Editorial: A Message from the Editor-in-Chief
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About the theme of this special issue:
Public Opinion and Media Discourse in the Era of Fake News and Filter Bubbles

The development of media architecture has enhanced the ease of information transmission. On the other hand, it has also given rise to some risks, such as unforeseen opportunities to access restricted information and sideline people who have different opinions. Eli Pariser, a famous internet activist, named this feature of the contemporary information environment the “filter bubble,” and he thought it problematic that people are surrounded by filters for viewing the information they want to see according to their interests. In the online discourse surrounding the concept of the filter bubble, the media has tended to manipulate “Popular Sentiments” to please the majority and secure a higher viewership and advertisement revenue, versus showcasing “Public Opinion” which is required to understand complex problems.

The origin of “fake news” dates back to the beginning of human civilization; and people have been deceived by rumors even as they have enjoyed spreading them, ever since. It is no different today, even in the contemporary information-rich society. In recent years, it is not only fake news but also fake accounts belonging to non-existent people, that are being used as undercover political and economic marketing tools online. Fake information such as fabricated GPS is also being used to camouflage personal details. The information that we encounter on a daily basis is being personalized, based on the history of one’s interests and web traffic. Not only has mass media slowly lost the battle to social media and new media in terms of audience interest and overall convenience, they are now struggling with monetization. As a result, the media’s capacity for nurturing transparency and shaping public opinion—which is based on truth and a clear sense of right and wrong—has been compromised.

What can be done to shape public opinion and media discourse; to improve the virtual information environment; and build a “new media environment” rooted in transparency and the “autonomy of information”? How do researchers majoring in media studies deal with the vanishing boundary between what is true and what is false, in a world of filter bubbles and fake news? What kinds of problem should they be aware of, and what research topics should they choose?

This second issue opens with Le Thu Mach and Chris Nash’s paper, titled Social Media Versus Traditional Vietnamese Journalism and Social Power Structures. This paper juxtaposes social media and journalism in Vietnam’s political and cultural contexts, and examines them from six different perspectives: function, content, the concept of freedom, content generators, legal frameworks, and cost. They analyze the core features of social media in Vietnam, and how it has created a space for public criticism and activism, in order to challenge the government.
This issue also focuses on Nancy Snow’s paper titled *NHK, Abe and the World: Japan’s Pressing Needs on the Path to 2020*. Snow explores the press and political environment of contemporary Japan, specifically NHK’s role as a news network that enables the needs and whims of the government. The author suggests that NHK expand its database of news sources for greater transparency, especially as it comes under increased scrutiny in the lead-up to the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

Yuan Meng and Sae Kyung Yu analyze China’s cultural proximities to Japanese animation in a paper titled *Uses and Satisfaction Afforded by Japanese Animation to Chinese Audiences*. Meng and Yu’s empirical research revealed various cultural proximities between China and Japan, including fondness for Japan, fondness for Japanese lifestyle and values.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s work, Yamaguchi Hitoshi’s contribution to political sociology titled *Public Opinion That Cannot be “Constructed,”* analyzes the concept of public opinion from a constructionist perspective. Using the media coverage of Japan’s 48th House of Representatives election—which was held in 2017—and the online reactions to it as a case study, Yamaguchi examines the idea that public opinion is constructed by public opinion polls and reports.

Hui Jiang conducted qualitative research for a paper titled *A Study of the Information Behavior of Chinese Youth, Focusing on the Relevance of Media Access and Status Quo Evaluation*. This paper examines the status of media use among China’s youth and the results of the “Lifestyle-value Test” which is a questionnaire survey that was conducted by several universities in 2012, in seven regions of mainland China. The author examines two aspects of the status quo evaluation: the evaluation of individuals, and the evaluation of countries and governments.

Song Chen focuses on the territorial dispute between Japan and China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in *When Did Public Opinion on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island Issue Begin Forming in China?* The author uses empirical analysis, a literature review, and theories of political communication to trace how public opinion of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands issue in Chinese society took shape.

In the second issue, the editorial board looked for research papers on “public opinion” and “media discourse” regarding the new media environment, with reference to the Asian region. Our editorial board welcomes original work from scholars both within and outside Japan. For details on submission procedures for the Asian Journal of Journalism and Media Studies (ISSN2189-8286), please consult The Japan Society for Studies in Journalism and Mass Communication’s web site (see link below).