

## Empowerment of the New Media

### A Case Study on Han Han's Ghostwriting Allegations

Boyang Fan<sup>1</sup> and Yao Nie<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Peking University, China <sup>2</sup> University of Udine, Italy

**Abstract:** This present study explores how traditional media digital media involved into an online protest, whether they are neutral or showed selection and description bias, as well as ideologies behind the bias. The disenchantment movement of a young celebrity writer Han Han is selected as a case study. 143 articles and videos related to the online movement from 29 media agencies are collected as main samples, and analyzed from 2 dimensions, containing selection bias like volume of coverage, percentage of special features, and description bias, such as attitudes towards each party of the issue, coverage focusing, misrepresentative information. What's more, from three dimensions we analyze the factors which affected Medias' bias. These three dimensions are cultural (media type & proximity), political (political orientation) and economic (audience status & commercialization) attributes of media. Results show that Media bias do exist type in terms of movement-specific reporting biases strong element of involvement. Media type matters considering attitudes toward Han. Radical media are more likely to publish coverage of the issue. And that media's marketization level may also have an impact on involvement and bias. Findings about the relevance of audience status are mixed. Fang are under harsh criticism from radical media with elite audiences and received greater support from neutral media with ordinary audience. Elite media could be divided into two sides when it comes to attitudes to Han.

**Key words:** Media bias, digital media, traditional media, Han Han

## Introduction

Han Han, a young writer and racing car drive, is often portrayed by mass media as the representative of post-80s generation, and both of them have become the leading actors for changes in the Chinese society (Southern Metropolis Daily, 2006). Han is well known in both online and offline worlds in China because of his rebellious in character and challenges he brought to Chinese society. 'Han Han Phenomenon' which is an eccentric in Chinese education system, refers to Han, as a failed high student, won the first prize in a Chinese composition competition and published his first novel Three Gates when he was only 17 years old. Besides, he enjoys writing blogs and commenting on serious social and political issues<sup>1</sup> (Southern Metropolis Daily, 2006). As a result, he becomes a hero, worshipping and mimicking by young people.

In the first half of 2012, an online protest, aimed at enchanting Han as a charisma leader, broke out in Sina Micoblog, and attracted hundreds of thousands of participators, including "Big V" online opinion leaders like writers, scholars, journalists, businessmen. Plenty of reports and TV shows were published about the online activity quickly, which made it even more popular online<sup>2</sup> (China Daily, 2012).

Nonetheless, it is unrealistic to expect media to cover all the protest events that occur online, as well as to be neutral in their reports.

Scholarship in collective action and social movement has already realized the phenomenon. Even though they developed a rich research tradition that uses data culled from mess media

reports of these events, like newspapers (Earl et al. 2004), they have issued a number of criticisms of the quality of such data. They believed media agencies may present the protest events in second ways to show their opinion towards events in both invisible and dominant ways. While it is still unclear whether different type of news agencies, like traditional media and digital media, would hold different attitudes toward a specific collective action, especially for cultural events. Thus, the purpose of this study is three-fold: to explore how they involved into the online disenchantment movement, and examine attitudes (bias) of news agencies to Han's affair and as well as demonstrate factors affecting their bias.

## **Media bias towards protests**

Media attention might raise the public saliency of an issue, activate otherwise silent bystander publics and put pressure on political elites to pay attention (Gamson 2004). However what is being presented as neutral reporting is in fact "an array of codes and practices" (Eldridge 1995:212) and "not neutral unselective recorders of event" (Oliver and Maney, 2000:464). In particular, some scholar argue that media company selectively report events ("Selection bias") or that they erroneously report information on events they cover ("description bias") (McCarthy et al. 1996, 1999).

### **Media Selection**

Collective action and social movement scholars have developed a long-standing interest in selection of protest events by mass media. Several research projects report fairly consistent and stable selection processes over time and within paper (Barranco & Wisler 1999, McCarthy et al 1996, 1999), because they do not report on all events that actually occur. Most previous studies define media selection simply as a binary condition of whether an event succeeded in attracting coverage or not. Media coverage of demonstration varies significantly, however. Whereas some events are treated in depth, other protests are given limited space or airtime. In the same way, some protests may be featured more prominently than other. When journalists assign headline status to an event, they clearly acknowledge its importance. So, besides the presence of protest in a particular newscast, volume and prominence of protest coverage is also very important as operationalization of media selection bias (Wouter, 2013).

### **Description Bias**

Description bias concerns the veracity with which selected events are reported in the press (Earl et al. 2004). Once a pretest event receives media attention, however, protesters often find that the media fail to portray their causes as they would like. Some researchers declared that protest activities or organizers are often portrayed in a manner that reporters believe will appeal to their mass audience (Gitlin 1980).

Researchers who are interested in description bias pursue two tactics. Some explored newspaper description bias across an identified set of events. McCarthy et al. (1998) identified three dimensions of description bias: (a) omission of information, (b) misrepresentation of information, and (c) framing of the event by the media. Smith et al. 's (2001) follow-up research on these events finds that event characteristics related to controversy (e.g., arrests, violence) drew attention to the event and away from the protest issues.

