News, Media and Democracy: Social Responsibility in the News Media

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Introduction

The discussion of political topics among individuals and groups is referred to as political discourse. Public speeches, dialogues, media coverage, and Internet forums are examples of the various forms it can take. Because it is crucial in influencing public opinion and government policy, political discourse is a significant component of social responsibility. Greater understanding and co-operation among various groups of people can be encouraged when political discourse is marked by civil conversation. However, political discourse characterized by polarization, isolation, vulgarity and implicit violence can harm society, erode trust, undermine democratic institutions, and cause societal rifts (Mira, 2018). Political speech should therefore be influenced by social responsibility. This essay sets out to answer the question of whether we can look to past press critics to solve the dismal state of our current political discourse by addressing polarization, isolation, profanity, and implicit violence. We will look at writings on social responsibility in the news media, as well as Walter Lippmann's and John Dewey's views on the public and the crowd.

Polarization

An essential component in the current depressing state of political debate is the polarization of popular opinion (Mira, 2018). Finding consensus and moving forward on essential topics becomes challenging when people and groups become more and more firmly rooted in their ideologies and are unwilling to negotiate or be open-minded. The growth of social media and online echo chambers are two essential aspects that fuel polarization (Mira, 2018). These elements enable people to self-select into groups of like-minded people and to support their pre-existing views and perspectives. Such channels have allowed groups like the LGBTQ+

community and the BLM movement to thrive (Mira, 2018). The decline in confidence in established institutions and media has also contributed to polarization. This initiative has influenced many people to disregard facts and evidence in favour of conspiracy theories and political talking points.

Several things could solve the polarization of public opinion and enhance the political debate. Encouragement of communication with others who hold opposing ideas to comprehend their positions better is one of the most successful and tried therapies (Mira, 2018). This strategy promotes empathy, open-mindedness, and active listening. Second, institutions and the media should foster trust, which can be facilitated by educating individuals on the value of organizations and information sources. To lessen concerns and anxiety about change and to develop a stronger sense of shared identity and purpose, people should strive to promote diversity and inclusion. Nevertheless, the polarization of public opinion is a complicated issue that requires a range of approaches that work to decrease polarization, dismantle ideological barriers, and advance an inclusive, courteous, and productive political dialogue.

Isolation

The isolation of like-minded people from others who do not share their ideas, commonly referred to as "echo chambers," is another important reason for the current depressing condition of political dialogue (Masip et al., 2020). Echo chambers are restrictive and self-reinforcing environments that can be challenging to leave. They are created by social media algorithms and other variables that reinforce people's pre-existing views and attitudes (Masip et al., 2020). Peer pressure and group social norms are a couple of the things that lead to echo chambers. Social media sites and events have also actively encouraged such influences. Most social media algorithms favour material based on previous user activity (Masip et al., 2020). Platforms like

YouTube and TikTok frequently build appropriate preferences depending on the user's search history. People also desire information that supports their pre-existing thoughts and beliefs and, as a result, makes them feel good about themselves.

The media can promote exposure to many viewpoints to overcome the exclusion of like-minded groups and enhance the quality of political conversation. The public is only summoned into being when difficulties and issues arise due to individual citizens banding together to address the problems. As a result, his theory suggests that modern society's distractions prevent the development of a public; therefore, it is up to media professionals, social scientists, and teachers to unite and create a great community that focuses on actively seeking out and conversing with people and organizations with opposing opinions and paying attention to what they have to say. Jürgen Habermas posits that discourse ethics should be about a free exchange of ideas among individuals who are not worried about being persecuted or subject to censorship, bias, or preconception. It should also be about understandable, verifiable, and factual statements and where everyone has an equal opportunity to speak (Lippmann & Dewey, n.d.). Promoting critical thinking is another way to end the isolation of the like-minded People who are more capable of critical thinking will be better able to evaluate information and differentiate facts from fiction. As a result, such initiatives can dismantle obstacles and encourage civil, constructive political conversation that is also inclusive.

