Public Opinion That Cannot be “Constructed”

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Abstract

In today's democratic society, public opinion is recognized as an "object of worship." Political elites such as politicians and bureaucrats want to grasp the trends of public opinion, and will sometimes try to control it. Meanwhile, the (mass) media conducts public opinion polls, interprets them, and reports both their results and interpretation. The mass media has become an influential actor in the political process.

In this paper, I will examine the concept of public opinion from a constructionist perspective. I present the view that public opinion is constructed by public opinion polls and their reports. These perspectives may not be new, but I would like to ask whether mass media can construct public opinion exclusively in the modern media environment.

Based on this question, we will analyze the public opinion reports on the 48th House of Representatives election in 2017. The Asahi Shimbun and other mass media outlets questioned the election’s legitimacy; they questioned whether the election results should be taken as public opinion and they presented "real public opinion" through their own opinion polls and critically commented on the election results.

However, these newspaper’ activities were criticized on the Internet. From a constructionist perspective, opinion has often been criticized as being constructed exclusively and predominantly by mass media. However, the opposite is evident in this case. Should we not consider that constructing public opinion will be increasingly difficult in the coming years?

1. Introduction

In today’s democratic society, public opinion is recognized as an “object of worship.” Political elites, such as politicians and bureaucrats, want to understand the trend of public opinion, and sometimes try to control it. Meanwhile, (mass) media organizations conduct public opinion polls and report the results, as well as their interpretations. Thus, mass media has become an influential actor in the political process.

The definitions of “public opinion” are ambiguous and diverse. Although we can explain the relationship between political society and public opinion in a general way, it is difficult to explain public opinion based on existing political and social theories. Nakaaki Hiroshi (2011), a public opinion scholar, classified the approaches to discussing public opinion as focusing on: (1) the characteristics of public opinion; (2) the social role of public opinion; (3) the constructability of public opinion; and (4) public opinion’s formation process.

This paper considers the process of public opinion formation and construction from the social constructionist perspective and discusses the role of public opinion in the modern nation state and
democratic society. It also discusses these approaches in relation to media coverage, especially opinion polls. Using these perspectives, the national news reports on the 48th Japanese House of Representatives election in 2017 and the online response to these reports will be examined.

2. Social and political processes regarding “public opinion”

2.1 Public opinion as a pseudo-environment

In general, public opinion is often defined as people’s collective cognition regarding social and political problems. In modern society, people recognize political and social problems through media (especially forms such as journalism); many discussions that have been carried out on this matter use the concept of a pseudo-environment (Fujitake, 1968; Lippman, 1922). People receive a variety of information from the real environment that surrounds them; then, they interpret, visualize, and symbolize it to create a “pseudo-environment” in their consciousness. People do not act directly in the real environment. People work in real environments but use the pseudo-environment, which is created in the human consciousness, for clues.

These pseudo-environments are not just personal or individual. Through communication, people partially share the pseudo-environment formed in their minds with others in an intersubjective manner. Through “mass communication,” which entails the sharing of information among unspecified people, pseudo-environments can become widely shared across society. People can have a common consciousness about political and social issues because they share information on these issues. In modern society, people must rely on the media to learn about political and social problems that they cannot experience directly. Moreover, to share pseudo-environments throughout society, it is necessary to depend on mass media to a considerable degree. Adoni and Mane (1984) summarized the real environment, the formation of the pseudo-environment, and the role of the media in their “Social Construction of Reality Model” (see Figure 1).

In the Adoni and Mane model (1984), “public opinion” is supposed to correspond with “subjective reality.” Likewise, phenomena which are regarded as political/social problems, are classified as “objective reality,” and those represented by the mass media (in media contents, including news and reviews) correspond to “symbolic reality.” This demonstrates that the three “realities” have a mutual influence on one another. In the Adoni and Mane (1984) model, both “symbolic reality” and “subjective reality” correspond to the pseudo-environment. Some explanations equate “symbolic reality” with the pseudo-environment, which, in a broad sense, is “what people [interpret] the real environment” to be, so its interpretation is based on media information, regardless of reality. Based on this model, public opinion (subjective reality) is formed by people’s direct interpretation of political and social events (objective reality), and its interpretation is based on media contents.
2.2 Social constructionist approach to public opinion

