

Mediated Political and Social Participation: Examining the Use of the Internet by Mongolian Government and Civil Society Institutions

Undrahbuyan Baasanjav

ABSTRACT. This study examines how governmental and civil society institutions in Mongolia use online discussion forums and whether or not these institutions benefit politically and socially from that use. By integrating the notion of civic culture proposed by Dahlgren (2005), and that of “zero institution” by Dean (2003), this study discusses the use of online participation by Mongolian government and civil society institutions and the issues of the digital democracy based on data gathered from 23 qualitative in-depth interviews conducted in 2005. Mongolian institutions are striving to use the Internet for democratic purposes, indicated by their efforts to use discussion forums for public participation in various ways; however, mediated political participation is also being molded by old institutional routines and the challenges inherent in newly established institutions. These limiting factors have not prevented a shifting of power, to some extent influenced by the Internet, among Mongolian institutions in recent years.

KEYWORDS. Mongolia, online forums, civil society, public sphere, zero institution, civic culture, post-communism

This study explores the interplay between society and Internet technology by asking whether the Internet meaningfully contributes to political and social practices in the former socialist country of Mongolia. The Mongolian case presents comparatively fast change in terms of democratic and Internet development. Recently, democratic development in Mongolia has been evaluated ambiguously.¹ This paper examines contemporary Mongolian notions of democracy and institutional routines and assesses how they are reflected in computer-mediated political and social practices.

The Mongolian case presents digital democracy development in a transitioning economy with considerable influence from East-Asian economic

developments in China, South Korea, and Japan.² Mongolia’s two neighboring polities—Putin’s “managed democracy” in Russia and the communist government in China—either cautiously oversee or suppress political participation on the Internet (Kluver & Banerjee, 2005; March, 2004; Milner, 2006; Zhang, 2002). At issue is whether Mongolian digital democracy contributes meaningfully to the development of democratic values and practices. This paper contributes to our understanding of democracy and the Internet in a post-communist country where political and economic practices are in flux, institutions are unstable, and international organizations have an important presence.

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INTRODUCTION: POST-COMMUNISM AND INTERNET DEVELOPMENT IN MONGOLIA

Mongolia is a post-communist country located in Central Asia between Russia and China. After the collapse of the Chinghis Khan's³ Empire, Mongolia underwent three centuries of Manchu colonization and seventy years of communism until the Democratic Revolution of 1990. In 1990, the Mongolian Democratic Coalition organized a series of protests followed by a hunger strike that led to the resignation of the Politburo and to the first parliamentary election with multi-party participation. The democratic revolution of 1990 led to the ratification and adoption of the new Constitution of Mongolia in 1992, which declared Mongolia a democratic country characterized by the rule of law and the freedoms of speech, press, and information. According to the new Constitution, Mongolia established a mixed, parliamentary/presidential governmental system with independent legislative, executive, and judicial branches.⁴

Since 1990, Mongolia has been transitioning away from the communist political system and a centrally planned economy toward democracy and a market economy. Mongolia has adopted the tenets of liberal constitutional democracy: universal suffrage, competing political parties, rule of law, and civil liberties. In terms of economic development, Mongolia adopted the neo-liberal economic approach by replacing state owned enterprise with privatized companies in a comparatively short period with a "hands-off" approach (Coleman & Kaposi, 2006). The new political system has faced a constitutional crisis and frequent resignations within the government (Ginsburg, 2005).

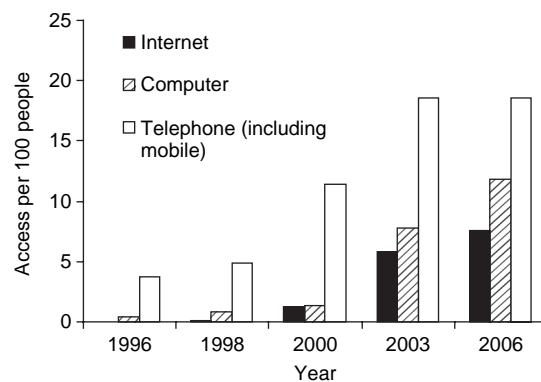
The Internet is the first electronic media to develop in Mongolia after the collapse of the socialist regime and Soviet domination. The Internet reached Mongolia in 1996 as a result of the joint efforts of a Mongolian private company, DataCom Co., the Canadian International Development and Research Center, and the U.S. National Science Foundation. Within the decade between 1996 and 2006, the number of

Internet users grew to approximately 268,300, the number of Internet hosts grew to 272, and the number of Internet service providers (ISPs) grew to 7 (CIA Factbook, 2007). The number of Internet users per 100 persons in Mongolia steadily increased from 0.01 in 1996 to 7.6 in 2006 as shown in Figure 1. This number increased as the number of telephone and computer users grew from 3.5 and 0.34 per 100 persons in 1996 to 18.6 and 11.86 per 100 persons in 2006, respectively (United Nations' Millennium Indicators Database, 2006).

The government of Mongolia has been keen to adopt information and communication technology as a way to be included in the global information society. The strategic document, *The Vision for Developing Information and Communication Technology in Mongolia until 2010*, was adopted by the Government in 2000, and in 2004 the government established the National Information and Communication Technology Authority and started implementing the E-Mongolia program (Parliament of Mongolia, 2000). However, the effectiveness of these policies and whether or not these efforts benefit Mongolian institutions have not been studied.

Since the democratic revolution of 1990, Mongolia has seen a steady increase in civil society and non-governmental organizations.

FIGURE 1. The growth in access to telephones, computers, and the Internet in Mongolia from 1996 to 2006.



Source: Data is from the United Nations' Millennium Indicators Database: Country Profile—Mongolia, retrieved June 21, 2007, from <http://millenniumindicators.un.org/>

Civil society is a heterogeneous group not easily defined, especially in emerging democratic societies; this study adopts the view of civil society as organized groups outside of direct state or capitalist control (Lim, 2003; see also Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2005). In the Mongolian context, civil society is constituted by both emerging Western-like institutions and communist-party-affiliated groups and associations that are adapting to the new context. In this study, civil society institutions include political, social and cultural non-governmental and non-profit organizations, as well as academic and scientific communities, and student and expatriate Web sites operating outside the country.

DIGITAL DEMOCRACY: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Digital democracy theories can be defined as discourses relating to democratic values, the notion of citizenship, and technological change. Different philosophical views on citizenship and democratic procedural norms result in different interpretations of digital democracy⁵ (Hoff, Horrock, & Tops, 2000; Van Dijk, 2000; see also Applbaum, 2002; Dahlgren, 2005; Wright, 2006a). The proponents of the constitutional democracy model emphasize three main democratic goals: the individual freedom, the citizens' right to vote, and the constitutional separation of powers. Proponents of constitutional democracy are more likely to use the Internet to solve the problem of information shortages between representatives and citizens and to increase the effectiveness of existing institutions by mass public information distribution, information campaigns, and online information services (Hoff et al., 2000; Van Dijk, 2000; Wiklund, 2005). Proponents of deliberative and republican democracy models advocate opinion formation in a society by aggregating interests and fostering discussions, therefore, they see the Internet as serving the goals of informing and activating citizens. In a deliberative democracy model, public dialogue on the Internet is seen as a metaphorical analogue to the Habermasian (Habermas, 1989) public sphere, similar to the Athenian agora,

and nineteenth century town hall meetings in the United States (Dahlgren, 2005; Howard, 2005; Pajnik, 2005; Poster, 2001; Wiklund, 2005; Wright, 2006a). Originally, the Habermasian public sphere referred to the bourgeois public sphere: "table societies," or salons and coffee houses in eighteenth century Europe, where autonomous individuals beyond the realm of social hierarchies discussed public affairs without state or other coercion to achieve consensus.

