



## The Modes of Government Response To Internet political participation for Decision-making in China

**Abstract :** **Theoretical framework:** Using the analysis framework of “participation-responsiveness model”, and drawing on several cases, the behavior logic of the government in the course of decision-making response to internet political participation are analyzed. **Research questions:** How does the government respond to Internet political participation? And why? **Methodology:** an exploratory multi-case study. **Findings:** The study reveals the effect mechanisms of Internet political participation on decision-making at the government level: power, information and communication. This paper then analyses four modes of government response to Internet political participation for decision-making, i.e. ostrich mode, cuckoo mode, queen bee mode and mandarin duck mode. Based on the network participation theory and empirical analysis, an attempt is made to construct a simple theory on the government response to Internet political participation. **Practical implications** –The study will help to realize Internet political participation orderly and legally, as well as enhance the effectiveness of governance.

**Key Words:** Internet political participation; decision-making; government response; mode; China

Our society, the network society, organizes its public sphere, more than any other historical form of organization (Castells 1996, 2004, 2008). Rapidly developing Internet technology, as a force for political participation of citizens, provides a totally new political environment. Although information technology is playing a fundamental role in China’s political development, relatively little is known about the contours of online participation in government policymaking (Balla 2012).

As an effective supplement of traditional civic participation, Internet political participation is playing an increasingly significant role in local government’s governance innovation in advanced modern countries (Gu 2010). At the same time, it also raises an obvious question for the Chinese government: in this new environment, how should the government respond to public opinion in the process of decision-making? How could government responsiveness and governance



effectiveness be improved? Both questions are urgent and their answers will have a deep significance from the theoretical and practical point of view. The literature pertaining to Internet political participation and government decision-making is extensive: at both theoretical and empirical levels. However unfortunately, this large and already rapidly growing body of research has not achieved “the cumulative character desired” (Emerson 1962). The interpretations given so far have remained focused on the view of power while our integrated knowledge of power does not significantly surpass the conceptions left by Max Weber (1947). This means that there is still a place for explaining government response to Internet political participation in decision-making.

The responsiveness of government policy to citizens' preferences is a central concern of democratic theory (Dahl 1956; Arrow 1963; Sen 1970), which focuses on whether government policy does or does not respond to public opinion. The question applies to the case of Internet political participation. Page and Shapiro (1983) present evidence that public opinion is often a proximate cause of policy, affecting policy more than policy influences opinion. Empirical studies have shown that, unlike mainstream television and newspapers in China, weblogs contain information that is both critical and divergent from party-state propaganda (Esarey & Xiao 2011). The statistics show that more than 80% of the hottest issues (top 20 trending topics) online focus on public policy in the latest years since 2003 in China (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, quoted by Zhang 2010, 70) . When these issues occurred, most netizens (Internet subscribers) disagreed with the government about the policy, and required the government to modify its unfair policy. The literature shows that social criticism dominates Chinese internet issues; much of these online participations take place on interactive weblogs, with 66 percent of Chinese netizens using blogs, 32 percent BBS forums, and 46 percent micro-blogs (CNNIC 2014, 31). But political content being often involved, online discussion reaches a more serious level and can catches public attention, sometimes creating anger at the government and political actors in reality, empowering ordinary netizens to shape and change government policies, as was the case with the infamous arrest and custody death of migrant student Sun Zhigang in year 2003 (Zheng 2007, 147–51; Yang 2009, 34–35). Therefore, the government response to Internet political participation is very serious in China.



In this paper an attempt is made to construct a simple theory on the government response in the decision-making process. Attention is focused upon the impact mechanisms of Internet political participation on government decision-making and modes of government response to Internet political participation for decision-making.

## **1. The effect mechanisms of Internet political participation upon government decision-making**

The following sections deal with the literatures on Internet political participation and government response, respectively: Why is government response to Internet political participation important, and more specifically in China? What are the basic problems the country has to face in this context?

We define Internet political participation as a political participation of citizens on the Internet. This is a kind of behavior and process to influence decision-making within the political system, using Internet to express citizens' political will and participating in political activities.<sup>1</sup> Political participation of citizens using the Internet is characterized by instantaneity, interaction, convenience, independence, randomness, explosiveness as well as other new influential features which greatly differ from traditional political participation. Through the Internet, citizens have more opportunities to understand what the government is doing, and how to express their views timely to take part in the decision-making process in different ways (Huang 2001). Graeme Browning (2000) called this phenomenon Electronic Democracy.

