

The Media Logic of Community Building in the Post-epidemic Era: Dewey's Communication Thought and Its Contemporary Value

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Abstract: In the era of globalization, any public security and emergencies may spread to the world and have a serious impact on social development. Only by concentrating their efforts and building an interrelated community with a shared future can all countries improve their capabilities of responding to public crisis. Dewey believed that the key to community building lies in how to choose media to improve the level of human communication and enable them to reach consensus. News media cannot enable human beings to reach a deeper essential level and cultivate their ability to think and judge in response to public affairs; art media provides opportunities for people to improve their participation level, break through the shackles of superficial social interactions, and lead to deeper spiritual exchanges. Dewey and Marx had the same pursuit of spiritual communication and human liberation for all mankind. Dewey hoped that human society could develop into a "great community" with free communication and mutual understanding. Dewey's theoretical logic of using media research to promote community building provides valuable inspiration for the development of human society.

Keywords: Dewey; community; communication; art; media; globalization

1. INTRODUCTION

Barrier is a social problem that is still common in modern society. Dewey once had a great vision. He hoped that every country could break the "barriers" in its future development so that "all elements of society have

opportunities to develop freely, exchange freely, help each other, share feelings and exchange ideas and knowledge" (John, 2010a), "Each element" can contribute to society "according to his own ability". He also hoped that the world could have "free communication and free exchange" that "not only circulate material aspects, but also circulate spiritual aspects" (John, 2010b). Many years after his death, as he wished, the world has entered the era of globalization with free material circulation. However, free communication in spiritual terms is still far away from people, and various "barriers" in human thoughts still exist as a "landscape" in the real society.

We have seen in the COVID-19 epidemic, which is a serious crisis faced by mankind after World War II, smooth channels for releasing epidemic information on the one hand, but "ignorant" people who listen to various rumors and act irrationally on the other hand; the early warning of the epidemic on one hand, but the "poor" response that missed the best prevention and control period despite strong economic and technological strength. State managers have never found it so difficult to communicate with citizens and gain their support for public policies. It is also difficult for us to understand that despite the most convenient communication technologies and the most diverse media platforms in the world, the messages carried by these media are still difficult to break through "prejudices" and "barriers", which led to bigger cost for the entire human society to cope with this crisis. We have entered the post-epidemic era, but the thinking it has brought us never ends, because none of us can say that human society will not encounter the next crisis. Every scholar needs to think about how to break the "barriers" and enable people to communicate freely so that the crisis response capabilities of the entire human society can be enhanced. Communication can break down "barriers" and push human society toward a "great community". Dewey's discussions in "The Public and Its Problems" and other works may provide valuable enlightenment for scholars to think about the above issues.

2. THE CRISIS CAUSED BY THE LACK OF COMMUNITY: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND LOGICAL PREMISE OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

As an early theorist of modern communication studies, similarities in work areas and academic groups connected Dewey to other scholars such as Cooley and Park. Together they gave "great significance to recent advances in communication media technology in general, and each placed

the meaning he discovered at the center of his broader social doctrine" (Czitrom, 1982), and thus formed the Chicago School of Sociology & Communication. Dewey was the earliest scholar of the Chicago School to engage in research on social issues and communication theory.

Dewey focused his academic attention on social issues since he entered the University of Chicago. Dewey noted that with the development of railroads in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, Chicago became a transportation hub connecting the east and west of the United States. Convenient transportation stimulated the development of urban industry and commerce, and the prosperity of industry and commerce attracted immigrants to settle there. A large number of American people have entered modern factories and engaged in specialized industrial production. "What the worker in modern factory does is a very small part of a complex activity. What he sees is only a limited series of activities performed by individual parts of the machine. This situation is extremely typical of our social life as a whole" (John, 2015u).

Each worker in the factory can only recognize the special part of the work he is doing, but cannot understand the whole behind the special and the complex relationships behind the whole, or grasp the main processes of the entire work system from a macro perspective. In the long-term repetitive work, the thinking of these people tends to be blocked. In other words, people tend to regard what they are doing as what they want to do, and replace independent pursuits with unconscious desires. This aimless physical activity focuses people on repetitive work practices, which is not beneficial to the development of the mind.

