

Discussion on Political Participation under New Media Condition from the Perspective of Dewey's Communication Thought

Ranmeng Li

South China Normal University
Guangzhou, China 510632

Abstract—Dewey believes that communication has two meanings: transmission and sharing. Communication can build a community. The community can accommodate the opinions of individuals and form a consensus to promote democracy. He is a technological optimist and believes that the continuous development of communication technology can be better. The formation of community and public opinion will double the promotion of democracy. Its concept of technological optimism coincides with the environment in which new media are popular today. The universal use of new media in the Internet era was generally considered to be an important way to promote the democratic process and increase the political participation of the audience. The forms of public services such as government affairs microblogging and new media have also become increasingly popular. However, this paper argues that it is impossible to achieve socialist democracy from the perspective of media technology alone. There are still many problems in the political participation of audiences in the environment of new media.

Keywords—Dewey; new media; socialist democracy; political participation

I. INTRODUCTION

John Dewey had served as a professor at Michigan State University, University of Chicago. He has worked in philosophy, psychology and education. And Dewey never claimed to be a communication scholar. His identity was closely linked with the Chicago school. The Chicago school emerged from the wave of great changes in American society: the formation of urban communities, the intensification of racial conflicts, the rapid development of information technology, and the transformation... Both Dewey and the Chicago school have never seen communication as the transmission of information. The communication is regarded as an important tool for the construction of a social community. And it will undertake the mission of social improvement and construction. Looking at China's current society, the new media is becoming more and more in-depth. And the media is an important way for the public to participate in public affairs. Informatization is an important manifestation of the modernization of governance capabilities. Many scholars and industry professionals believe that the new Internet media will become the important driving force of the society. From the perspective

of Dewey's concept of communication, we could discuss political participation under the new media conditions of today's Chinese society. And it is still of practical significance.

II. DEWEY'S THOUGHT: FROM SPREADING TO DEMOCRACY

There are roughly two concepts of communication in Westerners' thoughts. One is the transmission concept and the other is the ritual concept. With a long history of transmission, Dewey is deeply influenced by this concept of communication. He has used this concept several times to define communication. In its sense, Dewey's transmission in his thoughts of communication is closer to the material transfer such as transportation. He has repeatedly used the industrial development to promote the convenience of transportation and promote communication as an example to explain the connotation of the dissemination. "The United States has 10,000 mile traffic and must have such a weapon of transportation to enable people from all over the country to communicate with each other. The goods are easy to circulate and the emotions are easy to contact. [1] Dewey's second-level understanding of communication is also the essence of his concept. It refers to the sharing. In Dewey's case, communication not only has the function of transmission, but also has the function of reaching consensus through sharing. Dewey believes that communication is sharing of experience. People can achieve the sharing of experience through communication. And then, it could become new organic entity. Dewey believes that thoughts can form public opinion and promote the process of social democracy through the sharing process.

John Dewey believes that communication constitutes a social community. And the social community will promote the implementation of democracy. The new media provide a platform for audiences to gather opinions and collision. The Internet becomes new type of community based on developed technologies.

III. PEOPLE'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION UNDER THE BACKGROUND OF NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY IN THE INTERNET AGE

Many technologists believe that the media is a metaphor and will create new cultural forms and social forms. As a new medium, the emergence of the network has indeed changed the contemporary social forms and cultural patterns. However, things are not like what Dewey predicted. He believes that the community will promote democracy. And the new society created by the network is contrary to Dewey's democratic views.

A. *Widespread Dissemination of Democratic Ideas in the Context of New Media*

The Internet is transmitting in the form of conquering space and time. Due to the rapid transmission of information, the global village is increasingly formed. And people have obtained a large amount of swift information from the Internet.

Taking the questionnaire on the democratic consciousness of college students as an example, in 2006, the network accounted for 33% of the cognitive process of their own knowledge of democracy. In 2012, this proportion had increased to 60%. [2] The dissemination of non-governmental popular science knowledge has also evolved from a single solid science and technology association into a new situation where cash networks, television, newspapers, and social movements coexist in multiple channels. The authors take the famous folk science organization Squirrel Association as an example. Its official account on the Sina Weibo platform has 800,000 fans, which is equivalent to the circulation of top 30 of the newspapers nationwide. The internet makes information quick and cheap.

