of state surveillance in the U.S., the scale and scope of state censorship in these countries is not comparable. However, what is similar is that in both cases commercial sites push against this state control. They have far more

freedom to do so in the U.S., however, with, for instance, Twitter going to court to avoid handing over user information to the state.

Commercial online platforms in China have, nevertheless, contributed to an undermining of state control over information. Despite the focus on censorship and surveillance in China, Internet users engage much more frequently in online political speech acts and the speech acts highlighted in the case study of Weibo show that users are challenging existing dominant discourses in a way that online political speech in the U.S. appears not to. The content of these posts and the diversification of power over the agenda to new online opinion leaders appear to have led to a diversification of online information on commercial platforms in the Chinese Internet sphere.

In summary, therefore, the data presented in the previous four chapters of this thesis suggests that the commercialisation of online spaces gives huge agenda setting power to the commercial providers of these platforms and to the commercial players and existing power holders who have the resources to utilise the official and unofficial affordances provided by these platforms for the manipulation of the information presented within them. However, this thesis finds that, in general, commercialisation protects against state censorship. In the U.S. context, where it is believed that a diversity of information and free market of ideas already exists, these commercial platforms appear to have replicated established power hierarchies and tilted the agenda for online information toward instantiations of consumer identity and symbolic, individualised speech acts. However, in China, where the constitution of the political system itself and repertoires of appropriate political action are much more in flux, the commercialisation of online spaces appears to have increased the diversity of available information, moderated through a group of online opinion leaders. The interaction between the specific affordances provided by Weibo (which enable a much greater repertoire of political speech acts) and the offline context (in which there is less offline information diversity and a much greater discourse about social responsibility, community and the use of the Internet for ideologically correct

political speech) mean that the commercialisation of online spaces in China does appear to diversify the available information, even after greater restrictions have been placed on online speech since 2013.

8.5. Commercialisation and the frequency of political speech

A key critique of commercialisation is that it distracts individuals from engaging in political speech, both distracting from political topics and encouraging 'slacktivist', pacifying political actions (Curran, Iyengar, Lund & Salovaara-Moring, 2009; Dahlberg, 2005; Morozov, 2013). An opposing perspective argues that commercial online spaces and the types of speech acts that occur within them facilitate offline political action (González-Bailón et al., 2011; Howard et al., 2011; Zuckerman, 2013b).

The evidence presented in the previous four chapters makes a strong case that commercialisation does not undermine and indeed is even associated with more frequent political speech acts. In line, however, with the hypothesis derived from existing literature that commercialisation would be less negative and perhaps even positive for political speech in authoritarian contexts, the association of commercialisation with more frequent political speech is stronger among Chinese Internet users than U.S. ones, with the size of the association between measures of commercialisation and more frequent online political speech approximately eight times as large in China in terms of posting an opinion about politics online and twice as large in terms of signing online petitions.

Chinese Internet users engage more frequently in online political speech acts, with a higher percentage of individual speech acts on Weibo concerning political issues, higher levels of retweeting of political messages and a greater self-reported frequency of both symbolic and instrumental online political speech acts. Weibo users also engage significantly more frequently (at the 90% confidence level) in action-orientated political speech acts that intend to influence audience members to engage in online or offline political acts. This is despite higher levels of advertising and more direction toward commercial content on Weibo, a general

greater frequency of engaging in commercial speech and action online and higher levels of agreement with commercial paradigms in China. This apparent contradiction is likely due to both the moderating effects of stronger discourses from the state, media and society about the importance of these sites for political speech and the greater affordances provided by these online commercial platforms in China compared to offline political speech opportunities.

These data provide strong evidence that in China commercialisation does not distract from engaging in political speech or distract from substantive political action. However, in the U.S. the case for commercialisation is more mixed. The survey data show a correlation between levels of commercialisation and online political speech acts, although this correlation is much weaker and U.S. Internet users report less frequently engaging in political speech acts. Political speech on Twitter is characterised by individualised, passive and symbolic acts. This thesis intentionally employed a broad definition of political speech so as to not exclude speech acts that were deemed political by their creators; however, if the more restrictive definitions often employed in research were used in relation to these data, the difference between levels of political speech in the Twitter and Weibo datasets would be much larger.

This association between commercialisation and political speech, which is present in the survey analysis in both countries but which is much stronger in China, says nothing about the content of these political speech acts. Commercialisation of online spaces may be positive for rates of political speech but this is unsurprising given that the entire model of the bulk of these commercial online spaces rest on encouraging the production of user data, some proportion of which will be political. Additionally, the survey dataset is based on self-reported rates of political speech and, thus, cannot speak to more complex forms of power that serve to construct ideas of what is appropriate political speech and the bounds of what is political. A much more common critique of commercialisation and one that is harder to address is not that it is negative for rates of political speech but rather that it undermines the quality of political speech.

8.6. Commercialisation and the quality of political speech

Critiques of the effects of commercialisation on the quality of political speech are numerous and prominent (Dahlberg, 2005; Elliott, 1982; Habermas, 1989; McChesney, 1996). With political speech conceptualised, traditionally, as part of the relationship between the state and members of civil society, an increase in power of the market within an assumed-zero-sum national context is seen as undermining the power of one of the other players in this relationship. Indeed, many of the positive arguments about commercialisation in authoritarian systems take this perspective because they see inherent value in the reduction in power of the state within the national framework (Tang & Sampson, 2012; Tang & Yang, 2011). However, while critics of commercialisation are numerous, attempts to evaluate the effects of this process on the quality of political speech are extremely difficult because what an ideal speech act is is so contested.

Despite this difficulty, this argument is at the crux of the question posed by this thesis and the resulting conclusions would be highly unsatisfactory if they were concerned with the quantity but not the quality of online speech acts. Certainly, there exist a multitude of different perspectives on what a high-quality speech act would be (or at least numerous critiques of what is deemed to constitute poor quality speech acts) that complicate this evaluation. In particular, a discussion of the influence of commercialisation on the ability of online spaces to offer a venue for political speech in different political systems must be cognisant of the fact that what constitutes a high quality political speech act will be understood differently in different contexts. Indeed, what constitutes a high-quality speech act might not be agreed on by the state, the market and civil society, to say nothing of disagreement between different players within these spheres.

In order, thus, to provide an account of the effects of commercialisation on the quality of political speech acts in online spaces, this section draws on Freedman's description of three ways of doing politics: historical, normative and practical (2008). This thesis has considered the discourses concerning online political speech in both the U.S. and China and presented data concerning the political

speech that actually occurs in these online spaces. In order to address the argument that commercialisation undermines the quality of political speech acts, the actually occurring speech in these commercial online spaces and the relationship between commercialisation and political speech acts must be compared to the historical, normative and practical theories of political speech in both contexts and the apparent intentions of the speakers themselves regarding their own political speech acts.

The data presented in the previous four chapters find that online political speech acts are more numerous than would be predicted based on existing literature, potentially due to the new affordances provided by social networking sites. This relatively high frequency of political speech online accords with U.S. normative traditions of freedom of speech and discourses of information abundance and a marketplace of ideas. It is less in keeping with ideas of ideological correctness in the Chinese context that encourage individuals to think about the possible repercussions of their speech before speaking but this frequency does accord with the encouragement of the Chinese state that commercial online platforms be used for political speech to enable the monitoring of public opinion for the purposes of more efficient governance.

Online spaces also exhibit relative equality in terms of being able to speak but not in being able to be heard. This equality is, however, far from perfect, particularly in terms of gender, where males are much more likely to participate in public political speech acts online. Both Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China exhibit an underrepresentation of minority languages and Weibo use is significantly skewed toward more affluent, developed areas of the country. Despite these limitations, however, the relative equality in terms of being able to speak in commercial online spaces and the extent of the chances to be heard (although this being heard is often controlled by gatekeepers) is historically unusual in both political contexts and does represent significant new opportunities. These online spaces, in which many individuals have the chance to speak, strongly align with U.S. conceptions of ideal public speech, invoking (falsely) ideas of a virtual town hall or public sphere. These

opportunities are even more unusual in the Chinese context, where the history of mass participation in politics is both far newer and more limited, but the state has capitalised on these opportunities to guide, monitor, survey and respond to public opinion.

However, it is important to note that that ideas of equality in normative theories of political speech encompasses the idea of being heard, not just speaking. On Twitter, the dominance of existing elites in being heard in this space where equality of speech is nominally offered reinforces Mouffe's (2005) argument that ideal spaces for political speech should recognise that true equality is impossible and that power differences between speakers should be accounted for. Dominance of elites in being heard significantly undermines the potential for commercial online spaces to act as an online public sphere. However, the hierarchical power structures found on Weibo and the importance of public individuals in moderating political speech accords both with Chinese traditions of seeing political structures as replicating hierarchical family dynamics and, also, theories about political speech in the pre-Internet U.S.-context in which both the media and opinion leaders acted to moderate information flows.

A third point of similarity in online political speech in the U.S. and China is that the structure and affordances of these spaces prioritise the informational and the individual over the deliberative. This accords much more strongly with the Chinese political tradition in which individuals speak and it is trusted that appropriate action will be taken. This is, however, significantly counter to dominant ideas about ideal political speech in the U.S. context, which focus on rational deliberation and achieving consensus and conclusion within the realm of civil society. The vast difference between conceptions of political speech in the U.S. and China on this point mean that in both cases the affordances provided by commercial online spaces provide a step away from these ideals. Online social networks are more individual than the U.S. deliberative ideal but in China provide a stronger space for the development of civil society than the offline or state-run spaces.

The importance of site affordances should be noted here. The structure and architecture of Weibo provides a much better venue for political speech than the more limited affordances of Twitter. While this finding should caution against drawing simplistic conclusions about differences in online political speech based on studies of platforms with different affordances, it is also the case that these two countries were picked as case studies primarily because their offline contexts can be seen reflected in the structure of their online platforms. These findings, in part, demonstrate the importance of affordances and architectures in the ability of online spaces to offer a venue for political speech but also that these sites are not created in a vacuum and are instead themselves constrained by the state, market and civil society within their contexts of creation and use.

Twitter was initially created as a platform for sharing SMS length messages to a group of followers (friends, family, colleagues) and despite its development as an important venue for public speech in the U.S. the affordances of the site have developed relatively little. In contrast, the closeness of the links between Weibo and the Chinese state suggest that the affordances of the platform are encouraged and endorsed as providing mechanisms for approved political speech. The launch of the Gongyi platform can be seen as action by site actors to codify the early political speech functions of the site in response to incentives from the state, market and civil society, increasing the ability of this commercial online space to offer a venue for (approved) political speech. This structural affordance of Weibo (and likely other online spaces in China given the much higher frequency of political speech by Chinese Internet users for political speech) should therefore be seen not as a structural eccentricity of the system but as part of a development of ideas in China about the proper configuration of power in a networked society between the state, market and civil society and ideal repertoires of political speech. The greater independence of commercial platforms in the U.S. and the lack of development of affordances that increase the ability of these platforms to provide a venue for political speech, resulting in a divergence of online action and normative

ideals of political speech, can be seen more as a distraction and dilution of rather than a development of repertoires of political speech.

Thus, structurally the commercialisation of online spaces results in frequent speech and equality of voice (but not of being heard) and tends toward information and individualisation rather than discussion and debate, moderated by the structural affordances of the platform. These characteristics are relatively similar between commercial online spaces in the U.S. and China, although their interaction with offline contexts and historical and normative conceptions of political speech is quite different. These characteristics of frequency, equality of voice, informationalisation and individualisation are linked to the commercial online platforms themselves and their business model of tailored advertising and the collection of consumer data. This relationship between commercialisation and online political speech moderated through site architectures is relatively similar in both political systems under consideration. What is very different, however, is the influence of this process on the content of political speech acts moderated through social norms and the constitution of individuals as political entities. This is borne out in the very different way in which the affordances provided by these commercial online spaces are actually used.

The individualised and information-based nature of commercialised online spaces and the encouragement of users to produce and consume content interacts with the more individualised society and lower levels of state power in the U.S. context to encourage a movement toward performative, symbolic speech acts. This predominance of passive, symbolic speech without a particular intent to affect the structure of power in society represents a significant step away from normative conceptions of ideal political speech in the U.S. context. Recent attempts to expand understanding of political speech to take into account this reality have recognised these passive, symbolic acts as a legitimate part of the political process, but even those who hold that these online symbolic acts have political importance still see a necessity for active, intentioned political acts associated with and rising out these symbolic acts (Howard et al., 2011; Zuckerman, 2013b). The data provided in this

thesis indicate that understandings of political speech should be updated to account for the new forms of political participation emerging in these commercial online spaces but also that the lack of active, action-orientated attempts to change power structures in society found Twitter is potentially a worrying development, given that these online spaces are increasingly the venues in which political speech takes place.

Additionally, although the data collection period was chosen to cover the run up to the mid-term election and the election itself in the U.S., very little of this speech (less than 1% of individual tweets) concerned the formal political process, an indication that even when these platforms are used for political speech they are not used to increase engagement in formal political processes. This individualised and symbolic format of online political speech can be seen as linked with the commercial nature of these spaces in the sense that their business model rests on providing tailored advertisements to individuals. Statements of individual opinion help better tailor adverts to individual users while collective and action-orientated speech provides less indication of likely consumer behaviour and may even detract from the commercial potential of the platform by inducing content with which advertisers would not want to be associated.

The individualised, symbolic and non-formal orientation of political speech on Twitter also seems to result in a relatively polarised form of political speech. Political speech acts on Twitter often provide information on a political topic but do so in a way that implies an adversarial relationship between the speaker and those who disagree with them. This potentially results in the exclusion of individuals who do not feel safe expressing their opinion online and undermines the ability of these spaces to align with conceptions of deliberative, communitarian or monitorial citizenship.

Interestingly, the body of literature on online political speech that the political speech found in this random sample of individual speech acts on Twitter aligns most strongly with are derived from studies of Chinese online spaces; these

theories are not necessarily concerned with the implications to the balance of power in society of these speech acts but instead focus on performative and entertainment-orientated nature of engaging in political speech (S. Li, 2010; Poell, Kloet, Zeng & Guohua, 2014; Yang, 2009). This characterisation of political speech in commercial online spaces is a significant departure from normative conceptions of ideal political speech in the U.S. context but does align with many of the criticisms of the effects commercialisation on political speech.

However, these studies of Chinese online spaces that focus on performativity, the joy of argumentation and the provision of commercial spaces so individuals can engage in these functions mostly predate the Chinese state's transition to a much more active use of commercial online platforms to monitor and guide public opinion, the encouragement of the use of these platforms for political speech and the integration of the early civil society functions of these commercial spaces into more formal structures. The greater community orientation in China and the greater emphasis on the importance of welfare rights seems to have led to the development of a civil society online that largely but not wholly sits within the boundaries of what is permitted by the state. This accords with much of the work on Chinese online spaces, which concludes that they do offer new venues and affordances for political speech and are part of a development of new forms of politics that see a strengthened civil society but that the state is changing along with these new technologies such that this political activity occurs within boundaries approved by and does not fundamentally challenge the power of the state (Arsène, 2012; Herold, 2008; Sullivan, 2014; Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Yang, 2009).

This online civil society aligns with traditional ideas in Chinese political thought that ideal forms of political speech monitor and report when the state has not fulfilled its function in ensuring the welfare and economic development of its citizens. Posts on Weibo are often acts by opinion leaders and the generally more affluent population of microblog users to encourage action to protect vulnerable members of society. The Gongyi platform codifies these functions of commercial

online spaces. These spaces exhibit a culture of evidence provision to document the neediness and veracity of the issues discussed online, which unlike the idea of a performative online space links this online speech to offline identities, issues and repertoires of political speech.

However, these political speech acts are not directed at the state but rather at a networked civil society. This reality appears to align more with Kantian conceptions of civil society as an ethical commonwealth in which agentic individuals take action to attempt to align realities with their normative conceptions of morality (Ehrenberg, 1999), rather than Habermasian public sphere in which opinions are formed before communication to the state (1989). However, unlike ideas of universal rights and moralities governing civil society, the actions of individuals on Weibo align with state-led constructions of appropriate repertoires of political speech and culturally and contextually rooted ideas of citizen rights and state responsibilities (Perry, 2008; Shue, 2004; Zhou, 2010). The civil society facilitated by commercial platforms in China is not autonomous from state power; however, it is self-referential with political speech occurring on these platforms directed at other individuals within their roles as members of a civil society.

