

Media and Politics

On 15 June 2012, during the 65th Annual Conference of WAPOR (World Association of Public Opinion Research) held in Hong Kong, there was a panel session dedicated to “Media and Politics”. Five presentations were made and four of them are summarized in this article.

“The Influence of Trust in Mainstream Media and Political Anxiety on Intention to Listen to a Political Satire: A Case of South Korea”

- Minchul Kim, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA
- Ji Eun Kim, Chung-ang University, Korea

This presentation discusses an Internet-based political talk show in Korea named “Na-ggom-su” (or “I’m a Weasel”), which was full of uncensored satires to Korean political figures, and has brought huge impact on the South Korean politics. The presenters analyze two external factors on the intention of listening: trust in mainstream media and political anxiety.

Media trust refers to the public’s expectation that the mainstream media would report news in an objective and fair manner. It is generally believed that people discontented with mainstream media are more likely to tune into alternative sources. As for political anxiety, it refers to the fear of threats to one’s value and ideology, and the presenters hypothesize that public would increase consumption of alternative media sources in order to reduce the uncertainty.

A total of 436 participants completed an online survey. Findings revealed that trust in mainstream media was negatively associated with the intention to listen to “Na-ggom-su”, but no evidence was found regarding political anxiety. Meanwhile, for those who perceive mainstream media to be untrustworthy, their intention to listen to the alternative political talk show do not vary with the level of political anxiety whereas among those who trust mainstream media, their intention to listen increases as political anxiety increases.

However, heavy dependence on convenient sampling and heavy distrust among study participants may prevent the generalizability of this study.

“Media-Political Parallelism as an Indicator in Studying Mediocracy”

- Svetlana Bodrunova, St. Petersburg State University, Russia

The presenter puts forth a methodology of quantitative measurement of Media-Political Parallelism (MPP) in comparative perspective in the context of mediocracy studies. Seven parameters of measurement were proposed and three national cases (Germany 1998, UK 2005, Italy 2006) were investigated to show variations of the methodology. For estimation of party policy positions, the Manifesto Project dataset was used; for media, a special scale was created.

MPP is the degree to which the structure of the media system paralleled that of the party system. Yet, there is no shared or even discussed methodology of MPP measurement. The presenter thereby devised a research scheme by putting MPP in the context of mediocracy studies based on the premise that in established democracies, politics is no longer possible without involvement of media which becomes the “inevitable third element” between political system and citizenship, thus creating media democracies.

Findings indicated that nationally, in all the cases except the right-hand side of the spectrum in Germany in 1998, media spread follows electoral spread. This may have two explanations: either newspapers follow the position of “median voters” or have a degree of influence upon voting behavior (which seems more probable). In Italy, political papers show results very differently from generalist papers and illuminating in terms of national political discourse. Comparatively, the majoritarian UK showed higher MPP rate than “semi-majoritarian” polarized Italy and corporatist Germany but, contrary to expectations, Germany equals Italy or shows even higher parallelism.

Methodologically, non-statistical secondary data on perceived media bias show results comparable to data gathered by empirical research and may be used for comparative studies. In the case of Britain, estimated readership figures show predictability similar to average circulation figures.

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“Media Credibility and Its Correlate with the Popularity of the Ruling Party”

■ Syed Arabi Idid and Saodah Wok,
International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia

This study examines the relationship between media credibility and the popularity of the ruling party in Malaysia. A survey was conducted among voters nation-wide asking for their evaluation of the credibility of different media, namely newspaper, television and Internet. Respondents indicated which party they would vote for if elections were to be held “tomorrow”. Data was also collected on the amount of media coverage given to the respective political parties during the election campaigns using the agenda setting model.

Results revealed that when the credibility of newspapers and television declines there is also a decline in the popularity of votes obtained by the ruling party. On the other hand, the use of Internet and the trust voters have on the use of the Internet are on the rise.

The relationship between mistrust of the media and the popularity of the ruling party is best reflected in how voters perceive the media. When voters have more faith in the ruling party they have more trust in the newspapers and televisions perceived by them to be influenced or controlled by the ruling party.

Trust in the Internet is somewhat different as it is not perceived to be controlled by the government or the ruling party. The freeness of the Internet enables the floating of ideas. Voters would be able to discern for themselves the issues that they perceive to be true and make their own decisions.

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“Explaining Media Trust from Partisanship, Ideology and Their Interaction”

■ Yang Liu, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

This presentation investigates the role of ideology and partisanship in influencing media trust in American society and then examines their interaction to unravel how ideology

exerts influences on people in different parties and with different ideological orientations.

Mass media in America has long been accused of liberal bias. Public distrust of the news media is one of the most hazardous political challenges now facing Americans. This study seeks to find out the relationship between the two.

Partisanship is one powerful indicator in explaining political trust and has been adopted to interpret public confidence in mass media, while ideology refers to the concept that structures one’s political world.

The presenter measured the public confidence toward mass media based on the longitudinal data of General Social Survey (GSS) from 1975 to 2010. The survey asked a series of questions on institutional confidence on yearly basis with a few exceptions on a two-year interval.

In individual-level analysis, findings unveiled that Republicans are less confident with mass media compared to Democrats, and that Conservatives show less confidence than Liberals. With regards to the interaction between ideology and partisanship, it was found that ideological views are more important to Republicans than to Democrats in evaluating media confidence. Likewise, Conservatives are more inclined than Liberals to adopt ideological scheme.

In aggregate-level analysis, the percentage of conservative Republicans is highly correlated with the average confidence towards mass media across the years, which implies that increasing number of conservative Republicans is one of the sources of declining trust in the media.

Due to limited number of data points, only simple correlation between each pair of variables was studied, instead of regression and correlations between aggregate-level independent variables. Thus, we should be very cautious about the interpretation and generalization of the findings.

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