Public discussion on the Internet, oftentimes analyzed within the framework of the deliberative democracy model, has become a pertinent but controversial issue in mediated political and social practices in terms of its contribution to democracy building (Dahlgren, 2005; Wright, 2006a; Wiklund, 2005). Proponents of the deliberative democracy model claim that the Internet can provide three key tenets of the Habermasian public sphere: (a) inclusiveness, (b) discussion of common affairs, and (c) rational discussion by free individuals. They argue that online discussions have the potential to contribute to opinion formation and the plurality of voices and ideas (Best & Krueger, 2005; Dahlgren, 2005; Poster, 2001; Wiklund, 2005; Wright, 2006a). Recent scholarship acknowledges the fragmentation of modern society and emerging counter cultures on the Net, and it prefers a notion of the public sphere that is understood to be plural rather than singular (Dahlgren, 2005; Dean, 2003).

Furthermore, even though mushrooming online discussions are not always rational and do not necessarily lead to opinion formation and consensus building, these online discussions contribute to the overall "civic culture" (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 157). The notion of civic culture includes a wide range of online informal political and social spheres, such as advocacy and activist networks, civic forums, online discussions on social and cultural topics, journalistic and blogging domains, and diaspora networks where ordinary people participate and interact with each other in the context of their everyday routines. These informal online pre-political spheres are of importance for democracy because by participating in them, people develop shared values, affinities, and identities (Dahlgren, 2005; Hamelink, 2000).

This notion of civic culture is useful in the analysis of online Mongolian civic discourse because of the country's less established institutions and shifting democratic and cultural values.

Critics of online public spheres point out that the democratic potential of the Internet does not automatically lead to political participation; on the contrary, people tend to adapt technologies to their "old social mold" (Margolis & Resnick, 2000; see also Agre, 2002; Axford & Huggins, 2001). As scholars of the digital divide point out, the use of the Internet brings with it an undermining of the inclusiveness of the public sphere because of the disparity in information access (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Celeste, & Shafer, 2004; Hargittai, 2003; Norris, 2001; Milner, 2006; Warschauer, 2003). Furthermore, the Internet contributes to the increasing fragmentation in a society with already polarized and conflicting groups (Dean, 2003; Sunstein, 2001). Other scholars argue that disagreements, differences, and antagonisms on the Net do not proceed to consensus building but contribute to the plurality of views and ideas that is a necessary condition for a healthy democracy (Dean, 2003; Papacharissi, 2004). Dean (2003) theorizes the Internet as a "zero-institution" which does not make normative claims but accepts antagonism, conflict, and differences. Dean (2003) borrows from Slavoj Žižek (1999) and Levi-Strauss (1963), who define a zero-institution as:

. . . an empty signifier with no determinate meaning, since it signifies only meaning as such, in opposition to its absence: a specific institution which has no positive, determinate function—its only function is the purely negative one of signaling the presence and actuality of the social institution as such, in opposition to its absence, to pre-social chaos. (Dean, 2003, p.8)

Dean explains that the Internet is a powerful form of a zero institution because many on the Net view themselves as members of various conflicting networks. When the term zero institution was coined by Levi-Strauss, he explained

how tribe members identified themselves as the members of the tribe despite the antagonism within it. In a similar vein, Žižek explains how nationhood and gender are zero institutions of society's unity and division. In fact, the multiplicity of epistemic communities, the fluidity of actor networks, and the amorphousness of communication on the Internet, when applying the definition of an institution proposed by Bellamy and Taylor (1998),⁶ shows how it can be seen as a signifier of no determinate meaning.

Studies of the efficacy of e-democracy efforts in England and the US claimed mixed results concerning the role of institutions in facilitating e-democracy (Howard, 2005; Wright, 2006a). Wright's study of the British government e-democracy initiatives, *The Downing Street Forums* and *Citizen Space Forums*, explored unfettered online political discussion and how little of this discussion became enactment institutionally. While facilitation of e-democracy by governments brought mixed results, online political participation seems to thrive at the anti-Iraq-War Web site Moveon.org, reaching nearly 3 million members, and at the Web site Meetup.com, which organized grassroots political participation during the 2004 U.S. presidential election (Best & Krueger, 2006; Howard, 2005). These recent practices in the US indicate that the Internet can alter the balance of resources among institutions providing communication facilities for less established institutions.

By integrating the notion of civic culture proposed by Dahlgren (2005), and the zero institution by Dean (2003), this study examines the use of online discussion by Mongolian government and civil society institutions by asking the following questions:

- Who participates in online Mongolian public discussion and how?
- How do Mongolian institutions use online discussion forums?
- What procedural and technological challenges are faced by Mongolian institutions using online discussion forums?

RESEARCH METHOD

The study of communicative practices in a post-authoritarian country requires a methodological approach that takes into account social and political contexts, local languages, people's notions of democracy, and other specifics such as the greater use of the Internet in public cafes and at work than at home (Kolko, Wei, & Spyridakis, 2003; March, 2004; Warschauer, 2003).⁷ These specifics are best understood in what Geertz (1973) would call its "most complex whole" (p. 299) by the conducting of in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews allow the researcher to analyze the views, perceptions, and judgment of people working in key Mongolian institutions and to focus on a number of pre-identified central questions, for example: "Why does an institution choose to use the Internet?"; "Why does an institution make use of public participation in their activities?"; "What are the perceived obstacles in the use of online discussion for democratic purposes?" This case study fleshes out the challenges Mongolian political actors face in using the Internet for civic discourse. In this way, the theoretical debate on the Internet's role in the participatory discussion forums is integrated into the case study of Mongolian institutions.

An initial semi-structured interview schedule to guide the "conversation with a purpose" (Burgess, 1984, p.102) is shown in Appendix A. The approach followed a stimulus response model, where the researcher asks questions and the respondents respond to the stimulus. This model requires the researcher to make frequent on-the-spot decisions about what questions to ask next.

I selected interviewees based on the results of a prior study that examined 157 Web sites of Mongolian institutions and ranked them according to the extent to which these institutions use their Web sites to (a) provide comprehensive information, (b) encourage discussion and participation from users, and (c) interact with other users (Undrahbuyan, 2006).⁸ I chose to interview the top two or three Mongolian institutions scoring highest in each group. Despite the fact that they did not score high in the previous analysis, I also included three focal

institutions: the Information and Communication Technology Authority, the Information Technology Park, and the Mongolian Information Developers' Association (MIDAS). Because the institutions were chosen as examples of the best practices, the interviewees present elite subjects. Twenty-one of the interviews occurred face-to-face, and I conducted two interviews using e-mail. The pseudonyms of interviewees,⁹ the date of interviews, and the names of the institutions and Web sites for which the interviewees worked are listed in Appendix B. Interview length varied from 15 minutes to as long as 80 minutes, and interviews took place in the summer of 2005. I transcribed the interviews in the Mongolian language, and then I translated the excerpts used in this essay. An example of an interview transcript is shown in Appendix C.