Political speech on and about Weibo exhibits a much more active negotiation of the boundaries of accepted political action and the status of individuals as political entities and members of civil society than in the U.S. context. Rather than being incorporated into existing power structures, the platform is used to distribute political communication from the state to citizens and allows these users to speak back to these issues, communications that are monitored by the state as a tool of governance. This aligns with the theory of authoritarian deliberation, in which the state encourages and incorporates citizen discussion into policy making with the boundaries of discourse and a decision-making process dominated by unelected elites (B. He & Warren, 2011; Jiang, 2009). However, Weibo appears to have undermined some of the power of these elites over the agenda of political discussion and diversified the power over these agendas to new opinion leaders. Thus, this political speech in online commercial spaces in China can be seen as part

of a continued development of civil society and an increase in the power of the civic sphere drawing from historic and recent conceptions of ideal political speech both Chinese and Western, which is linked to China's process of commercialisation, opening up and the discourse of continual development.

The discussion of the effects of commercialisation on the apparent quality of political speech has, thus far, compared the nature of this online speech under different historical and normative conceptions of political speech. However, it has not yet considered the extent to which these speech acts seem to accord with what Internet users want from their political speech acts. A particular advantage of the mixed-methods research design employed in this thesis is that it is able to assess political speech both under a standard coding scheme and based on self-reported data. The accordance of the data from these two sources (that Chinese individuals seem to engage more frequency in generally accepted categories of political speech, that speech in Chinese online spaces is not constrained by individual opinions or concerns about censorship and monitoring and that speech in U.S. online spaces is characterised by more individualised speech acts) suggests that the broad understandings of political speech employed at the outset of this thesis do accord with the understandings of Internet users of the political nature of their own speech acts.

However, as discussed in Chapter Six, speech acts on Twitter are passive, symbolic and lack intention, compared to a more active orientation of speech acts on Weibo. The frequency of political speech acts on both platforms suggests that they do meet a perceived political speech need of their users. Twitter is mainly used to access information that confirms previously held opinions and to provide an opportunity to speak one's mind as part of performative, polarised repertoires. In contrast, Weibo is used to raise awareness about political issues (particularly the plight of vulnerable groups and individuals), to mobilise individuals as members of a civil society to take action to help these vulnerable members of society and to engage in discussion on policy and society within a state-run approved and monitored spaces.

In both cases, these commercial platforms are providing political speech functions to their users. However, the political speech functions that individuals desire from these platforms is not an independent variable but is instead related to way in which these users are constructed by discourses in society and how they are positioned with respect to their identities as political speakers within online spaces. This is a major critique of commercialisation: that it creates problematic constructions of citizens through a reconstitution of their roles, rights and responsibilities for commercial advantage.

8.7. Commercialisation and the Internet user

Criticisms of the process of commercialisation as undermining political speech by creating problematic constructions of citizens as consumers are influential and long-standing (Elliott, 1982; Habermas, 1989; McChesney, 1996). However, others have opposed this view, arguing that the distinction between the roles of citizen and consumer are false (Scammell, 2000; Schudson, 2007), that commercialisation can be empowering and provide new impetuses and roles for individuals to engage in political speech (Becchetti, 2012; Read, 2007) and that the movement of political speech into commercial spaces and the changing nature of political speech in these spaces are indications of the preferences of individuals as to how they participate in politics and are therefore political actions (Papacharissi, 2010). However, the provision of evidence in relation to this argument is difficult in that it relates to third-form power over how individuals understand themselves and their actions and opportunities to engage in political speech and influence the balance of power in society.

Ideas about whether commercialisation leads to problematic constructions of individuals as consumers or, conversely, whether commercialisation can be empowering is intimately linked with normative ideas about what a citizen should be and, even more basically, who should have power over the social construction of individuals and their understandings of themselves and their potentials for action. Lukes' definition of third-form power as power over social constructions and, in particular the aspect of this power that makes it so insidious - that it is invisible

and, thus, incontestable because alternatives seem unimaginable or impossible – can help address this point. One way in which the extent to which the commercialisation of online spaces leads to problematic constructions of individuals as consumers (or, conversely, empowers individuals) can be understood is as the extent to which the sources of construction of individuals are transparent and, potentially, the extent to which power over these constructions appears to rest with individuals or, more generally, with the civil society in which the identity of the citizen is embedded. Another way of conceptualising this issue is to ask whose interests are served by the nature of the constructions of individual users with respect to their potential as political speakers in these commercialised online platforms.

This theoretical perspective leads to conclude that the distinction between citizens and consumers as idealised roles for individuals is not necessarily false because, when remaining cognisant of the power of social constructions and of the configurations of power in society, it makes sense to ask where these constructions come from and whom these constructions serve. The roles of citizens and consumers are important and distinct concepts because the construction of consumer roles is primarily derived from and services the market whereas the construction of a citizen is concerned with the place of that individual as a member of civil society and the relationship between these individuals or groups of individuals and the state. While it may not make sense to speak of a single individual as a citizen or consumer or some amalgamation of the two, it is certainly important to examine both these idealised roles, as powerful structuring discourses, and the apparent alignment between individual online actions with respect to political speech and these idealised constructions.

Thus, the questions that need to be addressed are (1) how does the commercialisation of online spaces affect the power of civil society over constructions of the individual as a political entity or the power of the individual themselves over their construction as a political entity and (2) does the

commercialisation of online spaces make the nature of the construction of individuals as political entities more or less transparent?

Based on the data presented in the previous four chapters of this thesis, it is clear that in China the commercialisation of online spaces has increased (albeit marginally) the power of individuals to self-define as political entities and as members of civil society, increased the power of civil society over normative constructions of individuals as political entities and made the nature of these constructions more transparent by increasing the diversity of information, diversifying power over agendas to new groups of opinion leaders and encouraging action by the state to respond to and incorporate these repertoires of political speech.

In contrast, the commercialisation of online spaces in the U.S. appears to have decreased the power of civil society over constructions of individual users, through the increased power of commercial forces over these constructions, in a way that is particularly insidious due to its opacity. This is not to suggest that the status of civil society is necessarily worse in the U.S. than China but rather that the commercialisation of online spaces in China has acted to empower individuals as political entities. Conversely, in the U.S., where there has been historically a much stronger tradition of individual power as members of a strong civil society, commercialisation has acted to undermine this tradition.

There are three main reasons why this may be the case. Firstly, the state maintains a much greater power over individual constructions in China. This is not necessarily ideal; the constructions promoted and enforced by the Chinese state act to consolidate the power of the CCP and the state maintains strict control over conflicts and agendas. However, this relative greater power of the Chinese state over constructions of the individual as a political entity acts to counteract the commercial constructions of individuals that encourage individualised, symbolic and passive speech acts. The political speech that occurs in Chinese online spaces largely accords with dominant constructions of what ideal political speech is in

that context, which is dominated, although not wholly, by the state. This keeps greater focus on the potential for these commercial platforms to act as spaces for political speech and the more active involvement of the state means that these platforms can act as channels for communication rather than just sounding boards. In the U.S., where the market has more control over individual constructions and the state and civil society take a more limited role, this appears to devalue the use of commercial online spaces for certain kinds of political speech acts, namely those that are actionable or collective. It is not that the commercial or structural nature of these spaces are unsuitable for political speech, but rather that the discourses over how these spaces should be used have a great deal of shaping power over both the actual affordances of these spaces and the speech that occurs within them.

Secondly, the configuration of power between the state, the market and civil society, repertoires of appropriate political speech and the structures, affordances and proper governance of the Internet are much more contested and actively discussed topics in China than the U.S. In China, the state (in continuing to justify the dominance of the CCP, attempting to adapt to a rapidly changing population demographics and maintaining a state of continued revolution), civil society (with the rise of a new, urban, educated, middle class and a diversification of power away from the state to both civil society and the market) and market players (in attempting to establish businesses and turn a profit in a country in which the status of the power of the market is still evolving) all contribute to an on-going conversation about the proper nature of power in society and repertoires of appropriate speech and action. The new affordances of commercial online spaces have been incorporated into this debate.

The lack of debate over these topics in the U.S. context means that commercial online spaces replicate offline power structures and that the commercialisation of online spaces transfers power over political agendas and constructions to these commercial companies who, in the absence of influence from the state and civil society and following market logic, do provide spaces for political speech but not one that accords with normative theories of what ideal political speech should be

or, indeed, could be in these commercial online spaces. It is certainly time to question whether the definitions of political speech need to be updated to account for the rise of commercial online platforms as spaces for political speech but this does not mean that the speech that is found on the platforms should be seen as ideal: balance should be sought between the historical, normative and practical.

Lastly, contextual differences between the historic configurations of power in society and the responsibilities of civil society contribute to a stronger community in China that resists, to a greater extent, the individualising nature of commercialisation. The historical condition in which the roles and responsibilities of the Chinese state privilege welfare rights and economic development over individual and human rights and in which there has not historically (before the development of market capitalism in China) been a private sphere of individual action or a strong civil society separate from the state has created conditions in which the rise of commercial online spaces has encouraged the development of a stronger civil society. The underlying communal focus of Chinese society appears to have privileged the use of these commercial online spaces for communal functions. The commercialisation of online spaces in China has therefore transferred some of the power over constructions of individuals as political entities away from the state and toward a civil society and a market that (as in the Gongyi Platform) responds to these civil society demands within the boundaries of what is permissible under the state's ultimate control.

Thus, unimpeded commercialisation does lead to problematic constructions of citizens as consumers, in that it transfers power over constructions of individuals as political entities to these commercial players and tends to reduce the visibility of the power of these sites over the conflicts, agendas and constructions within them. Commercial spaces may be where individuals want to engage in political speech, but what spaces are seen as ideal for political speech and speech of what form is also a societal construction. In the U.S. it is commercial companies that have the most power over these discourses whereas in China it is the state. In the Chinese case, the commercialisation of online spaces has both afforded greater power to

civil society to define what constitutes appropriate political speech and made the process of the construction of individuals as political entities more transparent. However, this outcome is not necessarily associated with commercialisation per se but rather with a set of underlying variables, namely the configuration of power in society and the extent to which this power structure is under negotiation, that moderates the extent of the commercial power over constructions of individuals as political entities.

8.8. Commercialisation and configurations of power in society

The final aspect of the arguments identified in the literature about the effects of commercialisation on political speech relates to the proper balance of power between the state, the market and civil society. While an implicit assumption of many of the arguments against commercialisation is that political speech should occur in non-commercial spaces, others have argued that commercialisation protects against government domination and inefficiency. The impetus behind the wave of commercialisation in the late 1970s and early 1980s that occurred in both the U.S. and China was a neoliberal philosophy that posits that the market is a more efficient and effective arbiter of goods and services than the state (Harvey, 2007; Reder, 1999). This idea can be extended to the provision of spaces for political speech, with Papacharissi arguing that the movement of individuals into commercial spaces is in and of itself a political action that indicates the advantages of these spaces for political speech (2010). These arguments underlie many of the arguments about the diversity of information in commercial spaces and the ability of commercialisation to provide spaces for minority publics. Similarly, arguments about the positive effects of commercialisation on political speech in China are often based on the idea that the increase in power of the market protects against government dominance of information and agendas (Gang & Bandurski, 2011; Sullivan, 2014; Tang & Sampson, 2012; Tang & Yang, 2011).

The comparison of the interaction between commercialisation and political speech in the U.S. and China has shown that commercialisation does not necessarily result in a dramatic decrease in the power of the state. In China, there has been a

movement from state to private ownership, an increase in market logic, increased exposure of individuals to commercial forces and a movement into commercial spaces; however, the state still maintains significant control over the construction of individuals as political entities. The data presented in the previous four chapters have shown a diversification of power over agendas and constructions within China to commercial spaces and civil society players. However, the state decisively maintains the power to decide conflicts of interest in their favour and maintains significant control over agendas and constructions.

The comparison between the U.S. and Chinese cases shows that a transfer in state power over conflicts, agendas and constructions to market players as part of a process of commercialisation does not necessarily result in more efficient and effective spaces for political speech. Looking at the U.S. case, it cannot be said that the commercialisation of online spaces reduces government dominance and inefficiency. While the 1990s saw experiments in state-provided online spaces for political speech in the U.S., a major criticism of these spaces was that a small number of individuals dominated the agenda and this has got worse, not better, on commercialised social networking sites. The commercialisation of online spaces in the U.S. seems to have been less about a reduction in state power over spaces for online speech, because the state still maintains control over legislation that governs these spaces and accesses the data collected on them, but rather a reduction in the power of civil society over political speech in favour of commercial entities. This pattern of commercialisation, thus, represents a negative step in terms of the provision of spaces for online political speech in that power over agendas and constructions has been taken away from civil society.

Furthermore, the argument that the movement of individuals into these commercial online platforms as spaces for political speech is an indication of their greater desirability may be the case but what this argument does not consider is the importance of the power of social constructions over the political speech of individuals. When commercial platforms are marketing themselves as spaces for political speech but the realities of political speech found on these platform do not

match what is promised and the power of these commercial players over the constructions of individuals as political entities seems to be resulting in political speech that diverges from normative conceptions of valuable political speech, it is important to question if the movement of individuals into these spaces and the use of these spaces for political speech is based on false premises. Should the individualised, symbolic political speech that occurs in commercial online spaces when market players have significant power over the construction of individuals as political entities within these spaces be seen as a positive reduction in government dominance and inefficiency over the provision of these spaces and constructions of individuals as political entities? The case studies of Twitter and Weibo and the surveys of Internet users in the U.S. and China suggest that this is not the case; the market is not a more efficient and effective arbiter of political speech (when compared with any existing normative conception of ideal political speech) than the traditional conception of political speech and spaces for political speech as a relationship between the state and civil society.

8.9. Summary: Commercialisation, authoritarianism and political speech

This thesis, thus, returns to its central question: How does the commercialisation of online spaces affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech? Based on existing literature, it was hypothesised that commercialisation is negative for political speech but that commercialisation is less negative, perhaps even positive, in authoritarian systems. The investigation conducted in this thesis provides support for both these hypotheses but not necessarily for the reasons initially suggested. The research examined in Chapter Two that led to the development of these hypotheses did not include comparative components and, thus, could not evaluate the effects of existing configuration of power in society on the political speech potential of commercial online platforms.

This research finds that commercialisation is broadly negative for political speech. Higher levels of commercialisation may be associated with higher rates of online political speech and political speech may be overwhelmingly associated with

commercial social networking sites but considering quantity rather than quality provides unsatisfactory answers. Assessing the quality of political speech is notoriously fraught due to the large variety of conceptions of ideal political speech; however, when comparing online political speech to a variety of existing normative conceptions, it is clear that the speech that occurs under commercialisation tends to diverge from these ideals toward symbolic, passive, individualised and un-heard speech acts. Furthermore, commercialisation tends to make less transparent the power of social constructions over Internet users as political entities, by presenting these sites as places for free and equal political speech and the commercial nature of these sites as natural and unquestionable.

However, support is also found for the second hypothesis. The commercialisation of online spaces appears to be less negative, indeed even positive, for political speech in China compared to the U.S. This hypothesis was based on research that sees commercialisation in China as reducing the power of the state over agendas and constructions and creating an alternative sphere of power within Chinese society that could challenge state dominance in the event of conflicts. However, when, as in this thesis, the effects of commercialisation on the ability of online spaces to offer a venue for political speech is considered as embedded in the context of use and, in particular, the existing configuration of power and understandings of appropriate modes of political speech in society, the more positive effects of the commercialisation of online spaces on political speech in China compared to the U.S. are found to occur not in contravention of state power but more likely because of it.

In relation to the question of 'how', the commercialisation of online spaces affects their ability to provide a venue for political speech through the increased control of commercial entities over agendas of speech and information consumption and increased power over understandings of what it means to be a political speaker in a networked world. Political speech increasingly occurs in commercial online spaces and commercialisation is correlated with higher rates of political speech. However, political speech in online commercial spaces both in the U.S. and China is

substantively different from historic normative conceptions of political speech. The commercialisation of online spaces affects their ability to provide a venue for political speech by affecting the nature of political speech in society itself. This brings into focus the arguments introduced in Chapter Two, namely do ideas of what constitutes political speech need to be updated to account for changing repertoires of political action and, in particular, the movement of political speech into commercial, online spaces?