Researchers also explored newspaper coverage of a single protest event. For example, Richards & McCarthy (2003) compared newspaper coverage of the Promise Keepers "Stand in the Gap" Rally to the Million Man March, both of which occurred in the mid-1990s in Washington, D.C. They find that newspaper stories generally portrayed the Million Man March (and Reverend Louis Farrakan) in a more negative light than the Promise Keepers, although specific features of both events (e.g., mobilization and logistics) were often ignored. And the negatively cover of social movements potentially de-legitimated the movement and hurt its mobilization efforts (McLeod & Hertog 1999). McPhail & Schweingruber (1999), who used crowd observers to

collect data on the 1995 March for Life in Washington, D.C., find that newspapers are likely to report only the most frequent actions of participants.

In a sum, description bias could be measured by (a) media agencies report some particular topic or actors more frequent than others, (b) media agencies portray protest participants or its counterpart in a more negative or positive light, (c) provide misrepresentation information towards protest actors or its counterpart, and (d) pay more attention to event characteristics related to controversy instead of the protest issues.

Not every protest action is equally likely to become news and be portrayed as they would like. However, specific characteristics of protest events will increase or decrease the likeliness of coverage and positive light.

## **Media bias and its determinants**

By examining the validity and/or reliability of media protest event data, many researchers have focused on three sets of characteristics in predicting and explaining selection and description biases: (a) event characteristics, (b) news agency characteristics, and (c) issue characteristics. (Earl et al. 2004, McCarthy et al. 1996, 1999, Hug & Wider 1998, Koopmans 1999, Rucht & Neidhardt 1999, Barranco & Wider 1999, Oliver & Myers 1999, and Oliver & Maney 2000). Some events, it is argued, are seen as more “newsworthy” by the press, and thus are more likely to be reported (Barranco & Wisler 1999, Hocke 1999, McCarthy et al. 1996, Oliver & Myers 1999). Factors that influence judgment of an event’s newsworthiness include the proximity of the event to the news agency (regionally, see McCarthy et al. 1996, 1999; internationally, see Mueller 1997), the size or number of participants of the event (Barranco & Wisler 1999, Hug & Wisler 1998, McCarthy et al. 1996, 1999; Oliver & Myers 1999, Oliver & Maney 2000), the intensity of the event (Mueller 1997), violence at the event (Barranco & Wisler 1999), the presence of counterdemonstrators or police, sponsorship by social movement organizations (SMOs), or the use of sound equipment (Oliver & Maney 2000), the involvement of elites (Tresh, 2009), the form (for example dynamic or static, Wouter, 2013).

Some scholars also examine how the structure and process of news agencies may independently affect the selection and description of events. Factors are emphasized as the culture of the media, professional routines of journalists, political power and economic power.

This perspective acknowledges that different media have different sensitivities (Snyder and Kelly, 1977) with respect to what constitutes ‘news’. Selection bias seem to vary according to the type of media: local, regional, national, or international. It is found that local and regional newspapers are more biased (Barranco & Wisler 1999) than national newspapers in terms of movement-specific reporting biases (e.g., some movements have more events covered in local newspapers than others).

Meanwhile, some scholars found that press coverage functions less like a gatekeeper than a net (Tuchman, 1978). Spatial and time, as well as reporting norms, and editorial concerns (Earl et al. 2004), are regarded as important dimensions of the news net which would affect the selection of news. Personally, reporters tend to reflect the political leaning of their audience (Cooper & Johnson, 2009). In particular, editors’ “privilege” individual expression over the expression over the expression of activist group” and also “prefer the emotionally-charged stories of individuals.” (Karin Wahl-Jorgensen 2001; 2002a, 2002b).

What’s more, political power rather than culture is emphasized to explain the news selection process (Molotch and Lester, 1974). Mass media, as is pointed out by Hallin and Mancini (1984), do not stand apart from overall social processes. On the contrary, they tend to reproduce them using elite discourse (Clarke et al. 1976) and being relatively closed to challengers (McQuail, 1994). Power can be exercised directly, through the intervention of ‘manipulative’ governments, or indirectly, as a result of the working conditions of journalists (Barranco & Wisler 1999). There are several versions of this line of research, some emphasizing economic power (through the advertising channel for example) and others political power. The number of participants reported to be at a demonstration is likely to vary according to the political orientation of the newspaper (Mann, 1974).

Besides, The mass media are invariably biased in favor of the capitalist interests of their owners (Chomsky, 2002; McChesney,2008, McCurdy,2010) and this audiences. In China, media reform has systematically changed the way in which different kinds of media relate to the state and the market. As a result, their commercialization levels are quite different. Nonofficial media rely largely on sales at newsstands, while official media mainly finance themselves through advertising, but some official media still receive state subsidies (Stockmann, 2013). Each newspaper has a different public (Hetherington, 1985) and events are covered accordingly. Market forces “natural” marginalize dissent by crowding out any ideas for which there is no substantial economic backing and perpetuating self-censorship practices in media institutions (Herman 1995:170).

Finally, some critics argue that when events resonate with more general social concerns, they are more likely to be reported. They refer to this as the “issue attention cycle” (Downs 1972) or the media attention cycle (McCarthy et al. 1996, 1999). For example, if general social concern is triggered by legislative conflict over a particular issue, newspapers are more likely to report on events that relate to that conflict (Oliver & Maney 2000).

The culture of the media, political power and economic power could have more great impact on the processes of selection and description, while professional routines of journalists are too personal and arbitrary. In this article, I choose culture of the media as its type & proximity, like mass media or digital media press; and regional, national or international. Political power operated as it political orientation, and economical power as features of commercialization and main audience of the media.

