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Conformity builds walls, conversation breaks walls: Actor-partner interdependence analysis on communication patterns and perceived political similarity in Hong Kong young adults and their parents

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Abstract

Recent research found that the effect of conversation orientation on political similarity was mediated by a downward influence from the parents to the children. Nevertheless, whether a parent's perceived political similarity is influenced by their children's communication orientation remains an open question. The present study adopted the actor-partner interdependence modelling (APIM) to examine the reciprocal effects between Chinese young adults and their parents in Hong Kong. One-hundred and ninety-three parent-child dyads (Parents' $M_{\text{age}} = 52.80$; Children's $M_{\text{age}} = 21.96$) completed online surveys that measured family communication styles and perceived political similarity. We found that conversation orientation increased one's own and partner's perceived political similarity, whereas conformity orientation decreased one's own but not partner's perceived similarity. Our findings highlight the importance of viewing political socialization from a communication perspective. Open and candid communication is essential to facilitate the communication of political differences in the era of political polarization.

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In recent years, the study of political communication in families has been reinvigorated in response to the increasing polarization of political attitudes in mature democracies in North America and Europe. While many studies focus on how family may contribute to or mitigate political polarisation (Banducci et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2020; Iyengar et al., 2018), our project aims at exploring how family is responding to the challenges that political polarisation has posed to their members' relationships. This is particularly timely for Hong Kong because the families are at the juncture of transformation which is triggered by the political divides that have deepened over the last few years' political upheavals.

Hong Kong has experienced two waves of democratic movements in the recent years. In 2014, a peaceful occupation movement took place to demand genuine universal suffrage and it started coining pro-democracy supporters as 'yellow ribbons' and pro-establishment supporters as 'blue ribbons'. The division between the 'yellow ribbons' and the 'blue ribbons' continued to widen in the Anti-extradition law amendment bill (Anti-ELAB) protest movement that began in mid-2019. The social and political splits have reshaped citizen's purchase behaviors (Chan & Pun, 2020) as well as their personal life and relationships (Ho et al., 2018; Ho & Jackson, 2020). Hong Kong Chinese families, often characterised by hierarchical harmony, are struggling to contain the political differences that widen between the older and the younger generations as the democratic movement developed (Kong & Ho, 2016). The tensions triggered by intergenerational political differences have been seen to turn into emotional blackmailing, domestic abuse and relationship breakdown (Ho et al., 2018).

While Chinese families in Hong Kong are at the juncture of transformation, it is an important time to investigate how different patterns of communication between parents and adult children could have affected their perceived political similarity with each other. Seldom did studies on familial communication of politics address the issue of perceived political similarity (or differences). As witnessed in the phenomenon of ‘political homophily’, people tend to communicate with like-minded others, especially when it comes to political issues which involve the deliberation of abstract concepts, personal philosophies and welfare (Huber & Maholtra, 2017). Levinsen and Yndigegn (2015) found that perceived political distance, measured by a single item of perceived closeness of one’s political attitude to the communicating partner, predicts engagement in political discussion between Danish young people and their parents. While the pursuit for ‘actual similarity’ across generations could easily become ‘authoritarian’, understanding what drives a perception of ‘common grounds’ that in turn facilitates communication, despite the actual differences, could be worthwhile for mending cracks in familial relationships.

Family communication patterns

Social interactions are at the core of the ‘doing’ of family (Smart, 2007). Habitual patterns of communication between the parent and the adult child are associated with a myriad of relational outcomes including family satisfaction (Givertz & Segrin., 2014; Schrodts, 2009), communication competence (Schrodts et al., 2009) and conflict resolution (Curran & Arroyo, 2018; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006b). A communication perspective is vital to understand how family members express, deliberate and resolve their political conflicts, and therefore pinpoint practical steps for mending the cracks in the family that are generated by a highly polarized political climate (Shulman & DeAndrea, 2014).