Conclusion: Politics in the age of the Internet

This thesis began by recounting an anecdote: the story of an on-going debate, which began in China 2000 years ago, over what has been humanity's greatest invention and arrives, at least for the time being, in the decision that this honour lies with the Internet, a technology that has permeated almost all aspects of daily life and, in particular, holds the promise to profoundly democratise politics on a global scale. From initial utopian dreams for the Internet as a metaphor for democracy itself in the country of its birth, increasing state and market power over online spaces transformed discourse about this technology, seeing it as the harbinger of an almost inevitable dystopian future. Yet the Internet is not a monolithic technology and nor are its users. The rise of commercial social networking sites and the expansion of Internet connectivity across the globe, propelled by the use of these technologies during the Arab Spring, resurrected hopes about whether the Internet might indeed facilitate positive changes in politics, even in authoritarian states and after high levels of online commercialisation.

Through an examination of the question of how the commercialisation of online spaces might affect their ability to provide a venue for political speech, this thesis has contributed to this open topic. Cognisant of the changing centre of gravity of the global Internet away from the U.S. and toward China, this thesis grounded its investigation in a comparison of these two opposing poles of power over the future of how this technology might be used for political speech. This comparative focus allowed the role of the underlying configurations of power in society in shaping how the commercialisation of the Internet might affect its ability to offer a venue for political speech to be analysed. A synthesis of existing literature concerning the effects of commercialisation on political speech in different political systems led to the hypothesis that this process is negative for political speech but is less negative, or perhaps even positive, in authoritarian systems because it could create a space for political speech away from state domination and empower individuals to participate in politics.

The data presented in this thesis support both these hypotheses, commercialisation is largely negative for political speech but the commercialisation of online spaces has been more positive for political speech in China than the U.S. However, the comparative focus, which is unique to this work, yielded a surprising conclusion. The more positive nature of commercialisation in China seems to have occurred not despite state control but because of it. The active role that the state has taken in encouraging the use of these technologies for political functions seems to have helped mitigate the negative effects of commercialisation that are seen in the U.S.

This thesis employed a mixed-method research methodology that combined macro and micro and quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Rates of political speech in online spaces in both democratic and authoritarian systems were shown to be higher than previous estimates, calculated prior to the rise of social networking sites. The use of social networking sites was shown to be closely linked to participating in online political speech. Rates of online political speech were shown to be higher in China than the U.S., contrary to arguments that the Chinese state's regime of control stifles political speech within its borders.

The comparative nature of this research allows the configurations of power in society and their effect on the intersection of technology and political speech to be considered. This focus on power (both of the state and of the market) moves away from a consideration of the Internet as a static technology and permits both its structures and effects to be critically examined rather than taken as a given. It is hoped that further work will follow this comparative methodology to extend this understanding of the effects of state and market power over the participatory potential of online spaces (and indeed other supposedly revolutionary technologies).

The comparison of a random sample of individual speech acts on Twitter and Weibo provided the first ever illustration of the actual frequency and nature of political speech on commercial online platforms (rather than relying on case

studies of particular events, trending topics, keywords or specific opinion leaders to restrict the bounds of data collection). Research based on random samples is sorely lacking and a comparison of the results of this investigation with previous work illustrates that conclusions drawn from non-random samples often obscure the actual way that these online spaces are used by individuals.

This thesis uncovered an active mode of political speech on Weibo that promotes political action, fosters civil society, attempts to raise awareness of issues not addressed in the mass media, promotes the welfare of vulnerable members of society and negotiates the uncertain boundaries of ideological correctness in modern China. In contrast, political speech on Twitter is characterised by passivity, individualisation and the replication of offline hierarchies of information provision. Certainly, there have been many cases of active, successful political action in the U.S. facilitated by Twitter and other commercial social media platforms but the random sample employed in this thesis shows that this is not a primary mode of online political speech on Twitter and that active attempts to affect the balance of power in society are far more common on Weibo.

This analysis also highlighted the importance of site functionality and societal discourses in constraining and shaping user actions. The methodology of structural discourse analysis was developed in this thesis to serve as a counterpart to digital social research techniques that consider online activities divorced from their conditions of production and reading. This methodology also allowed for a consideration of how discourses might serve to construct Internet users in particular ways with respect to their status as potential political speakers. This perspective also suggests that studies that attempt to theorise online political activity based solely on how individuals act, rather than why they act a particular way and whose interests this serves, may overstate the value of online spaces as part of political processes. The movement of individuals into commercial spaces and the use of these spaces for political speech cannot be seen simply as an aggregate of individual choices but also must be understood as a powerful discourse that is sold to individual Internet users by online platforms for their own

commercial gain. It is hoped that other researchers could follow the methodological process of structural discourse analysis outlined here to deepen the critical potential of Internet research and to allow the structures, architectures and discourses that constrain online action to be brought to light and questioned.

The affordances provided by Weibo, such as the ability to include more information in a single post, greater multimedia integration, threaded comments at the site of the original post and the Gongyi subsite, facilitate the use of the platform for political speech. These affordances relate to societal discourses about the use of the Internet for ideologically correct political functions. This suggests that Twitter would likely be able to provide a better venue for the kind of discursive, rational, factual political speech of public sphere theory if these affordances were integrated. It also suggests that if the U.S. state took a more active role in encouraging and shaping ideas about online political speech and incorporating these speech acts into the political system then online spaces might become better venues for political speech.

This comparison also highlighted a difference in terms of the level of incorporation into existing power hierarchies of online spaces, with existing power holders having far greater representation on Twitter and platform users resembling the offline U.S. population. It may be the case that Weibo and other Chinese online spaces are still in the process of being incorporated into existing power structures and patterns of everyday life and will, in the future, see an undermining of their political potential through colonisation by the market and domination by existing elites. However, it appears that the active stance of the Chinese state in regulating online commercial spaces, online speech and ideas of what it means to be a citizen online will likely continue to protect against these potentially negative effects of commercialisation. Although this active stance also prevents attempts to fundamentally change the balance of power in Chinese society, it does encourage certain kinds of political speech and, for the time being, tolerates others.

The patterns of political speech described in this thesis can also help inform debates about whether understandings of political participation need to be updated to take into account changing repertoires of political speech in online spaces and what kinds of theories are appropriate to this definition of political participation. The pattern of political speech found on the Chinese Internet provides support for the theory of authoritarian deliberation, in which political speech is encouraged and responded to by the state while the agenda and permissibility/legality of this discussion remains firmly under state control. This theory has, thus far, received little academic study (either theoretical or practical) and the results presented in this thesis provide evidence of the discourses utilised by the Chinese state in shaping authoritarian deliberation and how individual Internet users respond to these messages. This thesis did not pre-select authoritarian deliberation as a theoretical framework from which to consider online politics in China at its outset; however, the results presented here suggest that further research should be undertaken to develop and extend this theory.

In addition to this authoritarian deliberation, a parallel strand of civic action seems to be emerging that is tolerated rather than encouraged by the state. This is a form of evidence-based citizenship that relies on the networked functionality of an emerging online civil society and on traditional orientations toward community and welfare in Chinese society. It is based around the provision of documented evidence of the need for civic action in the form of videos, photos, hospital bills and personal stories. This form of political speech relies on online network structures (to build a mass to address issues) and an orientation toward community (to incite information dissemination and political action). The scale of this type of political speech should not be understated; more than one in every 50 individual user posts on Weibo during the period of data collection was an action-orientated political speech act.

This empirical research makes a contribution to an understanding and theorisation of civic society in China. The use of public sphere theory to analyse political speech in China has both proponents and critics, with some arguing that public sphere

theory is inappropriate because it posits an adversarial relationship between the state and society that does not exist in China. However, the analysis in this thesis reveals a strong, self-referential civil society that primarily exists not in opposition to the state and to nourish political opinions that are then fed to policy makers but is rather concerned with nourishing and sustaining itself through forms of constitutive address and action to support vulnerable individuals in society.

However, this civil society is not entirely independent and self-referential with the state assumed to be a potentially benevolent or at least caring and responsible observer who will take action and can be encouraged to take action to support the nourishment and maintenance of this civil society and of the individuals within it. This is reminiscent of the traditionally conceptualised role of political speech in Chinese society in which an individual would make their case to the state and the state would be trusted to respond appropriately.

However, commercial social networking sites in China have allowed this target to shift, such that these tolerated acts of political speech can be directed at a newly networked civil society rather than the state. Thus, emerging parallel to and interlinked with authoritarian deliberation is civic action, conducted in and by action-orientated, evidence-based, technologically enabled issue publics. To the extent that this civic action continues to be tolerated by the state, this online activity will continue to push at the margins of acceptable political speech in China, contributing to the growing power of a constrained civil society at the same time as authoritarian deliberation establishes new repertoires of political speech and increases state responsiveness to political speech acts. Previous research on political speech in China has often used theoretical frames imported from studies in Western democratic states or assumed the lack of a political sphere outside state control; however, the results of this thesis suggest that greater attention should be devoted to developing theories in China based on studies of actually occurring political speech both on and offline.

This thesis found a stark contrast between political speech on Weibo and Twitter, with the latter characterised neither by deliberation nor by civil society action. These empirical data on the actual nature of online political speech by US Internet users can help contribute to discussions of whether the definitions of political participation need to be (or should be) updated to take into account changing repertoires and practices. Indeed, it is found that the theories and descriptions of political speech that most closely mirror the speech found in U.S. online spaces are actually derived from work on China that focuses on performativity, self-expression and the gratifications of these speech acts (rather than the ability of these political speech acts to effect on the balance of power in society). However, the context-neutral, inclusive definition of political speech developed in this thesis (as any communicative action that affects or seeks to affect the balance of power in society) points to a normative stance in which these performative, individualised speech acts that lack both intention and possibility of affecting power structures should not be used for the development of new theories of ideal political speech to replace those that seem no longer to apply in networked, globalised, individualised, commercialised modern society.

It is clear that the polemic, individualised and divisive online speech found among U.S. Internet users undermines the potential of these spaces to act as a public sphere. Although this type of speech aligns with the needs of commercial platforms to provide spaces that are comfortable, enjoyable and entertaining and that keep users returning frequently and contributing more data, it undermines the potential for online political speech through the colonisation of ideas of the political by commercial interests.

In addition to its significant divergence from deliberative and communitarian models of political speech, this pattern of online political speech also does not appear to align with the much-more-limited prescriptions of monitorial citizenship or the idea of latent citizenship.³⁷ These theories rely on exposure to diverse,

³⁷ As described in Almond and Verba's 1963 book *The Civic Culture*.

representative, factual information and the ability to rapidly mobilise political action when it is deemed necessary. The ability for Twitter users to monitor political decision makers and issues appears precluded by the divisive, polemic, performative information environment that emerges in online spaces, absent state and communitarian power over these spaces.

These theories also include the idea of latency: that citizens must have the power (and desire) to engage in political action, as necessary, based on their monitoring of political information. It is clear that modes of latent citizenship can emerge on and parallel to commercial social media in the U.S. For instance, The Black Lives Matter movement, which has emerged since 2013, uses the Internet for organisation and has been propelled by videos of violent police interactions with African Americans shared on social media. However, the comparison of online political speech on Twitter and Weibo shows a difference in the level at which this dormant, everyday citizenship might be seen to become active in these two contexts.

It could be argued that in China and other authoritarian systems or developing countries there are far more reasons for a citizen, monitoring political information, to become active in their citizenship. This may be partially the case but caution should be taken with this argument for two reasons. Firstly, while the U.S.'s political system certainly affords greater freedom and levels of rights (both civic and welfare) to citizens than China's, levels of inequality in wealth distribution are similar in the two countries.³⁸ Similarly while a reported 248 human rights lawyers and activists were questioned by the Chinese state police in the year following the crackdown that begun in July 2015 (of which nine were formally arrested), in the U.S. in 2015 1,146 people were killed by the police of which 234 were unarmed (Amnesty International, 2016; Swaine et al., 2016).

However, the activation potential of latent political participation should not be absolute but should be related to relative conditions and the ability and desire to

³⁸ A comparison of inequality in the U.S. and China was discussed in Chapter Three.

improve them. The dearth of action-orientated political speech found on Twitter (compared to Weibo) suggests that Internet users either do not think based on the political information they consume that there is a need for political action or that their potential political actions could not affect the balance of power in society in the way they desire. These are both constructing discourses that are associated with the furthering of the interests of these commercial platforms (in providing spaces that are comfortable for users and encouraging users to produce and consume valuable commercial data) and of existing power holders in society (whose interests lie the maintenance of existing power hierarchies).

A second reason for caution in employing the argument that the active-orientation of political speech on Weibo is related to an underlying greater need in China for individuals to participate in politics and, thus, that this finding does not undermine the idea of latent citizenship in the U.S. is that the structures and capabilities necessary for active political speech are strengthened through use. The political speech that predominates on Twitter most closely mirrors the idea of 'slacktivism'. However, it is not just that online political speech is 'slacktivist', the discourses about political speech that are presented by these commercial sites try to make users feel that they are not 'slacking'. The maintenance of the market position of these commercial sites in the U.S. rests on them simultaneously providing spaces for comfortable, enjoyable, easy political speech and that users continue to believe that these speech acts are necessary and sufficient for the functioning of the democratic political system.

The pattern of political speech in commercial online space in the U.S. is not just characterised by 'slacktivism' but also by a situation in which power over social constructions of what it means to be a citizen online is held by the commercial providers of the spaces in which latent citizenship might cease to be dormant. This is a commercialised citizenship that appears to have developed based on an underlying complacency about what is necessary to maintain latent citizenship under conditions of individualisation, globalisation, mediatization and commercialisation.

Theories of monitorial and latent citizenship hold that continued political action is impossible because, respectively, everything is potentially political and the state needs space to get on with politics without continued citizen involvement. However, there appears to be a divergence between normative ideas about the appropriate level at which citizenship ceases its dormancy in the U.S. and the way in which individuals actually engage in the political process. The commercialisation of online spaces in the U.S. appears to have offered the promise to users that 'slacktivist' actions and 'echo chambers' are sufficient to monitor the political process and maintain latent citizenship without any evidence that this is the case. In the net neutrality debates in 2014, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission ruled that the hardware of the Internet was an infrastructure of national importance, too crucial to the functioning of society to be managed by market logic. The same should be said for the software of the Internet that provides the spaces in which modern politics occurs and the societal discourses that provide roadmaps for online speech and action.

The authoritarian Chinese state, being unable to derive legitimacy from democratic elections must, in addition to censorship and control, make the majority of its citizens content by responding to their needs and continuing the economic development that has lifted more than 500 million out of poverty in the past decade.³⁹ Needing to struggle much more to maintain the legitimacy of its political system, the state has adapted to the new opportunities introduced by the Internet in a way that, while solidifying state power, has opened up new opportunities for political speech, new channels for information dissemination, new opinion leaders, new spaces to build publics and an increasing need for the state to respond to grievances before they become major issues.

In contrast, the democratic U.S. system derives its legitimacy from elections. This may mean that, conversely, the state needs to be less agile in responding to public opinion. U.S. elections confine political challenges from the people to a distinct and

³⁹ The increasingly authoritarian nature of the Chinese state under Xi Jinping is arguably associated with a slowdown of China's economic rise.

predictable schedule whereas in China these challenges could arise at any point and in any location. The U.S. state also derives legitimacy from the strong discourses that its political system and system of political speech has already arrived at a normative ideal. Of course, there is continued attention to the influence of money in U.S. politics, the decline of news provision and an economic system that marginalises large groups of impoverished and minority individuals from political, social and cultural life. However, while these challenges exist, there is still a prevailing discourse of the U.S. system as ideal and not in need of questioning or reform.

These are difficult conclusions to come to and it is the comparative framework employed in this thesis that allows the dominant discourses associated with political speech in the U.S. to be challenged and questioned. However, it is the very complacency about these ideals and tendency not to critically question the effects of assumed unchangeable practices and configurations of power that has left online political speech in the U.S. to the market. Commercial providers of spaces for online political speech sell back to the user the ideals of equality, free speech, the public sphere and a marketplace for ideas. However, this marketplace is closed and constrained, regulated rather than free. These markets for ideas are owned by a small number of multinational corporations and the participatory potential of these spaces has been undermined because the main reason why these commercial entities provide spaces for political speech is because it is profitable. Users want to believe that they are accessing truthful information, that they are participating in the political process and that they are engaging in important debates. These functionalities are provided to them by commercial companies but only in such a way as to users keep returning to the site and contributing commercially valuable data. This commercialisation of online spaces undermines political speech in a far deeper way than speech in previous commercial spaces because on social networking sites it is the speech itself that becomes a commercial product not just the ownership of the space. This process is even more insidious because the commercial value of these sites rests on users continuing to believe that their

actions as individualised data producers and consumers represent important and sufficient political actions.

