A Review of the Factors Influencing Political Polarization in the Perspective of Communication

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Abstract: Extreme differences of political parties' opinions will damage social order and threaten political stability. In order to understand the issue of political polarization thoroughly, this paper reviews the relevant research of mass media and political polarization from the perspective of communication, summarizes three factors and influencing mechanisms of mass media promoting political polarization, and complements the positive role of mass media. Finally, this paper puts forward constructive suggestions for both the mass media and the public themselves, in order to alleviate the political polarization.

1. Introduction

Political polarization has existed for a long time in western society. In recent years, the conflict of views among political parties in multi-party countries has been particularly intensified. In order to solve the serious consequences of social differentiation caused by such attitude differences, social scientists have been understanding and explaining the reasons for the party division from various perspectives. In these series of studies, there is a voice that the rise and development of mass media further formed and intensified the phenomenon of political polarization. In order to investigate the logic and rationality behind this statement, this paper reviews the previous studies on political polarization in the field of communication, and proposes that the three fields of leadership persuasion, media prejudice and group polarization of mass media have played a role in promoting political polarization, but at the same time, it further dispels political polarization with the help of mass media.

2. Leadership Persuasion Intensifies the Ownership of Consensus

In modern society, the individual of the atomized subject has been receiving and forming their own political ideas. Out of loneliness and fear, such a dispersed state is easily attracted by leadership groups, thus forming the polarization of belonging and aggravating political polarization. "It is important to recognize that some forms of leadership incite and encourage extreme polarization," said Moghadtam, author of the "Mutual evolution", "The individual's fear and misunderstanding of others, and seeing that these ideas and feelings can be incited by political leaders. "

In fact, the research on public opinion and control has a long history. Locke's "law of opinion, law of fashion, law of reputation"; Hume's "government only depends on public opinion"; Madison's "people are timid and cautious"; Rousseau's "public will and public will"; Bentham's "public opinion and control" all narrates the logic behind the public opinion control. During the presidential election, this social control was defined as "opinion leader" by Paul Lazarsfeld in the book "people's choice", which actively transmits information to others and influences others in the interpersonal network, and "two-step flow of communication", which means the information flow process of mass media filtered by opinion leaders and then to individuals.

Social control alone can not form political opinion belonging and polarization, which also needs the desires of the people to seek belonging. This view is clearly stated in Lisman's book "the lonely

crowd", "Due to the limited understanding ability, communication mode, time and energy, scattered individuals are difficult to form rational opinions. In order to communicate, people must form their own views on many unfamiliar things, so they need ready-made and concise answers. Secondly, in modern society, people become lonely, insignificant, and lack the intimate relationship, which all lead to psychological anxiety. In this case, only when it is integrated with a group can we regain the relationship between the lost people and the group can also make the individual feel lofty, and the achievement and pride of the group become the achievement and pride of everyone. " This is also corroborated by Elisabeth Noelle Neumann's finding that the "last minute follow up" effect of the 1965 election poll was observed. In the threat of isolated fear, most people choose to change their opinions and choose silence to deal with it. This spiral diffusion process of social communication is defined by Elisabeth Noelle Neumann as the "spiral of silence"

Because of the complexity of personal ownership, to find the reasons for aggravating polarization, we need to clarify the most important relationship. And whether the closer the relationship is and the more prominent the party propaganda, the stronger the political identity and the more intense the polarization effect. Social identity theorists assume that identity significance is the basis for predicting the degree of bias among groups and pointed out that the more obvious the connection, the more biased the individual's beliefs about the group. This significance can be reflected in the personality factors of individual loyalty to the group, and also in the frequency of being reminded to belong to a group (SHANTO IYENGAR, GAURAV SOOD and YPHTACH LELKES, 2012). And the author points out that higher level of negative emotions and general contact with political activities will lead to higher level of emotional polarization.

3. Media Bias Exacerbates Polarization

In social environment, people generally understand the political progress through the news reports of the media. In recent years, the changing media environment is often considered as the main factor leading to or aggravating political polarization. Media prejudice refers to the bias of journalists or journalists in the process of mass media information production about what kind of news content to report and how to report news content. This is usually shown in two forms: significant , expressed as clearly supporting or opposing a party, or in covert , as if the public were perceived by the press framework that prejudice was generated by themselves.

