On the Governance of Internet Public Opinion Polarization — Based on "Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action"

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Abstract: Since its inception, the internet has carried the hope of restoring and expanding interpersonal communication, promoting self-realization, facilitating meaningful encounters with others, and revitalizing subject relationships and social cohesion. However, in recent years, the public opinion arena has drastically deteriorated, with increasing polarization and growing difficulty in achieving peaceful, reasoned dialogues. This paper, while reviewing existing studies, reconsiders the deep-rooted causes of public opinion polarization—specifically the crisis of identity in the context of modernity. By adopting Habermas' perspective, this paper reconstructs the issue, highlights the problems with current governance measures, and suggests that the key to transforming these measures lies in the construction of communicative rationality.

I. Introduction

With the advancement of science and technology and the changing social environment, a series of deviant phenomena, such as rumors, fake news, false information, deviant speech, and extremist ideologies, have continuously emerged in China's internet sphere, creating an alarming situation. Public opinion polarization is one of the most typical of these phenomena. From the national discussion triggered by the Sun Zhigang case, to the ongoing "internet war" that refuses to die, disordered, ineffective, and misleading communication fills the current internet space. Irrational, unregulated, and non-consensus-driven so-called public discussions and social interactions are common, exacerbating societal alienation, division, and confrontation. At the same time, the internet, as a public sphere, carries the hope for public discussion: first, it provides a "negotiation table" and a space for social action that can accommodate diverse opinions, support public discourse, encourage equal negotiation, and foster rational critique, which is referred to as the public sphere; second, in the lifeworld, the internet has the potential to restore and expand interpersonal interactions, promote self-realization, facilitate meaningful encounters with others, and revitalize subject relations and social solidarity. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on and

develop strategies to address public opinion polarization, and further explore how to promote public interest and the common good, ensuring that the internet creates a beneficial space for public discourse and social interaction.

The question of whether diverse subjects in modern society can reach understanding and consensus involves a long-standing, complex academic debate: Is there a universally accepted ethical foundation or rational convention for human communicative behavior? This debate traces back to the representative figure of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant, and more recently, we can observe the development of Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action. Habermas emphasizes that, in the process of rebuilding the balance between the lifeworld and systems, it is crucial to recognize the importance of language in communicative behavior, the significance and value of the lifeworld, and to enhance the level of societal rationalization. [Habermas, translated by Zhang Boshui, Communication and Social Evolution, Chongqing Publishing House, 1989, pp. 3, 28.] Undoubtedly, interpreting the current phenomenon of public opinion polarization through the lens of Habermas is more appropriate and profound.

Currently, polarization is a hot research topic in academia, especially in political science, psychology, and communication studies (see figure below). In multidisciplinary research, scholars have reached varying conclusions about polarization. A review of domestic and international studies reveals differing opinions on whether the phenomenon of polarization is worsening. Some scholars, for instance, argue that there is a high degree of partisan polarization between the Democratic and Republican parties in the United States, which makes ideological polarization particularly evident (Wang Lili & Liu Zihao, 2018). Other studies, through field surveys, suggest that the view of an intensifying polarization is exaggerated (Ge Yan, Qin Yu, & Zhao Hanqing, 2020). Similarly, there is no consensus on the causes of public opinion polarization, especially regarding whether internet-based smart media exacerbates or mitigates polarization. Differing conclusions and viewpoints abound, focusing mainly on the debate over definitions, causes, and testing methods.

Based on this, the present study, after reviewing the concept of public opinion polarization and its manifestation in China, utilizes Habermas' theory of communicative action to analyze the causes and pathways of public opinion polarization, proposing a transformative approach to its governance.

2. Conceptual Definition and Characteristics of Internet Public Opinion Polarization

2.1 Conceptual Definition

Currently, there is no unified consensus on the definition of public opinion polarization, and the analysis of its characteristics mainly stems from foreign literature, with limited research on the characteristics of public opinion polarization in China.