Literature writing in English shows the great impact of the cyberspace on Chinese society. Someone posits that the Chinese Internet is a means for “gradual, slow revolution” (MacKinnon 2008, 45), “political liberalization” (Zheng 2007, 167), or a “communication revolution” (Yang 2009, 213). Others argue that it is “a platform for bottom-up information and public debate” (Zhou 2009, 1006) and “a new channel for individual expression” (Shen et al. 2009, 470), which either “democratizes communication of information in Chinese society” (Tai 2006, 289), “promotes political openness, transparency, and accountability” (Zheng 2007, 186), or “challenges the mainstream culture” through its “playful (mis)use of the available resources” (Yu 2007, 429). So how the government responds to such participation and how to improve the responsiveness and the effectiveness of governance has become a



critical issue.

There are three effect mechanisms of Internet political participation upon government decision-making: power, information and communication. In other words, these mechanisms are the factors that determine/influence the government's response, and the factors that are relevant for China.

Firstly, the power mechanism, the power in cyberspace is a key in understanding the impact of Internet political participation upon government decision-making. American scholar Mark Slouka suggested that "the digital revolution, in its deep core, is associated with power." (Slouka 1995, 71) Famous American futurist Alvin Toffler (1983) also stated that, in the information society, "all information move forward together with power, and then are closely related with politics. As we gradually enter the information politics era, this relationship will become increasingly deep." British scholar Tim Jordan (1999) engaged in a series of studies on the powers of the internet, and suggested that it spreads mainly on three levels: the power of technology, power of media and power of imagination, the three powers being connected with each other. Moreover, the essence of public decision-making is the "authoritative allocation of values for a society." (Easton 1953; 1971, 129-134) The use of social networking and the like have "the most dramatic effects in states where a public sphere already constrains the actions of the government, and social networking has become coordinating tools for nearly all of the world's political movements" (Shirky, 2011). It makes power become the core factor in the political participation. The internet and micro-blogs in particular have opened up new spaces for creating a sort of "digital civil society," which "can challenge cultural stereotypes, correct misinformation, and resist symbolic violence" (Yang 2009, 216 quoted in: Leibold 2011). Zhou (2009, 1016 quoted in: Leibold 2011) is "equally buoyant about the power of China's blogosphere to democratize public discourse".

Perhaps the greatest power of the Internet- along with its search engines like Baidu and Google in particular, is not the ability to locate information but rather to filter it. The increasingly personalized nature of internet speech and information presents a number of inherent problems (Sunstein 2006; 2007; 2009): First, it increases the ability of diverse yet segmented discourse communities to talk and listen to one another rather than engage in genuine dialogue; second, this process of



balkanization also polarizes online opinion, leading to more extreme opinions which can foster hatred and even real world violence; and third, enclave deliberation often produces cyber-cascades, allowing rumors, conspiracy theories and false information to spread like wildfire on the internet; and finally, cyber-niches undermine “general-interest intermediaries,” like newspapers and the nightly news, making shared deliberation and consensus building more difficult.

In the field of political management, especially in the public administration, Europe and other countries began trying to adapt to the challenge of network technology, through licensing, decentralization and other forms. In a study about the restructuring of governance in local governments in Western Europe, American scholar Chris Ansel (2000) suggested to use the networked policy instead of hierarchical organization.

Secondly, the information mechanism, information is an essential factor of Internet political participation impacts on government decision-making. Structurally, a social network site (SNS) is situated in the broader context of the Internet, and of course is the quintessential personal network tool. Karl Deutsch (1963) even said that the essence of politics is information but not necessarily power. In these three kinds of internet power mentioned before by Tim Jordan (1999), the technological power and the media power induce ownership and power dominance, by monopolizing control of information. Having limited resources and the asymmetry of information is very favorable to the government to make decisions unilaterally, but through the Internet society individuals can exchange directly with government officials, for instance, making requests and recommendations to government, participating in elections or government decision-making through a computer. At the same time, the popularity of the internet places government's actions constantly under the scrutiny of the public - therefore, the more transparency there is in the government's internal affairs, the more subject to constraints they become.

Since the rise of the Internet in the early 1990s, especially the SNS at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the networked population has grown very quickly and - the Sinophone internet is now the world's largest cyber-community. As the Data shows, at the end of 2013, the number of Chinese netizens reached 618 million, internet penetration rate rose to 45.8%; most notably, over the same period, SNS has



become a fact of participation for the public, as most entertainment applications have declined, the number of micro-blog users increased by 23.5%, from 251 million at the end of 2011 reaching a record of 309 million after one year, becoming the fastest growing internet application (CNNIC 2014).