To summarize, these arguments, can be regarded as understanding social research and public opinion from the perspective of social constructionism, or the “constructionist approach.” Burr (1995) summarizes the characteristics of social constructionism as follows:

1. A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge: knowledge exists to allow for the understanding of natural and social phenomena, but does not faithfully reflect these phenomena.
2. Historical and cultural specificity: categories for grasping the world may vary depending on each society and its age.
3. Knowledge is sustained by social processes: categories do not objectively reflect the world, but on being used repeatedly, they become common sense and are institutionalized; thus, categories are considered to be socially obvious.
4. Knowledge and social action go together: knowledge, with which the world is grasped, sometimes justifies actions based on the recognition obtained from it.

2.3 Normative approach to public opinion

The model described above provides a sufficient basis for the static consideration of the process by which public opinion is formed. However, studies of public opinion have presented various perspectives on how to truly capture public opinion (subjective reality). Scholars who have previously considered the concept of public opinion point out that features of public opinion are mutually contradictory (Okada, 2001, p. 73). However, Okada criticizes public opinion research that regards data obtained through the technique of social surveys as an accurate representation of “public opinion.” Okada argues that public opinion should be viewed as a normative concept in relation to democratic politics.

Simply stated, if we define “public opinion” as a type of pseudo-environment that interprets the real environment, it seems that it should be possible to grasp public opinion accurately by refining the survey technique and developing public opinion research. However, if we can capture “public opinion” as a major and important actor in the democratic political process, the argument about public opinion cannot be separated from the discussion on the “form of politics (norms on politics).”

In discussing normative discussions related to public opinion, the distinction between public
opinion (Yoron [輿論] in Japanese) and popular sentiment (Seron [世論]) is an important clue. According to Sato (2008), “public opinion” is social opinion that is publicly organized, and “popular sentiment” is a psychological emotion that has not yet been recognized, but expresses the mood and atmosphere of the masses (p. 32). Sato argues that public opinion and popular sentiment should be distinguished from each other. However, after the Second World War, the Japanese Kanji system was reformed, and “Toyo Kannji” was officially declared as the kanji character by the Japanese Ministry of Education in 1946. As a result, the kanji (輿論) for “public opinion,” cannot be used. Thus, both “public opinion” and “popular sentiment” were written using the kanji (世論) for “popular sentiment.” Thus, public opinion and popular sentiment were frequently confused. The premise of Sato’s argument is informed by a norm in which democratic politics should reflect organized opinions (public opinion), rather than popular sentiment.

2.4 The social constructionist approach to public opinion

There exists public opinion research that is more radical than the normative public opinion research mentioned above. Pierre Bourdieu insisted that public opinion was constructed by the act of the opinion poll (Bourdieu, 1991).

1. Every public opinion survey assumes that each person can have an opinion of some sort. In other words, it is assumed that anyone can easily form an opinion if they think they should.

2. All opinions are considered equivalent (i.e., there is no superiority or inferiority among opinion holders).

3. Regarding the simple matter of asking each person the same question, there is some agreement on the issues in question; in other words, there is an implied agreement that it is natural to ask question about the problems at hand.

Bourdieu’s discussions are often quoted in Japanese-language documents that critically discuss public opinion polls and their coverage (Nishihira, 2009; Oishi, 2014; Sato, 2008; Yamaguchi, 2017). Bourdieu criticizes the idea that public opinion is an objective phenomenon and that an appropriately conducted investigation can grasp it correctly. Rather, Bourdieu points out that public opinion is socially constructed through polls. Therefore, public opinion polls, as social actions, have some “sociality,” which is sometimes accompanied by political intentions and ambitions. As social surveys are conducted by humans, the notion that the common sense and values of the survey’s creator and their society will enter into the study as a bias is also a consideration. For this reason, opinion polls are said to have “sociality.”

