

Analysis of “Prejudice” and “Stereotype” in Walter Lippmann’s *Public Opinion***Yuxuan Zhu**

School of Journalism & Communication, China West Normal University, Nanchong, Sichuan, China

***Corresponding Author:**

Yuxuan Zhu

Email: guojijed@163om

Abstract: “Prejudice” and “Stereotypes”, two key concepts in Walter Lippmann’s *public opinion*, are analyzed in detail and interpreted for its formation in this paper. And the relationship between the media and stereotype is also discussed.**Keywords:** *Public opinion*; Prejudice; Stereotype; Pseudo Environment.

Introduction

Walter Lippmann was born in a wealthy Jewish immigrant family of New York in 1889. In his childhood, he experienced dramatic changes that the American industrious power was initially established and the consumer society was emerging. His career began in the age of peacefulness before World War I. When in his declining years, what accompanied by him were “the trauma of the Vietnam War, disgrace of a Watergate and street rampage of the rioters.” These fluctuant social factors made Lippmann think more profoundly. *The Public opinion*—one of his most famous works, was published between World War I and World War II in 1922. The book can be roughly divided into three parts: The first, the pseudo-environment which argues what the public face is not the real world, but the false environment that was treated by media; secondly is the formation of public opinion. Lippmann regards public opinion as people’s reaction to the false environment, and stereotype plays an important role in the process; finally, the relationship between public opinion and democratic policies is referred to in his book. The topic of prejudice and stereotype will be discussed in this chapter.

The Prejudice and the Causes

“We know too much but have little experiences” [1]. Lippmann believed that when recognizing and dealing with public affairs, we often follow our own location and habits, as well as the way our culture given to us, which causes people have actual bias about the understanding of the affairs, that is the prejudice. So when we accept external events that we are not present with these prejudices, we have some pre-assumptions and preferences. In other words, these prejudice would hinder our personal experience or simply to replace it. So how are the prejudice produced?

In Lippmann’s opinion, before prejudice comes from the outside, the public might have some prejudice in advance. This kind of pre-set is commonly from inert system in our body, which is habit. “In most cases, we often make out after giving definitions rather than giving definitions after making out” [2]. About the understanding and handling of affairs, we must instinctively have some preference and judgment to cater the inertia system in our body, so that we can reduce thinking time that is required to reduce energy costs at maximum extent.

Prejudice may also be derived from the “reasonable imagination”. As Lippmann said that for most cases, we imagined first, then experienced. Therefore he cited an example about the same thing happened in the theater, people’s narrates are not the same in later stage. For most absent-minded people, retelling external public affairs justly and objectively is difficult and boring. People are good at imagining, good at adding some details of received messages in order to make that conform to rules. Whether it is called reading preferences, or use and satisfaction, or cognition and harmony, people inevitably have stereotypes about them.

The circle is also mentioned. In the second part of the third chapter “Communication and Opportunities” in *public opinion*, Lippmann believed that the social contact of public is limited. “Poor People do not have enough money to buy the right to access of information, rich one knows nothing about the human’s arena. They do not want to perform on stage, let alone performance” [3]. Whether it is in the year of the book’s publication, or the current that information is very convenient, and when the complicated information flock to public, let alone the validity of the information and the public’s attitude is indifference or interested, there is no deny

that circle acts as a first gatekeeper. In this sense, although circle has control circulation and transferring of information, the stereotype perhaps is the core of our personal traditions, and it also protects our social status. Prejudice maintains homogeneity of circle and provides a substantially uniform of internal group's decision.

Anyway, prejudice cannot be abandoned or eliminated. Lippmann also affirmed the meaning of stereotypes' existence in a sense. He pointed out that "The problem is due to our readily believe when we using stereotype" [4], the common public is lack of rational capability. They are in the mimic environment, so they have no time and no energy to think about things and make rational judgment and they can only act as "outsider".

Most people's Prejudice

Lippmann's elitist democratic theory showed the skepticism to people's rational capacity. During the debate with Dewey in the matter of democracy issues, Lippmann considered citizens are not reliable due to their many limitations, these random polymerization of bystanders cannot predict before the crisis began to clear nor can they pay a continuous attention after crisis. So he disagrees the so-called statement that "most rules are considered to have inherent moral and intellectual beautification", and he feel ridiculous about the theory of absolute sense that 51% of any population represents.