The widespread popularity of mass cultural products in the industrialization era has resulted in the increase of the entertainment element in human nature, the decrease of political element and the weakening of the public's interest in public affairs that represent the sum of social relations. "The need for unity of action, and the desire for unity of opinion and sentiment, are achieved by organized propaganda and advertising" (John, 2015a). Mass media products provide "lubricant" to unify people's thoughts and emotions, and independent personalities are gradually replaced by unified emotions and thoughts provided by mass media groups and advertisers. "Our emotional life is fast, exciting and similar, without any individuality" (John, 2015b). Therefore, thinking is "superficial" and becomes a "formality," and people are included in organized business logic. Standardized mass media products give the public the illusory impression that the content they consume is reliable and consistent with the context of the times. In fact, they cannot gain valuable

inspiration from these standardized products. People are indulged in physical sensory enjoyment and become less creative." 'Creation' here refers to the ability to innovate, the ability to truly think innovatively" (John, 2015c). According to Dewey, the decline in creativity means that it is difficult for individuals to achieve spiritual independence. An individual who cannot achieve independence in thinking is difficult to make correct judgments on public affairs. Creativity and independent thinking and judgment complement each other.

The decline in individual creativity will hinder the development of thinking and affect people's ability to explore the essence and understand the truth. Dewey believed that the rapid development of industry characterized by standardization and mechanization had a profound impact on American society. The good side of it is that it has improved the external living environment of American people who entered a more superior urban living environment; while the negative impact is that this unified and mechanized feature has been infiltrated into the spirit and temperament of ordinary people, which becomes a metaphor for their thinking and action abilities. It has become difficult for individuals to "identify various values with judgment, think about what is better, what is bad, what is worse in a certain field at a certain period, and generally understand the reasons behind the good and the bad" (John, 2015d). As social participation of people living in big cities declines, it becomes difficult to make correct judgments and reflections on social and public affairs. "Few workers know what they are making or the significance of what they are doing"; (John, 2015e) "Those who appear to be in dominant positions and display their special talents in a high-profile manner are also buried. They may be financial and industrial giants, but only when people form a certain consensus on the significance of finance and industry in human civilization as a whole can they dominate their own souls" (John, 2015f).

"Newspapers such as 'Middletown' often assume that a 'bewildered' or 'confused' state of mind is a characteristic of our personality when reporting on American life" (John, 2015n). It has been difficult for the "Confused" Americans to control their own "souls" and reach a consensus on the overall meaning and value of human civilization. Although the United States has a strong material and industrial civilization, the shackles of the people's difficulty in reaching a consensus on the overall meaning and value of human civilization have determined the unpredictability of the prospects of American society. American society has transformed into a "big society", but it has not developed in the direction of a "great community". The absence of "community" has laid the foundation for a

"crisis" in the development of American society. Here we need to clarify the connotation and denotation of Dewey's community category, "As long as the results of joint activities are regarded as good by every individual participating in them, or the results of joint activities are regarded as good by every individual participating in them, or the realization of good inspires a positive will and effort, and its good can be shared by all; to this extent, a community emerges" (John, 2015t). Dewey regarded community as a social union that can stimulate human subjective initiative. It is a miracle of common life and shared experience established by social members based on common values, ideals, etc. Community can develop individual creativity and social participation capabilities, injecting vitality into social development.

Compared with the regional determination of community extension by Parker, who was also a member of the Chicago School, Dewey's community category has a broader extension. Families and scientific organizations may all develop into communities. Some basic communities formed in specific regions, such as rural communities and township communities, are more likely to become the driving force for social development. Dewey believed that the reason why early American society rapidly developed from a barbaric land into a vibrant country was closely related to "the imagination of the founders during the pioneer period and what could be realized or understood in a collection of autonomous communities and they're not too far away" (John, 2015r), and the basic community unit of township community plays an important role. In this kind of community, the American people can draw on the ideological wealth of other community members from different ages, cultural circles and professional experiences; a community environment of free communication provides them with opportunities to expand their horizons, think deeply, and form judgments about the common value and meaning of society. But unfortunately, when American society enters industrial civilization, all the essential and iconic life content of the community is lost. "Our laws, politics and the combined actions of people depend on this new combination of machines and money, resulting in the money culture that is unique to our time. The spiritual elements of our tradition - equality of opportunity, free association and mutual exchange - are eclipsed and disappeared" (John, 2015o).

