Political Polarization and Selective Sharing in Korea:
Exploring the Role of Presumed Media Influence and Hostile Media Perception[1）]

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Introduction

People have become increasingly exposed to information that is congruent with their political orientation and have avoided news and information that conflicts with their political views and opinions across both digital and social media networks. As Sundar & Marathe (2010) noted, "system-initiated personalization" and "user-initiated customization" change people's news consumption. "Personalization" is based on the algorism of search engines and social media, and "customization" relates to the practice of individual people who tailor their own news feeds in order to engage more actively with information that matches their political views. This, consequently, leads to a so-called filter bubble (Pariser,

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1） The earlier version of this paper was presented with Kwangho Lee at the workshop "Disinformation, Misinformation, and Propaganda in Online News and Social Media" of the 11th International Conference on Social Informatics held in Doha, Qatar on 18 November 2019.

2012) and causes political polarization and intolerance (Prior, 2013; Stroud, 2010; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012). The Pew Research Center revealed significant differences between conservatives and liberals in the US in terms of acquiring information and interacting with people in relation to political issues. With regard to discussing politics online and/or with friends, people were more likely to interact with like-minded people.

Korean society has faced an increasing confrontation between conservatives and liberals since 2016, due to a series of political scandals and the impeachment of the president of South Korea. In terms of political media use, conservative and liberal online media, including podcasts and YouTube channels have increasingly appealed to citizens. The Digital News Reports of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism indicated that online news continuously attracts people in Korea. According to the 2020 Digital News Report of the Reuters Institute, the use of YouTube for news purposes in Korea, is among the highest across the 40 countries surveyed, but was the country most concerned about YouTube broadcasting false or misleading information online (31%).

Notably, Korea demonstrated the lowest levels of trust in relation to the news overall.[2] In particular, the results highlighted a continuously low level of trust regarding news across the world and significant differences between countries in terms of the trust in news overall were recorded; more than half of the population (56%) of Finland and Portugal put their trust in the news, by comparison with less than a quarter in France (23%) and Korea (21%). In the 2019 Digital News Report of the Reuters Institute, 26% of Korean respondents stated that they share news via social messaging or email. As Hasell & Weeks (2016) noted, given the current news consumption patterns, sharing information in social media is a significant means of engaging in politics. Previous research has centered on selective exposure and its consequences on our democratic society, but the study of news and political information sharing is quite limited. To better understand news engagement in relation to social media and the whole process of news consumption, the way in which partisan news media influences

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2) The question was as follows: "please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I think you can trust most news most of the time".

information sharing on social media must be explored.

Considering the current media landscape in Korea, this study explores political information sharing on social media, with an emphasis on political orientation, attitudes toward news media, and perceptions of the influence of pro- and counter-attitudinal media. Based on two main theoretical frameworks, "influence of presumed media influence" and "hostile media perception", the study aims to investigate the perceptive effect of pro- and counter-attitudinal media, as well as negativity toward media outlets, by ascertaining to what extent and in which way they relate to selective sharing in the Korean context.

News Sharing across Digital and Social Media Networks

Despite that people are increasingly turning to social media for daily news updates and to share news, the factors which motivate citizens to share political information are not well documented (Hasell & Weeks, 2016). Based on panel survey data from the 2012 US presidential election, Hasell & Weeks (2016) found that the use of pro-attitudinal partisan news online was connected with increased anger toward the opposing party's candidate, which in turn lead to information sharing about the election on social media. On the other hand, Weeks, Lane, Kim, Lee, & Kwak (2017) denoted that incidental exposure to counter-attitudinal information, also motivates stronger partisans to turn to like-minded political content, which subsequently translated into political information sharing on social media.

Both studies highlighted the role of exposure to pro- and counter-attitudinal political content in the process of political information sharing, as well as emotional response and partisanship. Shin & Thorson (2017) also suggested the influence of partisanship and emotion in news sharing. Focusing on the sharing of fact-checking messages, evidence has shown that US partisans selectively share the messages that match their specific group but challenge the opposing group. Furthermore, republicans were more likely to show out-group negativity and hostility toward fact-checkers than democrats.