In addition, with the development of Internet technology, there have been many new channels of internet participation influencing government decision-making, mainly: internet cyber community, micro-blog, light blog, blog, web forum (BBS), professional websites, and so on, all of which have the potential to spread a large amount of information quickly. Major countries in the world, such as the UK, USA, France, Canada, and the European Union, are using SNS, like Facebook, Twiter, Youtube and so on, as information channels. A viral video (it means something that is rapidly shared, copied or replicated) Kony 2012, according to Wikipedia, was the most highly successful video in terms of its virility spread, gaining about 32,000,000 clicks just one week after it was originally aired (Rebecca Collins). Some international organizations, like the United Nations and the World Bank also launched official micro-blogs on Sina Weibo (micro-blog). Such a huge amount of internet subscribers, informational flows and information-spread ways create the base for Internet political participation, which has an important impact on government decision-making process.

Thirdly, the communication mechanism. The communication mechanism is a kind of logic particular to China of rapid developing Internet political participation, and it will have a major impact on all government decision-making processes. In sharp contrast, “research and debate on the political impact of the internet in the West has been more robust and wide-ranging in its focus, and far more cautious in its conclusions.” (Leibold, 2011) In Western countries, the rise of Internet political participation is closely linked with participatory democratic theory and practice. In addition to Internet political participation, there are many institutionalized channels for citizen participation. As John Thomas (1995, 29) said, "the advantages of citizen participation, include: to ensure that public services better suited to their requirements, to promote the formation of a more open and more responsive public bureaucracy, and to establish a more active and contend cognitive and emotional to the government and citizens themselves." Matthew Hindman (2008 quoted in: Leibold 2011) demonstrates



“how blogging remains a narrow, elite pursuit, which does little to increase the representative basis of American politics”. Dingxin Zhao (2011) said that it is a new “internet forced reform, micro-blog changing China,” but he also pointed out that “unlike China, the internet is not the main platform for political information delivery in the United States currently.

Internet political participation in China is part of the “blog revolution” that is sweeping China, and “shaking up the power balance between the people and the government of the world’s most populous nation” (Xiao 2004). At present in China there is a conflict between the few channels of citizen involvement and the enthusiasm of modern citizen for political participation. When the channels to express one's views within the system are not available, no effective public participation is possible. Thus citizens gradually lose their patience and confidence in the system. However the Internet breaks through a number of institutional barriers and technical limitations of the traditional expression and dissemination channels. This is why this new mode of public participation outside the system is developing rapidly. Moreover, it plays an increasingly important role in the public political participation and social life, and has become the most active part of the public domain in China (Sun 2010). In the country, it is not similar to western countries where the social network sites are homophilous, “create cavernous echo chambers as people reiterate what their friends posted” (Boyd 2008). Instead, average people spread information posted by strangers on SNS, usually the elites online. In China, the Internet makes people more informed and social network sites make them politically activated.

Let’s take the example of the recent protests of Wukan, a so called “landmark event of grassroots democracy” (Li 2012). The controversy happened in February 2011. But all channels to express one's view within the system are not available, and even confrontation happened: until September 21, Wukan villagers have been to the Lufeng Municipal Government to hand over a petition to complain about officials who had sold land to real estate developers without properly compensating the villagers. The villagers announced via the Internet that they would be marching to give the local government a petition on 21th November, and invited Chinese and foreign correspondents to report. Then it attracted worldwide attention in mid-November, and the high-level government (Guangdong Province) stepped in, thus solving the matter peacefully (Hu 2011).





However, once this "non-procedural democracy", about which netizens have high expectations, integrates with an impatient behavior, it could bring problems, such as the "tyranny of the majority", the distortion of government decision-making by the expression of public opinion, or group polarization caused by Internet political participation developing in a disorderly manner, etc. These would result in mistakes in government decision-makings, or sensible but not legal decisions and other negative effects (Fu 2010). In addition, Internet bullying (Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology) is different from the form of in-person bullying because of it gives the bully the ability to remain anonymous. As a result, he or she is less likely to be punished or singled out as a bully (Kat Brandos). Just like the case of the real estate mentioned above, Internet public opinion misleads the government decision-making. Take for example of the case of Deng Yujiao: a strong internet public opinion forced the judiciary to make a judgment, which appeases the public anger, but which is not compatible with the law. Disorder in Internet political participation is growing; it shows that there is no response by the official system to citizens' political participation. It also shows that lack of systematic relations between the state and citizens, groups, and the failure of standardization (Fu 2010). "False rumors and conspiracy theories alike are as old as human societies, but the speed, reach and filtering power of the internet have caused them to spread like wildfire throughout networked societies." (Leibold, 2011) The Chinese internet is "highly vulnerable to manipulation and deceit" and "ripe with willful ignorance, misinformation, and misguided faith in numbers and volume as proof of truth" (Zhu 2010). "China's unique form of online vigilantism, the so-called human-flesh search engines, is a case in point. Directed at the right source, they can result in petty, ill-informed and harassing witch-hunts based on innuendos, half-truths and bizarre conspiracy theories, especially they might be ways of invasion of privacy." (Leibold, 2011)