### **Media Bias with traditional and the internet media agencies**

Social movement scholars have developed a long-standing interest in the selection and description of protest events by mass media, especially the validity and reliability of newspaper (Barranco & Wisler 1999, Cooper & Johnson 2009, Earl et. al. 2004, Hug & Wisler 1998, Mueller 1997, McCarthy et. al. 2008, Oliver & Maney 2000, Oliver & Myers 1999). However, regarding protest coverage, television news is at least as relevant medium to study as newspaper. Not only do the visual stimuli of televised protests increase audience recall, the subsequent emotional arousal might be more effective than newspaper articles in pressuring viewers to choose sides (Graber 1990, 2001). Moreover, because of these visual conditions, other selection mechanisms may be at work in television news when compared to newspaper. And television news—with a far more limited newshole—covering fewer protest events than newspaper (Wouter, 2013).

While the protest paradigm (McLeod & Hertog 1999) suggests that traditional media will negatively cover social movements, potentially de-legitimate the movement and hurt its mobilization efforts. On the contrary, the internet allows social movements to bypass traditional gatekeepers and offer an alternative viewpoint, potentially empower activists by giving them a voice, as well as dramatically increase publicity through diffusion of information to regional and global publics (Lynch 2011). Smith et al. (2001:1418) contended online alternative media ‘allow for a more decentralized channeling of information about public demonstrations than is possible through the mass media outlets’.

However, the internet is not a perfect place without any bias. Social media, for instance, provide the tools for organized dissent yet can constrain collective action (Youmans & York 2012). The architecture of the internet shapes its uses and limits at two levels.

First, the application’s programming code sets the range of usability. “Codes constitute cyberspaces; spaces enable and disable individuals and groups. The selections about code are therefore in part of a selection about who, what, and most important, what ways of life will be enabled and disable” (Lessig, 2006, p.88).

Second, users’ actions are enabled and constrained by company policies and user terms governing, among other things, intellectual property, community policing provisions, anonymity, and offensive and violent content (Youmans & York 2012). The main social media platforms are institutions that shape interactions within activists’ collective action spaces. It

accepts power, ownership and control as important factors shaping social media development and use governance. Companies must appeal to broad classes of users and advertisers, which both can help activists and lead to policy changes that constrain them. Social media operators are not inherently antiactivist by agenda or driven by ideological impetuses. Social media firms will continue to limit anonymity, prohibit certain content, and depend on community policing (Youmans & York 2012).

The empirical approach of the paper expects to evaluate and compare the attitude (bias) of different media presses, and examine the cause of cultural, political and economic factors involved. These expectations result in the following hypotheses:

H1 Traditional media agencies are more likely to be bias than new media companies.

H2 Radical Media agencies are more likely to be bias than conservative media agencies.

H3 Regional media agencies are more biased than national and international media agencies.

H4 Media agencies targeting elite audience are more likely to be positive toward Han.

## **Data and Method**

In order to measure media bias, representative and influential media agencies should be selected, including traditional and digital media. So firstly, we gathered all tweets of Fang Zhouzi and Han Han's accounts on Sina. Weibo, related to Han affair during January 18 20123 to August 18 20124. Since Han was not as active as his father, who is also the essential actor in the issue, so we gathered posts from Han Renjun's weibo account instead of Han's. Secondly, we found 29 media companies mentioned among these tweets. Thirdly, we collected all reports of the 29 media by using Google and Baidu to conduct multiple searches for each media and articles, saved and concatenated results from those searches. Fourthly, self introductions of 29 media companies were gathered through Baike.Baidu and the their own websites. In all, 143 stories and 29 self-introduction articles of 29 different media agencies were located.

### **Content coding of media bias**

It is not surprised that all media agencies have electronic versions. So transcriptions of all the electronic stories served as the text and were coded for details of media coverage. Our first unit of analysis is media's one report of the protest event.

A detailed codebook was developed to assess various dimensions of coverage, focusing particularly on media selection bias: (1) the volume of coverage (the duration of the total news items about the protest event), (2) percentage of special features; and media description bias: (3) media attitudes toward Han Han, (4) media attitudes toward Fang, (5) the extent to which the coverage focus on Characteristic of the event or protest claim, (6) the extent to which the coverage misrepresented information.

Frequency of Han and Fang Zhouzi mentioned in coverage is discarded, because that as the main actor of the affair, Han Han's name and work were mentioned more frequent in the discussion and hard to distinguish.

### **Content coding of media attributes**

The final coding mechanism treated media as the unit of analysis. While a variety of characteristics could be coded from self-introduction articles on Baike.Baidu.com (Chinese version of Wiki) and media agencies' websites. Coding scheme is performed in the following variable: cultural characteristics of the media (1) mass media or new media press; (2) whether the it is regional, national or international; and political orientation: (3) radical or conservative, and economic power: (4) official or unofficial; (5)socioeconomic status of targeting audience: ordinary people or elite groups.

## Finds

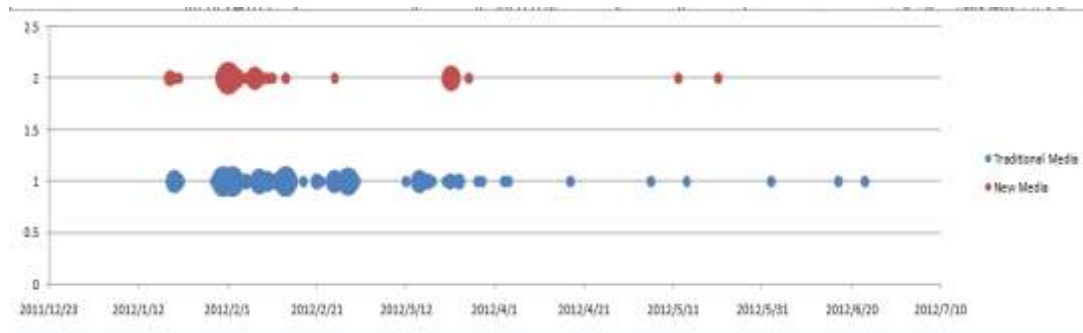
During January 18 2012 to August 18 2012, 29 media agencies were involved into Han Han's affair, and contributed 143 reports.