Considered as a whole, the way in which partisans perceive the effect of pro- and counter-attitudinal media, and how those perceptions drive them to

share information on social media must be addressed. The perceived influence of media on others can affect the perceivers' own attitudes and behaviors. In addition, emotional responses such as negativity or hostility toward the media could be associated with citizens' own information sharing and dissemination, particularly given the low level of trust in relation to the news in Korea, as mentioned previously.

Perceptions of Susceptibility to Effects: The Influence of Presumed Media Influence

Research into the media effect has centered on more direct influences of the media on its audience, however, more studies should focus on the indirect influences to better understand the process of the media effect (Gunther & Storey, 2003). The idea of examining the indirect media effect is based on the research of the third-person effect, which originated with Davison (1983). Davison (1983) suggested that "people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes and behavior of others" (p.3). He argued that people tend to believe that others are more influenced by media than they are.

The third-person effect posits two main components: third-person perception and the behavioral component (Perloff, 1999). The third-person perception is a tendency to underestimate the media effect on oneself while overestimating the media effect on others. The behavioral component is a hypothesis claiming that biased third-person perception will drive people to take action, such as supporting the restriction on undesirable media content (Perloff, 1999). On the whole, previous research has focused on the tendency that persuasive and biased media content increase third-person perception to the extent that such content influences others, but not themselves (Peter, 2007). In the context of the political message, the perception that others are more susceptible to political content might foster negative political attitudes (Cappella & Jamieson, 1977). Lee (2009, July) also found that those with a greater third-person perception of political content, in particular, political advertising, are more likely to display negative political attitudes.

Research into the third-person effect often considers the magnitude of the self-other difference (third-person perception) and its effect on people's attitudes and intentions (the behavioral component). Gunther & Storey (2003) argued that it is necessary to take into account the way in which the media influences others, namely, that presumed media influence (hereafter PMI) is related to the perceiver's own attitudes. Instead of the magnitude of the self-other difference, this study focuses on PMI, a broader explanation of indirect media effects.

In addition, it is also necessary to examine the concept of others. This study considers the role of social distance in the process of PMI (Gunther, 1991; Perloff, 1999). Third-person effect research often compares media effect on self and others overall, however, certain researchers have suggested that when people identify themselves with the comparison group, the third-person perception is significantly decreased (Lambe & McLeod, 2005; Idid & Wok, 2010, June).

Furthermore, the third-person perception in relation to undesirable content tended to be stronger with regard to out-groups than in-groups (Lambe & McLeod, 2005). Scharrer (2002) argued that negative stereotypes of out-group members might influence perceptions of susceptibility of negative media effects. As such, it was necessary to divide the comparison group into subgroups, based on the social and political distance for a better explanation of the perceptive effects on others, particularly in the context of partisan media and contemporary news engagement in Korea.

"Media is biased": Hostile Media Perception and its Consequences

Vallone, Ross, & Lepper (1985) originally demonstrated hostile media perception (hereafter HMP) that news reports in the media relating to a particular issue are biased against the perceivers' own attitudes or beliefs. In an experiment on news of the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, undergraduate students comprising pro-Arabs, pro-Israelis, and neutral groups showed a significant difference in the perception of the news report. Neutral viewers saw the news as balanced, but pro-Arab viewers evaluated the news as being opposed to them, while pro-Israeli viewers perceived the news as biased in favor of the opposing group, namely the Arabs. Since the pioneering research on HMP, many scholars

have researched the hostile media phenomena or effects by considering the explanatory factors (e.g., Weeks, Kim, Hahn, Diehl, & Kwak, 2019) and its consequences (e.g., Gunther & Chia, 2001). In this study, I focus on the explanation and definition of hostile media phenomena and their influence on news engagement in an online environment.

This definition has focused on citizens' partisanship, prior attitudes, or involvement (Perloff, 2015). Hansen & Kim (2011) defined HMP as one "in which partisans perceive a neutral news report as biased against their side" (p.169). Arpan & Raney (2003) described the hostile media effect as "the process by which some news consumers rate ostensibly neutral stories as biased against their point of view (and=or in favor of someone else's point of view)" (p.266). In a review of the research into the hostile media effect, Perloff (2015) defined the effect as "the tendency for individuals with a strong preexisting attitude on an issue to perceive that ostensibly neutral, even-handed media coverage of the topic is biased against their side and in favor of their antagonists' point of view" (p.707), focusing on the audience's prior attitudes.