"This is the reason why numerous campaigns will now have a SNS component while some are entirely SNS-based. There are additional strong reasons why campaigners have focused their attentions on social media and why there has been a general enthusiasm regarding social media as an opportunity for humanitarian campaigns and for cultivating cosmopolitan sensibilities."(Madianou 2011, 250) Campaigners can reach enormous "networked publics" (Boyd 2010), SNS can





potentially democratize “the space of appearance” (Arendt 1998; see also Silverstone 2007).

Therefore, in the context of Internet political participation, government decision-making becomes more complex. As a result of these crises, governments become the advocates of the needs at large, thus further need improving the role of governments in response to challenges posed by netizens, and increase the ability of governments to mitigate them. The form the response of the governance will take is an important issue. Based on different concepts, government response to citizens’ Internet political participation for decision-making will produce different modes, and different response patterns may lead to different results.

## **2. The analysis framework: participation-responsiveness model**

The modes of government response to Internet political participation for decision-making, refers to the ways that the government reacts or answers to issues or proposals arisen by Internet political participation, to make agenda-setting, modify public policy, or form a new public policy. It is a kind of government response which means that the government answers to the publics’ requirements of public policy change, and take actions to solve the issue (Starling, 2002). Government response, simply, is the government’s reaction or answer to someone’s issue or a proposal raised by the public. It includes two parts: governmental reaction and governmental answer.

Public policy is the output of political system’s decision-making, in which “a political system can be designated as those interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society” (Easton 1953; 1971, 129). Internet political participation has significant influence on government decision-making; especially, the communication mechanism is a very important and special factor in China. Then, these factors that determine/influence the government response would affect agenda-setting of public policy, and vice versa. Therefore, these discussions are used to develop the paper's major framework (on table 3), that is, the dimensions that the modes of government response to Internet political participation for decision-making were to be classified by: the level of networked public’s participation, the level of government’s response, and the interaction level between the networked public and the government.



There are many studies on government decision-making modes by scholars, featuring especially more research with regard to agenda-setting modes. Thomas J. Lando’s study shows that meaningful citizen participation happens mainly at the agenda setting stage (1998). The most classic is generally considered to be May’s agenda-setting modes on the basis of Cobb (1976) and other scholars’ research. According to the sponsors of the agenda and the level of public supports, May (1991) distinguished the agenda set modes between external autogenously mode, mobilization mode, internal self- mode, and the consolidation mode. (Table 1)

Table 1 May’s agenda-setting modes (1991, 188)

		sponsors of the agenda	
		government	society
the level of public supports	low	Mobilization model	Inside initiative model
	high	Consolidation mode	Outside initiative model

Chinese scholar Shaoguang Wang (2006) distinguished six kinds of public policy agenda-setting modes, according to the identities of the policy agenda and the level of public participation. (Table 2)

Table 2 Shaoguang Wang’s Chinese agenda-setting modes (2006)

		sponsors of the agenda		
		decision-makers	think-tank	Society
the level of public participations	low	Closed mode	Internal reference mode	Letter mode
	high	Mobilization mode	Leveraging mode	External pressure mode

Otherwise, combining May’s agenda-setting modes, Zheng Qi (2007) suggests the internal and external cooperation mode, and so on.

But I found in a study that, in the internet participation context, users may have an influence in choosing not only which issue should be included into the government's agenda for discussion and action in the stage the government selects various issues by order of importance (Kingdon 1984, 3-4), but also in the government’s decision-making stage, monitoring stage and evaluation stage after the government has made a decision. How the government responds at each of these different phases is a key issue.



