

# On the Construction and Reproduction of Ideology in the New Communication Ecology

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**Abstract:** Mass communication has played an important role in the construction and reproduction of ideology. However, the changes in the communication ecology caused by the Internet make the ruling group unable to effectively carry out the construction and reproduction of ideology in the new communication ecology and bring threats. To solve this problem, the ruling group needs to deeply understand the underlying logic of the new communication ecology, especially the communication characteristics of the Internet as a multi node and large flow information circulation platform, so as to update the communication concept, change the communication role, attach importance to the individual communication value, actively solve practical problems, enhance the explanatory power of ideological theory and build Internet culture so that do a good job in the construction and reproduction of ideology.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Ideology

Ideology is a systematic and theoretical ideological concept system that consciously reflects the economic and political interests of a certain social group, as well as the ideological foundation of the political ideals, value standards and behavior norms of certain social groups and classes<sup>[1]</sup>. For China, who is still in the primary stage of socialist development, whether socialist ideology can occupy the high ground will directly affect the country's future and destiny.

### 1.2 Construction and Reproduction of Ideology

Generally speaking, the main channels for ideological construction and reproduction are schools, churches, trade unions and the media, in other words, education, religion, organization and communication. It mainly has the following four characteristics: compared with the educated, ideological builders have obvious authority; ideological construction places include families, schools, institutions, enterprises and institutions, mass media and so on, which are substantive, tangible and limited; the process of ideological construction is one-way, positive and guiding; the ideological construction process of the educated is mandatory and non-selective<sup>[2]</sup>.

The main channels of ideological construction and reproduction are not unchangeable. Althusser, a Western Marxist philosopher, believes that capitalist rule is guaranteed by hegemony, consensus and ideology, and the relative importance of the state's ideological machine varies with different modes of production and the matching degree between different ideologies and their cultural systems. For example, the church is the main ideological state machine in feudal society, especially in medieval Europe, while education and media are the most important ideological machines in the current capitalist society<sup>[3]</sup>.

For individuals, accepting the mainstream ideology means accepting a set of ideas, concepts, ideas or value systems carefully created by the social ruling group, so as to understand and recognize things. Individual ideology is not born, but rooted in social existence, and will be affected by thinking ability, environment, information, value orientation and other factors. Among these factors, what the ruling

group of modern society can control is information, that is, they can construct a symbolic environment that conforms to the ideological standards and requirements. Information is an independent variable, and its sub independent variables are education and media. Education disseminates knowledge that can contain ideology, and it represents a set of cognitive systems for the world and the logic of the bottom of society; while the media can convey ideological information, which represents a set of interpretation system for the world and social changes.

Strict regulation of education is nothing new around the world. Nowadays, no matter what kind of political system it is in a country, education plays an irreplaceable role in the construction and reproduction of mainstream ideology, which is the core channel for ideological reproduction and the last line of defence for ideological security as well.

Compared with education, the media is relatively loosely controlled. Due to the nature and communication function of information, mass communication plays an important role in the construction and reproduction of ideology, and even plays a decisive role. In other words, the relationship between the media and ideology is always extremely close. British sociologist John B. Thompson believes that ideological analysis in modern society must put the nature and influence of mass communication at the core, although mass communication is not the only place where ideology operates<sup>[4]</sup>. Although there is no conclusive evidence to prove the role of mass communication in ideological construction and reproduction, mass communication is indeed an important element that social ruling groups cannot ignore or even attach great importance to.

The development of education is relatively less affected by the outside world, however not by the media, mass communication is affected by many factors, including politics, economy, technology, market, culture, readers, and its ecological structure is changing constantly.

