

UNIVERSITY OF ESWATINI

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

2018/2019 EXAMINATION QUESTION PAPER: MAIN

TITLE OF PAPER: MASS COMMUNICATION THEORY

COURSE CODE: JMC 231

TIME ALLOWED: THREE (3) HOURS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. ANSWER ANY THREE (3) QUESTIONS
2. EACH QUESTION CARRIES TWENTY (20) MARKS

Question One

Discuss the key assumptions of the transmission/process school of communication. Use Shannon and Weaver, Lasswell, Gerbner, and Westley and McLean's models to illustrate your answer. Show how each model enhances the transmission argument.

Question Two

Describe and discuss the following Normative Traditions of Public Communication developed by Christians *et al* (2009). Your answer should show both the historical and philosophical origins of these traditions.

- The Corporatist tradition
- The Libertarian tradition
- The Social Responsibility Tradition
- The Citizen Participation Tradition

Question Three

Carefully read the Op-ed article attached as Annexure 1 and answer the following questions.

- (a) The article takes for granted particular assumptions of the agenda-setting concept and the role of political elites and the mainstream media in setting the public agenda. Identify the key assumptions of the agenda-setting concept present in the article.
- (b) According to the article, how does the Trump administration achieve this agenda-setting role? Your answer should identify the techniques and contexts that have enabled this development.
- (c) The article makes key assumptions about the audiences of the media and political messages. How does the article view audiences? Provide a critique of the article in relation to its conceptualisation of audiences.

Question Four

Discuss the main features of the culturalist (reception) tradition of audiences. To what extent does the tradition address the loopholes left by the powerful effects tradition?

Question Five

The media has been often conceptualised through the metaphor of a 'mirror'. Essentially that the media mirrors some reality out there. What are the main assumptions of the Pluralist and Marxist traditions in their understanding of 'objective reality'? What are your views?



ANNEXURE 1: TIME LIST MAIN

A war of perceptions and emotions

By Qiu Zhibo Source:Global Times Published: 2018/10/5 11:31:01

Parallel to the ongoing trade war, there is another war which deserves our urgent attention and requires immediate joint action before it reaches a point of no return. That is the escalating and growing war of perceptions and emotions.

Alarmingly, the current war of perceptions is no longer about ideological divisions like in the Cold War, but is often fed by impulses, incomplete facts, fake news, biases, prejudice, rumors and suspected conspiracies, predominantly driven by a wide range of negative emotions and personality traits including anger, anxiety, distrust, confusion, ignorance, arrogance and close-mindedness.

In other words, we are not fighting against objective facts and real interests, but a projected enemy and problems based on unfounded perceptions - how we interpret the external world through our bounded rationality and limited cognitive process drawn on previous experiences, knowledge and perceptions. In this process, if people are reluctant and ignorant to learn new facts, new information and new perspectives, if people consciously or unconsciously self-censor and discourage alternative views, if people are always surrounded by like-minded or "seemingly" like-minded persons, an "echo chamber" is molded into a vicious cycle of reinforcing existing perceptions and silencing alternative voices.

That's unfortunately what is happening to the US. To use the jargon created by the Wall Street Journal and Foreign Affairs, an "emerging consensus" is uniting the polarized partisan divide: "the country (the US) is at imminent risk of being overtaken by China." And it is followed by an appalling call that authoritarian regimes are "interfering" the institutions of democratic societies. This emerging consensus spreads and resonates in the engulfing "echo chamber" from the Trump administration and political elites to the intellectual and media community. Increasingly, you hardly hear diverse views, angles and even facts on US-China relations. Instead, repetitive narratives, similar agenda setting, "evidence" and "quotes" are shared and justified in US government reports, think tank discussions, academic commentaries and media coverage. In each issue related to China, a fixed set of perceptions, narratives and policy positions are repeated and echoed in this loop. As the recent Foreign Policy article discussed, the diversity of the US policy discussions has been significantly discouraged under this administration. In this "echo chamber", alternative views are ignored, distrusted and denounced. This further discourages inputs from alternative sources to the current policy discussions.

This tendency can be attributed to three factors: political conformity, problematic cognitive process and social anxiety.

First, political conformity often converges both elite and public views towards the political beliefs of the incumbent administration through the powerful institutions in all aspects of our lives. Our behavior, beliefs and opinions are often unconsciously driven by the human tendency to conform to peers in a group or society. Through multiple political, economic and social institutions, political elites are in a dominant position to shape public opinion, particularly on foreign affairs due to the agenda setting effect and information asymmetry. In the US, the general

education curriculum attaches limited attention to learning about foreign countries outside the Western Hemisphere. As a result the American public often seems to be "ignorant" about the basic geography, sociology, political economy and history of foreign countries. While the general public has limited information channels and motivations to know about foreign affairs, a few journalists and politicians through reports and speeches can easily manipulate and dominate the policy positions towards foreign countries such as China. When we talk with Americans and Europeans who have never been to China, we are often surprised at how outdated and biased their views are on China, as if their news and information sources have not been updated.