Champagne (2004) identifies the reasons surveys have been repeatedly carried out to construct public opinion. Under a political regime, in which the people are deemed the source of the legitimacy of power, the illusion that the people should talk and politicians should listen to them is in play. Public opinion emerged from the meeting of such illusions and contemporary social technology (sampling, questionnaires with choices, and instant counting by computers). In a democratic society, public opinion becomes one source of power that is necessary for politicians to carry out their work. In other words, public opinion is a non-institutional (compared to institutional entities such as the Diet, Cabinet, or Court) but major actor in the political process. Conversely, the sides that resist certain politicians sometimes argue that they are embodying public opinion. In any case, in a democratic society, various actors invoke public opinion to justify their actions.
2.5 Purpose of adopting a constructionist approach

Yamaguchi (2017) mentioned the following three reasons for adopting a constructionist approach in studies of public opinion:

1. To criticize what was constructed;
2. To clarify the influences of the process through an analysis of the construction process; and
3. To apply the analysis of its construction process to consider other social process.

A constructionist approach is often adopted to criticize what was constructed. It compares what was constructed and the “real condition or thing” and points out how they are different. A typical example of such an approach is the discussion of moral panic in research on deviance or social problems; it critically considers phenomena that are given focus that is disproportionate to the objective degree of the deviation or social problem. Furthermore, even without explicitly using the concept of “moral panic,” much of the discourse of journalistic criticism has a logical structure that is similar to that of moral panic. The background comprises the normative premise that journalism should objectively capture things that exist.

In the context of studies on public opinion, a constructionist approach may be adopted in a context that offers the critique that public opinion constructed by media coverage is different from “real public opinion.” This debate criticizes public opinion surveys for containing (mass) media bias, in both public opinion research and its coverage. Furthermore, the argument mentioned above that distinguishes between “public opinion” and “popular sentiment” also applies owing to a prescriptive presupposition that politics should reflect the real public opinion (i.e., created after legitimate debate or deliberation), rather than a fictitious popular sentiment constructed by sensational media coverage. Such a discussion contends that “fictional” public opinion is constructed while “legitimate” public opinion is eliminated.

Second, from the critical view on power exercised in the communication processes, the process of constructing public opinion is also regarded as a process of exercising power. Oishi (2014) sees public opinion polls conducted by mass media organizations and their reports as building a kind of reality as public opinion. Furthermore, Oishi (2014) sees this process as a type of power exercise, wherein exclusion occurs. Oishi (2014) highlights the power of journalism in the process of exclusion in which values that should be diversified, and the reality upon which they are based, are instead constructed in a specific form. Likewise, through an analysis of public opinion polls and their reports, Yamaguchi (2017) also points out that information is used selectively in the process of public opinion surveys. Additionally, Yamaguchi (2017) emphasized that, owing to the Great East Japan Earthquake, items on public opinion surveys related to accidents and the nuclear power policies of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station differed greatly across newspaper companies.

However, Yamaguchi (2017) adopts a third perspective on the constructionist approach by identifying the significance of the construction process itself, rather than criticizing the construction process as one of elimination. In relation to public opinion research, constructing public opinion can be regarded as the formation of some agreement regarding the people’s will, which should be reflected in the democratic political process. The traditional constructionist approaches to public opinion assumed that public opinion was somehow socially constructed. Because of this assumption, these approaches also suggested that a false public opinion was constructed, or critically referenced the process of exclusion that occurred during the formation of public opinion. Mass media coverage, which is said to have great influence in these processes, has also been subject to criticism. However, in modern media situations, the process...
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whereby “public opinion” is constructed has become more complicated. Therefore, we must also consider the possibility that the mechanism of “mass media coverage affecting the political process by constructing a massive public opinion” (Oishi, 2014, p. 112) will be shaken. When public opinion cannot be constructed, people’s dissatisfaction regarding the political decisions that are made under such circumstances is consistently obvious; further, this dissatisfaction is shared with others, and, as a result, “dispute resolution” occurs. I propose that this function of politics may become difficult.

Klippendorff (2005) has already highlighted these interests, which arranged social constructionist perspectives related to public opinion. It is emphasized that a single, simple public opinion cannot be constructed, but various constitutions might dispute, and compete over, the concept of public opinion (Klippendorf, 2005, pp. 146–147). Social constitutionalism not only criticizes the exclusion that certain constructs become dominant, but also points out the possibilities of diverse constructs (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). However, it cannot immediately and positively evaluate the existence of various possibilities of construction. In our argument, in addition to highlighting the fact that public opinion is socially constructed, we also consider that mass media may not be able to construct public opinion dominantly or exclusively in contemporary society.