At the same time, although the agenda is divided into three categories: media agenda, public agenda and policy agenda (Kingdon 1995), these agendas may be interrelated, and in the context of network participation, they are often intertwined. Indeed, internet subscribers requiring the government to put an issue into decision-making agenda is the public agenda whereas when these internet subscribers are using online media in order to form internet public opinions, this is the media agenda; at the same time, these internet subscribers participate in government decision making process, in turn it is policy agenda. It is difficult to completely separate the three processes. Therefore, the mode of the government policy response discussed in this article is inclusive of the two processes of agenda setting and policy formation, and combines with the interaction of the public agenda, media agenda and policy agenda. And this is different from agenda-setting mode. In fact, what the discussed here is the ways of policymaking. But unfortunately, there is almost no specialized study for the mode of government response to internet politic participation for decision-making. Shuhua Zhang's (2010, 141) research of the relationship between government decisions and internet public opinions can provide us with useful references.

This paper argues that we can identify four modes of government response to Internet political participation for decision-making, according to two dimensions: the level of networked public's participation and the level of governments' response, and the interactions level of the two public decision-making bodies, i.e. the networked public and the government. According to the magnitude of the government response, these modes are arranged as follows: (Table 3).

First, this table's two dimensions were to be justified by more analysis. On the one hand, communication mechanism is an important factor that influences the government decision-making, and government response is that the government in response to the public's requirement to make decision-making for public policy changing rephrase (Starling 2002), so those factors that influence the communication mechanism would affect government response. Communication mechanism includes the networked public's participation and the government's response. "As the communication landscape gets more participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access and enhanced ability to undertake collective action." (Shirky, 2011) Therefore, the level of networked public's participations is a very important



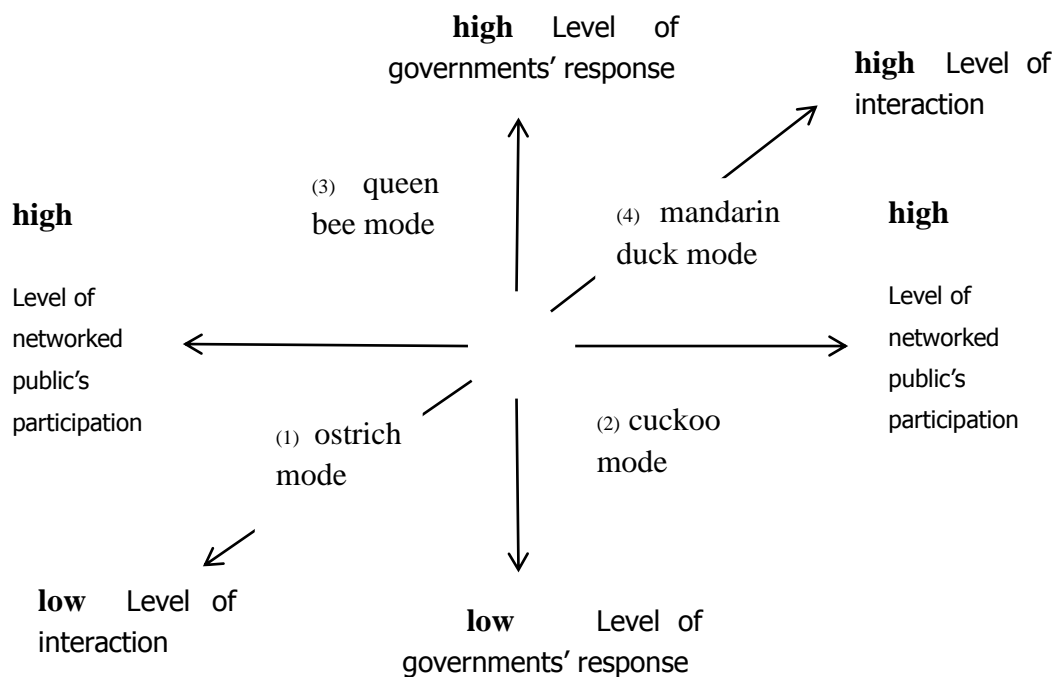
index to measure the government response. It is the same case for the level of government's response.

On the other hand, as mentioned above, those factors which determine agenda-setting of public policy would affect the government response. There are two parts that determine agenda-setting, the sponsors of the policy agenda and the level of public participation. And the level of public participations is an important factor that influences the government decision-making.

It should be kept in mind that the interactions level between the networked publics and the government reflects the level of government response.

Therefore, the level of networked public's participation and the level of governments' response, and the interactions level between the networked publics and the government are important factors that impact the government response. In other words, these two dimensions are useful to be used to develop the framework.

Table 3. The Modes of government Response to Internet political participation for decision-making



Source: the author.



