

# The Influence of Presumed Media Influence on News Sharing among Polarized Audience: A Korean Context

Jinah Lee<sup>1</sup> and Kwangho Lee<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Journalism, Media & Communication Studies, Keio University,  
2-15-45 Mita, Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan  
Jina@keio.jp

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Letters, Keio University, 2-15-45 Mita, Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan  
e-office@keio.jp

**Abstract.** Along with increasing selective exposure to the congruent political information, selective sharing of political information might foster political polarization. The study explores political information sharing on social media in Korea, with a focus on the difference between individuals with conservative and liberal political orientation and their perception to conservative and liberal media, based on the research on presumed media influence (PMI) and hostile media perception (HMP). In the survey, we measured political orientation, HMP, and PMI of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on in-group such as supporters for pro-attitudinal party, out-group such as supporters for anti-attitudinal party, and political centrists, political knowledge and so on. Results showed two types of political information sharing, promotive and defensive, based on PMI of pro- and counter-attitudinal media. The implication for the study of PMI and selective sharing would be further discussed.

**Keywords:** Polarization, Presumed media influence, Hostile media perception.

## 1 Introduction

With the increasing use of search engines and social media, people have become increasingly exposed to information that is consistent with their political orientation and reinforce their political beliefs and attitudes [7, 10]. The Pew Research Center [6] highlighted differences between conservatives and liberals in the US in terms of acquiring information and interacting with people about political issues. With regard to discussing politics online and/ or with friends, people were more likely to interact with like-minded people. It is argued that selective exposure to congruent information causes political polarization [10], which in turn would be a serious threat to the democratic society.

Korean society has faced confrontation between conservatives and liberals, since the impeachment of the then President of South Korea in 2017, triggered by a series of political scandals. Along with traditional mass media, conservative and liberal online media including podcasts and YouTube channels have increasingly appealed to people in recent times. The study examined political information sharing on social media, with an emphasis on the difference between individuals with conservative and liberal political orientation and their perception to conservative and liberal media in

Korea, based primarily on the literature on presumed media influence (PMI) [1] and hostile media perception (HMP) [5, 8, 11].

## 2 Related Work

As Gunther and Storey noted [1], media research has been centered on direct influences of media, but it is also needed to examine indirect effects to understand the process of media influence. Originally derived from researches of the third-person effect, PMI refers to perceived influence of media message on others that can change the perceivers' own attitudes and behaviors [1]. In prior work, Lee indicated general support for the third-person effect in the context of conservative and liberal media in Korea [3]: Both conservatives and liberals showed high third-person effect of incongruent media on out-group members. It is also worth noting that both conservatives and liberals perceived high third-person effect of incongruent media on political centrists.

HMP is a perception that reports of news media on an issue are biased against the perceivers' own attitudes or beliefs [11]. Partisans tend to perceive media content as biased against their viewpoint [8]. In prior work, Lee showed HMP based on political orientation, and the perception cause strong distrust in media and media cynicism in Korea [4]. In regard to news sharing, people could engage with political news and express their political views by sharing political information on social media [12], but it appears to be sharply polarized as seen in political information seeking. Shin and Thorson showed the US partisans selectively share fact-checking messages, and republicans were more likely to show out-group negativity and hostility toward fact checkers than Democrats [9]. Considering changing political landscape in Korea and previous researches, this study aims to explore the influence of HMP and PMI of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on in-group and out-group.

## 3 Methodology

The data was a part of online survey on "Political Attitude and Media Use" conducted in January 2019. A total of 1,075 Internet users residing in the metropolitan area in Korea participated in the survey. We measured political orientation, PMI, HMP, political knowledge, and political orientation of friends on social media. With regard to PMI, respondents were asked about their PMI of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on supporters for pro-attitudinal party, supporters for anti-attitudinal party and political centrists. The study categorized respondents who answered "extremely conservative" and "moderately conservative" as "conservatives" (Male: n=121, Female: n=74) and respondents who rated "extremely liberal" and "moderately liberal" as "liberals" (Male: n=184, Female: n=201) on a five-point scale that assessed self-designated political orientation.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

We conducted a series of multiple regression analyses to examine the relative predictive power of PMI of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on political information sharing of pro-attitudinal media on social media. The predictor variables included gender, age, political knowledge, the degree of having like-minded friends on social media, HMP, PMI of pro- and counter attitudinal media (See table1). For PMI of pro-attitudinal media, both conservatives and liberals with higher PMI on political centrists were significantly more likely to share political information of pro-attitudinal media (Conservatives:  $\beta = .223$ ,  $p = .010$ , Liberals:  $\beta = .178$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Liberals with higher PMI of liberal media on supporters of conservative party were significantly more likely to share information of liberal media as well ( $\beta = .212$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This type of news sharing can be referred to as ‘promotive sharing’. In contrast, liberals who perceive higher PMI of counter-attitudinal media, namely conservative media, on political centrists had a tendency to share political information of liberal media, which was a certain trend toward significance ( $\beta = .096$ ,  $p = .093$ ). This can be labeled as ‘defensive sharing’. It is interesting to note that liberals with higher PMI of conservative media on supporters of conservative party was significantly less likely to share political information of liberal media ( $\beta = -.208$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The result shows that liberals do not see any point in seeking to persuade conservatives.

