Segregated Spiral of Silence:
Investigating Influences on Outspokenness
on the Internet in China
分割型沉默的螺旋:
影響中國互聯網上意見表達的因素探究

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Abstract

The purpose of the dissertation was to investigate influences on online outspokenness based on the framework of Spiral of Silence under the dualistic discourse universes in China. Spiral of Silence (Neolle-Neumann, 1974) proposed that people’s outspokenness would be affected by the perceived opinion climate and those who perceived themselves as minorities would keep in silence. While under the context of dualistic discourse universes (He, 2009) in China, in which the official discourse universe was carried by traditional mass media and the unofficial discourse universe was carried by new media technologies, spiral of silence could work in a different form in the sense that challenged the hegemony of traditional mass media. This study examined how the divided media exposure (traditional media exposure and new media exposure), the focal social-psychological influences, individual dispositions, and issue dispositions affected Chinese citizens’ online outspokenness, based on the online survey of 870 participants on the issue of Fang-Han debate. Perceived online opinion congruency and online fear of isolation revealed significant impacts on the frequency of online outspokenness frequency, as the original spiral of silence model suggested, but difference was observed among segmented groups. Traditional media attentive exposure and new media attentive exposure revealed different influences on online discussion participation level among segmented groups. Theoretical implications and limitations of the current research will be addressed as well.

Keywords: Spiral of silence, online outspokenness, perceived opinion congruency, Fang-Han debate