### Selection Bias

Though, tradition media started to paid attention on the issue on January 19, a bit later than new media companies. However, they showed greater and long-standing interests in the issues. They not only released a majority of articles, but also kept continuous enthusiasm through 5 following months (Figure 1). Especially for newspapers, 6 institutions published 56 articles in all.

Meanwhile, video-sharing websites, among new media organizations, devoted a large part of coverage. Even though a huge amount of presses were published on news websites, most of them were reprint. News websites acted more like a repeaters or carriers, while traditional media companies provided more fresh and creative content to audiences.

It seems international media are more interested in the online contention. However, it may because almost all of the internet companies are grouped as international, as well as news agencies, like Xinhua agency and The Associated Press.



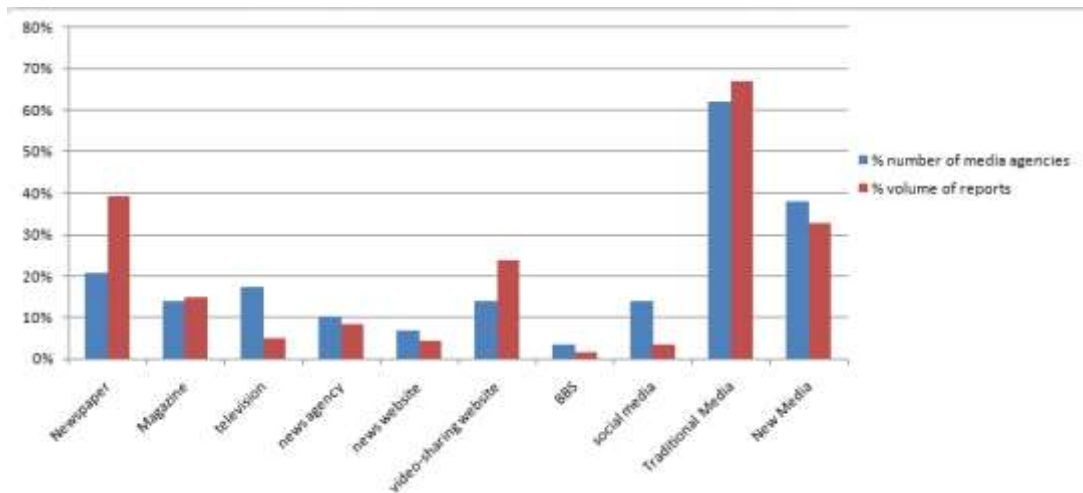
\*Notes: N=143. Big round dot means lager amount of reports.

**Figure 1. Time line of Media Reports**

**Table 1. Media Involvement in Han Han's Affair\***

	number of media agencies	volume of reports
Newspaper	6	56
Magazine	4	21
television	5	7
news agency	3	12
news website	2	6
video-sharing website	4	34
BBS	1	2
social media	4	5
Traditional Media	18	96
New Media	11	47
Total	29	143

\*Notes: N=29



**Figure 2. Distribution of media agencies number and reports**

**Table 2. Distribution of independent variables**

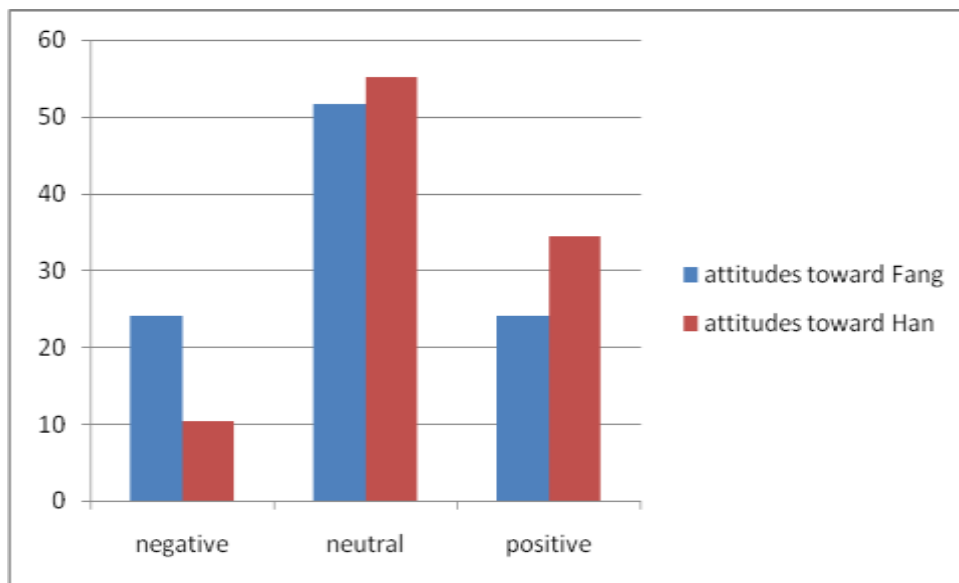
		N of agencies (n=29)	% of media	N of reports (n=143)	% of reports
Marketization	official	4	14	16	11
	unofficial	25	86	127	89
Political Orientation	radical	9	31	79	55
	neutral	17	59	52	36
	conservative	3	10	12	8
Audience status	elites	15	52	58	41
	ordinary people	14	48	85	59
Proximity	regional	10	34	57	40
	national	5	17	27	19
	international	14	48	59	41