The selective exposure of media news bias and the presentation of news framework may lead to the polarization of large-scale politics.For example, some scholars (Youngju Kim and Shuhua Zhou, 2020) believe that conflict oriented political news often emphasizes the friction between political parties, which is inseparable from the conflict bias of news media in order to attract the audience's limited attention and focus on differences rather than consensus. It's different from the political bias in the news that favors one candidate or another. When we discuss how mass media influences polarization through content framework, it should be traced back to the fact that news reports of media will show subtle information differences through framework practice, thus affecting people's political attitude (Price, Tewksbury and Powers, 1997). As a process of selection and highlighting (Entman R. 1993), the framework will enable individuals to selectively focus on specific aspects of information and activate relevant information, thus affecting subsequent interpretation and judgment (Tewksbury et al., 2000). When individuals are exposed to the framework of political conflict in news, specific identities in some social identities (such as race, gender and political party identity) can be activated and become prominent in the individual mind according to the situation (Turner and Reynolds, 2010), which leads to the large differences among different groups and similarity in the same group when facing news reports characterized by conflict framework. Party identity is the key factor to explain the political polarization of political parties on a certain topic. The news framework of party conflict is to increase the significance of political identity in a moment, leading to the political polarization of perception and attitude (YOUNGJU KIM and SHUHUA ZHOU, 2020).

4. Existing Choice Intensifies Group Polarization

The existing political tendency of the people makes it have the information consumption attitude of selective contact when facing the mass political news. This attitude is intensified in the explosive information supply, which intensifies the political position of the people and intensifies the political polarization.

When we examine the influence of mass media on the position of the public party, the 1940 presidential election research is a classic case. Paul Lazarsfeld and others believe that for most voters, the effect of change is very weak among the three effects of activation, reinforcement and change of mass media, but only activation and reinforcemeng their existing political tendency. This is mainly due to the existing political position of the public and selective contact with the mass communication information.

Similarly, this view is also mutually verified by other scholars. Political science research usually finds that information effect or media effect depends largely on the attitude of media information receiver (Zaller, 1992). For example, skeptics of global warming may not act in a more environmentally friendly way or may be more committed to their skepticism (Daniel j.coffey and Patricia Hallam Joseph, 2013). On the basis of this premise and foundation, some scholars (Sunstein, 2017) believe that the explosive growth of Party News Media and the rise of social networking sites may make people more political and extreme. Some empirical evidence also shows that too much exposure to arguments that only support their own views increases people's confidence in their beliefs and ultimately pushes the attitude of the person further away from the center (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009). This is also the "echo chamber effect" which is caused by the information cocoon room in political communication.

This phenomenon is becoming more and more enlarged under the condition of the Internet as the main channel of information transmission. Scholars used the 2012-2016 period to track changes in political perspectives of respondents over the past four years to assess the role of social media. The data collection results show that social media indirectly influences polarization by increasing political participation, such as online political news sharing, offline political discussion and voting (Boulianne, 2015).This increase in political participation makes personal political views clearer and thus gradually away from the neutral groups. Therefore, the neutral who often uses social media is more likely to be a liberal than the non social media, leading to the formation of more extreme political attitudes. In the new model proposed by Entman and her (Entman and Usher, 2018), social media, as a "public channel" of information dissemination, promotes the possibility of interaction between individuals through "viral spreading". According to factional preference, the public can form a field of communication of homogeneous information. Christopher also set up an intervention experiment that regularly made them accessible to people with opposite political ideologies through Twitter, which showed that Republicans became more conservative after intervention; Democrats have become more liberal after they focus on conservative twitter. This is the political polarization that voters highlight due to explosive information under the existing political tendency.

5. Mass Media Promotes Communication and Understanding

However, the influence of mass media on political polarization is not all negative. Optimists believe that this creates more opportunities for different groups, especially vulnerable groups, to help them communicate and understand each other and bring "voice of the people" to the ideological market (Fishkin, 1995; Fiorina, Abrams and Pope,2006; DiMaggio,Evans and Bryson, 2006; Coleman, 2003; Mutz) Some scholars (Ge Yan, Qin Yulin, Zhao Hanqing, 2020) used actor model to simulate the artificial society of MOR, and observed the relationship between social media and political public opinion evolution. It is found that in Morse society, mass media is not necessarily related to public opinion polarization, and social media is more likely to restrain or reverse polarization tendency than non social media. Only in the case of the mainstream media dishonesty, social media is more likely to promote the distance between opposing views, especially to greatly

promote the growth of the number of extreme people. At this time, social media should be responsible for the polarization of public opinion and social division.

6. Summary

This paper is a detailed analysis of the view that mass media aggravates political polarization, and it needs to be further supplemented in the positive role. According to literature review and analysis, we can see that in the perspective of communication, many theoretical logic in the process of mass communication is inseparable from political polarization. Its propaganda persuasion, content bias and echo effect can form and aggravate political polarization at different levels. Therefore, from the perspective of communication, we expect to bridge the polarization. For the mass media itself, we should emphasize journalism professionalism, optimize the information filtering mechanism, follow the ethical literacy of news and provide non biased news content; For the people themselves, we should open up their views and establish an inclusive attitude, actively communicate and promote inter group communication, and overcome the encouragement of fear and rational thinking. To correctly recognize the factors that affect political polarization will help us bridge the differences and build consensus.

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