### **3. Four modes of government response to Internet political participation for decision-making**

#### 3.1 Ostrich mode: netizens participate, the government does not respond

In this mode, although internet public users have been involved in and discussed the issue on the internet, but the government ignored the public opinion, and did not respond, adopting instead an ostrich policy. Characterized by a high level of participation of internet subscribers, but a very low level of government responsiveness, it is characterized by a lack of interaction between the two bodies. With traditional management thinking, most events have corresponded to this mode in China. An example of this mode is the case of banned BBS (a kind of forum online) by the Bureau of Binhai County, Jiangsu Province. In May 2010, the Department of Education of the Binhai County blocked the access to the website "Binhai.cn" to any computer of the county's primary and secondary schools. When questioned by journalists, the Secretary of Education Zuo Anqi explained that "bbs.binha.cn" (a part of "binhai.cn") was blocked, but not "binha.cn", because this website was unrelated to teaching and education. The Secretary of Education in Binhai County said that "bbs.binha.cn" is the "garbage dump" of a small number of people venting their resentment, therefore prohibited teachers and students to visit "bbs.binha.cn" or to post from the schools' computers. They continued to maintain the original approach, ignoring the objections of Internet subscribers (Guo 2010). For the government, using this mode is not relevant to resolve the issues at stake. The results of this mode use to be worse; it easily leads to an ostrich policy because the government does not act. But maybe the mode even worse the conflict.

#### 3.2 Cuckoo mode: public opinion pre-expressed, passive government response

In this mode, after unexpected events occurred, amplifying the event scale through the Internet, the views expressed by netizens focused on public policy and official responsibilities. Under the pressure of internet public users, the "senior government leadership" answers passively to achieve a new decision-making, which benefits netizens. All decision-making processes in this particular mode can generally be simplified as following this chain of events: events happen, stakeholders claim to maintain their rights – events reported on the social media platform – it attaches netizens intensive attention, and focus of online public opinion – then receives media



coverage of - a wide public opinion is attached, going as far as reaching the government - causing high-level government attention – this is how an event can influence the decision-making agenda: to solve the problem, adjust policies and programs. The government is pressured by public opinion online to make or change decision-making. It characterized by a high level of participation of netizens, but a low level of government response, is less interaction between the government and netizens. They are filled with anger and act as Fuya Tears of Blood (a Chinese proverb: it means cuckoo constantly crying with blood in pain and sadness). This model is full of conflict and blood and tears.

Events such as Wenzhou train collision, PX (para-xylene) events in Dalian and Xiamen, the Sun Zhigang case, the YaoJiaxin event, "Shanxi Black Brick Kiln" events etc., are all typical cases of Cuckoo mode: public opinion pre-expressed, passive government response. The "Wenzhou train collision" can be taken as an example. At 8:34pm on July 23, 2011, the Wenzhou EMU high-speed rail accident occurred, resulting in 39 deaths and 210 injured. Micro-Blog became the first and effective information platform of the accident. Since the beginning, many ordinary internet subscribers, especially micro-blog "opinion leaders" have posted over 1 million micro-blogs about it on Sina Weibo (micro-blog), and reached up to 3.58 million on Tencent micro-blog. Because the Ministry of Railways buried the falling Front of the EMU quickly after the incident, it caused strong questioning from the public opinion, and is suspected to cover up evidence of the accident. At a press conference, the government statement caused great dissatisfaction among Chinese netizens, the Ministry of Railways spokesman Yongping Wang was fired. Many media, websites, and famous Internet subscribers suggested that this was not only a factual investigation, but an institutional investigation. This event triggered demand for long-term monitoring to benefit both government and citizens. Under the pressure, on July 27 Premier Wen Jiabao chaired a State Council executive meeting, where it was decided that investigation on the accident had to be led openly and transparently with the results made publicly available, to give citizens a genuine account of responsibility. Before the end of 2011, the investigation report was finally released and 54 people were held responsible. Professor Shenyang commented in micro-blog: "It is time to force government to reform with internet." (People Web Opinion Observed 2011)



This mode is full of conflicts between network participation and public decision-making, between citizens' rights and the government's powers. It seems to coincide with the views and ideas of the conflict theory. But even conflict theory also recognizes the conflict as a "safety valve" of social systems, with function of integration (Coser, 1986). The author believes that shift from conflict to negotiation is an effective way to resolve the relationship between the two bodies. Following this theory, government initiative and the public participate directly to the decision-making. This mode could provide the basis and manner for conflict with a positive function of conflict and the possibility of a negotiated settlement.

