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**THE POSTMODERN CHALLENGES OF THE
INFORMATION SOCIETY TO THE
GOVERNANCE OF HKSAR**

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The postmodern challenges of the information society to the governance of HKSAR



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Abstract

Governments in developed countries world-wide are facing a number of challenges due to changing values in individualism, consumer capitalism, and hyper-pluralism, the growing diversity in values within society, and the development of information and communication technology. The information society empowers individuals to obtain information and to get connected with minimal efforts and maximum efficiency. This reinforces the basis of our present postmodern society.

Post-modernity is, perhaps, the most frequently used concept in circumscribing these themes. Present day political institutions and mechanisms built in the modern era and based on rationalism frequently cannot resolve the conflicts arising from such diversity of values and views. Furthermore, the growing mistrust towards the authority and political rhetoric articulated by those in the centre of our political system casts doubts on the effectiveness of our present political institutions in achieving its purposes.

Politics, political communication, public administration, consumerism, entertainment and popular culture are blended together. The popular culture in consumerism has turned to more abstract forms of consumptions. The verbal assaults towards government officials or most forms of political rhetoric are forms of emotive consumption gearing towards the needs of the general public or particular market segment of politics.

Difference in opinions among the members of the public towards any public policy is inevitable, and growing diversity in values and views is a universal phenomenon happened in all open societies, including Hong Kong, and is a result of globalization. The challenge is how to deal with such diversities and how to arrive at compromises so that a majority view can be obtained, though consensus is almost beyond reach.

The bureaucratic structure of governments today is good for performing specialized, repetitive and routine tasks but would find itself challenged in dealing with the increasing speed of change and increasing diversity of values, views and practices.

The HKSAR Government is faced with its unique challenges. “One country two systems” is unique and unprecedented. The lack of mutual trust between the Beijing government and the citizens of Hong Kong is one of the key issues, and the constitutional structure of HKSAR Government prescribed by the Basic law is also often seen as the source of many major challenges. The limited power of the Legislative Council coupled with limited policy decision responsibility of the Legislative Council turns its members into primarily critics of public policies, and makes the Legislature as a platform for ironing out differences and developing compromises almost dysfunctional. Together with the “no news

is good news” phenomenon of mass media, this makes the public policy promotion efforts of the Administration very difficult. Furthermore, the election system of Legislative Council makes fragmentation of political interests inevitable and it makes the Administration’s lobbying work more difficult.

Information and communication technology adds to the thrust of the postmodern challenges due to its accessibility to information, its facilitation of interaction among citizens, and its reinforcement to individualism and freedom. Yet, we should also make full use of the opportunities offered by it, while managing the risks involved with prudence. Modern governments subscribe to maximum transparency handled with sufficient prudence, as transparency is probably the only major means to enhance trust between the government and the citizens. Democratic governments worldwide are trying their very best to make innovative use of information technology and the internet to provide information to the public, to make the Administration more accessible to the public, and to engage its citizens in its policy formulation and implementation. This paper examines a few international examples.

Basically, we can conclude that the efforts of various government units of the HKSAR in e-engagement were basically unguided and self-initiated, and a more coordinated efforts and policy directive is needed.

This paper also argues that since sharing of information is sharing of power and conflicts are issues of power, sharing of power is the basic instrument for resolving conflicts and for reducing possible conflicts between the Administration and the Legislature and the relationship between the government and the public.

Two related challenges are mentioned in this paper with one related to the deteriorating opportunities for development of public leaders in politics and in the civil service, and the relationship between politically appointed officials and civil servants. The French emphasis on the development and training of its civil servants and allowing them to be appointed to ministerial positions and to return to civil service afterwards can serve as our reference.