MONGOLIAN LANGUAGE MEDIATED PUBLIC FORUMS ON THE INTERNET

Mongolian institutions use the Internet in a variety of ways. While government institutions strive to provide information to citizens through their Web sites, non-government organizations use the Internet for purposes ranging from signing human rights petitions to advocating for greater public participation in public policy making. The lack of print media and textbooks in Mongolia makes free resources on the Internet very enticing for Mongolian educational and research institutions. Mongolian folk tales, riddles, proverbs, and ancient literature such as *The Secret History of Mongols*¹⁰ all are available online now along with "recycled" old socialist magazine articles. New independent online media organizations such as *Olloo.mn* have attracted large numbers of users¹¹ by developing a new media model which packages information for individual users, while at the same time packaging audiences for advertisers. Interest and diaspora groups *Asuult.net* and *MGLclub.mn*, with their lively discussion forums and up-to-date information, have the most users.¹²

Although Mongolian institutions are striving to use the Internet for democratic purposes,

mediated political participation is also being molded by old institutional routines and the challenges inherent in newly established institutions. The Mongolian Government initiated the *Open-Government* Web site (www.open-government.mn) in 2001 to provide to business people and foreign and domestic investors access to policy documents, bills, legislation, and other relevant information. The initial purpose of the Open-Government Web site was to facilitate dialogue on economic reform issues, but the Web site shifted its focus to the legislative process, replicating the functions of *The Mongolian State Great Khural* (the Parliament) Web site, which also posts pending legislation, bills, and other legislative documents, and hosts discussion forums that allow citizens to discuss their views on pending legislation. This situation reflects the political system in Mongolia, where power separation between the legislative and executive branches, and power checks and balances, are still in flux. Dorj, who worked on the Web content of the Open-Government site, explained this dynamic:

This is a context specific to Mongolia . . . almost 80% of bills are proposed and initiated by the Cabinet. Even in the case of an individual parliamentarian proposing a bill . . . the parliamentarians have to submit a bill to the cabinet for comment. This way the cabinet is so influential. . . . The leaders of the winning party become the Ministers in the Cabinet, at the same time they are the members of the Parliament [laughs]. . . . Therefore, the words of the Government are the words of the leaders of the winning party. It is obvious that the Cabinet-proposed bills pass the Parliament straight through. In the future, a lot has to be done to increase the Parliaments' involvement. (Dorj, personal communication, June 27, 2005)

Dorj, who studied in a Western university, explained the overlapping functions of legislative and executive governance in Mongolia: The cabinet, led by the Prime Minister, is formed by the majority political party in the Parliament, and the Prime Minister is the leader of the winning political party. This situation

illustrates the fusion of legislative and executive powers that is typical to many post communist countries (Coleman & Kaposi, 2006; Holmes, 1997; and Sparks & Reading, 1998). Another interviewee, Elbeg, who worked in the Parliament Secretariat, agrees with Dorj. According to Elbeg, the Mongolian Parliament, functioning as a law making institution, has achieved a lot in increasing openness and transparency, yet the representative function of parliamentarians is oftentimes overlooked. The Parliament has little interest in public opinion studies and other policy related research. Moreover, he goes on to say that parliamentarians tend to get isolated from their constituents, partly because most parliamentarians reside in *Ulaanbaatar* (Elbeg, personal communication, August 3, 2005).

The Open-Government Web site is designed such that each version of a proposed bill is posted so that people will have the opportunity to discuss and contribute to drafts of bills. However, there is no strong routine guiding the procedure of how Parliament is supposed to discuss bills. As Ariun stated:

There is no fixed time schedule for discussing bills in the Parliament Sometimes, the first introduction of a bill happens during the Fall session [of the Parliament] and the second discussion takes place in the Spring session. Sometimes, an amendment to the Constitution is introduced at the morning session and is passed during the second discussion after lunch [laughed]. (Ariun, personal communication, June 27, 2005)

Ariun was frustrated with the unpredictability of Parliamentary sessions, which seriously impedes citizens' engagement in law and policy making, jeopardizing the possibility of Mongolians to participate in law making through discussion at the Open-Government Web site. In this instance, the lack of institutional routines in the Mongolian Parliament considerably constrains the shaping of mediated politics and limits public participation via the Internet. As Bellamy and Taylor (1998) explain, the shaping of Internet technology is not simply "a process of free and conscious choice" (p.151), rather the use of the

Internet is shaped and constrained by existing routines of public institutions that are transitioning to democratic institutions. In the Mongolian context, since the executive branch has taken over much of the legislative process, the government's view of democracy tends to focus on public administration, rather than on the public participation.

Even though the Internet brings new possibilities to engage in dialogue between government and citizens, constructive discussion between the government and its citizens does not automatically emerge. The Prime Minister's Cabinet manages discussion forums at the Open-Government Web site, where different ministry officials respond to questions posted on the Web site. The officials also organize online chats where ministers and ministry officials respond to citizens' questions on pre-identified topics. While these are new initiatives by the Government, there are still plenty of questions that are not responded to due to the time constraints of real time chats. Moreover, the questions asked during these chats tend to focus on more practical matters rather than on policy oriented feedback (Ariun, personal communication, June 27 2005). Even when there is some discussion, it tends to be less constructive or "not substantial enough" to be reflected in policy, as several interviewees working in government institutions expressed. The Open-Government Web site tends to emphasize officials' responses to questions, rather than to focus on participation and the collection of opinions. Two other government agencies, the Information and Communication Technology Authority (ICTA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, have also hosted discussion forums. However, feedback in these forums did not go beyond suggestions to clarify terms and to reduce jargon. One of the interviewees even suggested that the strategy in a government agency is to provide all necessary information on the Web in order to reduce "unnecessary" contact with the outside.

Members of non-government organizations interviewed in this research tended to emphasize the Internet's role to inform and engage citizens, and to gather opinions so these opinions can be included into drafts of bills and policy

documents. These practices have parallels to the use of the Internet by civil society and advocacy groups in Western democracies (Dahlgren, 2005; Jensen, Danzinger, & Venkatesh, 2007). These interviewees were critical of the government's approach to policy making and claim that people do not have enough information to give constructive feedback. Even though everyone—the government officials, the Prime Minister, and the media—talks about the importance of openness of information, a lack of information exists at all levels. The interviewees emphasized the difficulties of obtaining information from Mongolian institutions. Public officials in ministries are wary even of providing information to the Open-Government Web site team, using the excuse that "a draft is not finalized," and ministry officials, are slow to give information to be posted on government agency Web sites. Residual attitudes of the socialist time continue:

Though the Constitution guarantees the freedom of information in Mongolia, it does not legalize the process of providing information to the public by government organizations. In order to provide access to information on the Web, government organizations need to develop a system sorting public, and classified information. . . . (Naran, personal communication, July 18, 2005)

Naran, a policy researcher, argued that Mongolian institutions are slow to adapt to the complexity of Mongolian society and are still showing "a degree of continuation" of the previous regime. Since it is difficult to get information even now after sixteen years, the people's right to know is not yet guaranteed (Naran, personal communication, July 18, 2005).

Civil society and citizen participation in public policy-making are comparatively new in Mongolia, and they plausibly reflect problems of newly formed institutions. Emerging civil society and government institutions are adapting to the new political and social settings. The relationship between government and non-government organizations is still in flux, causing a tension between them. In socialist days, the government controlled information in all political, social, and economic spheres of Mongolian

society with a one party ideology, a centrally planned economy, and a preference for a certain type of cultural product. As Coleman and Kaposi (2006) point out in their e-participation study of new democracies, residual socialist habits in bureaucratic governance, censorship culture, and medium level passive resistance hinder online democratic participation in new democracies.