3. Case (Public opinion research on the 48th House of Representatives election)

3.1 Conflict over views on elections

Based on the theoretical considerations outlined in the previous section, we can make several speculations about public opinion in contemporary democratic politics. I would like to consider the 48th House of Representatives election held in 2017 as a case study to concretely consider the following speculations:

- “Public opinion” is formed by mass media coverage, and is constructed through the public opinion polls of mass media and subsequent reports.
- In a contemporary media environment, however, criticism of mass media is flourishing because bilateral computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been activated with the appearance of the Internet.
- At least on the surface, the dissemination of information in the process whereby public opinion is constructed is diversified, so definitive exclusion does not occur.
- Public opinion is constantly exposed to deconstruction, and stable construction is, thus, impossible. Even in everyday communication on the Internet, it is pointed out that the mass media constructs public opinion.

In the 48th House of Representatives election held in 2017, the legitimacy of the election itself was questioned more than ever. Ideally, an election is an important system necessary for reflecting the “people’s will” in politics in the democratic political process; to ensure this, the electoral system has been reformed repeatedly. However, the electoral voting rate has continued to decline over time, and the voting rate for the 47th House of Representatives election was the lowest ever recorded. There were also restructuring plays by the opposition party, and some critics, who harbored suspicions about the election itself, tried to exercise the right to abstain (e.g., the signature activities by Azuma²).

Regarding the election of the 48th House of Representatives, the significance of dissolution was
criticized in editorials by the *Asahi Shimbun*, *Mainichi Shimbun*, and other newspapers, which typically criticized the Prime Minister:

There are many issues to be discussed with calm down in the National Assembly. One of the suspicions surrounding Moritomo Gakuen and KAKE Gakuen where the Prime Minister and his Wife are involved is questioned…. By dissolution, investigation of the truth in the National Assembly will be postponed again.

Whether or not to keep the Abe administration’s 5-year politics as it is, despite listening to the voices of minorities, despite being majority. The attitude of the Prime Minister, who denies democracy and constitutionalism, is questioned. (*Asahi Shimbun*, September 26, 2017)

Is this the reason for dissolving the House of Representatives and making a general election? On the contrary it was a press conference deepening suspicion... To win confidence if you win the election is the reverse order. (*Mainichi Shimbun*, September 27, 2017)

These newspapers, of course, do not deny that elections are an important part of the democratic system. However, they do criticize Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s failure to respond to the opposition parties by not holding a sufficient number of deliberations in the National Assembly, by stating that “[Abe] neglects democracy and constitutionalism” (*Asahi Shimbun*, September 26, 2017).

Meanwhile, to some extent, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* admitted the legitimacy of the dissolution of the public, in the excerpt below; further, it criticized the opposition’s argument against dissolution by citing the short remaining term of the House of Representatives:

For many years, the dissolution of the House of Representatives has become established as “an exclusive matter of the Prime Minister.” As a premier, it is natural to implement the general election at the most appropriate time in order to realize the politics and policies that they are aiming for. …There is only one year until December next year, which is the term of office of the House of Representatives. It is time to prepare for the election already at “regular battle-field.” The criticism of the opposition party that “there is no cause of dissolution” is misplaced. (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 26, 2017)

Of course, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* also said, “Even if the real deliberations of the extraordinary Diet are gone, the Prime Minister and the government’s accountability on a series of suspicions will remain, it is important to continue polite explanation.” Hence, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* does not deny the prime minister’s accountability. Similarly, the *Sankei Shimbun* also shows a certain understanding of the dissolution of the House of Representatives and the holding of elections. However, like the *Asahi Shimbun* and *Mainichi Shimbun*, it strongly asserts the necessity of the constitutional amendment debate and does not dwell much on the legitimacy of elections.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed at the press conference that he will dissolve the lower house at the beginning of the extraordinary Diet session convened on the 28th and said, “dissolution to break through national problems.” It is understandable that he declared a declining birthrate and an aging society and the situation of North Korea as national problems and “wanted to hear the voice of the people to overcome the national difficulties with the people.”
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(Sankei Shimbun, September 26, 2017)

Regarding the comparison of editorials just before the dissolution, the Asahi Shimbun (or the Mainichi Shimbun) and the Yomiuri Shimbun (or the Sankei Shimbun) maintained contrasting positions regarding the election. The former suggested that the results obtained in elections did not reflect the “real people’s will,” and that elections that disregard the debate in the National Assembly are neglecting democratic norms. Based on these editorials, the two newspapers (the Asahi Shimbun and Mainichi Shimbun) created questions before the elections to systematically reflect the people’s will (or public opinion) in politics, that is, to endeavor to deconstruct the election’s legitimacy.