Material culture has become the "master" of joint actions of the American people in the context of urbanization in the industrial era. The absence of iconic community life contents such as free communication and common sharing makes it difficult for the American people to reach a

consensus on observing values from the overall level of human civilization, thus becoming "a house divided upon itself" (John, 2015p). The body and the professional skills they possess belong to the industrial age, but in terms of thinking, they are far from able to bear the heavy responsibilities entrusted by this era. Individuals with superficial ideas are not only unable to have a correct understanding of social and public affairs, but also lose the lasting power of social development because they are unable to absorb new spiritual and cultural resources. "Individual understanding and judgment are expanded and enhanced, and all this can only be achieved through the process of communication between individuals and local communities" (John, 2015m). "Communication itself can create a great community. Our 'Babel' is not a figure of speech, but a symbol and icon; without it, it's impossible to share any experience" (John, 2015s). Dewey believes that the improvement of individual thinking ability depends on in-depth communication between the individual and the members of the community. Only when people are in a community environment can these abilities be expanded. Communication, as a shared social interaction and communication activity, communicates human ideas and ideals in the broadest sense. Communication activities that represent shared experience are the logical premise for creating communities, and even "great communities"; they are also the starting point of his academic logic for solving social problems through communication research. How to enhance communication through communication media, improve people's thinking level so that they can reach consensus, and cultivate and develop community has become the logical purpose of Dewey's communication research. The essence of his communication research is a kind of media research.

3. CONCERNS ABOUT COMMUNICATION THOUGHT: MEDIA RESEARCH WITH THE PURPOSE OF ENHANCING COMMUNICATION

Dewey believed that the American people living in the era of industrial civilization have been exposed to a media-rich environment since birth, and newspapers, television, etc. have become their main media platforms for obtaining social information. From the perspective of the top-level design of society, Jefferson established the tradition of free press and publication in the United States. He hoped that a free press and publication system could provide guarantees for the people to make correct judgments

on social and public affairs. In order to expand the scope of information available to its own people, American society even introduces European news organizations to its own country. "Cable TV has been paid to make available to us in considerable detail the speeches of a French public figure who predicted that the next great war would be more horrific than any that had come before. That war will be fought in Asia and other parts of the world, with the United States being the main spearhead of the attack. As this speech and related reports were delivered at that time, according to other reports, the French government was anxious about another disarmament conference in Washington" (John, 2015g). This report from France involves the international relations issues of the United States. French media quoted an opinion leader as saying that the United States would be the "spearhead of attack" in the next world war, so it was an unwise choice for the United States to propose disarmament at the Washington Conference. Dewey believed that these reports were "silly reports and rumors" (John, 2015h) from which it was impossible for the American people to understand the current situation of their country's international relations. Through investigation, he found that the statement in the French news that the United States would start a war with Asian countries was irresponsible.

It is difficult for the public to understand the essential aspects of society from news reports. Dewey believed that the news media supported by advanced technology should become an important force in cultivating and developing communities, but in real situations, the news media were unable to shoulder this important task. The ordinary people are not only unable to extract the essential meaning and value from news reports and establish ideas and concepts that are compatible with social development, but also unable to expand their knowledge and improve their thinking.

Dewey could not stay within the logical framework of the news media for further "exploration". "There is another aspect to Dewey's thinking on communication, as part of his metaphysical and aesthetic reflections" (Czitrom, 1983). As Czitrom said, Dewey thought about communication issues from a broader perspective, and the overlapping of multiple identities such as philosopher, esthetician, and artist allowed him to extend the scope of media thinking from an aesthetic standpoint, to include art, the oldest medium in the history of human society, in the scope of research. Dewey conducted multi-dimensional thinking on art media and traced its origins with diachronic logic. He conducted in-depth investigations into ancient art and found that mime and dance, which are called the source of drama, have been developed as part of religious

celebrations since their birth. As a concentrated display of human organizational life, religious celebrations are a confirmation of the essential power of early humans. Mime and dance express the essence of social public life in the form of appealing to people's perceptual activities, and present it to social members through performers during festivals. Social members not only rise to the understanding of the essential level of social life and enhance friendship, but also gain tremendous spiritual power through communication by the medium of mime and dance. This power enables people to participate in production and life with full enthusiasm.

