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Harmonious communitarianism or a rational public sphere: a content analysis of the differences between comments on news stories on Weibo and Facebook

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ABSTRACT

In studying online political communication in China, many researchers apply theories generated in the West (particularly that of the public sphere) without questioning their applicability in the Chinese context. Others argue that new theories must be generated from the ground up, often basing these theories on traditional Chinese philosophies. However, the applicability of these approaches remains unproven. This research uses a content analysis to compare comments on news stories on Chinese and Western social media sites. It finds that there is little evidence to support either the use of public sphere theory in China or the use of traditional conceptions of Eastern styles of communication. Chinese netizens were no more subtle or harmonious (if anything, they were more divisive) and were less likely to talk with others, attempt to understand others' opinions or attempt to work towards consensus or resolution. Based on these findings, I propose that future research should attempt to build more appropriate theories based on an understanding of how political ideas are actually produced, transmitted and received in society, rather than continuing to apply foreign or ancient theoretical frameworks without a critical interrogation of their applicability in their context of application.

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Online political communication; China; Weibo; social networking sites; public sphere; Asian theories of communication

Introduction

The Internet was invented in the U.S.A. and it was in a Western context that this technology developed and matured. As part of its development, key U.S. values, such as privacy and freedom of expression, were built into the code and structure of the Internet (Norris & Inglehart, 2009). This discourse of the Internet as a freedom-spreading technology has been accepted by the majority of Internet users across the world, regardless of the conditions of the technology's use (Bolsover, Dutton, Law, & Dutta, 2014). However, despite the influence of Western nations in shaping Internet values, users in these countries no longer dominate the global Internet. China surpassed the U.S.A. in 2008 to become the world's largest population of Internet users, and users in Asia now make up almost half of the world's Internet population.

Does site architecture matter? The political implications of public- versus private-oriented social network sites in China

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ABSTRACT

Political communication researchers have shown that social network site (SNS) use and online network characteristics can impinge on people's political attitudes and behavior. Nevertheless, individual SNSs have varying site architecture, basic design features, and functionalities, which may influence usage and online network characteristics. This study thus examines whether site architecture matters for understanding the political implications of SNSs. Specifically, this article conceptualizes the distinction between public-oriented and private-oriented SNSs. It contends that the two types of SNSs would have varying impact on political behavior through the kinds of online networks that they tend to sustain. Analysis of a survey of university students in Guangzhou, China ($N = 897$), shows that respondents using public-oriented SNSs tended to have a relatively more 'public' online network – larger, involving more strangers, and with more connections to public actors. Some of these network characteristics in turn affected political discussion behavior. The analysis thus demonstrates how SNS architecture can indirectly impinge on individual-level political outcomes.

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Social network sites; site architecture; public-oriented versus private-oriented SNSs; online network characteristics; political discussion; China

Introduction

A large and still growing body of political communication research has demonstrated a generally positive relationship between social network site (SNS) use and political and civic engagement in varying national and cultural contexts (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Štětka & Mazák, 2014; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). An important finding is that SNSs do not necessarily promote political engagement for all because of variations in individuals' types of usage and online network characteristics (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Tang & Lee, 2013).

Existing studies typically focus on one specific SNS (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) or SNSs in general. Researchers have seldom considered the possibility that usage and online network characteristics are shaped by the design features and functionalities of SNSs in the first place. This possibility is nonetheless highly important because empirically existing

Differences within the mainland Chinese press: a quantitative analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a content analysis of five newspapers selected from the Chinese daily press. The research was conducted as part of an international project designed to explore the relationship between journalistic self-conceptions and journalistic practice. This paper reports only upon journalistic practice, in particular the extent to which different models of journalism are present. The results of the analysis demonstrate, firstly, that while the concept of a uniform 'national media system' is of some utility in comparative studies, there are, even in the highly structured Chinese case, very significant differences within a single country. Secondly, it demonstrates that the common division of the Chinese press into a politically oriented party press and a market-oriented commercial press is inadequate to explain the identifiable differences between titles in the sample. A four grouping solution fits the data much better and demonstrates that there are newspapers that combine strong evidence of indicators of the party press with strong evidence of indicators of the commercial press. As a consequence, the claim that marketization will necessarily lead to conflicts with the party appears to be mistaken.

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China; newspapers;
journalism; party press;
infotainment

Introduction

This paper reports on the results of a content analysis of the journalistic models embodied in national news in five selected mainland Chinese newspapers. These journalistic models represent the concrete embodiments of journalistic practices and thus provide evidence as to the presence and extent of different kinds of journalism. This data advances two very closely related debates about media and journalism in China: that on the nature of the current media system in the mainland and the degree of differentiation that there is within its journalistic practices.