3.2 Constructing “counter public opinion” through public opinion polls and public opinion poll reports

In this section, we will consider the processes of two papers (the Asahi Shimbun and Mainichi Shimbun) that are critical of the dissolution of the lower house and the elections; further, they endeavor to construct public opinion that opposes them through public opinion polls and their reports.

Approximately one month from the dissolution and to the election, the Asahi Shimbun reported its own research on public opinion on September 28 and October 19. The titles of the articles are as follows:

1. “Reasons for dissolution”: not convinced 70%; proportional selection vote, LDP 32%; Party of Hope 13% (September 28, 2018, p. 1)
2. “Right to dissolve”: to restrict 54%; maintain current status 31% (September 28, 2018, p. 4)
3. “Proportional voting destination, constitutional growth 13%; LDP 34%; Hope 11%” (October 19, 2018, p. 1)

In the public opinion survey (an emergency telephone survey) at the end of September, a question was posed about the immediate dissolution of the House of Representatives. A total of 11 questions comprised this survey, four of which were asked every time (the support rate of the cabinet, the supporting party, the voting place in the electoral district of the lower house election, and the voting in the proportional section of the lower house election in the previous question). Four further questions inquired about the rights and wrongs of the dissolution, and the remaining three questions were concerned with the House of Representatives election, support for the new party (the Party of Hope), and the amendment of Article 9 of the Constitution.

The dissolution of the House of Representatives and the 48th election is being questioned; in fact, during the 47th election, the question about whether it should be dissolved was also raised. The Asahi Shimbun reported the results of a public opinion poll on November 21, 2014 as follows: “65% not convinced of reasons for dissolution; 40% cabinet unsupported, 39% support,” and a critical stance against the dissolution was taken. In the 46th election, the question items of the opinion poll conducted by the Asahi Shimbun during November 15th–16th, 2012 included whether to approve the dissolution determined by Prime Minister Noda and the general election. However, unlike the 47th and 48th general elections, there were questions about whether the dissolution was made, but in that report, no mention was made of the pros and cons of dissolution. Regarding the 45th House of Representatives election, the
opinion poll carried no question about whether to dissolve) conducted immediately after the dissolution of the House of Representatives (July 18–19, 2009).

Oishi (2014) pointed out that journalists sometimes carry out public opinion surveys to rationalize or reinforce their own claims (p. 112). From this point of view, the stance of a newspaper company regarding the dissolution of the House of Representatives and the general election regulates the content of the questions comprising the public opinion survey, as well as the direction of the report. The Asahi Shimbun had a more critical stance on the 47th and 48th general elections compared to the 45th and 46th general elections. This difference in stance is also reflected in the question items of its public opinion survey and press coverage.

The Mainichi Shimbun, which, like Asahi Shimbun, was critical of the general election, reported the results of a public opinion survey on September 28, 2017 by stating that “64% do not support dissolution.” However, this article was on the fifth page and was less critical than the Asahi Shimbun article on the question of dissolution.

3.3 Public opinion survey and opinion research on individual issues

The public opinion polls and their reports offered criticism regarding not only the general election, but also individual political issues. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that he had dissolved the House of Representatives to inquire nation about increasing the consumption tax rate and the problems posed by North Korea. The Asahi Shimbun was also trying, through public opinion polls and their reports, to build public opinion against the two issues mentioned earlier. These also appear in the question items of the survey.

As mentioned earlier, the report on the poll of September 28, 2017 also contained a question about the revision of Article 9 of the Constitution, and reported the result (“there is no need for revision” 49%). The Asahi Shimbun also asked questions about the problems of “Moritomo Gakuen” and “Kake Gakuen,” which the opposition parties and mass media had been criticizing, and reported the survey results (“criticism by opposition parties and mass media is reasonable” 62%).