Because of their differing degree of marketization, nonofficial media are more autonomous within the broader boundaries for news reporting set by Chinese state; while official ones are more tightly controlled by the state, although everyone agrees that truly nonofficial papers do not exist in China (Stockmann, 2013). So it is not surprised that official media did not draw too much attention to Han's affair, a typical examples of contemporary Chinese online cultural controversies (Poell et. al. 2013). 86% media agencies involved are unofficial media, which are more commercialized and less tightly controlled by the government.

In terms of political orientation, even though only 9 (31%) radical companies engaged into the public affair, the overwhelming majority of coverage comes from them (55%), which is significantly higher than its share of conservative media (8%). As for the targeting audience' status of media, there is no particular difference between elite oriented and ordinary people oriented media.

### Description Bias

Regarding to Han ghosting writing allegation case, media’s attitudes toward the two main actors—Han Han and Fang Zhouzi differ considerably, even though more than half of them stay neutral to this issue (see Figure 3). It seems media are more likely to support Han Han, while more unfriendly to Fang. If we take audience status, political orientation into account, we will found that, Fang are under harsh criticism from radical media with elite audiences and received greater support from neutral media with ordinary audience. While majority of Han’s support and criticism comes from the elite’s group media. And H4 Media agencies targeting elite audience are more likely to be positive toward Han Han is rejected. It seems that Han Han represents some groups of Chinese elites. A commercial logic may exist behind him. It may be also true that choosing to state a position on the fierce debate between elite’s media is a behavior of taking sides to some extent.



**Figure 3. Distribution of media’s attitudes toward Fang and Han**

**Table 3. Attitudes Towards Fang grouped by Media’s political orientation and audience status\***

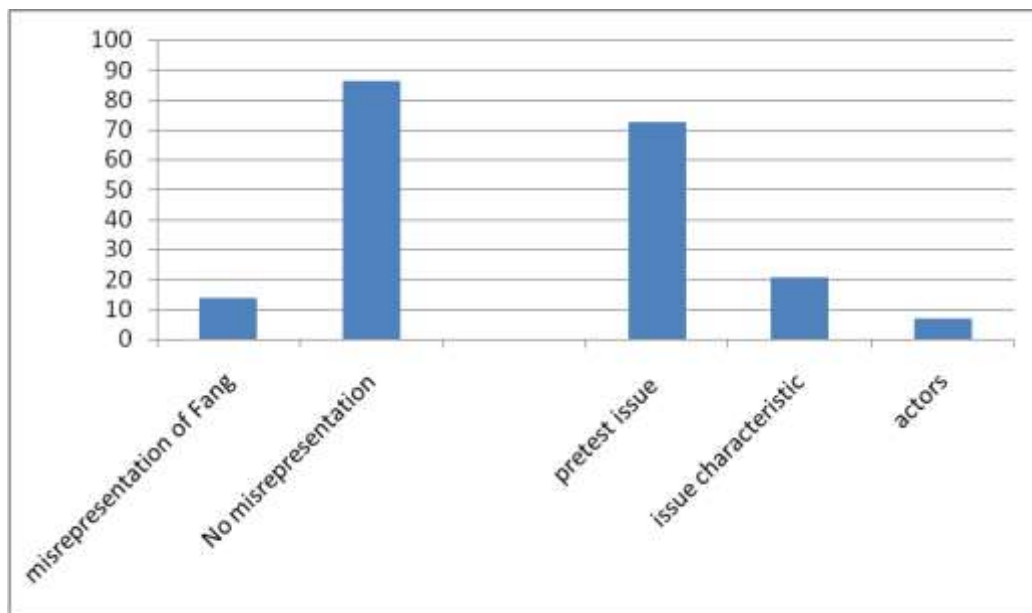
		Attitudes Towards Fang		
		negative	positive	neutral
ordinary people	radical	0	1	1
	conservative	0	0	1
	neutral	2	4	6
	Total	2	5**	8
elite group	radical	5	0	2
	conservative	0	0	2
	neutral	0	2	3
	Total	5**	2	7

\*Notes: N=29

**Table 4. Attitudes Towards Han grouped by Media’s political orientation and audience status \***

		Attitudes Towards Han		
		negative	positive	neutral
ordinary people	radical	0	0	2
	conservative	0	0	1
	neutral	0	4	8
	Total	0	4	11
elite group	radical	1	4	2
	conservative	0	1	1
	neutral	2	1	2
	Total	3**	6**	5

\*Notes: N=29



**Figure 4. Distribution of media's focus and representation**

Besides attitude, misrepresentation and attention also vary. Protest claim and event characteristic are both important topics. Some media aim at digging the truth of Han Han's writing by producing a series of investigation shows and interviewing multi stakeholders and experimenting related details (like video-sharing website tudou.com). Other media arouse large-scale debates on whether or not a public figure could be questioned; how court could be involved in the controversy. The Chinese public intellectual is also suffered from harsh critics for manipulating media to protect Han for their common interests. One reports entitled "Ghostwriting Han Han: Grassroots enlighten public intellectual and enchant his charisma" (Global Business & Finance, 2012) argues that the some public intellectuals are "organizing another cultural revolution under the banner of democracy". Moreover, biography of actors in the pretest, Fang and Han, are also popular theme of media coverage. Fang's campaigns against pseudoscience and fraud in China and Han's road to fame are frequently mentioned.