Institutional routines of the former socialist regime fade away slowly. The Government of Mongolia reluctantly adopted the Law on Public Radio and Television in 2006, which transformed the state owned National Radio and Television into a public service broadcasting entity. Several new non-government organizations, like the Open Society Forum, the Globe International, and the Press Institute, actively advocated and even pressed the government by publishing research, analysis, and drafts of laws on the Open Society Forum Web site. The Open Society Forum also hosted Web and television discussion forums (Jargal, personal communication, July 18, 2005). The Law on Public Radio and Television was instrumental in the democratic development of Mongolia, and the organized support for the law clearly showed the growing influence of non-government organizations.

Another example of a participatory policy happened when information and communications technology (ICT) professionals gathered while the Communication Regulatory Committee (CRC) proposed a new licensing classification for interactive services over communication networks. The Mongolian Information Developers' Association (MIDAS), which manages a professional mailing list with around 270 professional subscribers, effectively mobilized professionals to come to a meeting organized by MIDAS in order to criticize the CRC regulations which were "overly extensive and almost reminded one of the socialist centralized control system" (Enkh, personal communication, August 1, 2005). The licensing classification list proposed by the CRC included common Internet applications such as file transferring and e-mail use. Under the pressure from the MIDAS meeting, the CRC limited licensing requirements to Voice Over IP services and ISPs (Internet Service Providers) only. These comparatively successful advocacy

practices, which used the Internet to influence governmental policy, support Norris's (2001) claim that the Internet can be used to challenge power balances among institutions by providing communication tools for mobilizing less powerful institutions. Both interviewees representing the MIDAS and the Open Society Forum, Enkh and Jargal, pointed out the effectiveness of using the Internet in policy advocacy along with offline meetings or with other media, such as television programs in the case of the Open Society Forum.

The Mongolian government continues to adopt a paternalistic approach and to downplay the role of the emerging civil society, which has grown in expertise and is prepared to substantially contribute to policy making. Erdem, a deputy director of a government agency, claimed that "public contribution to the policy documents that have been prepared several months in advance by professionals tends to be not much" (Erdem, personal communication, July 20, 2005). A possible explanation for this view is given by Jargal and Naran who were of the opinion that people are not informed, and that therefore their participation in decision making is limited. Jargal, the director of an influential NGO, explains the policy making process in Mongolia:

A small number of policy makers create public policy without even consulting with researchers and professionals The government is not transparent; and public officials and parliamentarians have the notion that policy making is their job only. They accuse NGOs and individuals involved in the policy making process of being 'meddlesome,' or 'nosy.' They ask us 'Why do you make drafts of documents public [on your Web site], making people defy and consequently fail projects - 'forgetting' that these drafts of bills and issues being discussed at the Parliament are supposed to be public. (Jargal, personal communication, July 18, 2005)

The policy researcher Naran described the government's approach to participatory policy making:

The government invites the public and non-governmental organizations to participate in the policy making process when issues are complex and unclear. Then, when the issues become clear, and drafts of documents are close to finalization, the government usually brings in experts from outside. . .and at the same time the government's interest diminishes. . . . They discuss things inside ministries, and the final version becomes. . . very different from the initial document. (Naran, personal communication, July 18, 2005)

Both Jargal and Naran suggested that creating public policy with civil society's cooperation is problematic. It appears that government officials put forward the notion that policy making is the job of the government only; they involve non-government organizations oftentimes under pressure from donor and international organizations.¹³ It will take much more work from Mongolian civil society in order to alter this thinking.

The political participation practice in Mongolia provides little support for the possibility of consensus building on common affairs as it was envisioned by the proponents of the deliberative democracy model and the Habermasian notion of the public sphere. On the contrary, the situation leads more to contestation and conflict between the government and civil society, rather than to the notion of unity, as Dean (2003) suggested. Naran agreed that it is hard to make a normative claim about Internet political participation, saying "even though there are not many constructive arguments, people get engaged by reading, and informing themselves."

POPULIST POTENTIAL OF INTERNET FORUMS: FILTERING, MODERATING, AND THE ANONYMITY OF FORUMS

Varying opinions exist surrounding the question of "Who participates in Internet discussions and how?" Scholars who study the community level impact frequently conclude that the Internet tends to mobilize already

engaged people (Agre, 2002; Norris, 2001; Rogers & Malhotra, 2000), while other scholars argue that activities on the Internet are most often apolitical, but that the Internet has great populist potential (Thompson, 2000). Scholars of digital participation argue that democratic participation should be defined more broadly than the limited political praxis of elections, by including areas where ordinary people participate normally by posting comments, suggestions, and discussions (Dahlgren, 2005; Hamelink, 2000; Olsson, 2006; Pajnik, 2005; Poster, 2001; Wiklund, 2005). Poster calls these online discussion forums "social spaces," and Thompson argues that the marketplace of ideas on the Internet is an active interchange that should require "a bill of cyber rights" which would include no filtering, no lurking, no churning, no flames, and no cookies (Thompson, 2000, p.39). The notion of civic culture proposed by Dahlgren is helpful in understanding people's participation in Mongolian language online forums and their democratic potential because it incorporates cultural factors and communicative practices. Studying the social spaces of Mongolian Internet communities is important because, unlike in the democratic West, broad-based academic communities and online communities such as WELL, Usenet, and similar user groups do not yet exist there. Participatory public spheres on the Internet in the form of discussion forums are less known in Mongolia, reflecting a recent political regime that suppressed individual opinions and created an environment that did not foster democratic participation.

Mongolian society has a rigid social hierarchy. Young people are discouraged from being outspoken (Bayar, personal communication, July 7, 2005). Moreover, past fear of the secret police and the political surveillance that operated over the seventy years of communist rule makes people cautious. Memories of the "fearful time"¹⁴ have not yet faded away after 17 years of democracy. During the socialist time, each economic and social unit in Mongolia had a body of the communist party overseeing its activities. Through democratic centralization, the *nomenklatura* system,¹⁵ and various secret police institutions, the communist party

attempted to build a state-surveillance system in Mongolia analogous to the Panopticon prison-surveillance system where each cell is overseen from a central point (Kaplonski, 2004). Individuals who dared to evaluate communist party policy were punished, starting with the status of being “disfavored,” with no opportunity for career advancements, and ending with political imprisonment.

Partly because of this distrust of authority, the discussion forums of media, interest, and diaspora Web sites such as *MGLclub*, *Olooo*, and *Dotno* are much livelier than the discussion forums on the Web sites of government organizations. The interview findings in this study supporting the claim that discussions are less lively at government Web sites have parallels to Wright’s (2006b) analysis of the British government-led discussion forums in that users tend to be more suspicious of censorship when online participation is moderated and managed by government institutions.¹⁶ Wright (2006b) recommends that the shadow of censorship in online discussion can be reduced by having civil-servant-moderators, while Coleman & Kaposi (2006) suggest moderators of discussion forums should be contracted to a third-party.

Although interest group forums do not look very much like the public sphere where rational individuals discuss community affairs, they are still important forms of public engagement on the Internet. Bayar, the director of an online media company, explained the use of online forums in the Mongolian context in relation to their cultural appropriateness for Mongolians:

Our people are not outspoken in public. . . . One can really see their opinions in online forums, . . . things that are deep, and bottled up There was an incident recently when a policeman killed a person When we posted a poll [on our site] 78% of people responded ‘the police do not defend me,’ and only 7% responded ‘the police do.’ Then, people posted about their experiences with the police. I don’t think they waste their time just to tease other people . . . by leaving long messages. (Bayar, personal communication, July 7, 2005)

When the themes are informal and relevant to people’s experience, involvement tends to be greater. Mend, manager of a Web site helping to prevent HIV among youth, said online chat at *Dotno* (translated as “intimate”) conducted on the Candle Light Memorial Days became alive and interesting and involved many overseas Mongolians (Mend, personal communication, July 5, 2005). Discussion forums at the *Dotno* cover a wide range of topics that allow people to exchange their thoughts and opinions naturally.