The research that has led to these conclusions has not, of course, been without limitations. Prime among these is its temporality. Modernity is characterised by its pace of change, propelled by the very technologies examined in this thesis. New technologies are initially seen as revolutionary but are soon incorporated into the status quo. Specific Internet platforms, even those that achieve unprecedented success, may exist for only a fraction of a human lifetime and the Internet (or more accurately the Internet as it is currently understood, namely the world wide web) is only about 25 years old. The platforms of Twitter and Weibo may well be derelict in another five years and in another 25 years the Internet will likely have become so pervasive and commonplace that it will make little sense to discuss how it might affect existing power structures in society. Like all information and communication technologies before it, the revolutionary potential of the Internet will be lost as equilibrium is reached between its incorporation into existing power structures and patterns of daily life and the changes that it might engender in these existing patterns and structures.

What will not change, however, are underlying questions of technology, political speech and power; the cycles of invention, revolution and control and the struggle over the configurations of power in society. Much of what has been covered in this thesis is specific to the temporal conditions of its production. This is a necessary limitation of all social research but is specifically acute in the study of the Internet. However, it is hoped that by considering perennial questions of technology, political speech and power that the insights presented here can remain pertinent to this technology as it develops and potentially inform the study of other supposedly revolutionary technologies.

Yet, this attempt to connect this study of the specific with broad currents in the development of humanity presents another limitation. In engaging with the development of theoretical and practical ideas of politics and configurations of

power in two of the world's largest countries, each seen as leading representatives of the democratic and authoritarian political paradigms and of opposing cultural, social and political traditions, it has been necessary to both present and conduct a broad synthesis and summary of these conditions. Some research contributes to human knowledge based on its detailed examination of a specifically delineated phenomenon or object, while other research contributes based on a broad synthesis of grand concepts and currents. This research tends towards the latter and, as such, necessitates generalisations and omission, both known and unknown. It is hoped, however, that these limitations are mitigated by the research methodology and justified based on the academic contribution of these conclusions.

The mixed-method research design employed provides the distinct advantage of a variety of different data sources that together may be more than the sum of their parts and lead to deepening, refinement and complexity of the resulting conclusions. However, this also means that each of these methods is necessarily of a smaller scale than it would have been if it had been the sole or primary data source of this thesis. The structural discourse analysis attempted to provide a picture of the constraints on individual online political speech based on the study of a few hundred publically available texts. The emphasis on constructing a random sample of online political speech meant that the case studies of Twitter and Weibo were confined to a specific time period, excluded users with private profiles, relied on user-submitted data and necessitated a difficult process of geolocation on Twitter that could identify only about half of profiles to a specific country. Additionally, once the multitude of stages of working toward the construction of a random sample of individual political speech acts was completed the resulting number of actual acts that could be evaluated was relatively small. It is hoped that further research could be conducted on this dataset to increase the sample size and, thus, the strength of confidence in the results of this analysis.

The survey, which provided a model of the effects of commercialisation on politics that could account for a variety of different variables, was based on a non-random

sample, collected by a commercial company at a specific time and relied on simple operationalisations of the complex concepts that this thesis set out to examine. Conclusions reached from each of these methodologies alone should be guarded and cognisant of their limitations. Yet the ultimate conclusions of this thesis are not derived from any of these methodologies alone but rather a combination of the insights derived from their synthesis and the wealth of existing literature to which this thesis contributes. No piece of academic work stands alone or explains all but rather it is hoped that this thesis can make the particular contribution to existing knowledge concerning the Internet and politics that was found to be lacking in the review of the literature.

Despite employing a variety of different methods in the pursuit of this goal, what is still lacking is an on-the-ground study of how politics actually functions and is conducted (or not) by both individuals and institutions. Too much research of online phenomenon is divorced from its context of use. Older studies of politics in society travelled to voting booths, joined in on the campaign trail or sat at the dinner table observing family discussions. Although these political functions are increasingly taking place online, it is still important to ask to what extent a solely online study of these phenomena suffices. The increasingly online nature of political speech should not blind us to the importance of engaging in offline interviews and observations of both individuals and institutions in order to fully understand the nature of these online phenomena.

Another area in which the conclusions reached in this thesis could be broadened and deepened would be through a greater focus on civil society. The specific gap in existing knowledge identified in the literature review concerned configurations of state power: namely, the democratic or authoritarian nature of the political system. Thus, this thesis focused, particularly in its structural discourse analysis, on the constraining force of state power. While media discourses were considered, a more specific study of the role of civil society as a counterpart to the state and market could uncover new discourses that constrain individual online political actions and

that could lead to different interpretations of the online political speech uncovered in this thesis.

Another potential extension of this thesis is its geographic scope. The U.S. and China were chosen as the democratic and authoritarian cases of comparison due to their influence over both the global Internet and their own Internet spheres and their very different approaches to the regulation of online spaces and political speech. However, studies of other countries would shed further light on the issues and conclusions presented here. What about India, a large, rapidly developing democracy? Or the developed, authoritarian Gulf States? Or the small, socialist countries of Northern Europe? Each of these countries will have a different experience. Indeed, the level of the nation state may not always be the most productive lens to study the intersection of technology and power. With increasing globalisation, nation states are losing considerable control over their online spaces to (often-U.S.-born) multinational companies and supranational structures.

The data in this project from which the conclusions presented here are drawn were predominantly collected between 2012 and 2014. This includes data collected after many of the events of the Arab Spring (the survey analysed in Chapter Seven was fielded in late 2012) and data collected after the power transition between Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping in late 2012 (the random sample of individual user posts was collected in late 2014). China's political system has been, in general, becoming freer for the past 30 years over the administrations of Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao; Xi Jinping appears to have reversed this trend. Weibo, which had appeared to be a burgeoning public sphere at the end of the Hu administration, has been, at least somewhat, undermined by the crackdowns that began late 2013 on online political speech and the civic power of newly established opinion leaders.

The data analysed in Chapters Five and Six were collected after this crackdown and the start of the movement of Chinese online discussion into private spaces such as WeChat and QQ. These data show that Weibo remained a place for political speech

in late 2014 but the undermining of the democratic potential of social networking sites in China by state control seems to have continued in the intervening time. New regulations announced in December 2016, which specifically named both Weibo and WeChat, banned the distribution of user-generated audio or video programmes about current events (SARFT, 2016). This type of video was a crucial component of the evidence-based civic activity identified in this thesis in the study of Weibo.

Based on the data analysed in this thesis, it was concluded that the Chinese state maintains enormous power in shaping online political speech but that it also has responded to the rise of commercial online spaces in a way that has allowed the development of a new group of online opinion leaders and new repertoires of technologically enabled political speech (such as the user-posted videos of current events that this recent regulation seeks to make illegal). However, this new regulation, itself, is a reaction to newly developing repertoires of political speech. While this thesis did not consider WeChat, due to its private nature and the fact that it only recently began to emerge as a potential venue for political speech in China, the very fact that this platform is named in this new regulation is evidence that as political speech on Weibo was restricted, it shifted to this new venue and suggests that in light of new regulations political speech may adopt new spaces and repertoires.

After these recent events, the conclusion that commercialisation has been positive for political speech in China likely still holds. However, the extent to which the state promotes the use of these spaces for (sanctioned) political speech and the tolerance of civic-sphere action may be receding. In this situation, commercial companies may continue to respond to citizen desires for spaces for political speech and citizens may continue to use these platforms inventively to develop a self-referential, technologically enabled, action-orientated civil society. However, the rapidly changing nature of political power in China and the opaqueness of the political system means that, while the conclusion that commercialisation appears to be positive for political speech in authoritarian states still holds, wider

conclusions about the potential future of the Chinese political system need to be continually addressed in light of the dynamism and opaqueness of this system.

The U.S. political system has also recently undergone a sea change that seems to support the conclusions reached in this thesis. In January 2017, Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 45th President of the United States, after a divided campaign in which the kind of polemic, divisive, individualised political speech found in this thesis was taken to the highest levels of the political system. Trump is the richest individual to ever to accede the presidency (as well as the only to never have held a public office) and it appears that he will be maintaining unprecedentedly close links to his commercial interests during his presidency. Following Trump's election, there was significant concern about the effect of fake news distributed on social media in swaying the election. While these events were outside the bounds of the data frame of this thesis, they exhibit a logical continuation of the processes described here and evidence of a continued undermining of democratic process in the U.S. through the commercialisation, individualisation and mediatisation of political speech and action. This election demonstrates more than ever that power over conflicts, agendas and constructions within the U.S. political system have been transferred to commercial interests and that spaces and affordances for political speech are being sold back to individuals in a way that leads to the creation of individualised, divisive, sham public spheres in which the truthfulness of information is subjugated to its performativity. This commercialised citizenship provides comfortable, enjoyable spaces for political speech but undermines their political potential.

This thesis concludes that, in line with the hypotheses derived from existing literature, commercialisation is negative for political speech but that it is less negative in authoritarian systems. However, this analysis suggests that this may be the case for a surprising reason. It not that commercialisation protects against authoritarianism but that authoritarianism protects against commercialisation. Taking a step back from this conclusion, it is important to ask what is the difference between an authoritarian and a democratic state that leads to these

different effects? The difference is the power that that state has within society. All states, as the sole arbiters of legitimate violence within their borders, maintain ultimate power over the resolution of conflicts. However, authoritarian states maintain high levels of control over the setting of agendas and over social constructions.

Commercialisation has indeed undermined the Internet's democratic potential but this thesis has shown that this process cannot be understood without reference to underlying configurations of power in society. If this technology is to provide spaces for political speech, then control over the social construction of what it means to be a citizen in the Internet age need to be actively addressed rather than assuming that commercial technologies will provide spaces and affordances that support normative ideas of political speech. This is true both in the U.S., where the market holds power over what it means to be a political speaker online, and in China, where it seemed that the state was ceding some control over this discourse to a rising civil society but that this process is fragile and may be receding. In order that these commercial online spaces might fulfil their potential as venues for political speech, regardless of their context of use, they have to be understood as instantiations of underlying frameworks of power in society. The integral nature of these online spaces to modern political speech means that their structures and affordances and the norms and laws governing their use must be seen as a battleground in which the configurations of political power in society are being fought. If this contested nature is not appreciated, then power over what it means to be a political speaker in modern society will be ceded quietly and unquestioningly to the commercial owners of these spaces, who sell back the dream of an online public sphere to their users for their own commercial gain.

"So uncritically do we accept the idea of property in our culture that we don't even question when the control of that property removes our ability, as a people, to develop our culture democratically."

*Lawrence Lessig
Free Culture
2004, page 261*

"Don't panic, don't think that Marxism has disappeared, that it's not useful any more and that it has been defeated. Nothing of the sort! Peace and development are the two major issues in the world, and neither one has been resolved."

*Deng Xiaoping
Southern Speaking Tour
Spring 1992*

*"The Web as I envisaged it, we have not seen it yet.
The future is still so much bigger than the past."*

*Tim Berners-Lee
18th International World Wide Web Conference
April 21, 2009*

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Appendix: Search strategy and documents and materials collected for structural discourse analysis

A1.1. Political context

A1.1.1. Technological structures

A1.1.1.1. The text of state laws and regulations

A1.1.1.1.1. The text of state laws and regulations in the Chinese context

Source: Chinese Media Law Database of the China Copyright and Media Blog, edited by Chinese Media Law specialist Roger Creemers, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/>

Search Strategy: Search for keyword “microblog” resulting in 50 hits
Scan titles and first few sentences of each post for relevance and read/consider posts of relevance

Materials Considered

1. Some Beijing Municipal Provisions on Microblog Development and Management, 16 December 2011, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2011/12/16/some-beijing-municipal-provisions-on-microblog-development-and-management/>
2. Internet News Information Service Management Rules (Opinion-seeking Revision Draft), 13 January 2016, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2016/01/13/internet-news-information-service-management-rules/>
3. Procedural Regulations for Administrative Law Enforcement concerning Internet Information Content Management (Opinion-seeking Draft), 14 January, 2016, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2016/01/14/procedural-regulations-for-administrative-law-enforcement-concerning-internet-information-content-management-opinion-seeking-draft/>
4. Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System (2014-2020), 14 June 2014, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/06/14/planning-outline-for-the-construction-of-a-social-credit-system-2014-2020/>
5. Internet User Account Name Management Regulations. 4 February, 2014, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2015/02/04/internet-user-account-name-management-regulations/>
6. Notice concerning Strengthening the Management of Newsgathering and Editing Personnel’s Online Activities, 16 April 2013, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/04/16/notice-concerning-strengthening-the-management-of-newsgathering-and-editing-personnels-online-activities/>
7. Opinions concerning Letting Socialist Literature and Art Flourish, 3 October 2015,

- <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2015/10/03/opinions-concerning-letting-socialist-literature-and-art-flourish/>
8. CCP General Office and State Council General Office Opinions concerning Strengthening the Construction of New Types of Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics, 20 January, 2015,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2015/01/20/ccp-general-office-and-state-council-general-office-opinions-concerning-strengthening-the-construction-of-new-types-of-think-tanks-with-chinese-characteristics/>
 9. Opinions concerning Further Strengthening and Improving Propaganda and Ideology Work in Higher Education Under New Circumstances, 16 February, 2015,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2015/01/19/opinions-concerning-further-strengthening-and-improving-propaganda-and-ideology-work-in-higher-education-under-new-circumstances/>

Source: Chinese Media Law Database of the China Copyright and Media Blog, edited by Chinese Media Law specialist Roger Creemers,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/>

Search Strategy: Skim titles and first few sentences of recently posted articles for relevant content

Materials Considered

1. Guiding Opinions concerning Promoting the Healthy Development of Online Literature, SAPPRFT,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/12/28/guiding-opinions-concerning-promoting-the-healthy-development-of-online-literature/>
2. National People's Congress Standing Committee Decision concerning Strengthening Network Information Protection, 28 December 2012,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2012/12/28/national-peoples-congress-standing-committee-decision-concerning-strengthening-network-information-protection/>

A1.1.1.1.2. The text of state laws and regulations in the U.S. context

Source: Congress.gov

Search Strategy: Skim titles of legislation that became law since 1984 tagged in the science, technology and communication policy area (114 total)

Materials Considered

1. Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2014,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-bill/1353?resultIndex=6>
3. Unlocking Consumer Choice and Wireless Competition Act,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-bill/517?resultIndex=7>

4. Next Generation Internet Research Act of 1998,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/3332?resultIndex=66>
5. Internet Tax Nondiscrimination Act, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/1552?resultIndex=54>
6. Cyber Security Research and Development Act,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/3394?resultIndex=52>
7. Dot Kids Implementation and Efficiency Act of 2002,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/3833?resultIndex=51>
8. Technology Administration Act of 1998,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/1274?resultIndex=68>
9. Child Safe Viewing Act of 2007, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/senate-bill/602?resultIndex=31>
10. Broadband Data Improvement Act, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/senate-bill/1492?resultIndex=30>
11. High-Performance Computing Act of 1991,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/senate-bill/272?resultIndex=81>
12. American Technology Preeminence Act of 1991,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/house-bill/1989?resultIndex=78>
13. National Technology and Advancement Act of 1995,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/house-bill/2196?resultIndex=72>

Source: Congress.gov

Search Strategy: Read/consider text of key laws referenced in other materials

Materials Considered

1. Electronic Communications Privacy Act of 1986,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/house-bill/4952?>
2. Telecommunications Act of 1996, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/senate-bill/652>
3. Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/senate-bill/2037>
4. Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT ACT) Act of 2001, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/3162>
5. FISA Amendments Act of 2008, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-bill/6304>
6. Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/house-bill/4922>
7. USA PATRIOT Act Additional Reauthorizing Amendments Act of 2006
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/senate-bill/2271>

8. Communications Decency Act of 1996,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/senate-bill/314>

A1.1.2.1. Evidence from the implementation of these laws and regulations

A1.1.2.1.1. Evidence from the implementation of laws and regulations in the Chinese context