### 3.3 Queen bee mode: government-led, the public partly participate

The so-called "queen bee mode" is defined by the government acting as the queen bee, and urging worker bees to build together honeycomb. This mode plays a large part in the decision-making process by leading internet citizens to participate. It is characterized by a lower level of participation of internet public users, but a higher degree of interactions between internet subscribers and the government.

In this mode, after a public event or issue happens, the public discusses policy issues through the Internet. Then the government incorporates proposals of the representatives into the government decision-making agenda. It seems that the conflict between network participation and public decision-making, the conflict between citizens' rights and government's powers, converts into delivering consultation and integration.

A typical case of this mode is the latest decision-making process of Xiamen PX (para-xylene) incident. Some media stated that this event as "in the history of democratic decision-making of major projects in China, it was undoubtedly a landmark event." Some people saw it as a "specimen" of democratic decision-making in China (Zhang 2010). When dealing with internet public opinion and when making decision—citizens of Xiamen City demonstrated against the government's decision to build a PX chemical factory in Xiamen City—the government of Xiamen City chose this way. Under the lead of the government, all stakeholders negotiated an agreement, seeking consensus and eliminating conflict, carrying out decision-making smoothly, with benefit for all stakeholders, increasing the overall effectiveness of the community. However, it could not cover up the embarrassment of the event: passive response





reduced the efficiency of the government (making decisions repeatedly increase the cost of decision-makings). If there had been no strong involvement of internet subscribers, how would that have happened? Perhaps the outcome would have been more positive, if the government would have been more active, and would have allowed the public to participate in the decision-making process much earlier, and involving them in the routine system (Zhang 2010, 70).

3.4: Mandarin duck mode: government initiative, high interaction between government and netizens.

This is an ideal model, characterized by a high level of participation of Internet subscribers, a high level of government's response, and a high degree of interaction between the government and netizens. It is like a pair of mandarin ducks, inseparable, mutually caring for each other. This mode has not yet appeared in China. It is citizen-centered, facilitating a broad participation of citizens into the decision making process. It is convenient to open assessment of government action, and enables monitor and influence to correct exert. The process on the mandarin duck mode becomes institutionalized and normalized. It is the characteristic of participatory democracy, such as e-democracy. A large number of cyber communities develop and become advisory bodies which provide information and advice for the government. The level of government response to the local affairs is high. Citizens give a positive response to government decision-making. Governments initially gather public opinion and put forward policy issues. Internet public users can directly participate in the entire decision-making process. There is a wide range of policy discussion forums, and online policy questions and identification. Many government departments work together online, collect and organize user feedbacks. Governments carry out online public opinion surveys to examine user satisfaction with the current governance and expectations for future developments. Users can not only participate in the evaluation of e-government projects, but also take part in the discussion of the formulation of government policies online are free to express their views and opinions. Prior the process of administrative decision-making, governments are able to identify the concerns of the people through a public opinion survey, and put them into decision-making agenda. The government opens a public policy discussion paper through the Internet, and listens to public views; in decision-making, governments



invite representatives of the public to attend government decision-making meetings, who can participate directly in the decision-making process. Where Internet video broadcasts, Internet subscribers can express their opinions online; after decision-making, government departments respond in a timely manner to comments made by people through the Internet. The decision-making documents are published on their website. The video record of conferences will be published on the government website, and according to users' centralized opinions a readjustment of decision-making is possible. At all stages of decision-making, governments accept and take into account the supervision and evaluation by the public, and quickly respond. Of course, governments still play the leading role in the governmental decision-making.

The elements of the decision-making process can generally be simplified to: incidents, issues proposed – catching internet public attention and discussion, forming issues - the proposal of representatives or officers is access to government decision-making agenda- the government sectors ask representatives of the public to make special investigations, then form the initial comments and proposals –publish it through the media, comments are requested, and to expand surveys - a wide range of public opinion is formed, the government adjusts his plan based on the feedback - formal large scale survey online is launched - plan is finalized, the problem is solved or a policy is adjusted - formal promulgation through the media.