Previous studies suggested that the consequence of HMP has significant implications for democratic society, such as distrust in news media, perceptions of its influences on public opinion, and news consumers' political behavior (Feldman, 2017). Tsfati & Cohen (2005) denoted that HMP is related to distrust in news media. Research has also shown that those with a stronger HMP tend to perceive that political content influences public opinion contrary to their position (Gunther & Chia, 2001).

It has also been documented that HMP is related to political behavior, such as the intention to engage in corrective actions including political discussion (Rojas, 2010). Feldman (2017) argued that while HMP research has shown that perception drives citizens to engage in politics, such as political discussion or active participation, it also relates to distrust in democratic institutions and polarized discourse in society. Given the growing partisan media and selective engagement in the Korean context, it is important to consider the role of HMP in the information sharing process.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Lee (2020) showed that people tend to engage with news and political information that match their political views, and interact with like-minded people in Korea, by highlighting the political divisions in information consumption of pro- and counter-attitudinal media. The study also analyzed the perceptions of in- and out-group members' susceptibility to the effects of conservative and liberal media, based on PMI, indicating general support for PMI: Both conservatives and liberals perceived a high level of PMI of counter-attitudinal media on out-group members and a high level of PMI of pro-attitudinal media on individuals and on in-group members.

Focusing on the PMI of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on in- and out-group members, this study explores how partisan media influences political information sharing. RQ1, RQ2, and H1 focus on the presumed influence of pro- and counter-attitudinal media and political information sharing. The comparison groups include supporters of the liberal ruling party, supporters of the conservative opposition party, and political centrists. Considering a higher chance of interaction with like-minded people, the study posited that respondents with a higher presumed influence of pro-attitudinal media on in-groups are likely to share pro-attitudinal media content (H1). As for political centrists and counter-attitudinal group members, the study posed how the presumed influences of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on centrists relate to the sharing of pro-attitudinal media content (RQ1) and how the presumed influences of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on counter-attitudinal groups relate to the sharing of pro-attitudinal media content (RQ2).

H1: Higher presumed influence of pro-attitudinal media on in-groups is positively related to the sharing of pro-attitudinal media content.

RQ1: How do the presumed influences of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on centrists relate to the sharing of pro-attitudinal media content?

RQ2: How do the presumed influences of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on

counter-attitudinal groups relate to the sharing of pro-attitudinal media content?

As mentioned previously, Korea demonstrated a continuously low level of trust regarding news (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020). Lee (2019) showed HMP based on political orientation, which caused a deep distrust of media and media cynicism in the Korean context. Research has documented that HMP could drive citizens to engage in political behaviors, including political discussion (Rojas, 2010; Feldman, 2017). Partisan groups play a significant role in public discourse and tend to perceive media content as biased against their viewpoint (Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004). In the context of information sharing, this study predicted that HMP is associated with selective sharing (H2).

H2: A higher HMP is positively related to the sharing of pro-attitudinal media content among conservatives and liberals.

Methods

Sample
The data formed part of an online survey on "Political Attitude and Media Use" conducted between January 25th and 31st 2019. A total of 1,075 Internet users residing in metropolitan areas in Korea, participated in the survey, including Seoul (52.1%), Incheon (8.7%), and Kyunggi-do (39.2%).

Measurement
Political orientation
To assess political orientation, respondents were asked about their self-designated political orientation using a five-point scale: 1 (extremely conservative), 2 (moderately conservative), 3 (centrist), 4 (moderately liberal), and 5 (extremely liberal).

Political information sharing

To measure political information sharing within social media, respondents were asked, "how often do you share information from conservative media" and "how often do you share information from liberal media?" on SNS, such as Twitter and Facebook, and *KakaoTalk,* a mobile instant messaging application, popular in Korea, using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (absolutely).

Presumed media influence（PMI）

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent the pro- and counter-attitudinal media influence others, based on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (absolutely). The comparison groups included supporters of the liberal ruling party, supporters of the conservative opposition party, and political centrists.

Hostile media perception（HMP）

Respondents rated the level of hostility they felt toward the media using the question: "do you feel hostility toward any media?" based on a four-point scale ranging between none, little, some, and substantial.

Political knowledge

Knowledge of politics was measured using a question relating to respondents' self-assessed knowledge of politics with a five-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very knowledgeable).