Profanity

Various circumstances cause the vulgar language that infiltrates contemporary political discourse. We may attribute most of the vulgarity we hear in today's political debate to the media and social media trends. Profanity is highly promoted on social media platforms like Twitter and

Facebook, according to Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) – a multidisciplinary approach that deals with communication between people via networked ICT devices (Irimba et al., 2020). CMDA views social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter as significant influences on ethnopolitical rhetoric, as a type of hate speech and an example of how profanity permeates modern political discourse. The term "ethnopolitical hate rhetoric" is used to characterize any speech activity in the form of postings or tweets meant to harm, intimidate, threaten, degrade, and disgrace people or advocate hatred and violence against groups based on their association with an ethnic or political organization (Irimba et al., 2020). However, most Facebook and Twitter users use reasonably neutral language, and a sizable percentage of individuals replicate openly and covertly violent and identity-based discriminatory content in speech activities.

The media also promote profanity because they lack a focus on factual reporting. News organizations frequently put speed and sensationalism ahead of accuracy, which causes disinformation and undermines public confidence in the media. If not impartial, the media's influence is typically negative. According to a current trend with most news stations, news can only trend if it is harmful. Most news outlets are, therefore, accustomed to reporting bad news. Furthermore, much information on social media sites like Twitter and YouTube encourages the use of vulgar language in political discourse. Lippmann wrote that modern citizens often feel like deaf spectators in the back row who are supposed to be paying attention to the mystery in the distance but cannot do so (Lippmann & Dewey, n.d.). The terrible part is that despite being impacted by what is happening, most people still act this way. Since most people are unaware of how to stop it, they have grown accustomed to seeing vulgar language in the media.

Individuals can, however, take measures to raise the standard of speech and encourage more civil and beneficial conversations. First, it is critical to acknowledge that political discourse frequently evokes strong emotions and passion and that participants often bring firmly held opinions and ideals to the discussion. Even if we disagree with them, it is necessary to respect these beliefs. Lippman postulates that journalists ought to be more professionally trained, educated, and unaffected by outside forces (Lippmann & Dewey, n.d.). His opinions may be used as part of solving the issue of profanity, as the media holds the biggest mantle in solving issues regarding profanity. Additionally, a high standard of speech should be expected from our elected officials and leaders. It entails chastising politicians for using derogatory language, making personal remarks about people, and requesting that they keep their comments on topic and have courteous, practical talks instead. By doing these things, society may succeed in fostering a political dialogue that is more courteous and peaceful.

Implicit violence

A fundamental problem that contributes to the current depressing state of political discourse is the existence of implicit violence in public discourse. Speech that attacks, demeans, or dehumanizes people can be used in ways that are frequently subtle (Masip et al., 2020). This kind of rhetoric can be a roadblock to fruitful dialogues, since it can intimidate, stifle, or invalidate others with opposing viewpoints (Masip et al., 2020). Promoting an atmosphere of civil discourse is one possible solution to the problem of implicit violence in public discourse.

Promoting media literacy is another solution since it enables people to notice latent violence in public discourse. People can better comprehend the power dynamics in public discourse and make more informed decisions about the conversations they engage in by

cultivating critical thinking skills and the capacity to recognize language meant to humiliate or invalidate. Finally, it is critical to expose implicit violence when we notice it (Masip et al., 2020). It entails speaking up when we overhear remarks meant to insult or belittle others and arguing for a more civil and fruitful discussion. We may contribute to developing a society that values civil dialogue and encourages more positive and productive political discourse by speaking out against implicit aggression.

Conclusion

Lippmann, Dewey, and other scholars contend that a multi-pronged strategy is needed to diagnose and address polarization, isolation, profanity, and implicit violence in public discourse. We can assist in removing these barriers and fostering a more inclusive, respectful, and productive political discourse by encouraging exposure to diverse perspectives, critical thinking, media literacy, respectful dialogue, transparency, accountability, and engagement in community and civic life. In the end, social responsibility is about realizing that everyone can influence the world around us and that what we do can significantly impact how a healthy society functions. Individuals and organizations may create a more just, equitable, and sustainable future for all by acting socially responsibly.

References

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