### **Determinants of Coverage**

Why some media agencies cover one issue more and others less? And why the attitudes toward Fang and Han vary strongly across among media presses? Table 5 gives a first clue. The political orientation plays an important role when it comes to media selection bias of coverage

number, corroborating hypothesis H2. Media agencies, which seem more radical, are likely to publish more coverage about the issue. As radical media contributed a large portion of support and critic to Han and Fang, it is not surprised that more reports are needed to claim their opinions and persuade audiences.

**Table 5. Dependent variable Y1's Canonical correlation analysis\***

COVARIATE	B	Beta	Std. Err.	t-Value	Sig. of t
X1	.0963584032	.0100804263	2.09877	.04591	.964
X2	2.8714178451	.2942591025	2.25545	1.27310	.216
X3	-2.5975472406	-.1931168483	2.73642	-.94925	.352
X4	-6.7268176699	-.6709692532	2.02246	-3.32606	.003**
X5	-.2995870354	-.0322767184	1.82847	-.16385	.871

**\*Notes: Y1=N of coverage, X1=new media, X2=regional, X3=unofficial,  
X4=conservative+neutral, X5=elits**

As indicated by Table 6, types of media and proximity are important predictors of negative attitudes towards Han, corroborating hypothesis H1 & H3. Digital media are more likely to be positive to Han Han. It might be because supporting Han Han and embracing controversial media events could encourage their users to participate, and therefore increase web traffic, expand influence and obtain more audiences and advertising revenue (Yang, 2009). Constraints from the Internet is emphasized in this case by company policies.

Besides, proximity is also important in predicting media's attitudes. Regional media are more positive to Han Han, which confirms Barranco & Wisler's conclusion that local and regional newspapers are more biased than national newspapers in terms of movement-specific reporting biases. However, local media supported Han Han could be divided into two groups. The first group consists of Shanghai local media agencies, which are keeping eye on Shanghai born controversial celebrity Han Han. As an actor in a Chinese famous documentary film *I Wish I Knew* (Hai Shang Chuan Qi), Han is regarded as a representative of the city. The other group is made up of southern newspaper media group, including Southern Weekend and Southern Metropolis Daily and so on. It is said "Southern newspaper media group and other public intellectual packaged Han and promoted him as a genius without studying and reading" (Global Business and Finance, 2012).

**Table 6 Dependent variable Y2's Canonical correlation analysis\***

COVARIATE	B	Beta	Std. Err.	t-Value	Sig. of t
X1	-.3482042298	-.5547781348	.14013	-2.48492	.021*
X2	-.3876235765	-.6049781416	.15059	-2.57406	.017*
X3	.1365911651	.1546590393	.18270	.74762	.462
X4	.1264547616	.1920985729	.13503	.936486	.359
X5	.1735076962	.2846958190	.12208	1.42126	.169

**\*Notes: Y2=negative attitude towards Han Han, X1=new media, X2=regional,  
X3=unofficial, X4=conservative+neutral, X5=elits**

What about the attitude to Fang? Notable differences exist between radical, conservative and neutral media. Positive attitudes to Fang are more common among conservative and neutral media companies.

**Table 7 Dependent variable Y3's Canonical correlation analysis\***

COVARIATE	B	Beta	Std. Err.	t-Value	Sig. of t
X1	-.0639469403	-.0725090148	.20764	-.30797	.761
X2	.1080590664	.1200266407	.22314	.48426	.633
X3	.1238268052	.0997824832	.27073	.45738	.652
X4	-.4176573645	-.4515397995	.20009	-2.08731	.048*
X5	.0897259417	.1047773263	.18090	.49599	.625

\*Notes: Y3=negative attitude towards Fang, X1=new media, X2=regional, X3=unofficial, X4=conservative+neutral, X5=elits

## Conclusion and Discussion

This study scrutinizes how media agencies involved in an cultural online pretest and examines selection bias and description bias by tradition and digital media in terms of movement-specific reporting. The data in this analysis demonstrates the impact of several theoretically relevant predictors on media selection, and description process.

In line with previous findings for the press, television, the internet, media attention and bias are far from arbitrary. Media type appears to be a strong element of media involvement. It is digital media, instead of mass media paid attention on Han Han's affair at the very first beginning.

However, tradition media showed continuous interests during the next five months.

The first wave of large-scale reports lasts for the first 3 days. To both traditional media and digital media, newsworthiness is the single strongest predictor of publishing or not. As a result, the protest issue, that is whether Han Han has a ghostwriting team behind him, draws all media's attention. Regional newspapers and video sharing website consist of the main force.