When participation is expected on Web sites, regulations surrounding how one should participate become important. Thompson’s bill of cyber rights could be too advanced for Mongolian institutions, but the more hands-off approach advocated by those who work with online media and diaspora networks appears to bring more participation. This greater participation appears to support Thompson’s (2000) no filtering and no churning approach when it comes to postings in discussion forums. Tuul, the manager of the *MGLclub*, said:

We used to receive complaints from people and from companies about the postings at our site. They did not understand that the Internet is a place . . . where people exercise their free speech. Companies receiving bad reviews on our site used to threaten us. . . . We told them deleting complaints is considered ‘censoring’ people’s views. However, we delete harassing messages, fake announcements, or the harmful messages written by someone on behalf of others. (Tuul, personal communication, June 30, 2005)

Bayar, the director of a new online media company, agrees with Tuul’s approach: “It is better not to delete them [messages], unless the posting is outrageous When people read all the negative and positive postings, they will eventually get a balanced view” (Bayar, personal communication, July 7, 2005). For Bayar, the only way to give a balanced view on an issue is to leave all postings and let the readers decide. This “no-filtering” approach is in contrast to government institution Web sites that regularly deleted offensive postings.

The Mongolian institutions with more widely used discussion forums tend to have more relaxed rules concerning filtering and registration, and better volunteer-based facilitation. *Asuult*, for instance, has around fifty volunteer moderators overseeing certain topics on discussion forums, and *Tanhim* has several moderators who decide whether or not to delete flames. Deleting flames from their discussion forums when “discussion degrades into squabbles or offensive attacks” was a common practice for institutions encouraging online participation (Bayar, personal communication, July 7, 2005). Some organizations have filtering systems that do not allow “bad words” in discussion forums. Furthermore, oftentimes discussion forums and mailing lists require registration from people who post messages in order to protect them from spam and flames. Enkh, the director of an NGO, was of the opinion that registration increases the responsible behavior of users and reduces spam. However, required registration for users of discussion forums and mailing lists can also diminish the number of people who are willing to participate.

Several interviewees believed that Internet use in mediated political practices tends to support the reinforcement thesis, which claims that only active and knowledgeable people tend to participate in discussion forums and mailing lists. Enkh, the director of an NGO managing the most active mailing list in Mongolia, said that only a few (around ten) people already active and outspoken in meetings in real-life tended to post messages to the mailing list, while most people lurk (Enkh, personal communication, August 1, 2005). Gant, one of the administrators of the *Tanhim* Web site, observed that only a few people with expertise and confidence tend to post information on discussion forums or write articles for the Web. Those people tend to be scholars or engineers working in other countries who have more information and who have had greater opportunities for experimentation (Gant, personal communication, July 15, 2005).

BEYOND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Norris (2001) states that even though the Internet does not fundamentally change old

institutions and influence disengaged citizens, it does facilitate communication, organization, and mobilization of those already engaged. It appears that the case of Mongolian institutions supports Norris’ claim that the Internet can alter the balance of resources among institutions. The Open-Government Web site makes accessible a vast amount of informational resources at any given time, saving the government much money for buying newsholes and air time (Dorj, personal communication, June 27, 2005). *Dotno* Web site is effectively reaching out to young people on such sensitive issues such as HIV thanks to the anonymity the Internet allows (Mend, personal communication, July 7, 2005). The developers of online media can respond to their audiences’ needs by adding log-files to their Web sites and by having a flexible editorial policy (Bayar, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

However, there is still only a small percentage of people who have access to the Internet in Mongolia, and those who have access often choose not to stay online for a long time, since Mongolian Internet users are charged for access and for the minutes they use on telephone lines. The Mongolian case demonstrates global, social, and democratic digital divides. The vastness of the territory, the underdeveloped infrastructure, and the expensive international telephone call rate all contribute to expensive and unreliable Internet service in Mongolia. Most domestic users in the capital city *Ulaanbaatar* still have dial-up services costing around \$30–40 a month, and the speed and reliability of the this service is worse than a \$10 a month Internet connection in the US (Enkh, personal communication, August 1, 2005).

The situation is even worse in the countryside, where the Internet is accessible only at the center of *aymags*.¹⁷ The growing social divide between people living in the capital city *Ulaanbaatar* and those in the countryside appears to be deepening because of unequal information access. Due to the high cost of rural communication access, and the low rural wages, Mongolians living in the countryside unquestionably constitute the “have-nots.” Province centers have Internet cafes and Internet centers established either in their local government buildings or in

their provincial libraries. These centers are partially supported by international and donor organizations like the Soros Foundation and the United Nations Development Programme. Although there has been a report that people in *Dornod* province used the Internet to find medical help (*AsiaWeek*, August 24, 2001), projects employing new technology and skilled staff brought into the countryside tend to become unsustainable.

The Mongolian Government has initiated programs to make computers available for \$250 and the Internet affordable for 1 *Tugrigz* at night within its *E-Mongolia* program.¹⁸ However, socially beneficial applications of the Internet, such as developing useful government services, tend to fall behind the implementation of an access-centered policy. A couple of interviewees were critical of the Government policy. Bat asked:

Has the Internet developed [in Mongolia]? Not at all. Only people communicating with the outside world naturally use e-mail. Those who are standing at the *Naran Tuul* market [street market] don't need the Internet. . . . Why would [the government] give a \$250 computer. . . but not a washing machine or a fridge for \$100? Truly, the staple food in Mongolia is still meat; its price is rocketing [this summer]. What will families do with their \$250 computers? There is no basic government service available . . . for people to request with a single application using those computers. . . . This [the government program] is a pure a rent-seeking deal between the government and a company. . . . Policy should be evaluated asking 'Who gets fed and who gets hungry after this policy is implemented.' (Bat, personal communication, July 14, 2005)

Bat expressed his disappointment that government policy has not created "a single application" for people to fill out, but focuses instead on selling computers and regulating the price of Internet access.

The digital divide in Mongolia goes beyond Internet access. The lack of government

services and online payment systems—credit cards and other payment options—without a doubt hinders pervasive public use of the Internet. Suren mentioned the problems libraries face digitizing Mongolian language content onto computer systems. There is no software that recognizes the Mongolian alphabet, therefore the indexing of library resources falls behind (Suren, personal communication, June 27, 2005). The Latin alphabet used in online chats with government officials makes it difficult to read and type for Mongolians who use the Cyrillic alphabet (Ariun, personal communication, June 27, 2005). Even though adoption of the Unicode standard solved the Mongolian Cyrillic alphabet problem when using Internet browsers, few people have the Windows XP system that has the Unicode character sets.

The social divide that exists between different types of institutions, as well as between rural and urban areas, widened with the arrival of the Internet in Mongolia. Several interviewees stated that people working in government and business organizations visit their Web sites more often because these institutions have always-on Internet connections, unlike people who work in educational and research institutions. Tuya, the director of the Mongolian Educational Alliance, observed that discussion forums at the *MongolEducation* are "not very lively" because the Internet connections in countryside schools are "so unreliable and bad" (Tuya, personal communication, July 19, 2005). Teachers in the countryside can not stay online for a long time and can not afford Internet access, unlike the audiences of Web sites like *Olloo* and Open Society Forum, who work in government or in business organizations located in the capital.