Dewey also examined cave paintings with a longer history and found that most of these paintings preserved experiences closely related to human clan life. The important value of these murals to mankind is that it makes the clan's life experience more complete and continuous. Public affairs such as clan members farming and fighting wild beasts became more vivid and easier for people to accept through the expressions of early "artists". Using murals as a medium, clan members could not only learn rich experiences of living together, but also easily reach consensus with other members.

The artist is well aware of the audience's psychological acceptance habits and knows that people will always be tired of clichés. It is everyone's nature to gain a new way of perceiving the world and share it with others. Artists who are well versed in human psychological characteristics are more willing to present the true living conditions of human beings in novel ways through their own artistic creations, which makes their artistic works more "imaginative" in dealing with the relationship between people and the world they live in. Artists can always express objective reality in a relationship full of creative tension. Every classic work of art is in a creative relationship full of tension. This enables everyone to grasp social reality through the creative relationships displayed by art media, get new ways of touching the world through the creative relationships provided by artworks, and gain the meaning and value of civilization consistent with the context of the times in which they live, which provides a basis for human beings to reach consensus. Everyone may discover new "landscapes" from the rich experience contained in art, and find the common meaning and value of human social life in the in-depth exchange of shared experiences. Art media provides opportunities for people to break through the shackles of superficial communication and lead to deeper communication. There is no medium of art that is unsuitable for communication, which is the conclusion reached by Dewey in "Art as Experience". From a deeper logical level, Dewey's communication thought is manifested as a kind of media research with the purpose of enhancing

human communication. Multi-dimensional investigation provides him with a logical context and framework to analyze the characteristics of different media and propose a judgment on the effectiveness of artistic media in improving the level of human communication.

4. MEDIA SELECTION FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION: CONTEMPORARY ENLIGHTENMENT OF COMMUNICATION THOUGHT

The era in which Dewey lived has become "past tense". In the era of globalization, human communication channels are more developed. So does this mean that human society has broken down the "barriers" and moved towards the "great community" that Dewey expected? The answer is negative. We have seen that in the post-epidemic era, the barriers between people in various countries have not become closer due to reopening.

People do not have a common living environment where they can communicate freely in their daily lives. It is difficult for them to absorb spiritual nourishment from other members of society. The lack of communication makes it difficult to establish a relationship of mutual trust, so it is easy to understand that it is difficult to reach a consensus when encountering a real public crisis. In fact, it is not limited to these European and American capitalist countries. According to Dewey's positioning of community category, all those countries where there are "blocks" in communication, and it is difficult for the people to reach consensus on public affairs, are in lack of community spirit essentially. This means that in the future development of human society, cultivating and developing community will become very important. In other words, we need to focus our thinking on the issue of what kind of media to choose to break the "barriers" and enhance the exchange of ideas among people in the era of globalization. Globalization is an important premise in this issue. It means that the circulation of industries and capital between countries will be faster, the division of labor among enterprises in various countries will be more refined, and people's work rhythm will accelerate. Therefore, it is obviously unrealistic to expect entrepreneurs who control capital to give ordinary workers more time for face-to-face communication. In other words, the logic approach of enhancing human understanding to cultivate community through face-to-face oral communication and using language as a medium has no practical possibility. Another meaning of globalization is that every country that enters the globalization system has to face a wider

scope of social and public affairs, and its scope also includes international content. This requires members of society to have overall thinking and an international perspective when participating in public affairs.

