

**Research on cultural public sphere:  
Dominance, verbal conflict and interaction processes of China's online forum**

**WANG Rong**  
**Communications and New Media Programme**  
**National University of Singapore**

**Policy Brief**

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have huge potential to alleviate the ill of democracy, as platforms for citizens to participate into discussion about public issues (Dahl, 1989). They can be constructed as public sphere which is defined as "a network for communicating information and points of view" about common good (Habermas, 1989). ICTs are featured by information flow and instant interaction, which will facilitate the idea exchange between citizen participants and also between citizens and the authority. Regarding the democratizing function of ICTs, policy-makers can adopt them to serve for the state and their citizens, as we can see from e-governance applications in a lot of countries.

This study focuses on the issue of cultural industry policy. Cultural policy is nation-specific but will be influenced by the trend of globalization, which is evidenced by the popularity of overseas dramas in China's cyberspace. The digitalization in modern media environment makes mass reproduction and wide spread of these dramas at almost zero cost. More and more Chinese audience can get access to them through the Internet. This can be regarded as the background of the new issued regulation policy, aiming to prohibit the unlicensed TV programs. China's netizens are involved in a hot discussion about this new policy immediately. This case study on an online forum found out that drama audience is not just passive consumers of cultural product, while they are taking initiatives to develop public opinions about cultural policy. During interaction among forum peers, they are expressing their voice to the power and can give valued suggestions about how to develop local cultural industry. However the only audience is their peers in the same community. Their voice is not heard by policy-makers, who should be targeted on. To some extent, it is one-way communication and lack of response from the authority.