Source: Chinese Media Law Database of the China Copyright and Media Blog, edited by Chinese Media Law specialist Roger Creemers,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/>

Search Strategy: Search for keyword “microblog” resulting in 50 hits
Scan titles and first few sentences of each post for relevance and read/consider posts of relevance

Materials Considered

1. More information about the Weibo real-name registration system, 1 March, 2012,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2012/03/01/more-information-about-the-weibo-real-name-registration-system/>

Source: Chinese Media Law Database of the China Copyright and Media Blog, edited by Chinese Media Law specialist Roger Creemers,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/>

Search Strategy: Search China Copyright and Media Blog for commentary on and texts of official documents signalled as important in other examined materials

Materials Considered

1. Interpretation concerning Some Questions of Applicable Law When Handling Uses of Information Networks to Commit Defamation and Other Such Criminal Cases, 6 September, 2013,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/09/06/interpretation-concerning-some-questions-of-applicable-law-when-handling-uses-of-information-networks-to-commit-defamation-and-other-such-criminal-cases/>
2. Interpretation concerning Some Questions of Applicable Law in Hearing Criminal Cases of Fabrication and Wilful Dissemination of False and Terrorizing Information, 18 September, 2013,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/09/18/3032/>

A1.1.2.1.2. Evidence from the implementation of laws and regulations in the U.S context

Source: Court cases mentioned in other media

Materials Considered

1. Court decision, American Civil Liberties Union v. Ashcroft (2004),
https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/FilesPDFs/nsl_decision.pdf
2. Court decision, Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union
<http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/521/844.html>
3. California Court Partly Dismissed Twitter Lawsuit over US Information Requests. Lawyer Herald, 4 May 2016.
<http://www.lawyerherald.com/articles/44659/20160504/california-court-partly-dismissed-twitter-lawsuit-over-information-requests.htm>

A1.1.2. Forms of power and knowledge

A1.1.2.1. Official (state) commentary on laws and regulations and their implementation

A1.1.2.1.1. Official commentary on laws and regulations in the Chinese context

Source: Chinese Media Law Database of the China Copyright and Media Blog, edited by Chinese Media Law specialist Roger Creemers,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/>

Search Strategy: Search for keyword “microblog” resulting in 50 hits
Scan titles and first few sentences of each post for relevance and read/consider posts of relevance

Materials Considered

1. Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere (Document No. 9). Written July 2012 (allegedly leaked to Western press in July 2013 and widely covered in 2013),
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/04/22/communique-on-the-current-state-of-the-ideological-sphere-document-no-9/>
2. Xi Jinping, Speech at the News and Public Opinion Work Conference, 19 February 2016, translation of People’s Daily article,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2016/02/19/speech-at-the-news-and-public-opinion-work-conference/>
3. We Want Online Democracy, Not Online “Mass Democracy”, 29 September 2013, translation of article published in Red Flag Manuscripts,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/09/29/we-want-online-democracy-not-online-mass-democracy/>
4. Speech by State Internet Information Office Vice-Director Ren Xianliang at the 2014 China Internet Conference, 5 September, 2014,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/09/05/siio-directors-five-priorities-for-internet-development/>
5. The Heavy Fist Must Come Out to Deal With Online Rumours (Written Conversation), 31 August, 2013, collection of three articles denouncing online rumours published in Red Flag Manuscripts,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/08/31/the-heavy-fist-must-come-out-to-deal-with-online-rumours-written-conversation/>

6. Internet Society of China Proposal Letter on Resisting Online Rumours, 8 April, 2012,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2012/04/08/internet-society-of-china-proposal-letter-on-resisting-online-rumours/>
7. Hu Jintao's Article in Qiushi Magazine – translated, 4 January, 2012,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2012/01/04/hu-jintaos-article-in-qiushi-magazine-translated/>
8. People's Daily official on anti-rumour campaign and online public opinion management, 14 October, 2014,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/10/14/peoples-daily-official-on-anti-rumour-campaign-and-online-public-opinion-management/>
9. State Internet Information Office Deploys Attack on Activities of Fabricating and Disseminating Rumours Online, Xinhua Press Release, 2 May 2013,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/05/02/state-internet-information-office-deploys-attack-on-activities-of-fabricating-and-disseminating-rumours-online/>
10. Stimulating New Online Media to Shape an Objective and Rational Online Ecology, 13 June 2014,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/06/13/stimulating-new-online-media-to-shape-an-objective-and-rational-online-ecology/>
11. Xi Jinping's 19 August speech revealed? (Translation), 12 November, 2013,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/11/12/xi-jinpings-19-august-speech-revealed-translation/>
12. Lu Wei: Concentrate Positive Energy Online, Build the Chinese Dream Together, 30 October, 2013,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/10/30/lu-wei-concentrate-positive-energy-online-build-the-chinese-dream-together/>
13. People's Daily People's Commentary: Only by Embracing Convergence Can Traditional Media Have a Tomorrow, 20 August, 2014,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/08/20/peoples-daily-peoples-commentary-only-by-embracing-convergence-can-traditional-media-have-a-tomorrow/>
14. A Network Shared Together, A Space Governed Together, 23 June 2014,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/06/23/a-network-shared-together-a-space-governed-together/>
15. Drive Modernization With Informatization: Help Realize the Chinese Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation, 3 August, 2016,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2016/08/03/drive-modernization-with-informatization-help-realize-the-chinese-dream-of-the-great-rejuvenation-of-the-chinese-nation/>
16. State Governance in the Internet Era, 1 June 2015,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2015/06/01/state-governance-in-the-internet-era/>

Source: Chinese Media Law Database of the China Copyright and Media Blog, edited by Chinese Media Law specialist Roger Creemers,
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/>

Search Strategy: Skim titles and first few sentences of recently posted articles for relevant content

Materials Considered

1. Lu Wei, Mutual Trust through Communication, Cooperation through Win-Win, Speech at the 7th Sino-US Internet Forum, 2 December 2014, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/12/02/mutual-trust-through-communication-cooperation-through-win-win/>

A1.1.2.1.2. Official commentary on state laws and regulations in the U.S. context

Source: WhiteHouse.gov

Search Strategy: Skim titles and first few sentences of the first 100 items returned on a search for “internet” and consider relevant materials

Materials Considered

1. Coming Together to Combat Online Piracy and Counterfeiting, 15 July 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2013/07/15/coming-together-combat-online-piracy-and-counterfeiting>
2. Facilitating Internet Freedom in Iran, 20 March 2012, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2012/03/20/facilitating-internet-freedom-iran>
3. Transparency and Open Government, no date, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment
4. Working Together to Stop Internet Piracy, 7 July, 2011, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/07/07/working-together-stop-internet-piracy>
5. Protecting Privacy and Civil Liberties on the Internet and Beyond, 16 December 2011, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/12/16/protecting-privacy-and-civil-liberties-internet-and-beyond>
6. Remarks by President Barack Obama at Town Hall Meeting with Future Chinese Leaders, 16 November 2009, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-town-hall-meeting-with-future-chinese-leaders>
7. 5 Things You Need to Know About President Obama’s Broadband Announcement Today, 14 January 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/01/14/5-things-you-need-know-about-president-obama-s-broadband-announcement-today>
8. Statement by the President on the Cybersecurity Framework, 12 February 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/12/statement-president-cybersecurity-framework>
9. Obama Administration Responds to We the People Petitions on SOPA and Online Piracy, 14 January 2012, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2012/01/14/obama-administration-responds-we-people-petitions-sopa-and-online-piracy>

10. Net Neutrality: President Obama's Plan for a Free and Open Internet, 14 June 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/net-neutrality>
11. Connecting America, no date, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/connect-america>
12. Fact Sheet: Administration Announces an Advanced Wireless Research Initiative, Building on President's Legacy of Forward-Leaning Broadband Policy, 15 July 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/15/fact-sheet-administration-announces-advanced-wireless-research>
13. Delivering on Broadband Opportunity, 21 September 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/09/21/new-steps-deliver-high-speed-broadband-across-united-states>
14. Vice President Biden Kicks Off \$7.2 Billion Recovery Act Broadband Program, 17 December 2009, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/vice-president-biden-kicks-72-billion-recovery-act-broadband-program>
15. A Free and Open Internet: What You Need to Know About Net Neutrality, 10 November 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/11/10/free-and-open-internet-what-you-need-know-about-net-neutrality>
16. Statement by the President on Net Neutrality, 10 November 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/10/statement-president-net-neutrality>
17. Technology, no date, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/technology>
18. President Obama Details Plan to Win the Future through Expanded Wireless Access, 10 February 2011, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/10/president-obama-details-plan-win-future-through-expanded-wireless-access>
19. Fact Sheet: Plan to Protect Privacy in the Internet Age by Adopting a Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights, 23 February 2012, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/23/fact-sheet-plan-protect-privacy-internet-age-adopting-consumer-privacy-b>
20. What is ConnectED?, 6 June 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2013/06/06/what-connected>
21. Expanding Our Ability to Combat Cyber Threats, 1 April 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/04/01/expanding-our-ability-combat-cyber-threats>
22. The Open Internet Blog, 15 October 2009, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/The-Open-Internet-Blog>
23. Mapping the Digital Divide, July 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/wh_digital_divide_issue_brief.pdf
24. Today's Victory on Net Neutrality, 14 June 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2016/06/14/todays-victory-net-neutrality>
25. Ensuring an Open Internet, 2 May 2012, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2012/05/02/ensuring-open-internet>
26. We Can't Wait: Obama Administration Unveils Blueprint for a "Privacy Bill of Rights" to Protect Consumers Online, 23 February 2012, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/23/we-can-t-wait-obama-administration-unveils-blueprint-privacy-bill-rights>

27. President Obama Unveils ConnectED Initiative to Bring America's Students into Digital Age, 6 June 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/06/president-obama-unveils-connected-initiative-bring-america-s-students-di>
28. Working to Counter Online Radicalization to Violence in the United States, 5 February 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2013/02/05/working-counter-online-radicalization-violence-united-states>

A1.1.2.2. Official and non-official commentary on principles and doctrines underlying these laws and regulations

A1.1.2.2.1. Commentary on principles and doctrines in the Chinese context

Source: Chinese Media Law Database of the China Copyright and Media Blog, edited by Chinese Media Law specialist Roger Creemers, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/>

Search Strategy: Search for keyword "microblog" resulting in 50 hits
Scan titles and first few sentences of each post for relevance and read/consider posts of relevance

Materials Considered

1. Establishment of New Internet Leading Group Reported, 8 January, 2014, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/01/08/establishment-of-new-internet-leading-group-reported/>
2. Is China's media crackdown going to expand?, 16 September, 2013, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/09/16/is-chinas-media-crackdown-going-to-expand/>
3. New CAC rules for user names and social media handles, 4 February, 2015, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2015/02/04/new-cac-rules-for-user-names-and-social-media-handles/>

Source: Chinese Media Law Database of the China Copyright and Media Blog, edited by Chinese Media Law specialist Roger Creemers, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/>

Search Strategy: Skim titles and first few sentences of recently posted articles for relevant content

Materials Considered

1. Information Technology Development Trends and Ideological Security, 1 January, 2015, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2015/01/01/information-technology-development-trends-and-ideological-security/>

Search Strategy: Materials referenced in other media

Materials Considered:

1. Wu, Dingping. Xinhua commentary: Why there is a need for Weibo's "Big Vs" to talk more about social responsibility (新華網評：微博“大V”為何更要講社會責任). 11 August 2013.
http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/comments/2013-08/11/c_116896843.htm

A1.1.2.2.1. Commentary on principles and doctrines in the U.A. context

Search Strategy: Read commentary on U.S. legal and regulatory environment in reference to the Internet, online political speech and microblogs that have been referenced in other media

Materials Considered

1. Helft, Miguel and Claire Miller. 1986 Privacy Law Is Outrun by the Web, NYTimes, 9 January 2011,
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/10/technology/10privacy.html?hp&_r=0

A1.1.2.3. Academic and theoretical work concerning theories of power, politics and political speech

A1.1.2.3.1. Academic and theoretical work concerning theories of power, politics and political speech in the Chinese context

Materials Considered

1. Bell, D. A. (2009). *Beyond liberal democracy: Political thinking for an East Asian context*. Princeton University Press.
2. Chen, M. (2012). Modernity and Confucian Political Philosophy in a Globalized World. In F. R. Dallmayr & T. Zhao (Eds.), *Contemporary Chinese political thought: debates and perspectives* (pp. 112–130). Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
3. Chen, Shengyong. 'The Native Resources of Deliberative Politics in China'. In *The Search for Deliberative Democracy in China*, edited by Ethan J. Leib and Baogang He, 77–111. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
4. Coase, R., & Wang, N. (2012). *How China became capitalist*. Palgrave Macmillan.
5. Dallmayr, F. R. (2012). Introduction. In F. R. Dallmayr & T. Zhao (Eds.), *Contemporary Chinese political thought: debates and perspectives* (pp. 1–13). Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
6. Dissanayake, Wimal. 'The Production of Asian Theories of Communication: Contexts and Challenges'. *Asian Journal of Communication* 19, no. 4 (December 2009): 453–68. doi:10.1080/01292980903293411.
7. El Amine, Loubna. 'Beyond East and West: Reorienting Political Theory through the Prism of Modernity'. *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 01 (March 2016): 102–120. doi:10.1017/S1537592715003254.

8. He, B. (2010). Four Models of the Relationship Between Confucianism and Democracy. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 37(1), 18–33.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6253.2009.01561.x>
9. He, B., & Warren, M. E. (2011). Authoritarian deliberation: the deliberative turn in Chinese political development. *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(2), 269–289.
10. Hung, H. (2011). *Protest with Chinese Characteristics : Demonstration, Riots, and Petitions in the Mid-Qing Dynasty*. New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press.
11. Jiang, Min. 'Authoritarian Deliberation on Chinese Internet'. SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 1 August 2009.
<http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1439354>.
12. Leib, Ethan J., and Baogang He. *The Search for Deliberative Democracy in China*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
13. Malraux, A. (1967). *Antimémoires*. Paris: Gallimard.
14. Medalie, R. J. (1959). The Communist Theory of State. *American Slavic and East European Review*, 18(4), 510–525. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3000809>
15. Mitter, R. (2012). Communism, Confucianism, and Charisma: The Political in Modern China. In *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing Practices*. Routledge.
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<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592708080055>
17. Pott, W. S. A. (1981). *Chinese political philosophy*. Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press.
18. Rosenberg, S. 'Human Nature, Communication, and Culture: Rethinking Democratic Deliberation in China and the West'. In *The Search for Deliberative Democracy in China*, edited by Ethan J. Leib and Baogang He, 77–111. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
19. Schurmann, F. (1966). *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*. University of California Press.
20. Shao, P, and M Zhang. An Examination on the Possibility of Asian Theory's Construction in International Communication Research. (国际传播研究中的亚洲主张何以可能?). *China Media Report (中国传媒报告)* 45, no. 1 (2013).
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22. Solomon, R. H. (1971). *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture*. London: University of California Press.