First, "polarization" is a term with rich connotations, encompassing four major forms of polarization: public opinion polarization, partisan polarization, ideological polarization, and emotional polarization. These forms coexist, intertwine, and influence one another in the public sphere, where public opinion polarization is the primary manifestation. Each form plays a distinct role and impacts people's cognition, attitudes, and behaviors. Internationally, discussions on public opinion polarization have been closely associated with politics. Partisan polarization and ideological polarization are more frequently discussed in Western societies, with considerable overlap between the two. The link between party identification and ideological/political attitudes and behaviors has grown stronger. For example, a report from the Pew Research Center on the U.S. political landscape claimed that "the ideological divide between Republicans and Democrats… has exceeded any period in the past two decades," highlighting the highly polarized political ecology between the Republican/Conservative and Democratic/Liberal factions. (Ann Rev Polit Sci, 2014, cited in Yang

Guang, 2022). In China, public opinion polarization is more often associated with group polarization and emotional polarization. Through a search on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) platform using the keyword "public opinion and polarization," results show that "group polarization" themes account for more than two-thirds of the literature. Domestic scholars commonly combine the concepts of public opinion polarization and group polarization to explore the phenomenon of group polarization in public opinion, which refers to the tendency of group members to initially have some biases, and after discussion, these biases become more pronounced, ultimately resulting in extreme viewpoints (Cass Sunstein, 2003).

Regarding public opinion, the English term "public opinion" can be translated as public or societal opinion. One of the founding figures of French sociology, Gabriel Tarde, in his paper Opinion and the Crowd, argued that "every era, even the most barbaric, has public opinion." However, scholars have different answers to the fundamental question of "What is public opinion?" In the mid-20th century, a Princeton University professor, Moles, compiled various definitions of public opinion from the literature. Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann sharply pointed out that the debate among scholars revolves around two components of the concept: "public" and "opinion." Several prominent domestic researchers have also proposed their definitions of public opinion. Professor Liu Jianming argues that "public opinion is the collective perception and awareness of society, representing the authoritative consensus of the majority." Professor Yu Guoming, from a social survey perspective, refers to public opinion as the "public's collective opinion on a recent, widely concerning social issue" and describes it as "the sum of similar opinions, emotions, and behavioral tendencies held by the majority of society's members toward public affairs or phenomena." Professor Chen Lidan defines public opinion as "the totality of public beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotional expressions toward various phenomena and issues in reality, which has relative consistency, intensity, and sustainability, and influences social development and the progress of relevant matters. It contains both rational and irrational elements." Public opinion can thus be seen as "public consensus," rather than individual private opinions or a simple collection of private viewpoints; it is the collective opinion of the social public, not the dispersed individual opinions. Although public opinion is closely related to social ideologies and political, moral beliefs, it is not a clear and highly consistent social consciousness, but rather a relatively ambiguous social atmosphere full of contradictions and prone to change. (Wang Xiong, 2002)

Based on the above analysis, this study defines public opinion polarization as the inherent bias in the viewpoints, attitudes, and behaviors of group members, which, through information dissemination and communication mechanisms, continues to move toward their existing biases, ultimately forming a polarized public opinion pattern (Sunstein, 2003)

2.2 Characteristics of Public Opinion Polarization: Emotional, Social, Opinion Suppression, and Behavioral Polarization

2.2.1 "The Mob Struggling with Emotion"

Public opinion in China exhibits a distinct emotional characteristic, where the public's motivation for expression is often accompanied by strong resentment, especially when it concerns sensitive figures such as officials, the wealthy, police officers, celebrities, etc. This is often summarized as "prejudice before facts; emotion before objectivity; discourse before truth; attitude before cognition" (Zhang Hua, 2017). Some scholars have proposed the frameworks of "emotional struggle" and "social venting," pointing out that due to limited political participation channels and small institutional spaces for dialogue, emotion is the primary driving force behind events and developments. Anger, sympathy, and sarcasm have become the best catalysts for public emotional resonance (Yang Guobin, 2009).

2.2.2.Focus on Social Issues

Unlike the political polarization seen in the United States, the current public opinion polarization in China is more focused on social issues.