The result also revealed, both conservatives and liberals who have more like-minded friends on social media were more likely to share political information of pro-attitudinal media, which was close to a marginally significant level respectively (Conservatives:  $\beta = .132$ ,  $p = .060$ , Liberals:  $\beta = .095$ ,  $p = .053$ ). This tendency is consistent with the ideas of ‘the spiral of silence’ [2] and the presence of social supporter in the field of mass communication and social psychology. In addition, the result indicated a significant relationship between political knowledge and political information sharing for both conservatives ( $\beta = .186$ ,  $p = .016$ ) and liberals ( $\beta = .105$ ,  $p = .043$ ): Those who have higher political knowledge were more likely to share political information of pro-attitudinal media. With regard to HMP, there was no significant relation contrary to our expectation. Overall, our study highlighted two different types of political information sharing, promotive and defensive, based on PMI of pro- and counter-attitudinal media. The findings provide us with an empirical evidence of the influence of PMI on polarized selective sharing process.

### Acknowledgement

This study was funded by Keio Institute of East Asian Studies.

### References

1. Gunther, Albert C., Storey, J. Douglas: The influence of presumed influence. *Journal of Communication*, 53(2), 199-215 (2003).

2. Noelle-Neumann, E., The spiral of silence a theory of public opinion. *Journal of communication*, 24(2), 43-51(1974).
3. Lee, Jinah: Political orientation and information behavior: How Korea's conservatives and liberals Consume and share political information? Paper presented at Keio Global Research Institute "Risk Society and the Media" Project International Symposium, How to Approach Risk Society: Theories and Case Studies (March 2, 2019).
4. Lee, Kwangho: Hostile media perception and media cynicism. *Institute for Journalism, Media & Communication Studies, Keio University, Media Communication*, 69, 85-95(2019). (in Japanese)
5. Perloff, Richard M.: A three-decade retrospective on the hostile media effect. *Mass Communication and Society*, 18(6), 701-729 (2015).
6. Pew Research Center Homepage, Political polarization and media habits. <https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/political-polarization/>, last accessed 2019/10/7.
7. Prior, Markus: Media and political polarization. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16, 101-127 (2013).
8. Schmitt, Kathleen M., Gunther, Albert C., Liebhart, Janice L.: Why partisans see mass media as biased, *Communication Research*, 31(6), 623-641(2004).
9. Shin, Jieun, Thorson, Kjerstin: Partisan selective sharing: The biased diffusion of fact-checking messages on social media. *Journal of Communication*, 67, 233-255 (2017)
10. Stroud, Natalie Jomini: Polarization and partisan selective exposure. *Journal of Communication*, 60(3), 556-576 (2010).
11. Vallone, Robert P., Ross, Lee L., Mark R.: The hostile media phenomenon: Biased perception and perceptions of media bias in coverage of the Beirut massacre. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 49(3), 577-585 (1985).
12. Weeks, Brian E., Lane, Daniel S., Kim, Dam Hee, Lee, Slgi S., Kwak, Nojin: Incidental exposure, selective exposure, and political information sharing: Integrating online exposure patterns and expression on social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 22(6), 363-379 (2017).

**Table 1.** Regression analyses predicting political information sharing of pro-attitudinal media

	Conservatives	Liberals
Gender <sup>a</sup>	.076	.027
Age	-.010	.156**
Political knowledge	.186*	.105*
Hostile media perception (HMP)	-.005	.073
The degree of having like-minded friends on social media	.132†	.095†
Presumed media influence (PMI) of pro-attitudinal media on		
Supporters for pro-attitudinal party	-.103	.040
Supporters for anti-attitudinal party	.089	.212***
Political centrists	.223**	.178**
counter-attitudinal media on		
Supporter for pro-attitudinal party	.120	.067
Supporters for anti-attitudinal party	-.010	-.208***
Political centrists	-.046	.096†
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.109**	.189***

† < .1 \*p < .05 \*\*p < .01 \*\*\*p < .001 <sup>a</sup> Gender was coded male=1, female=0