Like-minded friends on social media

Respondents were asked about the political orientation of their friends on social media with the following question: "what is the political orientation of people with whom you interact on SNS?". Respondents were asked to select a rating on a five-point scale from the following: primarily conservative, more conservative than liberal, half conservative and half liberal, more conservative than liberal, and primarily liberal. The degree to which respondents have like-minded friends on social media was recoded depending on the respondent's political orientation.

Table1. Sample descriptive statistics:
Gender, age, and political orientation (N=1,075)

	N(%)
Gender	
Male	536(49.9)
Female	539(50.1)
Age	
20s	207(19.3)
30s	211(19.6)
40s	219(20.4)
50s	219(20.4)
60s	219(20.4)
Political orientation	
Extremely conservative	28(2.6)
Moderately conservative	167(15.5)
Centrist	495(46.0)
Moderately liberal	346(32.2)
Extremely liberal	39(3.6)

Characteristics of the Sample

49.9% of the respondents were male (n=536) and 50.1% were female (n=539), with an average age of 44.5 (SD=13.4). The age range included the following: 19.3% were between the ages of 20 and 29, 19.6% between 30 and 39 years, 20.4% between 40 and 49 years, 20.4% between 50 and 59 years, and 20.4% between 60 and 69 years. In the sample, 46.0% of the respondents claimed to be centrists; the percentage of respondents who assessed themselves as liberals and conservatives was 35.8% and 18.1% respectively (See Table 1).

Findings

For the subsequent analysis, the study categorized respondents who answered "extremely conservative" and "moderately conservative" as "conservatives" (Male: n=121, Female: n=74) and respondents who rated themselves as "extremely liberal" and "moderately liberal" as "liberals" (Male: n=184, Female: n=201) on a five-point scale that assessed self-designated political orientation. In the sample,

conservative respondents were older than liberal respondents. Among the conservatives, 37.4% were between the ages of 60 and 69, 19.0% were between 50 and 59 years, 14.4% between 40 and 49 years, 15.4% between 30 and 39 years, and 13.8% between 20 and 29 years. With regard to the liberals, 21.3% were between the ages of 20 and 29, 22.9% were between 30 and 39 years, 24.2% between 40 and 49 years, 19.5% between 50 and 59 years, and 12.2% between 60 and 69 years.

The study conducted a series of multiple regression analyses to examine the relative predictive power of presumed influences of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on the political information sharing of pro-attitudinal media content on social media. The predictor variables included gender, age, political knowledge, the extent to which people have like-minded friends on social media, HMP, and the PMI of pro- and counter-attitudinal media (See Table 2).

The result indicated a significant relationship between political knowledge and political information sharing for both conservatives (β= .186, p= .016) and liberals (β= .105, p= .043): Those with greater political knowledge were more likely to share the political information of pro-attitudinal media. In addition, liberals at a more advanced age, were more likely to share pro-attitudinal content (β= .156, p= .002).

The result also revealed that both conservatives and liberals who have more like-minded friends on social media, were more likely to share the political information of pro-attitudinal media, which was close to a marginally significant level respectively (Conservatives: β= .132, p= .060, Liberals: β= .095, p= .053).

The first hypothesis predicted that respondents with a higher presumed influence of pro-attitudinal media on in-groups are likely to share pro-attitudinal content (H1). As seen in Table 2, the study showed no significant results, contrary to the hypothesis.

The first research question asked how the presumed influences of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on centrists relate to the sharing of pro-attitudinal content. In relation to pro-attitudinal media, both conservatives and liberals with a higher presumed influence of pro-attitudinal media on political centrists, were significantly more likely to share pro-attitudinal content (Conservatives: β=

Table2. Regression analyses predicting sharing of pro-attitudinal content

	Conservatives	Liberals
Gender[a]	.076	.027
Age	− .010	.156**
Political knowledge	.186*	.105*
Hostile media perception (HMP)	− .005	.073
The degree of having like-minded friends on social media	.132†	.095†
Presumed influence of		
Pro-attitudinal media on		
Supporters of pro-attitudinal party	− .103	.040
Supporters of counter-attitudinal party	.089	.212***
Political centrists	.223**	.178**
Counter-attitudinal media on		
Supporter of pro-attitudinal party	.120	.067
Supporters of counter-attitudinal party	− .010	− .208***
Political centrists	− .046	.096†
Adjusted R^2	.109**	.189***