The second wave begins on January 28th and lasts till February 11th. It is clear that mass media contributed a majority of coverage volume during this period of time. Official and international media started to join in the controversy, like Xinhua agency, Associated Press and four Chinese microblog websites. The third stage, through February 12th to 26th, is highlighted by special features, in forms of a serial of investigation, interview or comment reports of elite newspapers or magazines, including China Newsweek, Xinmin Weekly, Famous, Global Business and Finance, and Southern Metropolis Newspaper. Interestingly, except for Southern Metropolis Newspaper, most elite mass media did not present support to Han Han. Some even showed rather negative emotion to him or the assumed public intellectual power behind. The last stage lasts from March 27th till August 31st. However, media agencies don't report this online pretest after June 26th. Scatted positive and backing up reports to Han, and negative and ironical articles to Fang are very common during this period. It seems media agencies not only have specific bias but also manipulate reports with bright strategies to either support actors with common interests or critic others with different interests.

So how do media's cultral, political and economic powers affect their bias?

Result for descriptive bias shows that media type matters considering attitudes toward Han.

Digital media are more likely to be positive to Han Han, since supporting Han equals to embracing controversial and encouraging users to participate. Therefore it may function as a catalyst to increase web traffic, and commercialize media culture. Besides, proximity is also important in predicting media's attitudes. Regional media are more positive to Han, which reinforce Barranco & Wisler's conclusion that local and regional newspapers are more biased than national newspapers. It is sharing cultural, economic or political interest behind those regional media's behaviors.

The differences are obvious when we examine the relationship between media selection bias of coverage number and their political orientation. Radical media are likely to publish more coverage of the issue. They need more reports to claim their opinions and persuade audiences. It seems that media's marketization level may also have an impact on involvement and bias. Nonofficial media, including semiofficial and commercialized media are more interested in online contention, which may attract more audience and advertisers.

Findings about the relevance of audience status are mixed. It doesn't work directly. Taking other elements like political orientation into account, we found that, Fang are under harsh criticism from radical media with elite audiences and received greater support from neutral media with ordinary audience. Elite media in the sample could be divided into two sides when it comes to attitudes to Han. It seems that Han represents some Chinese elite's media and stating a position on the fierce debate is a behavior of taking sides to some extent.

In sum, the analysis presented in this article suggests that media shows bias through coverage volume, special features, negative or positive angle to actors, focusing on event characteristics/pretest claims, or misrepresenting information. And media's cultural, political and economic characteristic may affect bias regarding to a specific issue. More research is needed as to how the media bias will present to other cases with more media companies, such as political issues. It is better to conduct a substantial empirical examination of a long term trend of media bias in China. And audience status may be classified into specific categories, like their socioeconomic status, combined total measure of an individual's work experience and economic and social position, based on income, education and occupation.

### Note

1. Han Han's blog, he published many articles on the websites, including commenting on serious social and political issues. <http://blog.sina.com.cn/u/1191258123>
2. China Daily's official website, published an article titled 'Science cop' defends himself in face of lawsuit on January 30th, 2012. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-01/30/content\\_14502424.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-01/30/content_14502424.htm)
3. On January 18 2012, Fang Zhouzi published a blog post and tweet, in which Fang further raised questions on the plausibility of Han's work and responded to Han Han's article. This is regarded as the beginning of Han Han ghostwriting allegation affair.
4. On August 18, Fang Zhouzi stopped updating his account in Sina Weibo. This is regarded as the end of Han Han ghostwriting allegation affair.
5. <http://www.chinaqking.com/qkj/2012/214809.html>

### References

- Barranco J, Wisler D. (1999). Validity and Systematicity of Newspaper Data in Event Analysis. *European Sociological Review*. 15(3):301-322.
- Christopher A. Cooper & Martin Johnson (2009) Representative Reporters? Examining Journalists' Ideology in Context. *Social Science Quarterly*, 90(2), 387-406
- Chomsky N. (2002). *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, 2nd edition. New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Clarke, J., Hall, S., Jefferson, A. and Roberts, B. (1976). Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview. Pp. 9-74 in *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* edited by Hall, S. and Jefferson. Hutchinson, London.
- Daniela Stockmann, (2013). *Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China*. New York: Cambridge university press
- Downs A. (1972). Up and Down with Ecology—the Issue Attention Cycle. *The Public Interest*, 28:38-50
- Eldridge J. (1995). *Glasgow Media Group Reader, Volume One: News Content, Language and visuals*. London: Routledge.

CIRN Prato Community Informatics Conference 2013:  
Works in progress and more speculative pieces

