Sniffer Packets & Firewalls

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©
Abstract

Falun Gong protesters, the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, the spy plane incident and a series of mine accidents are just some of the events over the past decade that involved the Internet. In each incident the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was caught off guard by the circumvention of informational flows as a consequence of the Internet. This is in some ways indicative of the impact the medium is having on the ability of the CCP to manage political discourse within the confines of the country. This thesis examines the way that political discourse in contemporary China is managed in response to the development of the Internet, using the concepts of time and space as conceived by Harold A. Innis.

This historical study considers the strategies used in the management of time and space in the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) across a broad range of ways in which the medium is used by particular groups, such as online gamers, bloggers, hackers, and activists. I have also looked at the way information flows are managed during a crisis or disaster using critical textual analysis of Internet sources, and specific examples. These sources are both official and unofficial including Chinese government sites, journalistic sources both Chinese and Western and Chinese legal databases that appear on the World Wide Web (WWW). The study finds that there is an emerging shift from propaganda based media manipulation and suppression to a style of stage managed spin. The CCP have used three strategies to contain and maintain their hold over central power, including the rule of law, investment in the development of content and technological means. The development of the Internet in China is marked by a dialect of desire for the technology for economic purposes and the perceived need to control the technology for political purposes. The Internet has also enabled the central government in Beijing to reassert its position as a central authority over local and provincial governments.

This study contributes to the existing knowledge about Chinese media policy and the Internet, and will shed light on the ways in which the technology influences the production and consumption of media and the impact that the development of this medium has upon media policy in China. Furthermore, this study will contribute to a greater understanding of CCP’s ability to manage information and the impact that this medium will have on the operations of Chinese politics within the space of the Internet, as well as the impact of the technology on politics, and China’s interaction with the international community.
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