† $p < .1$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ [a] Gender was coded male=1, female=0

.223, p= .010, Liberals: β= .178, p= .001). This type of news sharing of pro-attitudinal content can be referred to as "promotive sharing". In contrast, liberals who perceive a higher presumed influence of counter-attitudinal media on centrists, namely that the conservative media can influence political centrists, had a tendency to share political information relating to liberal media, demonstrating a certain trend toward significance (β= .096, p= .093). This can be labeled "defensive sharing".

The second research question asked how presumed influences of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on counter-attitudinal groups relate to the sharing of pro-attitudinal content. The results showed that liberals with a higher presumed influence of liberal media (pro-attitudinal media) on supporters of the conservative party (out-group members) were significantly more likely to share information relating to liberal media (β= .212, p= .000). This demonstrates "promotive sharing". On the other hand, liberals with a higher presumed influence of conservative media (counter-attitudinal media) on supporters of the

conservative party (out-group members) were significantly less likely to share the political information of liberal media ($\beta= -$ .208, $p=$ .000).

With regard to HMP, the second hypothesis posited that higher HMP is positively related to the sharing of pro-attitudinal media content among conservatives and liberals. The result showed that there was no significant relationship, contrary to the hypothesis.

Discussion

Social media has enabled citizens to consume news and political information as well as express, recommend and disseminate political content to others across social media (Weeks & Holbert, 2013; Kümpel, Karnowski & Keyling, 2015). Considering the Korean political landscape and media environment, this study aimed to explore political information sharing on social media, focusing on the differences between individuals with conservative and liberal political orientations and their perception of pro- and counter-attitudinal media, based on theoretical frameworks including PMI and HMP.

The findings showed that liberals of an increasing age were more likely to share pro-attitudinal content, and political knowledge was related to pro-attitudinal sharing among conservative and liberal respondents. This study also revealed that interaction with like-minded friends on social media is a factor which motivates both conservative and liberal respondents to share pro-attitudinal content. This tendency is consistent with the presence of social supporters in the field of mass communication and social psychology, and the ideas of the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

Most importantly, this study highlighted two different types of political information sharing, promotive and defensive, both representing the specific sharing of political information online based on the PMI of pro- and counter-attitudinal media. With regard to promotive sharing in the case of political centrists, the presumed influence of pro-attitudinal media among conservative and liberal respondents was related to pro-attitudinal sharing. In addition, liberal respondents with a higher presumed influence of the liberal media on supporters of the conservative party tended to share information relating to the

liberal media. By comparison, the presumed influence of counter-attitudinal media on political centrists among liberal respondents was connected to pro-attitudinal sharing, indicating defensive sharing.

Among liberals, the presumed influence of conservative media (counter-attitudinal media) on conservatives (out-group members) was negatively related to pro-attitudinal sharing, suggesting that liberals who tended to show high political efficacy under the current liberal government, saw no virtue in seeking to persuade conservatives.

In particular, the findings showed that the presumed influence of pro- and counter-attitudinal media on political centrists plays a significant role in the process of sharing. With regard to in- and out-group differentiation, it is possible that the respondents might view political persuasion and media effect among political centrists as being in their favor. Future studies should investigate the partisan's view on centrists directly for a better understanding of the process. An experimental approach using political news and messages would also be useful in exploring the psychological process of partisans, including presumed influence and the emotional responses of pro- and counter-attitudinal content.

Overall, the findings have furthered understanding of the link between the presumed influence of partisan media and the sharing process across the digital and social media networks. People are more active and freer to make a choice in relation to what they consume and what they share, recommend, and disseminate in the current digital and social media context, rather than passively consuming news as seen in the traditional media environment. For the wider population, partisan news might have an indirect effect in terms of partisan's news sharing, as highlighted in a two-step flow model of traditional media effects (Hasell & Weeks, 2016). To conclude, although concerns are growing in our democratic society as selective exposure and sharing are increasing, it is also possible that incidental news exposure (Week et al., 2017) and shared experiences (Stroud, 2010) across digital and social media networks might foster civic engagement with political news.

Acknowledgement

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