### **1.3 Communication Control in the Era of Traditional Mass Media**

In the era of traditional mass communication dominated by Newspapers, Magazines, and Broadcast & TV, social ruling groups appear in the process of ideological information dissemination as the information monitor. They control the mass media and strictly censor media information, whether newspapers, radio or television, almost all of them can guide and control public opinion. Obviously, such kind of guidance and control depends on the traditional mass media's communication method, that is, the elitist top-down communication cantered on institutions. The communication process is linear and mechanical, and the people can only passively receive information and do not have the power to speak and express in the media. Obviously, the communication mode of traditional mass media is extremely susceptible to geographical and temporal constraints. As long as the social ruling group controls the media organization, it can achieve control of communication, without any difficulty. Therefore, in the era of traditional mass communication, the head of the media is a political party, a social economic group, but ordinary people have no right to build their own media and are not allowed to express themselves in public. In the traditional mass communication ecology, the ideological system of the social ruling group will hardly be dispelled even if it faces the impact of multiple social thoughts due to the change of media control. In other words, there is not much value in discussing the relationship between mass communication and ideological construction and reproduction.

## **2. Control Failure in the New Communication Ecosystem**

New media especially the emergence of PC Internet and mobile Internet, has changed the communication ecology. In the new communication ecological environment, the main channels for the construction and reproduction of the ideology above are all facing the impact of the PC Internet and the mobile Internet, and thus change or even disappear.

### **2.1 Internet**

The Internet is inherently a distributed structure, formed by interconnecting nodes. The structure of the Internet seems simple, but it contains incomparable power, manifested in:

Firstly, the distributed structure determines the inherent equality, decentralization, and democracy of nodes in the Internet.

Secondly, the node connection of the Internet realizes the connection between information and information (information network), people and people (interpersonal network), things and things (Internet of things), and also realizes the compound connection of information network, interpersonal network and internet of things.

Thirdly, Internet is changing the resource allocation method and power structure of the entire society and makes it possible that “everyone can share and spread information socially” and “ordinary individuals have such a big voice”<sup>[5]</sup>.

Therefore, there are huge differences between the new communication ecology centered on Internet media and the old communication ecology centered on traditional mass media. The basic communication units that construct the old communication ecology are institutions and organizations, and they are the core, which includes not only the relationship between the various elements of the media organization, the relationship between different media organizations, but also the relationship between the media organization and the external environment; however, the basic communication unit of the new communication ecology is the individual, breaking the old asymmetric, unidirectional, and localized traditional mass communication ecological pattern, and becoming a new form of communication that is organized and connected in a new way by large-traffic platforms and communication nodes such as individuals, organizations (commercial or non-commercial), and professional news organizations<sup>[6]</sup>.

## **2.2 The Impact of the New Communication Ecology**

In the new communication ecology of the new structure, the construction and reproduction of ideology has been hit by an unprecedented impact, which is roughly expressed in the following four aspects:

Firstly, the Internet activates the ability of individuals to control social communication resources, and individuals become content producers. As a result, the discourse monopoly of the traditional mass media organizations controlled by the social ruling group was broken, and the authority of its dissemination of information was questioned.

Secondly, the Internet has activated the annihilated information needs and preferences of individuals, and the power relationship between the media and the public has changed. The previous “point-to-plane” situation where traditional media set the agenda to dominate information dissemination was broken, and information communicators and recipients began to move towards interactive communication and two-way collaboration.

Thirdly, the Internet enables individuals to obtain more information and content that is different from mainstream ideology and can independently choose which information to receive and which to reject.

Fourthly, if the content of ideological information is not embedded in the social relationship channel, it may die in the “last mile” of social communication, and ultimately fail to reach the terminal interface and contact users<sup>[7]</sup>.

It can be seen that in the new communication ecology, the effective and usual old method of the social ruling group in the old communication ecology-controlling the information dissemination process-will be powerless. Although in terms of the desire of power organizations, any country is striving to maintain power. No matter how great the loss it causes, the country will try its best to prevent the latest communications revolution from achieving its goals and restrict the free flow of information<sup>[8]</sup>, even make many efforts, e.g. a variety of controls are implemented, including technical control, political control, economic control and information sources control<sup>[9]</sup>. However, the effect is very little, not satisfactory.