In addition to the transmission of democratic information and ideas, many government departments in China have also used the new media platform to carry out government affairs activities, which has greatly increased the degree of political participation of the audience. By the end of 2013, there were 100,151 government microblogs on the Sina platform, including 66,830 institutional microblogs and 33,321 public employees, an increase of approximately 40,000 over the same period of the previous year. In 2013, China's various government affairs microblogs have made great breakthroughs in terms of political level and geographical spread. The government affairs microblog has become one of the important ways for the government to open information. And it has provided important help for realizing the Chinese dream and promoting the socialist core values. It can be said that the emergence of the Internet has strengthened the two definitions of transmission and sharing of communication. The Internet has accelerated the speed of dissemination, enriched the content of communication, expanded the number of communicators, accelerated the formation of group opinions, and shared the formation of sharing.

The development of network technology has greatly reduced the barriers to exchange of opinions among people. The advent of the era of media has given the possibility of sending information and ideas. With the rapid promotion of

new technologies, on the one hand, government agencies actively use new media to enhance their image and accelerate the pace of information disclosure. On the other hand, the rapid development of public opinion has provided a tremendous boost to the optimization of public affairs. And it becomes an important force to monitor public power.

B. *The Mob in the New Media*

As mentioned above, the spread of democracy, freedom, and scientific thinking has become increasingly popular. And the exchange of views among people has become more widespread. The full information environment makes people contact different perspectives and thoughts. Public opinion has been increasingly formed. There are frequent incidents of monitoring and restricting public power through public opinion. Due to the development and popularization of new media technologies, the society has indeed achieved greater democratic improvement.

However, due to the reduced threshold of information disclosure in the media era, the number of netizens has expanded dramatically. On the one hand, the original culture and political quality of netizens have been uneven. And the mob in the new media environment has gradually emerged.

1) *"Pornographic messages" is highly sought:* On the one hand, the fragmented nature of the spread information on the Internet has shaped the value orientation of the Internet's fickleness, surface layer, profits, pornography and explosions. The Internet lacks effective value guidance. Judging the information or viewpoint is not based on its scientific nature. It is based on the number of netizens holding this view.

2) *Anonymity becomes hotbed of cyber violence:* In addition, due to the anonymity of the Internet, it is difficult to blame some irresponsible remarks. And some netizens pursue stimulative fictional information. As a result, the Internet information is promiscuous. It is difficult to discern. And it has great influences on the value of the Internet's dissemination of information.

3) *Fragmentation information is contrary to rational thinking:* Finally, due to the limitations of the nature of the Internet media, the audience has developed fragmented, superficial reading and thinking habits. Such thinking habits are incompatible with the profound and rigorous needs of the democratic process.

When a member of given occasion has both the disappearance of individual personality and the feelings of thought focusing on two characteristics of same thing, these members constitute common group. [3] Gustav Le Pen does not believe that the wisdom of the group is composite or average of the wisdom of the members. In his opinions, due to the instincts of human instinct, the mutual transmission of group emotions, and the group's suggestive effects, the group would be primitive and barbaric. And the judgment ability and decision ability wouldn't rise, and it would decline.

The emergence of the Internet provided evidence for Gustav Le Pen's point of view. Netizens in the Internet space

have all faded their personal colors. They often pay attention to a hot topic at the same time. Therefore, netizens form a group. At this time, group characteristics began to appear. And human primitive emotions such as violence and anger were activated by the anonymous network. The advantage of quantity made these emotions quickly spread in the cyberspace. And the gradual emergence of online propaganda means deliberately imposed on group members. It implies that the IQ and intelligence of the online community are rapidly collapsing. The quality of public opinion on the Internet is worrying.

IV. THE NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY PROMOTE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

The active verification of the Internet's view of Dewey's communication has stopped here. As we continue to dig deeper into the relationship between the Internet and democratic practices, we quickly discover that the Internet is moving away from Dewey's imagination of the community. And it is running in the opposite direction. Harold Innis, a communication scholar, believes that the changes in communication technology have undoubtedly produced three results. They have changed the structure of human interest, the type of symbols, and the nature of the community. The new communication technology of the Internet has provided evidence for Innis's prediction. [4]

From the print media to the television media, people's criteria for judging information have changed from usefulness to fun. In the Internet age, people's evaluation criteria for information have become exaggerated and unbelievable. The valued and eyeball information has become the most popular information in the Internet age. The network has greatly reduced the cost of communication. However, the reduction in the cost of communication did not bring about the deepening and sharing of the communication. However, it intensified the redundancy and noise of the information. The Internet has changed the audience's evaluation of information by its rapidity and richness of communication. Among the vast online information, the audience prefers violence, pornography, or highly entertaining news. The author personally believes that the rapid development of new media has not weakened the audience's rational thinking ability to a certain extent. And it has transformed their interest and taste into fragmentation and vulgarization. Freud believes that civilization advances on the premise of suppressing human instincts. The primary goal of man is full satisfaction of various needs, and civilization is based on the complete abandonment of this goal. [5]