2.2.3.Post-Truth Era

In the post-truth era, the weakening of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and the shift of their role have transformed the two-step opinion flow model (officials → opinion leaders → public) into a direct official-public interaction mode. Without opinion leaders as buffers, public crises now see direct confrontations between the government and the public. When coupled with the effects of entrenched stereotypes, this easily leads to fluctuations in public opinion. Public authorities often struggle to understand why previously effective responses to public opinion crises no longer work—why, after issuing situation reports and explaining the truth, there is still widespread disbelief? This is because the public sees little emotional validation or expression in the situation report, and the factual truth has become fragmented in the tug-of-war between the authorities and the public. While public authorities want the public to "calm down and stop causing trouble," the public feels that their stance and emotions are ignored, rendering the factual truth irrelevant. In this case, "clarifying doubts" is less real than "venting anger" (Li Biao, 2018).

2.2.4.Behavioral Polarization

Public opinion polarization, stimulated by virtual identity, transforms into action within communities. For example, in the incident involving Li Xiaolu and PG One, the fans of PG One self-organized to buy trending search keywords and attack the magazine that criticized their idol. After the Beijing Daxing fire, some people organized to provide accommodation and job opportunities to those affected. These shifts illustrate how prejudice-based communities turn into action-based communities.

3. The Multiple Causes of Public Opinion Polarization from the Perspective of Communication Theory

Current research on the causes of public opinion polarization traditionally analyzes factors leading to extreme views, group opposition, and the fragmentation of public opinion from various perspectives, including social psychology (e.g., social comparison theory, the theory of persuasive power), cognitive psychology (e.g., cognitive schema theory, selective exposure psychology), new media technologies (e.g., the anonymity and virtuality of the internet, the repetitiveness and continuity of new media communication, the echo chamber feature of social media), and information production and dissemination mechanisms (e.g., information fragmentation, algorithmic production and information pushing). However, when we extend our perspective to the broader philosophical domain, we find that these phenomena may be closely related to the crisis of Enlightenment and modernity.

3.1 Traditional Causal Analysis

3.1.1. Development of Media Technology

The development of media technology has intensified public opinion polarization, which aligns with theories such as the "echo chamber." Pariser et al. (2011) identified the drawbacks of online

media, arguing that online platforms create a "filter bubble," a virtual space that isolates users from differing viewpoints. Digital platforms present a more fragmented media landscape compared to traditional media, and the internet provides every user with the opportunity to produce information. The internet's "everyone is a journalist" and "everyone has a microphone" characteristics have given rise to diverse stances and viewpoints. Consumers can personalize their information consumption, accessing the information they wish to know while excluding what they do not, leading to an ideological "echo chamber" effect. At the same time, users are guided by ubiquitous recommendation algorithms. Major information platforms and social media continuously optimize algorithmic recommendations, helping users deal with information overload. However, algorithms, due to their "black box" operation, have introduced a series of negative consequences, including information cocoons, public opinion polarization, the dominance of trivial content, emotional overflow, and a lack of values. Thus, users fall into an even deeper trap of algorithmic recommendations, being engulfed by information that aligns with their views. The direct interaction between users with similar stances or ideologies further exacerbates the trend of public opinion polarization.

3.1.2. Information on Digital Platforms

Information on online platforms is a mixture of facts, emotions, and opinions, markedly different from the information on traditional media. Under the influence of digital technology, mainstream news narratives have undergone significant changes, shifting from objective to subjective, with narrative threads becoming liquefied and fragmented (Chang, 2019). The reduction of factual information, the fragmentation of information, and the proliferation of partisan and emotional content result in an overwhelming surplus and overload of information that users find difficult to digest. Information overload often requires the public to resolve it through emotional venting, a process that easily leads to the concentration of opinions, creating fertile ground for public opinion polarization.

3.1.3.The Networked Information Environment Facilitates the Rich Emotional Expression of the Public.