A1.1.2.3.1. Academic and theoretical work concerning theories of power, politics and political speech in the U.S. context

Materials Considered

Materials Considered

1. Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

2. Arendt, H. (1999). *The Human Condition* (2nd Revised edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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6. Dahl, R. A. (2015). *On democracy*. Yale University Press.
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15. Verba, S., & Nie, N. (1987). *Participation in America: Political democracy and social equality*. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press.
16. Vile, M. J. C. (1999). *Politics in the USA* (5th ed.). London and New York: Routledge.
17. Weber, M. (1946). Politics as a Vocation. In H. H. Gerth & C. W. Mills (Eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (pp. 77–128). New York: Oxford University Press.
18. Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society : an outline of interpretive sociology*. Berkeley ; London: University of California Press.
19. White, S. (2010). Ethics. In F. G. (Francis G. Castles (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the welfare state [electronic resource]*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
20. Wolff, J. (2006). *An introduction to political philosophy*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

A1.1.3. Discourses about these constraints

A1.1.3.1. Media and expert commentary on laws and regulations, the principles and doctrines underlying them and their implementation

A1.1.3.1.1. Media and expert commentary on laws and regulations in the Chinese context

Method: Search the China Core Newspaper's Database for articles with “治理” and “网络” as the subject (384 total since the beginning of 2012) and read/consider a selection of relevant articles

Materials Considered

1. Fan, Hua. Telecommunications network fraud down 7.8% (电信网络诈骗案降 7.8%). Xi'an Daily (西安日报) 26 February 2016. Third edition.
2. Ma, Zhe. The Internet and serving the people: zero kilometres (“互联网+”服务群众“零公里”). Yunan Daily (云南日报). 20 November 2015. Tenth edition.
3. Huang, Baoshan and Luoxuan Bai. "Six network" Controlling Crimes "five mechanisms" to do security (“六张网络”打防控“五项机制”做保障). Western Legal Journal (西部法制报). 18 August 2015. First edition.
4. Bai, Long. “Strong Internet country” moving forward in upgrading governance (“网络强国”催动治理升级). People's Daily (人民日报). 3 March 2014. Fifth edition.
5. Xu, Jinghui. “Wuzhen summit:” an analysis of the key issues (“乌镇峰会”热点解读). Wenhui News (文汇报). 12 December 2015. Twelfth edition.
6. Wang, Binbin. How developed countries can control violence and hate speech online (发达国家如何治理网络暴力言论). Study times (学习时报). 16 September 2013. Second edition.
7. Lu, Chuanying. Developing countries are actively involved in governing in cyberspace (发展中国家积极参与网络空间治理). Chinese Social Sciences Today (中国社会科学报). 21 October 2013. A01 edition.
8. Tian Yu. The effects of Internet network security threat management actions are remarkable (互联网网安威胁治理行动效果显). Post and Telecommunications News (人民邮电). 21 September 2015. First edition.
9. Wu, Mengjie. Internet governance: you and I have a responsibility (互联网治理,你我有责). Zhejiang Daily (浙江日报). 19 December 2015. Fifth edition.
10. Wang, Xiaohong. Thoughts on Improving the Legal Network Governance Level (对提高网络治理法治化水平的思考). Xi' an Daily (西安日报). 9 February 2015. Eighth edition.
11. Jin, Liang and Cong Wu. Innovation and action to “realize a community in cyberspace” (创新+行动,为了“网络空间命运共同体”). Post and Telecommunications News (人民邮电). 31 December 2015.
12. Gao, Kang. Networking security incidents reach 13,000 (处理安全网络事件 1.3 万余起). China Quality Newspaper (中国质量报). 30 September 2015. Eighth edition.

13. Lu, Yu and Jia Huang. Offensive and Defensive joint governance stop momentum mention efficiency (打防结合遏势头 联动治理提效率). Shaoxing Daily (绍兴日报). 30 October 2015. Second edition.
14. Yan, Shuping. Crackdown on the Internet to rectify chaos to be a heavy blow (打击整治网上治安乱象须出重拳). People's Public Security Report (人民公安报). 25 August 2016. Third edition.
15. Yang, Gu. A historical perspective on the development of governance of Internet rumours (从互联网发展历史看网络谣言治理趋势). Guangming Daily (光明日报). 16 April 2014. Second edition.
16. Ren, Songyun. Big Data era prison network needs to weave a safety net (大数据时代亟待织牢网络安全网). Xinhua Daily (新华日报). 13 May 2016. Sixth edition.
17. Qiao, Wenxin. Internet era of big data governance dilemma (大数据时代的网络治理困境) Qingdao Daily (青岛日报). 24 June 2013. Sixth edition.
18. Wu, Shengwu. From microblog governance to Internet social management (从微博问政到网络社会治理). Legal Daily (法制日报). 3 July 2013. Ninth edition.

Method: Consider/read articles located using the keywords 微公益 (Weibo Gongyi) and 新浪微博 (SinaWeibo) in the China Core Newspapers Full-text Database (which collates articles from 159 national level newspapers) (total 11 articles)

Materials Considered

1. Li, JiBin. Getting the rapidly developing Weibo Gongyi programme on a legal track (尽快将微博公益纳入法制化轨道). Legal Daily (法制日报). 17 August 2012. Third edition.

Method: Search the China Core Newspaper's Database for articles with “新浪微博” as the subject (171 total), wanted to make sure that I obtained a breadth of time periods and focus on longer, more comprehensive or summary articles and articles from more influential outlets,

Materials Considered

1. The real me, the most reliable (真实的我,最靠谱). People's Post and Telecommunications (人民邮电). 22 November 2011. Sixth edition.
2. Zhu, Wei. Sina Weibo's Community Convention: a milestone in Internet self-discipline (新浪微博社区公约:互联网自律的一个里程碑). Guangming Daily (光明日报). 3 March 2012.

3. Zhao, Jiaxin, Weizhou Tao, Xueting Tian and Guijie Wang. Jiangning public security line: will sell cute police sorghum (江宁公安在线:会卖萌的警察蜀黍). People's Public Security Bureau (人民公安报). 18 November 2011. Fifth edition.
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5. Liu, Tianming and Weiqian Ji Contrasting the agenda setting of new and traditional media (新媒体与传统媒体议程设置对比). China Press and Publication (中国新闻出版报). 10 May 2013. Fourth edition.
6. Chen, Fei. Public Archaeology in the new media age (新媒体时代下的公众考古). Chinese Culture (中国文物报). 25 March 2016. Seventh edition.
7. Li, Miao. Weibo rumour processing speed doubled ().
8. Weibo rumour processing speed doubled (新浪微博谣言处理速度提升一倍). China Press and Publication (中国新闻出版报). 18 August 2014. Second edition.

Source: China Media Project, Journalism and Media Studies Center, Univeristy of Hong Kong

Search Strategy: Skim titles of all articles posted by the China Media Project (Total : 335 posts) since the beginning of 2013

Materials Considered

1. Shu, Xiao. The Southern Weekly incident, an exercise in citizen action. 31 January 2013. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2013/01/31/31034/>
2. Stinking Up Weibo. 26 August 2013. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2013/08/26/33902/>
3. Bandurski, David. China's "seven base lines" for a clean Internet. 27 August 2013. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2013/08/27/33916/>
4. Bandurski, David. Censors, show your swords! 4 September 2013. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2013/09/04/33995/>
5. Hooked by the Internet. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2013/10/02/34254/>
6. Gang, Qian. Parsing the "public opinion struggle". 24 September 2013. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2013/09/24/34085/>
7. Guidance of Public Opinion 舆论导向. 5 November 2013. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2013/11/05/423/>
8. Bandurski, David. "Media control" in the United States. 23 December 2013. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2013/12/23/34819/>
9. Gang, Qian. China's political discourse in 2013. 6 January 2014. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2014/01/06/34866/>
10. "Your post is inappropriate". 11 April 2014. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2014/04/11/35265/>

11. Bandurski, David. People's Daily: speech is free, rumours are not. 13 August 2014. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2014/08/13/35715/>
12. Gang, Qian. A backstage glimpse at the Plenum "Decision". 10 November 2014. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2014/11/10/37015/>
13. Bandurski, David. News and propaganda resolutions for 2015. 12 January 2015. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2015/01/12/37683/>
14. Bandurski, David. A "Year of Innovation" for Internet Controls. 7 January 2016. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2016/01/07/39575/>
15. Bandurski, David. How Xi Jinping sees the Internet. 9 December 2015. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2015/12/09/39451/>
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17. Bandurski, David. Envisioning the splinternet. 20 November 2014. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2014/11/20/37261/>
18. Bandurski, David. A history of "internet diplomacy". 4 December 2014. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2014/12/04/37373/>
19. 18 China bans in 2014. 31 December 2014. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2014/12/31/37545/>
20. Ming, Zhang. People power and order under heaven. 9 February 2015. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2015/02/09/38152/>
21. Bandurski, David. Lu Wei on the "dream of the web". 17 February 2015. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2015/02/17/38218/>
22. Bandurski, David. Control and innovate. 20 May 2015. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2015/05/20/38731/>
23. Bandurski, David. Report claims victory for information controls in China. 29 June 2015. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2015/06/29/39071/>
24. Bandurski, David. Putting China's Cyberpolice in Context. 11 August 2015. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2015/08/11/39139/>
25. Internet Sovereignty. 30 September 2015. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2015/09/30/39279/>
26. Bandurski, David. Re-defining cyberspace. 8 October 2015. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2015/10/08/39309/>
27. Bandurski, David. Global Internet Governance 2.0? 16 December 2015. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2015/12/16/39508/>
28. Bandurski, David. Mirror, Mirror On the Wall. 22 February 2016. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2016/02/22/39646/>
29. Bandurski, David. How Xi Jinping Views the News. 3 March 2016. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2016/03/03/39672/>
30. Bandurski, David. Three Cheers for China's Cyber-Volunteers. 13 April 2016. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2016/04/13/39684/>
31. Bandurski, David. Supervising Supervision. 17 June 2016. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2016/06/17/39775/>
32. Bandurski, David. Bullets and smartphones. 20 June 2016. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2016/06/20/39760/>
33. Bandurski, David. Hot Peppers for a New China. 14 July 2016. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2016/07/14/39838/>

Source: Chinese Media Law Database of the China Copyright and Media Blog, edited by Chinese Media Law specialist Roger Creemers, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/>

Search Strategy: Search for keyword “microblog” resulting in 50 hits Scan titles and first few sentences of each post for relevance and read/consider posts of relevance

Materials Considered

1. New Draft Internet Regulations: the Empire Strikes Back? 8 June, 2012. <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2012/06/08/new-draft-internet-regulations-the-empire-strikes-back/>
2. Media scholars Appraise 10 Large Chinese Media Law Events from 2011. 30 March 2013. <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2012/03/30/media-scholars-appraise-10-large-chinese-media-law-events-from-2011/>

Source: Search for newspaper articles on key events referenced in other sources

Materials Considered

1. Buckley, Chris. Crackdown on Bloggers Is Mounted by China. NY Times. 10 September 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/11/world/asia/china-cracks-down-on-online-opinion-makers.html>
2. Hewitt, Duncan. Five lives changed by China’s Twitter. 16 July 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-18773111>
3. More, Malcolm. China kills off discussion on Weibo after Internet crackdown. 30 January 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10608245/China-kills-off-discussion-on-Weibo-after-internet-crackdown.html>

Search strategy: Links from information considered as other parts of this investigation

Materials Considered

1. Kaiman, Jonathan. China’s “Brother Wristwatch” Yang Dacai jailed for 14 years for corruption. The Guardian. 5 September 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/05/china-brother-wristwatch-yang-dacai-sentenced>.
2. FlorCruz, Jamie. Online popularity can be perilous as China obsesses about Internet rumours. CNN. 13 September 2013. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/13/world/asia/china-online-rumors-crackdown-florcruz/index.html>.
3. Bandurski, David. Dear leaders: what would you do? China Media Project. 19 November 2012. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2012/11/19/29201/>

A1.1.3.1.2. Media and expert commentary on laws and regulations in the U.S. context

Search Strategy: Search Factiva database (which collates thousands of newspapers, magazines etc.) for articles containing the phrase “Internet governance” that were published in the past five years in publications that the site defines as Top US newspapers (total of 306 publications), skim article titles and read/consider relevant articles

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1. Clayton, Mark. Secrets are safe as WikiLeaks, starved of funds, halts operations. The Christian Science Monitor. 24 October 2011.
2. Pfanner, Eric. Group Urges Countries To Protect Web Speech. The New York Times. 14 December 2011.
3. Chertoff, Michael. Defining 'privacy' in the cloud. The Washington Post, 10 February 2012.
4. Tsukayama, Hayley. 2012 Republican Convention: GOP adopts Internet freedom plank; Republicans adopted an Internet freedom plank, vow to protect current governance. Washington Post.com. 29 August 2012.
5. Brooks, Jermyn. Hands Off the Internet! The New York Times. 7 December 2012.
6. Pfanner, Eric. Citing Internet Impasse, The U.S. Rejects a Treaty. The New York Times. 14 December 2012.
7. Nakashima, Ellen. U.S. refuses to back U.N. treaty, saying it endorses restricting the Internet; The U.S. delegation to the meeting in Dubai rejected last-minute Internet restrictions inserted in text by UAE. Washington Post.com. 14 December 2012.
8. Crovitz, L. Gordon. Information Age: America's First Big Digital Defeat. The Wall Street Journal. 17 December 2012.
9. Moorhead, Molly. Online Privacy Issues Still at Forefront. Tampa Bay Times. 14 January 2013.
10. Keeping the Internet free. Washington Post.com. 21 January 2013.
11. Cukier, Kenneth and Viktor Mayer-Schonberger. The Financial Bonanza of Big Data. The Wall Street Journal. 8 March 2013.
12. Kanter, James and Somini Sengupta. Europe Continues Wrestling With Online Privacy Rules. NYTimes.com Feed, 7 June 2013.
13. Kakutani, Michiko. Watched By the Web: Surveillance Is Reborn. The New York Times. 11 June 2013.
14. Fung, Brian. Obama wanted an open Internet he could spy on. Thanks to the NSA, he may get neither. Washington Post.com. 17 September 2013.
15. Fung, Brian. Twitter has started lobbying. Here's how much they spent; The social media firm may be new to the game, but it has its eye on a broad array of issues already. Washington Post.com. 22 October 2013.
16. Wasserman, Edward. NSA's Insatiable Thirst for Everything. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. 14 November 2013.
17. Markoff, John. Viewing Where the Net Goes. The New York Times. 31 December 2013.

18. McDowell, Robert. A Victory for an Unfettered Internet; After another court loss, the FCC should abandon its 'net neutrality' regulation goal. The Wall Street Journal Online. 14 January 2014.
19. Ignatius, David. The Internet after Snowden. The Washington Post. 6 February 2014.
20. Timberg, Craig. U.S. will relinquish last of its control over the Internet, The Washington Post. 15 March 2014.
21. Editorial Board. Updating Internet Governance. The New York Times Times. 19 March 2014.
22. Genachowski, Julius. 'Global' Internet Governance Invites Censorship; If the U.S. surrenders Web oversight, firm steps must be taken to protect free speech and commerce. The Wall Street Journal Online. 3 April 2014.
23. The NSA may have exploited Heartbleed. That's a very, very big deal, Henry Farrell, Washington Post.com, 14 April 2014
24. Crovitz, L. Gordon. Information Age: Keeping the Internet Free -- for Now. The Wall Street Journal. 14 April 2014.
25. Fung, Brian. How China and Russia are trying to undermine the Internet, again. Washington Post.com. 24 April 2014.
26. Crovitz, L. Gordon. Governments Grab for the Web; Authoritarians accept Obama's invitation to take Internet control. The Wall Street Journal Online. 27 April 2014.
27. Kanter, James, Mark Scott and Raphael Minder. European Court Lets Users Erase Records on Web. The New York Times. 14 May 2014.
28. Crovitz, L. Gordon. Au Revoir to the Open Internet; Authoritarian regimes want more control over the Web. Now France has joined the movement. The Wall Street Journal Online. 29 June 2014.
29. Neyfakh, Leon. Dawn of the Web; Two decades ago, a strange thing called the Internet started to arrive in people's lives. What did it feel like in the moment? An oral history. The Boston Globe. 6 July 2014.
30. Protect Internet with wise policies // Pew study, "Net Threats," identifies challenges to an open Web. Star-Tribune. 6 July 2014.
31. Downes, Larry. Why Internet governance should be left to the engineers. Washington Post.com. 5 September 2014.
32. Crovitz, L. Gordon. The Internet Power Vacuum Worsens; The U.S. hasn't even abandoned its Web protection yet, and authoritarians are making their move. The Wall Street Journal Online. 7 September 2014.
33. Post, David. Stand Down! UN 'takeover of the Internet' postponed indefinitely. Washington Post.com. 7 November 2014.
34. Crovitz, L. Gordon. Information Age: Halfway to Wrecking Internet Freedom. The Wall Street Journal. 1 December 2014.
35. Browne, Andrew. World News -- China's World: Exporting Beijing's Web Vision. The Wall Street Journal. 3 December 2014.
36. Scola, Nancy. In the 'global struggle for Internet freedom,' the Internet is losing, report finds; A think tank finds that Internet freedom is in decline around the world -- again. Washington Post.com. 4 December 2014.
37. Royce, Ed. Support global fight for Internet freedom. The Orange County Register. 4 January 2015.
38. Editorial Board. Protect the Internet. The Washington Post. 5 January 2015.