Given that the contemporary mainland Chinese media originated in a tightly controlled propaganda system, and are still structurally and editorially subject to control by the propaganda departments of different levels of the Communist Party of China (CPC), there is a strong body of research that investigates the extent to which it can be considered as a more

Road to international publications: an empirical study of Chinese communication scholars

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines factors motivating Chinese communication scholars to publish in international journals and how these factors shape their knowledge production. We also investigate these scholars' treatment of particularity, which is central to debates on Asian approaches to communication scholarship. Based on in-depth interviews with 22 Chinese communication scholars, this study finds that Chinese scholars choose to publish overseas both as a result of institutional incentives and an attempt to relieve themselves from institutional and sociopolitical constraints in China. While promoting international publications, these institutional and sociopolitical factors also markedly influence the knowledge production process, leading to the segregation of international and local knowledge production; scholars' active self-censorship; and their efforts to subject to perceived international biases. The study also demonstrates that while adopting an eclectic and pragmatic attitude toward particularity, Chinese communication scholars are generally cautious of advocating particularity. The attitudinal and behavioral eclecticism and institutional and sociopolitical constraints jointly result in a fragmented particularity in the international publication of Chinese communication scholars. The findings' implications for Asian approaches to communication studies are discussed.

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International publication; institutional constraints; particularity; Asian approaches to communication; Chinese communication studies

In recent years, the number of international publications authored by Asian communication scholars has increased rapidly (So, 2010). Chinese scholars have contributed significantly to this momentum (Zhang & Jia, 2015). According to Thomson Reuters' Web of Science, in the past five years (2011–2015), China (including Hong Kong and Macao) has become the fifth largest producer of papers published in communications journals archived by the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), after the United States, England, Australia and the Netherlands (retrieved on 6 March 2016).

Led by the flagship platform of communication scholarship in the region – *Asian Journal of Communication* – scholars have assessed the general status of Asian

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Examining public acquisition of science knowledge from social media in Singapore: an extension of the cognitive mediation model

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ABSTRACT

This study extends the cognitive mediation model (CMM) by examining the role of social media in cultivating public science knowledge. A sample of 901 Singaporeans was collected through an online survey panel. The results showed that the CMM could be applied to a social media context with a focus on science literacy. Specifically, the findings indicated that people with higher levels of surveillance gratification and social utility motivations tended to pay more attention and to elaborate more about science news that they encounter on social media. Likewise, people with greater social utility motivation tended to engage in greater interpersonal discussions on social media. Notably, attention to news on social media had an indirect association with science knowledge through news elaboration and interpersonal discussion on social media. Implications for theory and practice for science communication were discussed.

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Cognitive mediation model;
social media; motivation;
information processing;
science knowledge

In the past decades, many countries have witnessed rapid economic development due to the advances in science and technology. Singapore, a city nation with little land and few natural resources, has utilized its technological and entrepreneurial approaches to become economically successful at the international level. Science literacy plays a crucial role in promoting Singapore's technological and economic development. In response to the development, cultivating public science literacy has become an important agenda in Singapore. For example, science curriculum remains a core subject throughout the compulsory education in Singapore. Although school-based education can shape public interest and knowledge about science and technology, the contribution of formal education to individuals' long-term public understanding of science is very limited (Falk, Storksdieck, & Dierking, 2007).

A growing number of evidence supports the notion that the public learns about science and technology development through informal learning rather than formal education in schools (Anderson, Lucas, Ginns, & Dierking, 2000; Falk & Dierking, 2002). Among them, media are the main information source for the general public (Nelkin, 1995;

The CSR green halo effect on the corporate–public communication: an experimental study

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ABSTRACT

Environmental corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been a popular practice among corporations. However, the mechanism and effectiveness of environmental CSR in affecting corporate–public communication are still unclear. Against the theoretical backdrop of the ‘halo effect’ and through a controlled experiment with 742 participants from Hong Kong and mainland China, we find that: if a company’s environmental CSR activity receives higher support from the consumers, it is less likely for consumers to avoid advertisements endorsed by the company. The CSR green halo effect therefore exists. Moreover, consumers’ nationality and their three preexisting attitudes (general environmental CSR support, environmental beliefs, and favorability of products’ country of origin) are important moderators of the green halo effect and need to be considered in practice.

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Environmental CSR; Green halo effect; experimental study; corporate–public communication; online advertisement

Introduction

Evaluations made by human beings can hardly be objective. There is an ‘inevitable’ (Feldman, 1986) and ‘ubiquitous’ (Cooper, 1981) ‘halo error’ (Thorndike, 1920) that influences people’s opinions when rating a person or an object. This so-called halo effect surfaces itself from the obvious bias spilling over from people’s impressions of one thing to another. For example, in marketing research, a halo effect often refers to the phenomenon in which consumers extend their preference for or affection to one particular characteristic of a certain product, brand, or service to their evaluation of other attributes of the same product, brand, or service (see an early review by Beckwith, Kassarian, & Lehmann, 1978; see a structural model on examining the halo effects proposed by Holbrook, 1983). The appearance of a halo effect may simply reflect human beings’ tendency to maintain cognitive consistency (Abelson, 1968) and subconsciously distort their perceptual judgments (Thorndike, 1920).

In general, the halo effect can be categorized into two models: the general impression model and the salient features model (Cooper, 1981). The former refers to the seepage of a global evaluation of a person or an object into the evaluation of its particular traits. The