Among the polls reported on October 19, questions about the increase in the consumption tax and revision of the Article 9 of the Constitution were asked. The title of an article emphasized that there are many opinions against the revision of Article 9. In the opinion poll, the question was, “Do you want Abe will continue to be Prime Minister in the future?” The result (51% “I do not”) is a subheading of the article on the first page, which has already been mentioned. The data of these survey results are frequently quoted in Asahi Shimbun’s editorials: “In the Asahi Shimbun opinion poll, 70% are not convinced of the dissolution reasons the Prime Minister makes. ... must avoid elections that left voters behind” (Hirotoshi, Sako, September 29, 2017). As Yamaguchi (2017) indicates, public opinion polls conducted by newspaper companies are reported extensively on the front page, are discussed on other pages, and, further, are also cited in editorials for the purpose of supporting the opinions of newspaper companies and reporters.

About 80% of respondents in the Asahi Shimbun’s telephone public opinion survey in September replied that “the explanation of the Prime Minister is not enough.” Even in the survey in October, 41% said that “problems of Moritomo and Kake are important” in deciding the voting destination. Still, the voters are not convinced by the Prime Minister’s explanation. And it turns out that there are some people who think that the problems of Moritomo and Kake are the main issues of the election. (Asahi Shimbun, October 20, 2017)
In addition, the Asahi Shimbun frequently pointed out that people’s support for the revision of Article 9 of the Constitution, which is the issue presented by the Prime Minister at the time of dissolution, was minor, and quoted public opinion polls conducted in-house (for example, the October 16th editorial). This was a criticism against the Prime Minister, who said that victory in the election was a reflection of the “people’s will.” The Asahi Shimbun was trying to construct a public opinion that countered the Prime Minister’s views. Such a trend continued during the election campaign. In addition, after the House of Representatives election, the Asahi Shimbun expressed doubt regarding the results in an editorial:

The Prime Minister won the “power game” that he set in. However, the people’s will that chose to continue the administration is actually diverse. There is a big gap between the election results and the people’s will indicated in opinion polls during the election period. (Editorial, Asahi Shimbun, October 23, 2017)

Likewise, the Mainichi Shimbun questioned the continuation of Prime Minister Abe’s term while quoting opinion polls in an editorial:

According to an opinion poll conducted by the Mainichi Shimbun during the House of Representatives election, 47% of people responded, “I do not think it is good” for Prime Minister Abe to continue prime after the election. It surpassed 37% who answered “I think it is good.” (Editorial, Mainichi Shimbun, October 23, 2017)

The tendency to clarify the people’s will through public opinion surveys rather than election results can be confirmed by a report from the Yomiuri Shimbun:

It is not enough to support all of the Abe administration. However, the citizens want to maintain the stability of politics, to obtain results properly by economic revival and the security of Japan. That will be the people’s will that is shown this time. … Public opinion polls immediately after the election notice day showed that the cabinet support rate fell below the disapproval rate. The Prime Minister should not think that his policies and political attitudes were unconditionally confident. (Editorial, Yomiuri Shimbun, October 23, 2017)

To differing degrees, newspaper companies tried to show the existence of “true public opinion,” and to build “real public opinion” while quoting the results of their opinion polls. The attitudes of such reports contrasted with those of the ruling party and the Abe cabinet, who claimed that they had to be credible if citizens were ensuring their victory in the elections. Oishi (2014) considers mass media to be exercising a kind of power by conducting public opinion polls and reporting them. In this case, it could be regarded as the media’s exercise of power to oppose the government.

3.4 Public opinion that cannot be constructed, power that cannot be exercised

As mentioned earlier, objections are eliminated, to some extent, in the process whereby “public opinion” is constructed by newspaper media through public opinion surveys and reporting. Conversely, for situations in which there are many objections, “reality” has always been deconstructed. Under such circumstances, it is impossible to stably construct reality. However, in modern media environments, anyone can propose an alternative to narratives created by mass media coverage and editorials.
Furthermore, it has become easy for people to access such objections. Objections were instantly raised against the editorial of the *Asahi shimbun* on the Bulletin Board System and Social Networking Services. For example, in the thread of “5 channes (2 chan),” which is a Japanese BBS, several comments criticized the editorial of the *Asahi Shim bun* as follows:

The *Asahi Shim bun* denies anything that does not agree with his opinion, even if it is the result of a free election. The *Asahi Shim bun* is a reading written by anti-democratic, self-righteous, communist (No.2)