V. DIFFICULTIES OF PUBLIC POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Based on optimism expectations, the scholars generally regard technology as the progress of human civilization. And they are full of hope that new media will drive contemporary audiences to participate in it. It should be pointed out that the rationality and objectiveness required for the democratic process are inherently contrary to human instinct. Therefore,

it is more ideal to attempt to simply use new media technologies. It would satisfy human instincts and promote arguments against democratic progress.

A. *The Unrealistic Nature of Technological Optimism*

It is generally believed that technology can bring greater order to the world. However, the fact is exactly the opposite. Technology cannot be created. And it will also consume more resources. In the new media technology, people discover that the materialized delivery has failed to meet the needs of mankind and facilitated the use of the Internet. People freely expressed their opinions on the Internet. And it gradually threatened the authority and interests of the ruling class. And the rulers once again used more advanced technologies. The technology is used to build the network. Various anti-engineering technologies such as over-the-top walls have emerged. Technology cannot fundamentally solve the problem. However, we can only cover it with greater contradictions. We should soberly see that technology is only a converter. To solve a contradiction would produce greater contradictions. Therefore, optimism about technology is certainly dangerous and impractical.

B. *The Dilemma of New Media Entering into People's Political Participation in China*

In addition to above rational critique of technological optimism, many of China's existing problems also raise questions about media optimism and democracy.

1) *Ordinary audiences lack political literacy*: From the founding of New China to the reform and opening up, China's political formation has a rigid and stereotypical "leftist" phenomenon. It has overemphasized class consciousness. And people's political and cultural life is extremely poor. Their ideological activity has been imprisoned. After reform and opening up, China's work focus has been on the socialist economic construction. It has stimulated the enthusiasm of Chinese people to participate in public affairs. The popularization of the Internet and new media technologies has opened the door for the people to express their opinions. Therefore, the public opinion of the Internet is unprecedentedly prosperous.

Much false information such as rumors spread widely in the new media space. Compared with developed countries such as Europe and the United States, most Chinese citizens are seriously lacking in civic education. There is a lack of awareness in modern civil society such as citizenship and participation.

2) *The violence of new media*: Since the reform and opening up, China's socialist construction has made major achievements. However, all kinds of conflicts in the Internet space are also intensifying. And cyber violence, public opinion rumors, public trials, personal information abuse and information fraud have created huge obstacles to the development of public space in new media.

VI. CONCLUSION

The idea of relying solely on media innovation to promote social democratic participation has many inconveniences. It turns out that the development of new media technologies will greatly promote public political participation and the establishment of social communities. The government agencies should speed up legislation and purify the Internet's new media space. And the Internet governance rules would be compliant. The new media political participation would be well-documented. And new media will become an important way to promote public participation.

A. To Use Media Technology to Popularize Democratic Consciousness

The popularity of multimedia technology and media terminals has greatly reduced the acceptance and delivery costs of media information. The convenience of information acceptance has made it increasingly possible for the audience to receive civic education. For example, the microblogging live broadcast of Bo Xilai's case and the announcement of Li ** ... The new media provide a good platform for the broad masses to receive citizenship and legal education.

B. To Use Media Technologies to Optimize Governance

More and more government agencies in China have begun to use new media technologies such as Weibo, Wechat, and online press conferences to interact with the public. The masses would exercise their own right to know the things and participate in politics through the new media technology. And the governments departments also use new media technologies to listen to public opinion improve work style and work efficiency. The rational use of new media technologies will lay a solid foundation for positive interaction between the people and the government.

REFERENCES

- [1] Hu Yiqing. Re-speaking. On the communication of the Chicago school. [M]. Beijing. China Encyclopedia Press, 2007-5
- [2] Yang Yuhuan. Democratic consciousness of college students [D]. East China Normal University, 2006-4
- [3] Gustav Le Pen. The mob. [M]. Beijing. New World Press, 2010-1
- [4] Neil Bozeman. The elimination of childhood [M]. Guilin. Guangxi Normal University Press, 2004-5
- [5] Sigmund Freud. On the culture [M]. Beijing International Culture Press, 2001-1-4