In this mode, the government response was citizen-centered, timely monitored and there was a proactive disclosure of information; citizens broadly participated in the decision-making process to deal with issues; and there are more open channels for the public opinion to make assessment, monitor and correct government's actions. This requires using a variety of systems as a guarantee to continue to improve decision-making rules and procedures, and use criteria to determine the scope, efficiency, forms and other areas of decision-making, in order to prevent arbitrary government decision-making.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Through the four kinds of modes of government response to Internet political participation for decision-making and some of the typical case studies discussed



above, it can be found that, when issues arise, if ostrich mode (internet publics participate, the government does not respond), or cuckoo mode (public opinion pre-expressed, passive government response) is applied, it will result in severe consequences, and the credibility of the government will decrease. The queen bee mode (government-led, the public participate directly) might develop from conflict to negotiation between internet participation and government decision-making. Thus the government should avoid using ostrich mode, or minimizing use of cuckoo mode, while promoting government-led queen bee mode to make network internet participation and government decision-making work together, for the prevention of incidents. If efficient government decision-making were pursued with policy stability and predictability, then queen bee mode is a good option, but it still doesn't provide a better solution to the interaction between Internet public users and the government in government decision-making. In this mode, active participation of Internet public is not enough. The latest article in *New Century* magazine pointed out, when facing the awakening of civil rights stimulated by the market economy, governments at all levels must learn "to use dialogue, negotiation and consultative approach to resolve conflicts of interest", and create a mechanism for officials and the public to interact. The biggest challenge to the modes of government response to Internet political participation for decision-making in currently China is mostly non-institutionalized, and not normalized. They fail to solve deep-seated problems and contradictions, resulting in the government becoming the fire brigade, struggling to cope with various crisis events and mass incidents.

Therefore, the ideal model in the future might be mandarin duck mode (government initiative, high interaction between government and netizens). Although there is obviously a certain tension and conflict between Internet political participation and public decision-making, as well as between citizens' rights and government's powers, there is also the basis of mutual integration and balance. The shift from conflict to negotiation is an effective way to resolve the relationship between the two bodies. The government-led queen bee mode offers the basis and method for a conflict to have a positive function and a negotiated settlement. The mandarin duck mode provides a theoretical basis for the future institutionalization and normalization of effective government decision-making. As Cleveland said: "More and more works in the participation of citizens be resolved or not. A growing number



of decision-making is developed based on extensive consultation - Otherwise, the decision made lacks of support and implement." (Cleveland 1985) For decision-making, it means that the mechanism of democratic consultation, in which putting the power of the internet public opinion into a rational track, establishes a mechanism of power that can absorb reasonable components of public opinion. Political system is the reason and guarantee for Internet political participation, and can protect substantive rights of citizens with Internet political participation. Strengthening and improving the system of civic political participation in the Internet has become the question, means considerable of implementing the political stability, promoting political democracy and civilization (Fu 2010).

In short, the mandarin duck mode provides a good basis for the institutionalization and normalization of effective government decision-making, and for orderly and legal Internet political participation in the future. In the network participation environment, in order to improve government decision-making capability to respond, to resolve cyber political risk, and to guide legal and orderly network participation, the ideas and strategies can be considered from the following aspects:

Firstly, improving information release system and establishing a governmental source of authority. This is from the power and information mechanisms of Internet political participation.

Secondly, establishing the open Internet system of policy decision-making and building in response-oriented government, integrated into the Holistic Government (Perri 6 2002). This is a departure from the public decision-making purposes.

Thirdly, reforming the mechanism of government decision-making, and enhancing the cost-benefit ratio of political participation. The purpose is to prevent the disorder of Internet political participation.

Fourthly, improving the legislation of Internet political participation, and regulating the order of Internet political participation. This is a starting point for the process of Internet political participation.

Generally speaking, there are two arguments against the viewpoints that the Internet will play an essential role in national politics: the first is the critique of ineffectiveness of the tools themselves--SNS and the like, degenerated by Malclm Gladwell in *The New Yorker*; the second is that the tools produce as much harm to



democratization as positive effects, “because repressive governments are becoming better at using these tools to suppress dissent”, as emphasized by Rebecca Mackinnon of the New American Foundation and Evgeny Morozov of Open Society Institute (Shirky, 2011). “Academic analysis of the internet in China has become bogged down in the ubiquitous yet increasing stale debate between digital-activism and cyber-censorship—the good versus evil struggle between the internet’s liberating potential and the Chinese party-state’s ongoing efforts at thought-control.” (Leibold, 2011) Therefore, further researches could be made to investigate how to deal with these problems.

## Endnotes

1. This concept is derived from concept of political participation introduced by Manuel Castells 1996.
2. Twitter is a micro-blogging service on the world wide web in which users post messages of up to 140 characters to their account page or ‘profile’. Their messages can then be viewed by any other account holders, or users can choose to ‘follow’ each other, in which case messages are streamed instantly to the accounts of their ‘followers’. This produces a form of virtual network that can quickly expand to allow large numbers of users to communicate simultaneously and in near-real time. – Hands 2011, pp. 191.

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