### **3. Measures to Deal with the Threat of New Communication Ecology**

#### **3.1 Underlying Logic of New Communication Ecology**

In the new communication ecology, how should the ideological construction and reproduction of social ruling groups be carried out? As stated in the art of war, if you know yourself and know your enemy, you will be invincible in all battles. Therefore, the most important point is to find out what the new communication ecology is, what its underlying logic and operating mechanism are, what its communication process is, how the people contact and choose the information they transmit, what kind of information reception and response, etc., so as to suit the remedy to the case. As mentioned above, the basic operating system of the new communication ecology dominated by the Internet is a large flow information platform, in which the nodes including individuals, organizations (commercial or non-commercial), and professional news organizations, circulate freely, interact equally and aggregate with each other among the large flow platforms, and jointly complete the production, sharing and value creation of information, and reach a dynamic balance under the constraints of the community<sup>[10]</sup>, forming the so-called “platform media”. On this information platform, the media organization that the social ruling group relies most on in the old traditional ecology is just one information node, which constructs the whole platform together with other nodes, rather than the centre. Therefore, the social ruling group can no longer effectively control the information circulation and communication interaction of the platform, nor can it smoothly and effectively carry out the ideological construction and reproduction work. In other words, the new communication ecology poses a threat to it and causes difficulties.

#### **3.2 From “Gatekeeper” to “Night Watchman”**

Faced with the new communication ecology, if social ruling groups want to continue to carry out ideological work, they must update their concepts and change their roles in the process of information dissemination - transition from the manager of the communication agency to the co-builder of the social communication ecology. In other words, in the face of the new situation, the social ruling group should pay attention to and think about “how I, as one of the actors, should maintain the orderly and healthy operation of this system”, rather than “how should I manage this system”<sup>[11]</sup>. They should abandon the role of the so-called “gatekeeper” and assume the responsibility of the “night watchman”. By formulating rules and building a platform, the ruling groups should provide the most basic guarantee and constraint for each communication subject in the information platform, and handle disputes, resolve difficulties, provide public services for them, and strive to become “comrades” and “friends” of each node in the new communication ecology. By the way, it is much easier to construct and reproduce ideology.

However, based on a deep understanding of the new communication ecology, the change of the role of social ruling groups does not mean that the nodes of the communication institutions they control must be able to play the function of ideological construction and reproduction in the information platform, even if these institutions have established an equal and friendly relationship with users, and even become a communication community, but if there is no suitable communication content and social existence matching the ideological claims to maintain the relationship, the communication will still get twice the result with half the effort, or even backfire. Therefore, the ideological work of the social ruling group under the new communication ecology, in addition to the realization of conceptual renewal and role change, should still pay attention to the following three aspects:

Firstly, the most important thing is trying to solve social problems, such as the gap between the rich and the poor, education fairness, and class consolidation. And building a social existence that everyone can feel and consistent with ideological claims is the most fundamental measure for the social ruling group to win the struggle for ideological communication in the new communication ecology.

Secondly, the social ruling group must continue to enhance the explanatory power of the ideological theory system, enrich its connotation, and produce information and knowledge content suitable for the new communication ecology, and compete with diverse social thoughts in a multi-node information platform, win the battle of public opinion, gain the power of voices, and lead a new media culture.

Thirdly, one should attach great importance to the feedback of individuals in the new communication ecology to ideological information and knowledge content, that is, take the communication value of each individual seriously, and use feedback information as a reference for optimizing the effect of communication, rather than noise in communication. In addition, always be prepared to talk to individuals and control the complex situation formed by group communication.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In the new communication ecology dominated by the Internet, the ideological construction and reproduction measures rooted in the era of traditional mass communication have gradually failed. For the social ruling group, it is necessary to understand the underlying logic and operating mechanism of the new communication ecology, and change its communication role, from “gatekeeper” to “Night watchman”, from manager to co-worker. Only by effectively solving practical problems, enhancing the explanatory power of the theoretical system, caring for the value of individual communication, and disseminating appropriate and high-quality information and knowledge content, can the ruling groups truly do a good job in the construction and reproduction of ideology and thus achieve real results.

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