Emotionally charged content is more likely to stimulate extreme emotions in users and encourages them to express these emotions with greater intensity. The more people are exposed to emotionally charged information, the more likely they are to trigger public opinion polarization, particularly in relation to the social affordances of online media. On the one hand, online interactions are subject to the phenomenon of "toxic disinhibition" (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012), where the anonymity and lack of immediate interpersonal feedback in online communication lead users to act impulsively and engage in hostile and uncivil exchanges (Suler, 2004). As a result, user-generated information on the internet is often emotionally charged, and direct interactions among users become more aggressive, intensifying polarization. On the other hand, the successful spread of online information often depends on its emotional activation level, with content that triggers higher levels of arousal attracting more attention.

In other words, online media encourage people to express themselves with greater emotional intensity. Even in the absence of non-verbal cues, online text interactions can lead to emotional contagion, where uncivil and inflammatory language, which is emotionally charged, has become a major barrier to public discourse on the internet. This is because strong emotional stimuli lead to higher levels of opinion polarization.

3.1.4.Individual Psychology

Selective exposure is a common psychological mechanism in which audiences choose information that aligns with their views. People tend to expose themselves to similar or homogeneous viewpoints and information, and prefer to interact with others who share similar interests or values. For example, Yardi and Boyd (2010), in their study of Twitter users, found that when users interacted with individuals holding different views, the differences were not bridged; rather, each party reinforced their own position, thereby increasing the divergence between groups.

3.2 The Perspective of Communication Theory: The Crisis of Identity

Setting aside the superficial technical and psychological causes, public opinion polarization may be embedded in the very DNA of modern society. In a world of temporal and spatial dislocation and value pluralism, modern individuals are deprived of the barriers, certainty, and security found in close-knit societies. In a society of strangers, each of us is frequently and intensely involved in unfamiliar social relationships and cultural contexts. In this disordered backdrop, fragmented "selves" engage in fragmented communication with others. Thus, Habermas points out that modern society faces a deep crisis—an identity crisis. Identity is essentially a sense of meaning, selfhood, and belonging, reflecting an individual's recognition and acceptance of oneself, others, and the community. In the broadest sense, it is a product of communication and interaction.

While traditional societies also experienced identity crises, blood ties, geographic location, language, customs, and religion provided people with a sense of value and belonging. However, with the deepening of modernity, traditional notions of kinship, region, and value have been constantly broken down, particularly in the rapidly changing realm of the internet, where group formation and alliance-building are more common. Regarding the deep roots of the identity crisis, Habermas views it as a typical modern crisis, stemming from the subject philosophy established during the Enlightenment, especially the "subject-object" binary relationship that pervades modern society. The Enlightenment emphasized that individuals use their reason to become their own masters. This human-centered philosophy, while a remarkable beginning, also created a paradox in modern society: emphasizing the individual naturally turns humans into objects for manipulation; emphasizing the self makes others mere objects.

In short, the identity crisis leads individuals to seek warmth online, form camps, and treat those who differ from them as objects to be attacked. In a world characterized by temporal and spatial dislocation and the uprooting of social relationships and cultural contexts, diverse subjects meet and interact. Their sense of meaning, identity, and continuity is weakened, and the sense of belonging, consistency, and certainty between them is lacking. There is a dearth of shared values or meaningful bonds to establish recognition, and one party always attempts to suppress or conquer the other, thus intensifying public opinion polarization.

After examining the causes of public opinion polarization, we can see that it is often irrational, but this does not mean that all irrationality is detrimental. Le Bon argued that the irrationality of the masses is the deep-driving force behind historical progress. "Although reason always exists, the driving force of civilization remains various emotions, such as dignity, self-sacrifice, religious faith, patriotism, and love of honor" (Dong & Kong, 2016). Therefore, the more important issue is how, in modern society, we can effectively guide the overflow of emotions, maximizing the value of irrationality to achieve a new societal consensus and, on this basis, construct peaceful and constructive social discussions.