Government buildings and business organizations, especially in the capital, tend to have better Internet access, while educational institutions like libraries and secondary schools are "falling through the net" (NTIA, 1999). The Parliament, the Prime Minister's Cabinet, Ministries, and key government agencies have already developed the structural and technical capability to use the Internet to a certain extent, thanks to the support of international organizations. This situation does not exist, however, for educational and

research institutions. There is a need for policy that will help overcome this difference by adopting programs like E-rate in the US, which sets aside funds for schools, libraries, and hospitals to guarantee Internet access.

DIASPORA AND THE INTERNET

Consideration of the use of the Internet and e-mail by Mongolians residing in other countries emerged as a discussion point in most interviews. Several interviewees claimed that e-mail is the most common communication for around 110,000 Mongolians (equal to 4% of the total population) living outside the country, mostly in South Korea, China, Japan, USA, and in the countries of the European Union.¹⁹ The largest number of Mongolians living outside the country resides in South Korea,²⁰ and the remittance money from Mongolians working outside of the country is sizeable in the foreign currency exchange for the country.²¹

The interviewees expressed different views about the reasons Mongolians living outside made greater use of the Internet. Several interviewees claimed that the Internet allowed for the creation of a socially beneficial, “community-like” network for Mongolians living outside of the country, especially among illegal workers. The manager of the *MGLclub* Web site, Tuul, explained why its Web site is livelier, more community-oriented, and has a broader user base:

We have an audience ranging from teenagers to 50 year-olds They get sick, women get married, and get pregnant . . . they face different problems illegally working people can not get services for. . . . Then, they post questions, and other Mongolians advise them on where to go and what to do. People really exchange information in discussion forums. . . . Other people discuss software, computer viruses, counterstrike games and many other things. (Tuul, personal communication, June 30, 2005)

The Mongolian songs, music, and news that people living far away from home “really need” were placed on their Web site, Tuul said. The

Web site was initiated in 2001 by a Korean who visited Mongolia. In the beginning, it functioned as a South Korean service center for the Mongolian company, Rose, that delivered packages to family members from people working in South Korea. Mongolian pop songs, in the form of MP3 files, and discussion forums were the main features. Within five years, the user base of the Web site grew to 50,000. According to Tuul, the Web site now finances itself by ads from Mongolian banks, as well as from Korean transportation and cargo companies and a percentage of airline tickets and phone cards sold.

In November 2005, *MGLclub.com*’s advertisers, Anod Bank and Zoos Bank, were closed by the South Korean police for illegally operating in South Korea and channeling money earned by Mongolians in South Korea back to Mongolia (EIU, December 2005). This situation supported the claim of another interviewee, Enkh, who stated that advertisers on the net were often those businesses not allowed to advertise on television (Enkh, personal communication, August 1, 2005). Legal issues surrounding cross-border transactions are still a less clearly defined territory that needs further exploration.

Since almost one in five families in Mongolia has someone living outside of the country, expatriate Mongolians are a niche target for some Mongolian Web sites. Media, health, and educational organizations in Mongolia have already started services for the Mongolian diaspora. Mend, the doctor of the Web site *Dotno*, said:

Workers, especially illegal workers, in foreign countries do not receive social, medical, and educational services. They e-mail me and post questions at our site when they have health problems. We are happy to help them to solve urgent problems, advise, and educate them. (Mend, personal communication, July 5, 2005)

Mend noted that almost one half of the e-mails she receives come from Mongolians living outside of the country. The Internet and e-mail are efficient ways to help her communicate. A similar project was started

by Suren, the computer specialist of the metropolitan central library, who works on the digital library project. Suren scans and makes available on the Internet famous Mongolian folk and literary novels mostly targeting the Mongolians living outside the country. The digital library he created has Mongolian riddles, proverbs, and folk tales, and it is requested and appreciated by the Mongolians who live outside the country (Suren, personal communication, June 27, 2005). The Mongolian diaspora wants to have access to that literature for themselves, and for their children. Although many Mongolians living in Korea learn to speak the Korean language after a few years, Tuul explained that they often read Mongolian newspapers that arrive weeks late. Furthermore, as Tuul observed, there are children in Korea who can not attend schools because of their parents' illegal status (Tuul, personal communication, June 30, 2005).

Not only social institutions, but commercial institutions as well are involved in these cross-border networks. The Mongolian commercial television station TV 5 started to broadcast its news and over-the-air programs, like its signature program Let's Develop Motherland Mongolia, on the Internet. TV 5 invests approximately \$2,000 a month in an Internet broadcasting service in the US. This service allows Mongolians to send an Internet greeting to family members and friends living outside of the country for a small charge. Furthermore, Mongolians outside of the country sometimes send requests to TV 5 to take pictures and video images of the places where they grew up. A top manager of TV 5, Devshil, explained that his company targeted the Mongolian diaspora because "Mongolians living outside of the country are the ones who see more, are better educated, and have more resources than those in Mongolia" (Devshil, personal communication, July 26, 2005). This initiative has not proven to be financially viable, but Devshil explained that it is important to involve those Mongolians. A similar view about the Mongolians living abroad was expressed by Gant, one of the managers of the *Tanhim* Web site that allows Mongolian engineers to exchange information:

Students and engineers working in foreign countries have more information and more opportunities to build and experiment . . . whereas engineers and students in Mongolia do not have information, equipment, and labs. (Gant, personal communication, July 15, 2005)

Both Badral and Gant mentioned the superior resources and skills that Mongolians outside the country have compared to Mongolians in the country, especially in technology. Several interviewees suggested that Mongolians outside the country also tend to participate more often in discussion forums. Almost half of the visitors to the Web sites *Dotno*, *Olloo*, *Mclibrary*, *Tanhim*, and *Openforum*, as well as government organizations' Web sites like Open-Government and *ICTA*, sign on from foreign IP addresses in Korea, China, Japan, USA, and Russia. Several Web sites were created and are maintained by Mongolian students and workers living in other countries, including *Asuult*, *MGLclub*, *Monstudent*, and *Openmn*. The interviewees claimed that these sites are popular not only among the Mongolians living outside, but also among the people living in Mongolia. These Web sites often have more creative use of the interactive and participatory possibilities of the Internet than Mongolian Web sites inside the country.

Internet development in the countries where Mongolians are working and studying contributes to the greater use of the Internet by Mongolians everywhere. As Tuul explained, in South Korea every three months there is a new computer model and a new cell phone model. The Internet is cheaper and faster there, since South Korea has become the country with the highest broadband penetration (Tuul, personal communication, June 30, 2005). This situation shows how skills and resources tend to match each other, as explained by Easterly (2002), one of the top-ranked economists of the World Bank group. Easterly points out that when new knowledge complements existing knowledge, it has greater worth and use. The servers for *Tanhim*, *Asuult*, *Openforge*, and *MGLclub* were created and maintained by Mongolians who have skills and knowledge equal to that of more technologically advanced societies.