- Gamson, William. (2004). Bystanders, Public Opinion and the Media. Pp. 242-261 in Blackwell Companion to Social Movements, edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- Gitlin T. (1980). The Whole World is Watching. Berkeley: University of California. Press
- Graber, Doris A. (1990). Seeing is Remembering. *Journal of Communication* 40(3): 134-156.
- (2001). *Processing Politics: Learning from Television in the Internet Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hallin, D. and Mancini, P. (1984). Political Structure and Representational form in US and Italian TV News. *Theory and Society*, 13, 829-850.
- Hetherington, A. (1985). *News, Newspapers and Television*. Macmillan, London.
- Herman ES, Chomsky N. (1988). *Manufacturing Consent*. New York: Pantheon Books
- Hocke P (1999). Determining the Selection Bias in Local and National Newspaper Reports on Protest Events. Pp. 131-163 in *Acts of Dissent: New Developments in the study of Protest*, edited by Dieter Rucht, Ruud Koopmans, Friedhelm Neidhardt. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Hug S, Wisler D. (1998). Correcting for Selection Bias in Social Movement Research. *Mobilization* 3:141-161.
- Jennifer Earl, Andrew Martin, John D. McCarthy, and Sarah A. Soul. (2004). The Use of Newspaper Data in the Study of Collective Action. *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:65-80
- Karin Wahl-Jorgensen. (2001). Letters to the Editor as A Forum for Public Deliberation: Modes of Publicity and Democratic Debate. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 18(3), 303-320
- (2002a). The Normative-economic Justification for Public Discourse: Letters to the Editor as a “Wide Open” Forum, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79:121-133
- (2002b). The Construction of the Public in Letters to the Editor Deliberative Democracy and the Idiom of Insanity, *Journalism*, 3,183-204
- Koopmans R. (1999). The Use of Protest Event Data in Comparative Research. Pp. 90-110 in *Acts of Dissent: New Developments in the Study of Protest*, edited by Dieter Rucht, Ruud Koopmans, Friedhelm Neidhardt. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Lessig, L. (2006). *Code: And Other Laws of Cyberspace*. Version 2.0. London, England: Basic Books.
- Lynch, M. (2011). After Egypt: The Limits and Promise of Online Challenges to the Authoritarian Arab State. *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(2), 301-310.
- Mann, L. (1974). Counting the Crowd: Effects of Editorial Policy on Estimates. *Journalism Quarterly*, 51: 278-285.
- McCarthy John, Larissa Titarenko, Clark McPhail, Patrick Rafail, and Boguslaw Augustyn. (2008). Assessing Stability in the Patterns of Selection Bias in News Coverage: The Transition from Communism in Belarus. *Mobilization* 13(2): 127-146
- McCarthy JD, McPhail C, Smith J, Crishock LJ. (1999). Electronic and Print Media Representations of Washington D.C. Demonstrations, 1982 and 1991: a Demography of Description Bias. Pp. 113-130 in *Acts of Dissent: New Developments in the Study of Protest*, edited by Dieter Rucht, Ruud Koopmans, Friedhelm Neidhardt. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- McCarthy JD, McPhail C, Smith J. (1996). Images of Protest: Dimensions of Selection Bias in Media Coverage of Washington Demonstrations, 1982 and 1991. *American Sociological Review*, 61:478-499
- McChesney R. W.(2008). *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

CIRN Prato Community Informatics Conference 2013:  
Works in progress and more speculative pieces

- McCurdy P. (2010). Breaking the Spiral of Silence: Unpacking the 'Media Debate' Within Global Justice Movements. A Case Study of Dissent! and the 2005 Gleneagles G8 Summit. *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* 2(2): 42-67.
- McLeod, D. M. & Hertog, J. K. (1999). Social Control, Social Change and the Mass Media's Role in the Regulation of Protest Groups. Pp. 305-330 in *Mass Media, Social Control and Social Change: A Macrosocial Perspective*, edited by D. Demers & K. Viswanath, Ames: Iowa State University Press.
- McPhail C, Schweingruber D. (1999). Unpacking Protest Events. Pp.164-195 in *Acts of Dissent: New Developments in the Study of Protest*, edited by Dieter Rucht, Ruud Koopmans, Friedhelm Neidhardt. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- McQuail, D. (1994) *Mass Communication Theory*. Sage, London.
- Molotch, H. and Lester, M. (1974). News as Purposive Behaviour. *American Sociological Review*, 39, 101-112.
- Mueller C. (1997). International Press Coverage of East German Protest Events, 1989. *American Sociological Review*, 62:820-832
- Oliver PE, Maney GM. (2000). Political Processes and Local Newspaper Coverage of Protest Events: from Selection Bias to Triadic Interactions. *American Sociological Review*, 106:463-505
- Oliver PE, Myers DJ. (1999). How Events Enter the Public Sphere. *American Journal of Sociology* 105:38-87
- Richards A, McCarthy JD. (2003). Description Bias in Newspaper Coverage of Mass Gatherings, Work Paper, Department of Sociology., Pennsylvania State University. As cited by Jennifer Earl, Andrew Martin, John D. McCarthy, and Sarah A. Soul. 2004.
- Rucht D, Neidhardt F. (1999). Methodological Issues in Collecting Protest Event Data. Pp. 65-89 in *Acts of Dissent: New Developments in the Study of Protest*, edited by Dieter Rucht, Ruud Koopmans, Friedhelm Neidhardt. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Ruud Wouters. (2013). From the Street to the Screen: Characteristics of Protest Events as Determinants of Television News Coverage. *Mobilization: An International Journal* 18(1):83-105
- Smith, J., McCarthy, J. D., McPhail, C. & Augustyn, B. (2001). From Protest to Agenda Building: Description Bias in Media Coverage of Protest events in Washington, D. C. *Social Forces*, 79: 1397-1423.
- Snyder, D. and Kelly, W. R. (1977). Conflict Intensity, Media Sensitivity and the Validity of Newspaper Data. *American Sociological Review*, 42, 105-123.
- Thomas Poell, Jeroen de Kloet and Guohua Zeng. (2013). Will the Real Weibo Please Stand Up? Chinese Online Contention and Actor Network Theory. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, July 26  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17544750.2013.816753#.Up54h9JDvGc>
- Tresh, Anke. (2009). Politicians in the Media: Determinants of Legislators' Presence and Prominence in Swiss Newspapers. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 14(1): 67-90
- Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making News A Study in the Construction of Reality*. Free Press, New York.
- William Lafi Youmans & Jillian C. York. 2012. Social Media and the Activist Toolkit: User Agreements, Corporate Interests, and the Information Infrastructure of Modern Social Movements. *Journal of Communication*. 62: 315-329.

CIRN Prato Community Informatics Conference 2013:  
Works in progress and more speculative pieces