4. An Examination of the Current Situation of Opinion Polarization Governance from the Perspective of Communication Theory

4.1. Governance Countermeasures – Law

Looking at the current laws and regulations in China concerning the internet, there are few directly related legal documents or regulations addressing opinion polarization. Existing laws show that the government has gradually strengthened its efforts in internet governance, issuing normative documents such as the "Decision on Strengthening Network Information Protection," "Opinions on Strengthening Information Security Work," the "National Informatization Development Strategy (2006-2020)," and the "State Council's Opinions on Vigorously Promoting Informatization and Ensuring Information Security." In 2013, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate jointly issued judicial interpretations concerning the legal application for cases involving online defamation and other criminal acts. On December 20, 2019, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) issued the "Regulations on Ecological Governance of Network Information Content," emphasizing the responsibilities of content platforms to manage and cultivate a healthy and positive network culture. In August 2021, the CAC Secretariat issued a notice on further strengthening the governance of "fan circle" chaos, prohibiting "online infighting" and requiring platforms to clear harmful content, such as rumors and attacks, and impose strict penalties on accounts involved in illegal activities. Recently, the revised "Regulations on Internet Comment Services" were issued, which include provisions on prior review for comment systems.

In summary, legal measures include the following three points:

4.1.1. Use of Technical Means for Information Deletion, Blocking, and Account Banning

The Chinese government has long maintained a high level of vigilance over online speech, tightly monitoring the public's internet access and information dissemination. Harmful information identified by the government is often deleted or blocked, and participants may face account bans, fines, detention, or even arrest.

For instance, in 2009, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) issued a notice requiring the installation of "Green Dam – Youth Escort" software on all personal computers sold in China after July 1, 2009, which effectively filtered harmful internet content. The government has also coordinated efforts with other departments to combat online pornography and obscene content under the "Sweep Pornography and Crackdown on Illegal Publications" campaign, utilizing technical means such as information deletion and blocking.

4.1.2. Promotion of Real-name System

In response to issues like online violence, rumors, and fraud, China has gradually established a real-name system, requiring individuals to use their real identities when posting online. This system controls user access through authentication and traceability mechanisms to purify the online environment.

The "Decision on Strengthening Network Information Protection" by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in 2012 required service providers to obtain real identity information from users. Furthermore, various regulations have been implemented for different kinds of network access, such as phone users being required to register their identity before accessing services, or internet users needing to authenticate their identity when registering accounts.

4.1.3.Increasing Legal Deterrence

The Chinese government advocates for strict control over information dissemination and severe punishment for violations. In line with this approach, there is a focus on prior censorship to prevent the potential spread of harmful content, and strong actions are taken once violations occur. Measures include suspending accounts and applying penalties to deter further breaches.

For instance, the "Criminal Law Amendment (IX)" introduced a new crime of "fabricating and intentionally spreading false information." These offenses are categorized into three types: those that harm national interests, social interests, and personal rights.

However, these measures also have certain limitations, including:

Overemphasis on regulating public online behavior, while overlooking the structural risks created by technical settings in network architecture.

Excessive focus on government regulation while ignoring the role of technical governance mechanisms in the online society.

Too much emphasis on national security, neglecting citizens' personal rights.

Overreliance on traditional methods of governance, disregarding the differences between online and offline behaviors.

Ignoring emotional needs and suppressing the space for expression.

4.2. Governance Countermeasures – Technology

Online existence in a digital society is heavily reliant on information and communication technology, where simulated reality is transformed into massive binary code. Technology-based governance is seen as more efficient and flexible than traditional methods. Scholars suggest adopting a combined approach, integrating both legal and technological governance, to ensure that state-led actions incorporate social elements. This balanced governance would include various stakeholders, such as individuals, institutions, and markets.

Key technological measures currently in place include:

4.2.1.Mainstream Media Guidance

One key strategy for mitigating opinion polarization is through positive guidance from mainstream media. Research suggests that mainstream media can enhance their role in shaping public opinion by strengthening network communication capabilities, managing public sentiment, and developing effective communication strategies. Before polarization occurs, media can create repositories of initial viewpoints and interactions to assist in governmental prediction and regulation. During polarization, efforts can be made to persuade individuals to adopt more neutral positions through education and exposure to diverse viewpoints.