CONCLUSIONS

The case study of how Mongolian government and civil society institutions use the Internet for civic discourse shows important developments for digital democracy theory building in new democracies. The study shows both the potentials and the limitations of digital democracy practices in a post-communist society where civil liberty, political participation, and the Internet have been introduced recently. The government and the people of Mongolia are enthusiastic about the potentials for new political and technological developments, indicated by their efforts to use discussion forums by several government as well as non-government institutions and interest groups. Yet, the findings of this study show that several factors limit the use of online forums on the Web sites of government institutions: (a) slowly fading away bureaucratic practices; (b) a paternalistic approach by the government regarding citizen involvement in policy formation; (c) a historically formed distrust in authority; and (d) a society unfamiliar with civic participation practices. Furthermore, the secrecy in society, inherited from the socialist time, also exacerbates the difficulty of obtaining information at all levels of Mongolian society.

This does not discount the altering balance of power in recent years among institutions in Mongolia to some extent influenced by the Internet. Two successful cases—MIDAS using its mailing list to mobilize people in preventing unnecessary regulations proposed by the Communication Regulatory Agency, and the Open Society Forum's support of the Law on Public Radio and Television using its portal Web site and discussion forums—suggest that the influence of non-governmental institutions has grown because of their use of the Internet. To some extent, these new civil society institutions have more expertise and mobility thanks to their links to various international advocacy groups and organizations. The Mongolian government might consider partnering with civil society institutions in order to increase participation by Mongolians on the Internet. Furthermore, emerging discussion forums on the Web sites of diaspora, interest groups, and

new media companies engage many Mongolians who want to share their opinions, thoughts, and interests. As Dahlgren (2005) and Hamelink (2000) noted, public participation is greater in areas where ordinary people normally participate. Comments and discussions on the Internet about policy and related issues should both be considered civic participation.

The findings of this study support the social constructivist argument that political and social settings tend to shape technological development. The political context in Mongolia, such as the fusion of legislative and executive governance, the narrow separation of powers among government institutions, and the less-established institutional routines, is reflected in digital democracy practices. The analysis provided in this article contests the notion of an integrated public sphere where the networks of ordinary citizens naturally mesh with the networks of policy-makers. On the contrary, the conflicting views presented by the interviewees, representing government and civil society institutions surrounding the role of online public participation, tend to support Dean's (2003) assertion that it is still too early to make normative claims about the role of public participation on the Net. Discussion forums on the Internet seem to provide social spaces for Mongolians to converse with each other, even though these conversations are not very robust, are often conflicting, and are not necessarily rational. At the broader theoretical level, Dean's (2003) notion of the Net as a zero institution that acknowledges conflicts but has no determinate meaning seems to be more appropriate to the context of Mongolia than the notion of the Habermasian rational public sphere. As Wright's (2006a) analysis of the British government-led discussion forums shows, even in "the democratic West" discussion forums oftentimes do not look very much like the ideal rational discussion which would link unfettered online discussion to formal policy making. In this sense, the concept of civic culture posited by Dahlgren (2005) that takes into account cultural contexts and social agency when explaining online public participation is useful for future studies. In a post-authoritarian society like Mongolia, when people choose to participate,

they prefer to converse with each other in discussion forums hosted by diaspora, media, and interest groups rather than government-hosted Web sites. People participate in these online forums and develop their affinity, knowledge, and identity. This discussion is important to the development of democracy.

NOTES

1. The Freedom House (2006), an agency evaluating the democratic development on the global scale, evaluated Mongolia as a “free” country based on political rights and civil liberty criteria, while its neighbors and other Central Asian countries are ranked as “partially free” or “not free.” However, Transparency International issued a contradicting evaluation citing the high level of corruption (Coleman & Kaposi, 2006; Transparency International, 2006).

2. The biggest producers of telecommunications equipment—China, Korea, and Japan—are among the biggest investors and economic partners in Mongolia. Japan is the biggest official source for development aid (ODA), and 50% of all Japanese investment in Mongolia goes to the telecommunications sector via companies like MobiCom, a leading mobile phone joint venture company with Japanese Sumitomo and KDD. Korean Telecom owns 49% of Mongolia’s Telecom, and the second mobile phone operator SkyTel in Mongolia is a joint company with Korean SK Telecom (ADB, 2003).

3. Known in the West as Genghis Khan.

4. The legislative branch is unicameral and is called the *State Great Khural* with 76 seats elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms. The executive branch is headed by the president, who is elected by popular vote for a period of four years. The president has the power to veto bills, but he or she can be overruled by a two-thirds majority of the Parliament. The Parliament appoints the Prime Minister and the Cabinet in consultation with the President.

5. Historically, philosophical debates on citizenship emerge from three main perspectives: libertarian, emphasizing the citizen’s personal autonomy and freedom of choice; republican, advocating dialogue and deliberation over public issues to solve common problems; and communitarian, highlighting the interest of historically specific and culturally different communities, self-realization, and identity (Hoff et al., 2000).

6. An institution is defined variedly, especially in less-established democratic countries like Mongolia. Bellamy and Taylor (1998) define an institution as an entity having (a) established routines; (b) epistemic communities of “professional and occupational groups whose members rely on common funds of knowledge, memory, and skills and that promote specific interpretations and paradigms;”

and (c) actor networks of people with “different roles, expertise, and domains” (p. 158).

7. There is little available and reliable empirical evidence of digital democracy practices in post-democratic countries, partly due to the long history of censorship of information during the socialist time (Coleman & Kaposi, 2006; Dimitrova & Beilock, 2005; Johnson, 2003; Kolko et al., 2003; and Undrahbuyan, 2006).

8. Undrahbuyan’s (2006) study grouped those 157 Web sites of Mongolian institutions into six groups: (a) government, (b) research and academic institutions, (c) non-governmental institutions, (d) media and Internet, (e) political and interest groups, and (f) diaspora.

9. This study uses pseudonyms for its interviewees because some interviewees gave permission to reveal their names, and others did not.

10. *The Secret History of Mongols* is a book describing the rise of Chinghis Khan, his empire, and his military campaigns.

11. *Olloo.mn*, a new online media site, claimed that it has 25,000 visitors on average each day (Bayar, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

12. The user base of the MGLClub Web site grew to 50,000 within five years (Tuul, personal communication, June 30, 2005).

13. One of the interviewees, Bat, said that “donor money of 300 million dollars a year in the one-billion-dollar Mongolian economy brings some changes to Mongolia” (Bat, personal communication, July 14, 2005). Other official sources of information on the economic development of Mongolia confirm his estimates. The EIU estimate of the GDP of Mongolia in 2004 was US\$1.2 billion, and foreign aid received by Mongolia for the period 1991–2002 reached US\$2.9 billion (yearly estimate is US\$241.6 million) in the form of mostly emergency aid without including loans and other developmental assistance (EIU, 2005).

14. To maintain the socialist regime, the communist party attacked counter-revolutionaries, monks, religious recalcitrants, feudal or capitalist elements, and critical intelligentsia. The number of people affected during these purges varies from one document to another, since information was censored and controlled tightly during the socialist days. Some sources state that there were 35,800 killed and imprisoned from 1930 to 1950; other accounts claim 100,000 killed and imprisoned during the same period (M. Rossabi, 2005; see the chapter by Dashpurev & Soni). Sanders (1987) states that there were 800 monasteries with 80,000 monks and 7,700 *jas* (monastery properties) in Mongolia at the beginning of the 1930s. By the 1980’s, there was only one operating monastery; a few reserved monasteries operated as museums, and around 1,000 monks lived in Mongolia. The entire population of Mongolia was less than one million at that time.

15. The communist party “*nomenklatura* system” (Spark & Reading, 1998, p. 32) is a system where professionals are chosen based on their loyalty to the communist party.