The distinctive leadership style of the Trump administration amplified the power of political conformity. Many scholars have criticized Trump's closed decision-making circle and overwhelming dependence on a small group composed of family members and a few military figures. President Trump is seemingly satisfied that he is surrounded by "like-minded" staff and partners (as the language he used repeatedly). This closed circle creates the classic groupthink to filter and denounce alternative views. To gain political resources and political attention, many of the other political institutions have adapted to stay relevant and useful for the administration.

The current US leadership style is gradually changing from democratic to militant. However, as the President often dominated media agenda and public attention, his agenda setting easily becomes the national agenda setting, from media coverage to what scholars and common people on the street talk about the next day.

When the "worst nightmare" becomes daily life, people unconsciously tend to get used to the status quo. The recent economic growth has done a great favor for the current administration and the President's popularity has increased compared with the first few months of his term. However, people often have "psychological biases" to correlate and associate phenomenon with the explanations and reasons behind. The economic growth and reduced unemployment could be the immediate effects of Trump's trade and tax policies, but it could also be an accumulated effect of the past administrations' macro-economic policies. Also, the public fails to understand that short-term growth might be at the cost of long-term economic recession and social chaos.

Second, in the information age, our cognitive process becomes problematic. Our quality reading and analytical thinking time have been dramatically reduced as our attention span is shortened by the fragmented information explosion. We focus on immediate emotional stimuli which quickly triggers our automatic responses drawn from previous experiences and perceptions. Based on very limited information, often one-sided stories, we spontaneously rush into emotion-driven conclusions.

Increasingly, rather than reading, the public relies on shorter videos and political entertainment shows to understand foreign affairs and form their political opinion. This is a short cut for human cognition. We become lazy to think on our own. Our minds are easily manipulated in an audio-visual setting.

This is a dangerous tendency and habit. In these political videos, our information inputs are well-produced political opinions by adept speakers with strong emotions and personal biases rather than clear and objective facts on the paper.

These "gut feelings" are often based on previous perceptions, biases and personal experiences, rather than taking time for rational thinking after exploring and proceeding diversified information, views and perceptions.

Political campaigns and media reports often feed this short-sighted human nature. As a result, our headlines are dominated by fake news,

partial facts, conspiracies and rumors with strong and contagious negative emotional stimuli such as threat, danger, crisis, suspicion and sabotage. US cultural products such as movies, novels and songs are full of biases and stereotypes of foreign figures.

This over-simplified perception could easily drive people into a black and white attitude towards other countries - friend or enemy, war or peace.

On one side, as the US mainstream media invests less on the profit-losing international news, the quality and depth of media coverage is shrinking. On the other side, the public become more likely to turn to singular and often biased sources. According to a Pew survey, almost 40 percent American adults only use Facebook for news. Many have already said that the "invincible wall" on Facebook have already separated the public into blocks of like-minded groups. This informational and cognitive segregation fans extreme thoughts.

Third, collective social anxiety of a perceived danger often results in scapegoating a common external enemy - the classic solution to redirect the attention from internal problems and unite partisan divide. In this closed and extreme "echo chamber," the US is creating many "enemies" in their mind and fighting perceived wars which do not exist.

The "enemies" are projected from its own fears, confusions, failures, weaknesses and problems. Psychologically, the obsession to scapegoat China for everything is a way to avoid addressing the real social concerns of US society.

To understand the Trump administration, we need to understand authoritarian leadership and followers. Authoritarians often harshly divide the world into "in-groups" and "out-groups." They are punitive, ruthless and apathetic toward out-groups. And they project, denounce and punish out-groups for their own failures and weaknesses.

Living in a black-or-white world, authoritarians are belligerent, hunting for violent confrontation and strong emotional (often negative and aggressive) stimuli to temporarily escape the emptiness of their lives and attract others' attention. Driven by extreme thoughts and actions, they constantly change their views and attitudes from one extreme to the other. For things which they cannot perceive or explain, authoritarians crave for conspiracies, sabotage, rumors and darkness, as they lack belief in love, tenderness and trust.

Consequently, the US projects its confusion and weaknesses to others - Chinese firms, Chinese products, Chinese students, Chinese media, Chinese scholars and the Chinese government. China is the target, but this target can be changed easily to any other country. All these "enemies" are not the real concerns and solutions of US society. It is in the interest and emotional needs of the American people that the US government redirect back their attention and actions to domestic issues such as immigration policy, political polarization, identity confusion, democratic decay, and lower social investment in education and technology.

The author is an independent researcher and political consultant, focusing on China's foreign policy, industrial policy and overseas investment. She holds degrees from Peking University and the University of Cambridge, and is currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Oxford. opinion@globaltimes.com.cn

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