4.2.2.Setting Opinion Leaders

Opinion leaders are encouraged to present multiple competing viewpoints, ensuring a balance between polarized and consensus-driven opinions. They should center discussions around the event itself, avoiding excessive subjective emotional judgments and encouraging respect for opposing opinions to reinforce the democratic element of discussions.

4.2.3.Balanced Information Distribution

Since opinion formation is based on information, the distortion and spread of biased information

can exacerbate polarization. Researchers suggest improving the quality of online information to reduce uncertainty and prevent negative outcomes. Strategies to achieve information balance include visualizing biases, creating new platforms for rational voices, developing "middle-ground topics," and using recommendation algorithms to expose users to a variety of content, thereby fostering a space for diverse public debate.

4.2.4.Adjusting Network Structure

In recent years, researchers have explored adjusting network topology to reduce opinion polarization. The fundamental assumption is that connecting users with opposing viewpoints may reduce polarization. This approach redefines the problem as finding the optimal topology to minimize polarization and divergence.

4.3 Ethical Construction Deficiencies

4.3.1.Absence of Internet Ethics

There is a significant lack of internet ethics, as highlighted by scholars like Yan Geng in Network Ethics, who points out that online behavior often results in complex, intersecting problems that are theoretical and practical. Li Lun in Virtue Under the Mouse observes that while the internet offers material and informational benefits, it also leads to moral decline, online crimes, and emotional crises. The rise of moral relativism, anarchism, and individualism in the online world complicates the spiritual development of network culture. Additionally, information worship and technological determinism can deviate from human-centered values.

4.3.2.Ethical Advantages

Ethics, in contrast to laws and technologies, provides a deeper, more flexible framework with substantial potential to improve the online environment. Personal moral aspirations are important, but the realization of these values in social life plays a crucial role in guiding the public and promoting societal value orientation. Ethical frameworks help in fostering constructive dialogue, serving as a critical guide toward a more just and beneficial online space.

Clearly, the internet requires a dialogue ethics that aligns with its communicative potential. Public discussions and social interactions in the digital realm need not only laws and technology but also procedural ethics that direct conversations toward positive outcomes.

In conclusion, research on public opinion polarization must ultimately focus on strategies to mitigate or eliminate polarization. However, current studies on solutions are fragmented and lack a comprehensive framework that includes multiple stakeholders. Many strategies rely on subjective recommendations without sufficient analysis of their applicability or effectiveness. Thus, a comprehensive system of case studies, theories, methods, and technologies is urgently needed to provide objective evidence for addressing opinion polarization.

5. Reconstructing Governance Logic: Cultivating Communicative Rationality

As previously analyzed, the current governance measures for opinion polarization are superficial and do not address the underlying issue of identity crises. In broader areas of the internet, the pain of fractured identities and confused values is also common. In this regard, Habermas provides a deeper answer: cultivating communicative rationality. Based on communicative rationality, "the goal of communicative action is directed towards mutual understanding. Understanding pertains to reciprocal comprehension, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and interdependence between subjects"

(Habermas, 1989). Furthermore, he believes that communicative rationality is also the only way to reaffirm value rationality and promote the balanced development of instrumental and value rationality. Communicative rationality emerges in the lifeworld and is shaped through dialogue where individuals treat each other as subjects. It emphasizes principles of equality in status and opportunity, non-coercion, and mutual respect between subjects. Through interaction, dialogue, reflection, and critique, understanding and consensus are reached. It is precisely in this equal dialogue, rather than in the opposition between subject and object, that social solidarity is strengthened, cultural continuity is maintained, and the value foundation of identity is preserved.

5.1 The Specific Framework for Cultivating Communicative Rationality

Habermas's ethical philosophy of dialogue can be summarized in one paradigm (dialogue), two principles (the U-principle and the D-principle), three rights (equality of status, opportunity, and discourse power), and four claims: comprehensibility, truthfulness, sincerity, and legitimacy.

(1)One Paradigm: A consistent ethical foundation originates from the communication between subjects and from those norms and agreements that have been fully discussed and universally accepted through dialogue.