39. Downes, Larry. Eight reasons to support Congress's net neutrality bill; Here are eight reasons why the Thune-Upton legislation would benefit consumers. Washington Post.com. 20 January 2015.
40. Crovitz, L. Gordon. Information Age: AmericanExceptionalism.com. The Wall Street Journal. 2 February 2015.
41. Post, David. Internet governance: What if the sky really is falling? Washington Post.com. 4 May 2015.
42. Mozur, Paul and Jane Perlez. China Flexes Tech Muscles Before a State Visit. NYTimes.com Feed. 9 September 2015.
43. Rauhala, Emily. Donald Trump wants to 'penetrate' the Internet. So does China's president. ; Xi and Trump put security, not free speech, first. Washington Post.com. 16 December 2015.
44. Yuan, Li. Will China's Censorship Spread? Since last year, China has been promoting its notion of 'Internet sovereignty' for global Internet governance. The Wall Street Journal Online. 16 December 2015.
45. Levin, Dan and Paul Mozur. Role for State in Internet Policy Shows China's Influence at U.N. The New York Times. 17 December 2015.
46. Editorial Board. Keep the Internet free. The Washington Post. 26 December 2015.
47. Mozur, Paul. Seeking Access to Facebook in China, Zuckerberg Courts Risks. The New York Times. 21 March 2016.
48. Crovitz, L. Gordon. Information Age: Stop Obama's Internet Giveaway. The Wall Street Journal. 21 March 2016.
49. Fung, Brian. The U.S. just took one step closer to privatizing a core part of the Internet. Washington Post.com. 9 June 2016.
50. Crovitz, L. Gordon. The Battle Over Obama's Internet Surrender; Congress must act this summer to keep U.S. oversight and protection intact. The Wall Street Journal Online. 13 June 2016.
51. McKinnon, John D. U.S. News: Privatization Of Internet Governance Begins Oct. 1. The Wall Street Journal. 17 August 2016.
52. Russell, Andrew L. Five myths about the Web. Washington Post.com. 19 August 2016.

Source: Deeplinks Blog of the non-profit digital rights group the Electronic Frontier Foundation

Search Strategy: Skim titles and first few sentences of all blog posts tagged with the "keyword" social networking (114 posts) for relevance and read/consider posts of relevance

Materials Considered

1. Galperin, Eva and Jillian York. Twitter Withholds Information from Police After Troll Threatens Murder? Not Quite. 12 August 2012.
<https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2012/08/twitter-withholds-information-police-after-troll-threatens-murder-not-quite>
2. York, Jillian. The Guy Adams Case Demonstrates Twitter's Need for an Appeals Process. 31 July 2012.
<https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2012/07/guy-adams-case-demonstrates-twitters-need-appeals-process>

3. Fakhoury, Hanni. Court in OWS Twitter Case Gets it Wrong Again. 5 July 2012. <https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2012/07/court-ows-twitter-case-gets-it-wrong-again>
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5. Bankston, Kevin. Man Arrested for Twittering Goes to Court, EFF Has the Documents. 5 October 2009. <https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2009/10/man-arrested-twittering-goes-court-eff-has-documen>
6. Lynch, Jennifer. Government Finds Uses for Social Networking Sites Beyond Investigations. 10 August 2010. <https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2010/08/government-finds-uses-social-networking-sites>
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8. Lynch, Jennifer. Social Media and Law Enforcement: Who Gets What Data and When? 20 January 2011. <https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2011/01/social-media-and-law-enforcement-who-gets-what>
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11. Fakhoury, Hanni. NY Twitter Decision Fails to Recognize Content and Location Data Require a Warrant. 11 May 2012. <https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2012/05/NY-twitter-decision-fails-to-recognize-content-and-location>
12. Reitman, Rainey. Obama Should Reject Anti-Encryption Legislation and Protect Digital Security. 11 April 2016. <https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2016/04/eff-joins-32-civil-liberties-groups-and-companies-ask-obama-reject-anti-encryption>
13. Galperin, Eva and Jillian York. Transparency Is No Substitute For Free Speech. 13 February 2015. <https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2015/02/transparency-no-substitute-free-speech>
14. York, Jillian. Some Things Never Change: Governments Still Present Biggest Threat to Open Internet. 20 November 2012. <https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2012/11/some-things-never-change-governments-still-present-biggest-threat-open-internet>
15. Harmon, Elliot. House Passes Bill to Sabotage Net Neutrality. 15 April 2016. <https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2016/04/house-passes-bill-sabotage-net-neutrality>

16. Cohn, Cindy. Secret Court Takes Another Bite Out of the Fourth Amendment. 16 April 2016. <https://www.eff.org/es/deepinks/2016/04/secret-court-takes-another-bite-out-fourth-amendment>
17. Higgins, Parker. Who Has Your Back? 2015: Protecting Your Data From Government Requests. 2 July 2015. <https://www.eff.org/es/wp/who-has-your-back-2015-protecting-your-data-government-requests>
18. York, Jillian and Cindy Cohn. Twitter, Free Speech, Super-Injunctions and the Streisand Effect. 24 May 2011. <https://www.eff.org/es/deepinks/2011/05/twitter-and-free-speech-case-super-injunction>

Search strategy: Links from information considered as other parts of this investigation

Materials Considered

1. Miller, Claire Cain. Twitter Plans to Offer Shopping Advice and Easy Purchasing. NYTimes. 19 June 2009. <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/19/twitter-plans-to-offer-shopping-advice-and-easy-purchasing/>
2. Wagner, Kurt. Twitter Unveils Exclusive Feature For Verified Users. Mashable. 13 September 2013. <http://mashable.com/2013/09/12/twitter-exclusive-feature/#G8m7Clv9Dmqg>
3. Hansell, Saul. Advertisers Are Watching Your Every Tweet. NYTimes. 13 July 2009. http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/07/16/advertisers-are-watching-your-every-tweet/?_r=0
4. Twitter to selectively 'censor' tweets by country. BBC. 27 January 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-16753729>
5. Smith, Lewis. Twitter chief hints he may have to divulge users' names. The Independent. 25 May 2011. <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/twitter-chief-hints-he-may-have-to-divulge-users-names-2289187.html>
6. Rosenbush, Steve. Twitter Leaves the Business Market to Others. Wall Street Journal. 23 July 2012. <http://blogs.wsj.com/cio/2012/07/23/twitter-leaves-the-business-market-to-others/>
7. Keilon, Leo. GCHQ leak lists UK cyber-spies' hacking tools. BBC. 15 July 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-28306819>

Source: American Civil Liberties Union

Search Strategy: Browse the privacy and technology section of the website, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/privacy-technology>

Materials Considered

1. What's at Stake
2. Current Issues
3. The Latest
4. Act

A1.2 Site architecture

A1.2.1. Technological structures

A large number of screenshots and textual documents (such as terms and conditions and the contents of help pages) were collected as part of this research. However, in the interests of brevity they are not reproduced here.

A1.2.2. Forms of power and knowledge

A1.2.2.1. Interviews with site actors and official publications

A1.2.2.1.1. Interviews with site actors and official publications for Weibo in China

Source: Chinese Media Law Database of the China Copyright and Media Blog, edited by Chinese Media Law specialist Roger Creemers, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/>

Search Strategy: Search for keyword “microblog” resulting in 50 hits
Scan titles and first few sentences of each post for relevance and read/consider posts of relevance

Materials Considered

1. Time for Weibo Community Service? 31 May 2012.
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2012/05/31/time-for-weibo-community-service/>

Search strategy: Watch/read/consider key speeches by Weibo’s executives referenced in other media

1. Chao, Charles. Speech at 2014 Sina Kirin/Golden Lion Forum. 22 November 2014 <http://finance.sina.com.cn/hy/20141122/093320891704.shtml>
2. Chao, Charles. Speech at 2013 Sina Kirin/Golden Lion Forum. 25 November 2013. <http://finance.sina.com.cn/hy/20131125/092917423448.shtml>
3. Chao, Charles. Speech at 2009 China Entrepreneur Summit. 6 December 2009. <http://finance.sina.com.cn/hy/20091206/13167062537.shtml>
4. Chao, Charles. Keynote Speech at the fourth annual China 2.0 conference hosted by Stanford Graduate School of Business. 28 October, 2013.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlliivJKHk8>

Search strategy: Scan titles of articles containing the keyword “曹国伟” (Charles Chao) in the China Core Newspapers database (total 898) and consider a selection of relevant articles

Materials considered

1. Liu, Jia. Charles Chao: microblogging changes the entire process of media production (曹国伟:微博改变整个媒体产业链). First Financial Daily (第一财经日报). 19 September 2011.
2. Wang, Xianzhi. Charles Chao: Sina Weibo can become the preeminent online platform (曹国伟 : 新浪微博会超越所有网站). China Times (华夏时报). 26 September 2011.
3. He, Chun. Weibo: Slow down think about money (微博:且慢向钱看). Securities Daily (证券日报). 20 July 2011.
4. Yang, Guoqiang. About Sina's Charles Chao (新浪"曹国伟造").). First Financial Daily (第一财经日报). 24 December 2008.

Search strategy: Locate key documents published by the company

Materials Considered

1. Weibo 2015 Annual Report. 29 April 2016. <http://phx.corporate-ir.net/External.File?item=UGFyZW50SUQ9NjMxNTI0fENoaWxkSUQ9MzM2MDI1fFR5cGU9MQ==&t=1>
2. Weibo 2014 Annual Report. 28 April 2015. <http://phx.corporate-ir.net/External.File?item=UGFyZW50SUQ9NTc4NDQ2fENoaWxkSUQ9MjgyNzU5fFR5cGU9MQ==&t=1>
3. Contents of the Weibo Investor Relations Website, <http://ir.weibo.com/phoenix.zhtml?c=253076&p=irol-irhome>

A1.2.2.1.2 . Interviews with site actors and official publications for Twitter in the U.S.

Search Strategy: Search Factiva database (which collates thousands of newspapers, magazines etc.) for articles containing the words "Jack Dorsey", "Twitter" and "interview" that were published in the U.S. (total 938 hits, of which 760 publications, 172 web news, 3 blogs and 3 multimedia), skim article titles and read/consider relevant articles

Materials considered

1. Gynn, Jessica. Jack Dorsey pledges to make Twitter inclusive. USA Today. 25 March, 2016. http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2016/03/25/jack-dorsey-national-society-of-black-engineers-diversity-inclusion/82256686/?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzRss&utm_campaign=usatoday-techtostories
2. Gaudin, Sharon. Twitter's Jack Dorsey takes on censorship, trolls and the 140-character limit, ComputerWorld. 18 March 2016. http://www.computerworld.com/article/3045924/social-media/twitter-s-jack-dorsey-takes-on-censorship-trolls-and-the140-character-limit.html#tk.rss_news
3. Nickelsburg, Monica. Twitter at 10: Jack Dorsey speaks out about augmenting reality, shifting priorities, and facing challenges. Geekwire. 21

- March 2016. <http://www.geekwire.com/2016/twitter-10-jack-dorsey-speaks-augmenting-reality-shifting-priorities-facing-challenges/>
4. Discussion about Tragedy in Tucson; Interview with Jack Dorsey, NBC Nightly News. 10 January 2011. Transcript hosted on Factiva.
 5. CNBC Exclusive: CNBC Media Alert: CNBC's Julia Boorstin Speaks with Jack Dorsey, Square and Twitter Co-Founder and CEO. CNBC. 26 April 2016. <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/04/26/cnbc-exclusive-cnbc-media-alert-cnbc-julia-boorstin-speaks-with-jack-dorsey-square-and-twitter-co-founder-and-ceo.html>
 6. Boorstin, Julia. Twitter CEO Dorsey: Here's what Wall Street doesn't get about us. CNBC. 27 April 2016. <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/04/27/twitter-ceo-dorsey-we-are-focused-on-live.html>
 7. Twitter Founder Jack Dorsey: I've Never Blocked Anyone. NBC. 18 March 2016. <http://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/tech/Today-Twitter-Founder-Jack-Dorsey-Never-Blocked-Anyone-372562462.html>
 8. Cook, James. Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey says he's never blocked anyone because he 'wants to see what people are saying'. Business Insider. 18 March 2016. http://uk.businessinsider.com/twitter-ceo-jack-dorsey-says-hes-never-blocked-anyone-2016-3?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+typepad%2Falleyinsider%2Fsilicon_alley_insider+%28Silicon+Alley+Insider%29?r=US&IR=T
 9. Twitter's Biz Stone: "Humor Is A Powerful Mechanism For Delivering Truth". PR Newswire. 12 January 2012. Article hosted on Factiva.
 10. Twitter's Jack Dorsey, CEO of two firms? Big deal, laughs every working mother ever; How running two companies is like working full-time and running a household. MarketWatch. 25 January 2016. Article hosted on Factiva.
 11. Twitter co-founder Biz Stone in his own words. AFP. 14 March 2011. Article hosted on Factiva.
 12. Twitter at 10: Jack Dorsey Looks to the Next Decade. Bloomberg. 21 March. 2016. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2016-03-21/twitter-at-10-jack-dorsey-looks-to-the-next-10-years>
 13. Kim, Tae. Pro Uncut: Full interview with Jack Dorsey. CNBC. 9 March 2016. <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/03/09/pro-uncut-full-interview-with-jack-dorsey.html>
 14. Jack Dorsey, the man (and mind) behind Twitter. USA Today. 6 October 2015. Article hosted on Factiva.
 15. Biz Stone Twitter's co-founder talks about the vision and the reality, plans for the future and favorite tweets. Computerworld. 6 April 2009. Article hosted on Factiva.
 16. The Weekend Interview with Evan Williams and Biz Stone: The Twitter Revolution. The Wall Street Journal. 18 April 2009. Article hosted on Factiva.
 17. Weekend Confidential: Biz Stone – Review. Dow Jones Institutional News. 28 March 2014. Article hosted on Factiva.
 18. Twitter CEO: New Policy for Transparency, Not Censoring, Wall Street Journal. 31 January 2012. Article hosted on Factiva.

19. Executive of the Year: Jack Dorsey. San Francisco Business Times. 23 December 2011. Article hosted on Factiva.
20. Twitter's Biz Stone On Starting A Revolution. NPR: Fresh Air. 16 February 2011. Transcript hosted on Factiva.
21. Twitter shares near all-time high but billionaire founder Jack Dorsey couldn't care less. The Independent. 10 December 2013. Article hosted on Factiva.