By mobilizing intellectual, the *Asahi Shim bun* defends the Constitution and criticizes the Abe cabinet. However, the *Asahi Shim bun* advocates impartiality, justice and tolerance in its own press code. This is nothing but a fraud. It is evident to everyone’s eyes. The *Asahi Shim bun* is a fascist who pretends to be liberal. (No.59)

In other threads, there was a critical comparison of the editorials of the *Asahi Shim bun* following the elections in 2009 and 2017. The former editorial appreciated the election results as an expression of the people’s will, while the latter denied this view. As a result, the *Asahi Shim bun* was criticized for its reporting stance. Yamaguchi (2018) argues that criticisms of mass media and journalism on the Internet tend to criticize the media itself, rather than the content of the report. The same trend is also seen in this case.

Regarding the editorials of the *Asahi Shim bun*, many have even responded on SNS platforms, such as Twitter. Among these, the largest number of tweets seems to be arguing that “*Asahi Shim bun* cannot guide public opinion, the *Asahi Shim bun* does not discipline (laugh).” This tweet was retweeted at least 1,000 times. In addition, replies to these tweets are almost critical of the *Asahi Shim bun*. On Twitter, upon searching the editorial title by the *Asahi Shim bun*, 33 tweets are found that mentioned it and 29 tweets were critical of the *Asahi Shim bun*. In addition, the tweets and replies criticizing the *Asahi Shim bun* pointed out that the editorial of the *Asahi Shim bun* is arbitrary by comparing its editorial with those of the past.

Of course, we cannot judge from this reaction whether the construction of public opinion by the *Asahi Shim bun* was a social failure. However, it is certain that some people oppose the “true people’s will” presented by the newspaper and have shared their objections with others. Criticisms of the public opinion constructed by the *Asahi Shim bun* are amplified by communicating with people of the same values through SNS platforms. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of power through public opinion surveys (Oishi, 2014) by the *Asahi Shim bun* has been, at least in part, ineffective.

4. Conclusions

From the viewpoint of constructionism, by considering the public opinion research report of the 48th House of Representatives election and the online reaction, the following can be said:

- Some newspaper companies tried to present “real or true public opinion” based on their opinion polls. The newspaper companies created question items in their survey to conform to the company’s thesis; reported the findings; and cited them frequently in editorials. As Oishi (2014) pointed out, it is possible to view polls and their reports as “a type of power-exercising process to construct reality.”

- In particular, the *Asahi Shim bun* designed polls to criticize the Abe cabinet. The *Asahi Shim bun*
opposed the reality presented by the Abe cabinet, which asserted that “winning the election is winning confidence in public opinion.” The exercise of power by the *Asahi Shimbun* is against a government.

- However, the exercise in which a particular power is opposed through opinion polls is not necessarily effective in modern media environments. The Internet reveals many criticisms of public opinion polls and the coverage of the *Asahi Shimbun*. It is doubtful whether the *Asahi Shimbun* has been able to construct collective public opinion.

- Constructionist research tends to critically recognize constructs, but I think it is also necessary to consider the possibility that public opinion will be far more difficult to construct in the future.

**Note**

1 The theoretical examination of public opinion developed in this paper refers to Yamaguchi (2017, 205-217). However, its contents have been revised and modified substantially by considering subsequent research.

2 https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/2017/10/09/hiroki-azuma_a_23237074/ (Access on 2018/12/10)

3 https://www.logsoku.com/r/open2ch.net/newsplus/1508729910/ (Access on 2018/10/10)

4 @YoichiTakahashi (October 23, 2017) https://twitter.com/YoichiTakahashi/status/922258838652252160

5 Use Twitter's search function. https://twitter.com/search?q=%E6%94%BF%E6%A8%A9%E7%B6%99%E7%B6%9A%E3%81%A8%E3%81%84%E3%81%86%E5%AF%A9%E5%88%A4%E3%80%80%E5%A4%9A%E6%A7%98%E3%81%AA%E6%B0%91%E6%84%8F%E3%81%AB%E7%9B%AE%E3%82%92%E5%90%91%E3%81%91%E3%82%88&src=typd

6 @hirofujiponpon(October 23, 2017) https://twitter.com/hirofujiponpon/status/926225044707205128, @SUSHImedia2018 https://twitter.com/SUSHImedia2018/status/922595674981507074

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