(2)Two Principles:The Dialogue Principle (D-principle): A moral norm is only valid if it has been accepted by all participants in the dialogue. "Only such norms can claim validity that have been accepted (or can be accepted) by all participants in communicative practice."

(3)The Universal Principle (U-principle): A moral norm, if it aims to gain universal acceptance in dialogue, must reflect and meet the interests of all individuals, and everyone must acknowledge the potential consequences it may bring.

(4)Three Rights:

Equality of Status: Every subject capable of speech and action has the right to participate in the discussion.

Equality of Opportunity: This includes three specifics: every subject has the right to challenge the claims made in a discussion; every subject can propose a claim and make it part of the agenda; and every subject has the right to express their attitudes, desires, and needs during the discussion.

Non-Coercion (Equality of Discourse Power): The discussion should occur in an ideal context where no coercion is present. No subject should be prevented from exercising the first two rights due to dominance or coercive power, either inside or outside the dialogue situation.

(5)Four Claims:

a.Comprehensibility: This is the basic prerequisite for communicative action. It requires that participants in dialogue follow common or compatible grammatical and linguistic structures, using expressions that can be mutually understood. In an internet context, comprehensibility has at least three meanings: participants must be able to correctly encode and decode exchanged information in the same way; expressions should be accurate and clear, aiming for the recipient to grasp the full meaning; no one should misuse knowledge, power, or rhetorical advantages, and communication must be oriented toward mutual understanding and consensus.

b.Truthfulness: A statement made by a subject must correspond to the objective reality, meaning the propositions or statements should align with facts, and information shared should be truthful.

c.Legitimacy: This refers to the relationship coordination between dialogue participants and the social world they inhabit. In the dialogue, each participant should understand what type of speech behavior is appropriate for their relationship and the normative framework that they mutually recognize. Legitimate actions should adhere to the principles of equality of status, opportunity, and discourse power, with the aim of achieving understanding and consensus.

d.Sincerity: This addresses the speaker's subjective world—motivations and intentions. It emphasizes honest expression, consistency between words and actions, and truthful communication.

Participants should sincerely express themselves, communicate openly, and focus on core issues, avoiding superficial or irrelevant matters.

5.2 Governance Pathways for Change

In conclusion, to govern opinion polarization, we must focus on and alleviate the identity crises present in modern society, including in the internet context. We must rebuild a consistent ethical foundation. Moreover, this foundation should not stem from metaphysical monologues or transcendental moral agreements but should emerge from the dialogue between diverse subjects. In other words, we need to establish the ethical norms of dialogue itself, creating communicative rationality among multiple subjects. A further generalization is as follows: alleviating identity crises → rebuilding ethical foundation → dialogue to rebuild the ethical foundation → constructing communicative rationality. Though this description may seem idealistic, it provides us with policy design guidance:

(1)Paradigm Shift: Replace the "zero-sum conflict mentality" with the "positive-sum game of opinion competition."

(2)Choice of Governance Path: Break the negative effects of "echo chambers" and "filter bubbles" within communities, and construct overlapping consensus.First, break the echo chambers to allow members to see a larger world. "Make it uncomfortable for those who are pretending to sleep," gradually leading those who are detached in digital tribes to step outside. The key path is to make the consensus within each circle more explicit and, eventually, form an overlapping consensus. Second, unify various digital tribes and break free from identity shackles and idolization misconceptions like "the idol is always right." Build dialogue platforms across society, amplify constructive opinions, find the greatest common denominator, and create the largest consensus.

(3)Reconstruct Discourse Space: Be cautious of the "post-truth" and populism "collusion." Circles are the underlying framework of opinion polarization, and emotions are the bonds within these circles, which align closely with online populism.

(4)Rooting Dialogue-based Internet Ethics: Emphasize the power of dialogue and reflection, achieving understanding and consensus among subjects.

This approach, though challenging, offers a path forward in managing and mitigating the consequences of opinion polarization, leading towards more meaningful engagement and social cohesion.

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