16. Wright (2006b) analyzed the relationship between censorship and moderation in British government initiated forums, *Downing Street's Policy Forum*, and *Citizen Space's E-democracy Forum*.

17. Mongolia is administratively divided into 21 aymags or provinces.

18. *Tugrig* is the Mongolian currency, approximately 1,177 of which equals US\$ 1 on July 27, 2006.

19. This dissertation studies the use of the Internet by Mongolians who mostly left the country after 1990. It does not discuss the use of the Internet among Mongolian ethnic groups in Inner Mongolia in China, or in Buriatya in Russia.

20. The South Korean government estimates that there are around 27,000 Mongolians living in South Korea, some 15,000 of which are there illegally (EIU, December 2005).

21. According to the Government of South Korea, the remittance money the Mongolians in Korea have transmitted is US\$22 million.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

Loosely structured in-depth interviews were conducted using a tentative set of questions as the following:

1. When and how did your organization start to create and maintain a Web site? And what were the major milestones in the development and use of the Web site?
2. What were the initial purposes? Who were the leaders in initiating the Web site?
3. What is the process of Web maintenance in your organization?
4. What are the benefits and disadvantages of the Web site compared to other media?
5. How are the questions asked on the Web site analyzed and responded to at your Web site?
6. How are feedback, chat rooms, and comments analyzed and used?
7. Is there anyone responsible for preparing, moderating, and following up discussion forums?
8. How do you make use of the discussions and comments posted on the Web site?
9. Are there financial, technical, language, and other obstacles? How do you overcome these problems?
10. Do you collaborate with international communities and organizations? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this participation?

APPENDIX B

TABLE A1. Chronology of Interviewees/Institutions

Pseudonym	Date	Institution and Web site
1. Dorj	June 27, 2005	The Asia Foundation (Open-government.mn)
2. Ariun	June 27, 2005	The USAID (Open-Government.mn)
3. Suren	June 27, 2005	The Metropolitan Central Library (mclibrary.mn)
4. Tuul	June 30, 2005	MGLclub (MGLclub.com)
5. Mend	July 5, 2005	The National AIDS Foundation (Dotno.mn)
6. Tungaa	July 6, 2005	The Amnesty International - Mongolia (amnesty.mn)
7. Bayar	July 7, 2005	Pixel Co. (Olloo.mn)
8. Luvsan	July 8, 2005	DataCom (mol.mn)
9. Bat	July 14, 2005	Datacom (mol.mn)
10. Bold	July 15, 2005	The Information Technology Park (itpark.mn)
11. Gant	July 15, 2005	The Mongolian National University (Tanhim.net)
12. Jargal	July 18, 2005	Open Forum (Openforum.mn)
13. Naran	July 18, 2005	Open Forum (Openforum.mn)
14. Tuya	July 19, 2005	The Mongolian Education Alliance (mongoleducation.mn)
15. Erdem	July 20, 2005	The Information and Communication Technology Authority (icta.mn)
16. Devshil	July 26, 2005	TV 5 (tv5.mn)
17. Tumen	July 29, 2005	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Mongolia-foreign-policy.net)
18. Odnoo	August 1, 2005	The Parliament of Mongolia (parl.gov.mn)
19. Enkh	August 1, 2005	MIDAS/MONITA (www.midas.mn)
20. Elbeg	August 3, 2005	The Parliament Strengthening for Democratic Governance Project (parl.gov.mn)
21. Zol	August 3, 2005	The Democratic Party (demparty.mn)
22. Tomor	August 26, 2005	Asuult Net (asuult.net)
23. Tsog	August 29, 2005	Open Source Developers (Openforge.mn)

APPENDIX C

Sample Interview Transcript

Нээлттэй Засаг вэб сайтыг координаторуудтай хийсэн ярилцлага.

Азийн Сан

6-27-2005 16 цаг.

- У: Та Нээлттэй Засаг вэб сайтыг талаар танилцуулах уу.
- А: Нээлттэй засаг вэб сайт 2001 оны 12 сард анх нөгөө Энхбаяр даргыг ерөнхий сайд байхад, өөрийнх нь санаачлагаар албан ёсоор нээсэн. Гол зорилго нь болохоор бизнесийнхэн, гадаад дотоодын хөрөнгө оруулагчдад бодлогын документуудыг өгөх, холбоотой мэдээллийг өгөх, хуулийн төсөл вэб дээрээ тавиад, эргүүлээд тэр нь одоо бас тэр хүмүүсээс санал тийм зорилготой нээсэн. Тэгээд ерөнхийдөө болбол ерөнхий сайдын ажлын албаны өөрийнх нь вэб сайт гэж явдаг юм, санхүүжилтийн хувьд манай төслөөс явж байгаа тэр Фернандо гэж байгаа
- У: Ямар төсөл вэ
- А: USAID ын төсөл . . . эдийн засгийн бодлогын шинэчлэлт . . .
- А: өрсөлдөх чадварыг төсөл. Тэгээд Азийн сан болохоор манай subcontractor гэж явж байгаа. Тэгээд Азийн сан бол вэб сайтыг content ыг тэр чигээр нь хариуцаж ажилладаг. . . . дарга тэгээд хариуцдаг.
- Д: Тэхээр энгээд ярилцаад л ярилцаад л явчихья
- У: Тиймээ ярилцаад ярилцаад явчихья.
- У: Тэгээд өөрөө бол ямар үүрэгтэй оролцдог
- А: Би бол яахав вэб координатор гэж явж байгаа, тэгээд вэб қдрийн тутмын update давхар хийгээд хийдэг. Бqr анх бол зqгээр нэг монголын local IT company хийсэн. Техникийн хувьд
- У: Ямар компани хийсэн бол
- А: Интерактив. Тэрнээс хойш 2 ч удаа нэлээн бас техникийн хувьд сайжруулсан.
- У: Ямар өөрчлөлтүүд хийсэн юм бол
- А: Форум эд нарыг нь нэлээн user friendly болгох, тэгээд л манайх чинь нэг онлайн чатыг засгийн газрын гишүүд, их хурлынхан эд нүүдтэй хийдэг байхгүй юу. урьдчилан зарлаж байгаад тэгээд тусгай сэдвээр. Тэрний чат эд нарыг хийсэн юм байгаа юм. Ерөнхийдээ зүгээр нэг public чатуудаас арай өөр. Нэлээн шалгуур үзүүлэлттэй.
- Д: Тэхээр Азийн сан бол EPRC тэй contract-ын гэрээгээр ажилладаг. Тэрний гол үндсэн чиглэл нь гэхээр эдийн засгийн шинэтгэлийн шинжтэй асуудлуудаар үндэсний хэмжээнд диалог, ярилцлаг өрнүүлэх тэ
- У: Диалог, эдийн засгийн чиглэлээр ..
- Д: Тх. Энэ хүрээнд хамгийн гол асуудлууд нэгт нээлттэй засаг вэб сайт өөрөө орж байгаа. Энэ чиглэлээр нээлттэй засаглал вэб сайтыг функц ч гэдэг юм уу, үйлчилгээ байдаг. Үүний хамгийн гол үндсэн функц гэхээр УНХ-аар хэлэлцэгдэж байгаа хууль, тогтоомжийн төслүүд нь тодорхой хугацааны өмнө иргэдэд очиж байх тийм нөхцлийг хангах гэж үзэж байгаа. Тэгснээрээ иргэд бол тэр талаар, тодорхой төслийн талаар саналаа урьдчилж өгсөн байх тэ.