The reason is that Lippmann believed that the public who collects most of prejudice obviously do not have decision-making capacity, and this view is proved in *phantom public: Public comes up at the show's third act, and they left at the end of the show. It is too enough for them to distinguish who is good and who is evil. Making such judgment usually do not need any talent, you just need to watch shows, know little about plot, and have a rough grasp of information* [5]. On the one hand, the public prefer clear and concise information, and they cannot maintain complete attentions about the public events with detailed explanation. On the other hand, their inherent prejudice makes them judge impatiently.

Lippmann thinks that the formation of most stereotypes is mainly as a result of education and public awareness. In Russell's sentence, since universal education appeared, to instilling some artificial loyalty into a large number of the population is easier. And this indoctrination function of education belongs to religion in earlier stage. Most people's education from their early age, and centralized education finished around adulthood, then education is not finished at this moment, but continues to be educated mainly depends on the information provided by the media. Thus, with

this endless practice process, prejudice is implanted into our minds hideously and calmly.

With closer contacting with wartime propaganda work, Lippmann is worried about the propaganda. He saw wartime propaganda and censorship of information. On the one hand, it blocks the American public to see the truth of the cruelty of war, on the other hand, patriotism influences people's mind. Public is vulnerable to affect by the propaganda and they cannot tell what is truth and what is rumor. His raised serious doubts about the press freedom meaning in democracy system. In the *Freedom and news*, he said that freedom is not the aim, but becomes a means of achieving goals.

From Prejudice to Stereotype

Stereotype shows a mechanism for people's cognitive thinking in their minds. It is an unchangeable and simple concept and impression which people treat some specific things. It is usually accompanied with evaluations and emotions that we treat things. Lippmann regards public opinion as people's reaction to the imagination in their minds, which affirmed the decisive function of stereotypes during the formation of public opinion. After that, the theory has become one of the basic theories of political science, journalism, communication, sociology and other disciplines in the study of "public opinion". With respect to prejudice, stereotyping formation is difficult to change, after managing and regulating, it becomes a standard stereotypes system, once fixed, it becomes the standards for our reference, and it is prone to bring blind spots. Of course, this set of standard have some merits and "labeling" makes us understand things more convenient.

Before the *public opinion* was published, Lippmann took part in propaganda in world war 1 and knew everything of means that Britain and other government's propaganda institution by publishing false information and controlling the media to gain public's support, what makes him worried about is that this massive mind control in the post-war's advertising, public relations, publicity has been renewed. Media became the first promoter for making stereotype. Compared with the previous religion, church, family's tradition, the media provides stereotypes for public deliberately or not deliberately all the time. In his book, he talks about the impact of the media on people, the public cannot distinguish movies and reality, "as for today's imagination, photos mainly administer it. The right belonged to the printing yesterday, in retrospect, it belongs to oral language." [6]

Except for the news and media, there is some business which put attractive force at first place, such as advertising, public relations, film, arts, etc. They make living by making popularity, they advocates to use a variety of means to catch people's eyes and use

“eyeball economy” as the way of gaining profit, which continues to provide a new stereotype for the general public in society. So, people unanimous agreed what is beauty, what is the trend, what is of good value sand what is a good lifestyle, because of the continuous attract about information. You may watch a movie because of most people’s suggestions; you may buy a latest mobile phone because it is popular. However, most people’s opinions are probably decided by the media. At the time that the realistic democracy theory that Lippmann puts forward is almost at the peak period, this theory believed that some irrational public is a mortal malady for social stability, so policies are mastered by some elites.

But now public is probably more clever than Lippmann’s period, and this is what Dewey’s hope. The improvement of public capability and enthusiasm can exert positive effect to the sound development of modern democracy. In the past10 decade, people’s aesthetic became generalized, and authoritative deconstruction, pluralism, and post modernism is popular. People seem to have higher rebellious spirit to denounce with the so-called mainstream. While, how much does this kind of confrontation contain rational factors? Or, as Neil Postman says everything is processing in an entertaining way and this kind of confrontation is just an entertainment spirit?

REFERENCES

1. Bertrand Russell. Authority and the individual. Routledge. 1996. Chapter III.
2. Walter Lippmann. Public opinion. New York: Free Press, 1997. Chapter VI, Stereotypes.
3. Walter Lippmann. Public opinion. New York: Free Press, 1997. Chapter III, Communication and Opportunities.
4. Walter Lippmann. Public opinion. New York: Free Press, 1997. Chapter VI, Stereotypes.
5. Walter Lippmann. The phantom Public. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993. Chapter VI.
6. Walter Lippmann. Public opinion. New York: Free Press, 1997. Chapter VI, Stereotypes.