Search Strategy: Locate interviews with site actors referenced in other media

Materials considered

1. Wagner, Mitch. Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey Talks About Its Business Model. Information Week. 4 June 2008.
<http://www.informationweek.com/desktop/twitter-ceo-jack-dorsey-talks-about-its-business-model/d/d-id/1068539?>
2. Halliday, Josh. Twitter's Tony Wang: 'We are the free speech wing of the free speech party'. The Guardian. 22 March 2012.
<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2012/mar/22/twitter-tony-wang-free-speech>
3. CEO Jack Dorsey: Twitter Absolutely Does Not Censor Users. TODAY. 18 March 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhd2ilAD5wg>

Search strategy: Locate key documents published by the company

Materials Considered

1. Twitter 2015 Annual Report.
<http://www.viewproxy.com/twitter/2016/2/index.html>
2. Twitter 2014 Annual Report.
<http://www.viewproxy.com/twitter/2015/2/index.html>
3. Contents of the Twitter Investor Relations Website.
<https://investor.twitterinc.com/>
4. Twitter's Transparency Reports
 - a. Information Requests, 2012- 2015,
<https://transparency.twitter.com/information-requests>
 - b. Removal Requests, 2012 – 2015,
<https://transparency.twitter.com/removal-requests/>

Search strategy: Skim the video's posted by the official Twitter account on YouTube, (28 total videos)

Materials Considered:

1. Twitter: Connect And Discover. 7 November 2013.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15u2G-L07x8>
2. Twitter: discover what's new in your world. 14 September 2010.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIpD7hfffQo>
3. #TwitterTips: Profile Photo. 6 April 2016.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sate_gIR1hc
4. Periscope: Now on Twitter. 12 January 2016.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYyWfxUH9_Y

5. #ThankYou for 9 Amazing Years. 21 March 2015.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-jfpahGhRc>
6. Tools for Improving Your Twitter Experience. 18 March 2015.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqtvWzUW9GM>
7. Year on Twitter 2014. 14 December 2014.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrREX0N6rP4>
8. Join Twitter in helping make it #betternow. 4 February 2011.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVKxPt0S5zM>
9. Follow Your Interests. Discover Your World. Twitter. 18 March 2011.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4AN4_N5N52U

Search strategy: Skim posts in the Twitter blog and read/consider posts that appear relevant to the topic, search for blog posts about topics and events mentioned in other media

Materials Considered

1. Stone, Biz. The Tweets Must Flow. 28 January 2011.
<https://blog.twitter.com/2011/the-tweets-must-flow>
2. Tweets still must flow. 26 January 2012.
<https://blog.twitter.com/2012/tweets-still-must-flow>
3. Trickett, Alex. Follow the @OlympicFlame on Twitter and Periscope. 21 April 2016. <https://blog.twitter.com/2016/follow-the-olympicflame-on-twitter-and-periscope>
4. St. Jean, Nicole. Coachella 2016: weekend one recap. 18 April 2016.
<https://blog.twitter.com/2016/coachella-2016-weekend-one-recap>
5. Thank you! Love, Twitter. 20 March 2016.
<https://blog.twitter.com/2016/thank-you-love-twitter>
6. To trend or not to trend. 8 December 2010.
<https://blog.twitter.com/2010/to-trend-or-not-to-trend>
7. Graves, Matt. Promoted Tweets: Testing in the Timeline. 1 November 2010.
<https://blog.twitter.com/2010/promoted-tweets-testing-in-the-timeline>
8. Lee, Ben. Taking the Fight for #transparency to Court'. 7 October 2014.
<https://blog.twitter.com/2014/taking-the-fight-for-transparency-to-court>

Search strategy: Skim posts in the Twitter advertising blog and read/consider posts that appear relevant to the topic

Materials Considered

1. Trakimas, Matt. New research: 8 ways early tech adopters use Twitter. 21 April 2016. <https://blog.twitter.com/2016/new-research-8-ways-early-tech-adopters-use-twitter>

A1.2.3. Discourses about these constraints

A1.2.3.1. Media and expert commentary on site actors, site architecture, the constraints and the principles behind site architecture

A1.2.3.1.1. Media and expert commentary on site actors, site architecture, the constraints and the principles behind site architecture in the Chinese context

1. Sina Weibo Community Management Regulations (Trial). 8 May 2012.
<https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2012/05/08/sina-weibo-community-management-regulations-trial/>

Method: Consider/read Wikipedia and Baidu Baike pages for Twitter and related/linked content

Materials Considered

1. "Sina Weibo" on Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sina_Weibo
2. "新浪微博" (Sina Weibo) on Baidu Baike.
<http://baike.baidu.com/view/2762127.htm>
3. "Charles Chao" on Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Chao
4. "曹国伟" (Charles Chao) on Baidu Baike.
<http://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%9B%B9%E5%9B%BD%E4%BC%9F/2373379>
5. "彭少彬" (Peng Shaobin) on Baidu Baike.
<http://baike.baidu.com/view/2718391.htm>
6. "Sina Weibo" on Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sina_Weibo
7. "新浪微博" (Sina Weibo) on Baidu Baike.
<http://baike.baidu.com/view/2762127.htm>

Search strategy: Scan titles of articles containing the keyword "曹国伟" (Charles Chao) in the China Core Newspapers database (total 898)

Materials considered

1. Long, Hao. The Internet and technology for the advancement of human life (互联网与科技促进人类生活). China Economic Times (中国经济时报). 30 March 2016.
2. Dou, Yingying. Charles Chao: Facing Greater Challenges (曹国伟：面临更大挑战). China Economic Times (中国经济时报). 5 September 2012.
3. Lu, Jing. Ma Yun and Charles Chao How does "Ali-lang" (a portmanteau of Alibaba and Sina) play? (马云&曹国伟 "阿里浪"玩哪样?). China Business News (中国经营报). 6 May 2013.

Method: Search the China Core Newspaper's Database for articles with "新浪微博" as the subject (171 total), wanted to make sure that I obtained a breadth of time periods and focus on longer, more comprehensive or summary articles and articles from more influential outlets,

Materials Considered

1. Liu, Pengfei. 140 characters, a release of “political” energy 140 (字,释放“政”能量). Emerging Media (新兴媒体). 11 December 2012.
2. Liu, Xiaowei. Charles Chao's Microblogging Puzzle (曹国伟的微博难题). China Times (华夏时报). 25 February 2013. Twentieth edition.
3. He, Ke. Is there no free lunch? (免费午餐没了?). China Quality Newspaper (中国质量报). 2 July 2012. Fifth edition.
4. Zhao, Zhiwei. Weibo's commercialisation dilemma (新浪微博的商业化困局). China Electronics News (中国电子报). 5 February 2013.
5. Huang, Qiang. Sina Weibo's advertising barrage annoys users (新浪微博强插广告惹恼网民). Computer Edition (电脑报). 22 July 2013.
6. Jin, Ke. Users with less than 60 credit cannot forward microblogs (信用低于60分微博无法转发). Beijing Daily (北京日报) 31 August 2013.
7. Yuan, Shujie. Using real power to move people's hearts (用真实的力量打动人心). China Press and Publication (中国新闻出版报). 14 March 2014.
8. Zheng, Zhihui. Weibo's initial commercial success (新浪微博商业化初见成效) Private Economy (民营经济报). 17 August 2012.
9. Xu, Xiao. The background of Alibaba and Weibo's marriage (阿里“联姻”新浪微博的背后). Worker's Daily (工人日报). 8 May 2013. Seventh edition.
10. Xu, Jieyun. Facing operating pressure - Member Weibo launched paid services (直面运营压力 - 新浪微博上马会员付费业务). First Financial Daily (第一财经日报). 19 June 2012. Edition B04.
11. Twitter+Facebook=Sina Weibo 4.0 (Twitter+Facebook=新浪微博 4.0). China Computer Education (中国电脑教育报). 8 August 2011. Edition A03.
12. Dou, Yingying. What does Alibaba want with its crazy investment? (疯狂投资的阿里巴巴想做什么?). China Economic Times (中国经济时报). 12 June 2014. Tenth edition.
13. Xia, Ying. Sina microblogging: go to the left or the right (新浪微博:向左走还是向右走). Southern Weekend (南方周末). 30 June 2011. Edition D20.
14. Fang, Wei. Sina Weibo micro-credits in the third quarter to be pushing force individual value-added services (新浪微博三季度拟推微币 发力个人增值服务业务). Communication and Information Report (通信信息报). 20 July 2011. Edition B12.
15. Sina microblogging valuation of \$ 750 million (新浪微博估值 7.5 亿美元). Liberation Daily (解放日报). 19 July 2010. Ninth edition.

16. Tang, Longhui. Sina microblogging pay the full liberalization of word of mouth spread into a social function electricity supplier of double-edged sword (新浪微博全面开放支付功能 口碑传播成社交电商化双刃剑). Communication and Information Report (通信信息报). 9 July 2014. Edition B12.
17. Ao, Xiangfei and Lu Li. Activity fell three percent Weibo micro-channel blocking revision? (活跃度下滑三成 新浪微博改版阻击微信?). Chongqing Economics Report (重庆商报). 10 July 2013. Edition B09.
18. Sun, Jin. Sina microblogging's "Wild tease" (新浪微博的“江湖挑逗”). First Financial Daily (第一财经日报). 14 January 2011. Edition B03.
19. Guo, Kuitao. Weibo helpless as before the waves? (新浪微博无可奈何成前浪?) China Enterprise News (中国企业报). 14 October 2014. Seventh edition.
20. Xu, Jieyun. Sina microblogging how to accelerate the monetization process (新浪微博如何加快货币化进程). First Financial Daily (第一财经日报). 1 March 2012. Edition C02.
21. Lü, Jing. Sina Weibo social profitable commercialisation how to play? (新浪微博盈利 社交商业化怎么玩?). China Business News (中国经营报). 23 March 2015. Edition C07.
22. Lü, Jing. Sina microblogging test the water a fan of social economy (新浪微博试水粉丝社交经济). China Business News (中国经营报). 20 January 2014. Edition C05.
23. Zhang, Hui. Running Weibo micro-channel speed up the commercialisation process (暗战微信 新浪微博商业化进程提速). China Business Daily (中国商报). 11 July 2014. Edition P07.
24. Wang, Xianzhi. Chao: Sina Fair beyond all sites (曹国伟:新浪微博会超越所有网站). China Times (华夏时报). 26 September 2011. Twenty-third edition.

Method: Consider/read all the articles located using the keywords 微公益 (Weibo Gongyi) and 新浪微博 (SinaWeibo) in the China Core Newspapers Full-text Database (which collates articles from 159 national level newspapers) (total 11 articles)

Materials Considered

1. Zhang, Shouying. Weibo public interest, reducing the threshold for Chinese charities (微公益降低中国慈善门槛). China Economic Herald (中国经济导报). 24 May 2012. Edition B06.

2. Shi, Qian. When public interest is injected into Weibo's power (当公益注入“微力量”). People's Daily (人民日报). 11 October 2011. Twenty-third edition.
3. Xin, Zhijian. Weibo's public interest should not be underestimated (不可小觑的微公益). Henan Daily (河南日报). 14 November 2012. Eighteenth edition.
4. Hu, Jingbo. Weibo public interest's era has come (微公益时代来到). China Business Times (中华工商时报). 11 September 2012. Ninth edition.
5. Zhu, Xiaomeng. Weibo public interest – universally enlarging Weibo's powers for good (微公益：万能的微博放大善念力量). China Business Times (中华工商时报). 3 May 2011. Tenth edition.
6. Bai, Lu. Weibo Public Interest – a simple transparent transfer of big love (微公益:简单透明传递大爱心). China Business Times (中华工商时报). 23 July 2013. Twelfth edition.
7. Yan, Kunlun and Lu Yang. Weibo public interest – a new platform for the continuous improvement of charity (微公益：不断改进的慈善新平台). Nanfang Daily (南方日报). 26 July 2013. Edition A11.
8. Yu, Na. The Butterfly Fund: Weibo Public Interest's Living Specimens (蝴蝶基金：“微公益”生存标本). China Times (华夏时报). 17 October 2011. Thirty-third edition.
9. Lu, Xiao. Suning and Tesco insist on micro-public electricity supplier (苏宁易购坚持电商微公益). China Times (华夏时报). 31 December 2012. Twenty-fourth edition.
10. Zhang, Chunxiao. How to travel the road ahead for Weibo's public interest platform (“微公益”未来之路怎么走). United Daily News (联合日报). 26 September 2012. Fourth edition.

Method: Consider/read all the articles located using the keywords 公益 (Public Interest) and 微博 (Weibo) in the China Core Newspapers Full-text Database (which collates articles from 159 national level newspapers) (total 5 articles of which one is included in the above list)

Materials Considered

1. Zheng, Li. “Micro-charities”: How long is self-discipline's shelf-life? (“微慈善”，自律“保鲜期”有多长？). Worker's Daily (工人日报). 19 November 2011. Seventh edition.
2. Yang, Hao. The four types of Weibo's Public Interest (微博公益的四种方式). Chinese Community Newspaper (中国社会报). 20 July 2012. Sixth edition.

3. Mao, Jinghui. Sohu microblogging launches its first public platform (搜狐推出国内首个微博公益平台). China Economic Times (中国经济时报). 14 December 2011. First edition.
4. Yi, Dan. Sohu microblogging public interest platforms attracts societies interest (搜狐微博公益引发社会关注). China Business Times (中华工商时报). 28 November 2011. Sixth edition.

A1.2.3.1.2. Media and expert commentary on site actors, site architecture, the constraints and the principles behind site architecture in the U.S. context

Method: Consider/read Wikipedia and Baidu Zhidao pages for Twitter and related/linked content

Materials Considered

1. "Twitter" on Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>
2. "List of mergers and acquisitions by Twitter" on Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mergers_and_acquisitions_by_Twitter
3. "WikiLeaks-related Twitter court orders" on Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WikiLeaks-related_Twitter_court_orders
4. "Twitter" on Baidu Baiku. <http://baike.baidu.com/view/843376.htm>
5. "Jack Dorsey" on Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Dorsey
6. "Evan Williams" on Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evan_Williams_%28Internet_entrepreneur%29
7. "Dick Costolo" on Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick_Costolo
8. "Biz Stone" on Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biz_Stone
9. "Noah Glass" on Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noah_Glass

Search Strategy: Search Factiva database (which collates thousands of newspapers, magazines etc.) for articles containing the words "Jack Dorsey", "Twitter" and "interview" that were published in the U.S. (total 938 hits, of which 760 publications, 172 web news, 3 blogs and 3 multimedia), skim article titles and read/consider relevant articles

Materials considered

1. In Return to Twitter, Dorsey Aims to Follow Path of Steve Jobs. NYTimes. 17 June 2015. Article hosted on Factiva.
2. Momentum Grows for Dorsey to Stay at Twitter. NYTimes. 29 September 2015. Article hosted on Factiva.
Can Twitter Make Money? MIT Technology Review. 1 March 2010. Article hosted on Factiva.

Method: Google search for keywords about important topics and issues referenced in other media

Materials Considered

1. Parr, Ben. Twitter Improves Trending Topic Algorithm: Bye Bye, Bieber! Mashable UK. 14 March 2010. <http://mashable.com/2010/05/14/twitter-improves-trending-topic-algorithm-bye-bye-bieber/#K3GRG1m2gmqb>
2. Steadman, Ian. MIT algorithm predicts Twitter trending topics up to five hours in advance. 2 November 2012. www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2012-11/02/algorithm-predicts-twitter-trends
3. Sydell, Laura. How Twitter's Trending Algorithm Picks Its Topics. NPR. 7 December 2011. <http://www.npr.org/2011/12/07/143013503/how-twitters-trending-algorithm-picks-its-topics>
4. Gillespie, Tarleton. Can an algorithm be wrong? Twitter Trends, the spectre of censorship, and our faith in the algorithms around us. Social Media Collective Research Blog. 19 October 2011. <https://socialmediacollective.org/2011/10/19/can-an-algorithm-be-wrong/>

Search Strategy: Search for information on key events mentioned in other media.

Materials Considered

1. Rushe, Dominic. Icelandic MP fights US demand for her Twitter account details. The Guardian. 8 January 2011. <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/jan/08/us-twitter-hand-icelandic-wikileaks-messages>
2. Stempel, Jonathan and Alison Frankel. Twitter sued by U.S. widow for giving voice to Islamic State. Reuters. 14 January 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-twitter-isis-lawsuit-idUSKCN0US1TA>
3. Galperin, Eva. Twitter Steps Down From the Free Speech Party. 21 May 2014. <https://www.eff.org/es/deeplinks/2014/05/twitter-steps-down-free-speech-party>

Method: Search Factiva for articles for the “Twitter” in the headline published in the U.S. by “major news and business sources” in the past five years (total 11,370), out of this restrict to key publications and skim titles of these articles for relevance

Newsweek (9 publications total):

1. Bernasek, Anna. Twitter’s New Owners: Big Institutions. Newsweek. 15 November 2013.
2. Carmody, Tim. Can Twitter Pass Its Test of Characters. Newsweek. 8 November 2013.
3. Newsweek. We’re All Martians Now. Newsweek. 3 September 2012.
4. McGrath, Leah. The EMBERS Project Can Predict the Future With Twitter. 20 March 2015.

The Orange County Register (6 publications total):

5. Fausto, Alma. Twitter lights up over sightings of possible shooting star. 30 December 2014. The Orange County Register.

The New York Times (1028 publications total):

6. Benner, Katie. Twitter Names Jeffrey Siminoff as New Diversity Chief. The New York Times. 30 December 2015.
7. Goel, Vindu. Twitter's Communications Chief Leaves as It Seeks New Message. NYTIMES Blogs. 16 July 2015.
8. Goel, Vindu. Twitter's Head of Engineering Steps Down. NYTIMES Blogs. 29 May 2014.
9. Miller, Claire Cain. A Woman to Serve on Twitter's Board? Here Are 25. 8 October 2013.
10. Boutin, Paul. Nine Things You Didn't Know About Twitter. The New York Times. 19 January 2012.
11. Bilton, Nick. With People Aplenty, Twitter Aims to Cut Through the Noise. NYT Blogs. 2 May 2012.
12. Revkin, Andrew C. How Twitter Matters: Casting a Worldwide Net. NYT Blogs. 23 May 2012.
13. Considine, Austin. Celebrities Leave A Void in Twitter. The New York Times. 19 July 2012.
14. The New York Times. Twitter Turns Over User's Messages In Occupy Wall Street Protest Case. The New York Times. 15 September 2012.