This also means that when choosing media, we must not only consider the improvement of people's intellectual level and the cultivation of independent thinking ability; but also enable the people to fully understand the real situation in other countries around the world, so as to provide them with prerequisites for making correct judgments on public affairs. "With many manifestations of truth, the pursuit of freedom and perfection will have no special effect. Because it is argued that most of the public are not interested in learning and assimilating precise findings. However, unless these findings are read, it is impossible to influence public thinking and behavior; instead, they can only lie in isolation in a library niche, to be studied and understood by a few intellectuals. If the power of art is not taken into account, it is certain that people tend to accept the objection. A specialized and elegant form of expression can only attract people with higher cultural accomplishments, while remains strange to the public. The form of expression is fundamentally important, and is a matter of art" (John, 2015i). Dewey believed that the public was not interested in "free" scientific inquiry, although scientific media is a powerful tool for increasing intelligence and improving people's thinking and judgment ability. But due to its highly technical nature, "or being highly 'abstract', it actually means that its significance to human life is not worthy of consideration. All pure natural knowledge is technical, expressed in technical terms, and can only be accessible to a small number of people" (John, 2015j). Few people are willing to approach complex social and public affairs through abstract scientific media.

Dewey considered social science research reporting, as a form of professional investigation, to be the "relentless application of compilation and interpretation" of news far away from current events in society (John, 2015k). It is difficult for the public to understand the truth of what is happening in the world based on the "opinions" given by these profound reports derived from "old news". They would rather these investigative reports, which are not even as good as "news", lie in the library niche to be understood by "intellectuals" than willing to accept the "opinions" they give. Of course, this also reflects people's resistance to the so-called authority. Dewey believed that art can transform profound content about the essential aspects of social and public affairs into popular and novel forms that can be accepted by ordinary people. It provides an opportunity for people to not only accept "opposing opinions" but also improve their

critical thinking ability. Art is an important medium to enhance people's spiritual communication in the era of globalization. Although Dewey never experienced the era of globalization personally, his theories provided valuable insights for the cultivation and development of communities in this era. If we are only content to think about the above issues at a superficial level without in-depth questioning of the scope of artistic choices, it will still be difficult for art media to play its role in community building. As mentioned above, the cultivation and development of communities in the era of globalization essentially involves the issue of spiritual communication. Although art assumes the function of a spiritual communication medium, this does not mean that the public can establish ideas and concepts suitable for the era of globalization through the medium of artistic works in any region or scope, or they can not be bound by "prejudice" when participating in social and public affairs, or they break the "barriers" and enter the common life of society with a holistic thinking and international perspective (Report).

"Art expresses a deep attitude of adjustment, a fundamental idea and ideal of a universal human attitude, so that art specific to a civilization becomes a means of sympathetic access to the deepest elements of the experience of distant and foreign civilizations" (John, 2015l). The essence of human spiritual exchange lies in mutual learning. Dewey believed that the convergence content similar to one's own civilization is obviously not as important as the artistic works produced by "distant and foreign civilizations" with greater differences in "adjusting" individual concepts and thoughts. Dewey believed that the selection of works of art could be expanded to the field of classic works of art bred by foreign civilizations. In this way, it is possible for the people to break through the "intolerance" brought about by the "centrism" and "superiority theory" of civilization, break through the "barriers" of thought, and adjust their "attitudes", so as to achieve the "liberation" and development of their own thoughts while scientifically responding to social and public affairs. Marx once said that only when people have free access to the largest amount of information in the world can they achieve complete spiritual liberation. Kurtz, a professor at the State University of New York who is known as the "Father of Secular Humanism", believes that although Dewey and Marx did not live in the same era, the influence of Marxist thought on Dewey is self-evident (John, 2015q). In terms of free communication of human spirit and the improvement of human ideas and creativity, Dewey and Marx are consistent in their pursuit. Dewey hoped that in the future social development, all human beings can freely absorb the spiritual wealth of the

world and strive to create a "great community" where people can communicate freely and understand each other. This is also his ultimate purpose to promote human communication, cultivate and develop community with media research. As Hu Shi said of Dewey, "Although Mr. Dewey has passed away, his influence will still exist forever". For the academic community, in-depth study of Dewey's ideological legacy will make it possible to produce "richer" theoretical fruits for creating a better future for human society. In the post-epidemic era, the shaping of community will inevitably be widely shaped as a global issue and discourse. However, to truly realize the essence of community, I am afraid we need to look back to the spiritual core of thinkers including Dewey.

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