Grounded in the basic cognitive processes of verbal communication and originated from the quest to understand how family members deliberate media messages, the Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCPT) is a ‘grand theory’ that can be applied to a wide range of family communication contexts, including the communication of political attitudes (Graham et al., 2020; Ledbetter, 2015; Shulman & DeAndrea, 2014). The original conceptualization of FCP by McLeod and Chaffee (1972) is based on the idea of co-orientation. Co-orientation (Newcomb, 1953) refers to a situation where two or more persons devote their attention onto the same object in their social or physical vicinity, and formulate an understanding about the object. Theoretically speaking, co-orientation serves to generate an accurate and congruent social reality on which the family members can work with one another. However, this is not always the case - Even though the communicating partners co-orient, they may not necessarily formulate a consensual understanding of the object, or they may each formulate an understanding of one another but turn out to be inaccurate. To facilitate accuracy and congruence in their understanding of the object, in other words, a shared social reality, family members may follow one of the two distinct paths. They may either come into an agreement about the object based on the discussion of its overt and covert properties and outcomes, in other words, to adopt the process of concept-orientation. Alternatively, they may allow one person, often the family member at the higher end of the hierarchy, to determine the nature of the object, in other words, to adopt the process of socio-orientation. These processes tend to be habitual cognitive strategies used by the communicating partners to achieve a shared social reality, but are not mutually exclusive.

Later, Mary Ann Fitzpatrick and colleagues moved beyond the original conceptualization by highlighting the communicative behaviors manifested by these cognitive processes as well as

how these communicative tendencies impact on family relationships (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). They also proposed that these habitual tendencies are rooted in people's values and assumptions of what families should look like. According to the Revised Family Communication Patterns scale (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Koerner & Fitzpatrick., 2006a), the concept-orientation was reconceptualized as the conversation orientation which refers to the extent to which unrestrained interactions on various topics are encouraged. A high degree of the conversation orientation involves spontaneous and frequent exchanges of thoughts and feelings among the communication partners. Behind the conversation orientation is the belief that open and frequent communication is the key for family satisfaction. Exchange of ideas are valued in these families and parents utilizes candid and frequent communication to influence their children. The socio-orientation was reconceptualized as the conformity orientation, which refers to the extent to which homogeneity of values and beliefs are encouraged. Uniformity in beliefs and interdependence of family members are valued. In an intergenerational context, this means obedience to the authority figures in the family. Behind the conformity orientation is a belief in a traditional, hierarchical family structure where family members are expected to relinquish personal interests for family relationships and revere the authority figures in the family.

Schrodt et al. (2008) found the two dimensions to be differentially related to a range of information-processing, behavioral, and psychosocial outcomes, including conflict avoidance (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997), mental health (Zarnaghash et al., 2013), perceived social support (Koerner & Maki, 2004; Bosch et al., 2012), children's resilience (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 1996) and family satisfaction (Schrodt, 2009). In general, the conversation orientation could be related to the adoption of adaptive management strategies when it comes to conflicts related to political attitudes. Shearman and Dumlao (2008) found that the conversational orientation was associated

with young adults' preference for integrating conflict strategies (i.e., focus on problem solving and empathy) to handle conflicts with parents in both Japan and the United States. The adoption of integrating conflict strategies might help parents and children to take each other's perspectives when communicating political views. Second, the conversational orientation communication may increase the perceived malleability of political ideology. The beliefs that another group can or cannot change influences social judgement and inter-group interaction quality (Halperin et al., 2011; Lassetter & Neel., 2019). Candid conversation may not directly change one's political ideology but it may instill a sense that the other group is changeable, and therefore facilitate exploration of 'common grounds'.

However, the conformity orientation may 'build walls' between communicating partners especially when they disagree with each other. Koerner and Cvancara (2002) found that families characterised by a high conformity orientation used more self-oriented communication with more interpretations, questions and advice; while those with low conformity orientation applied more other-oriented communication with more confirmation, reflection and acknowledgement. The differences in speech acts illustrate how high conformity may stifle conversations that could be relevant to the needs of the communicating partner. High conformity orientation was also related to greater listening anxiety and intellectual inflexibility (Ledbetter & Schrodtt, 2008), reticence (Kelly et al., 2002), as well as communication apprehension (Avtgis, 1999) among adult children. Hence, the conformity orientation tends to stifle the communication of complex and potentially conflicting attitudes, which is often the likely situation in political communication.

A direct test on how the two communication orientations are related to the communication of politics between the parents and their adult children is scarce. An exception is

Shulman and DeAndrea (2014) which investigated the association between university students' perceptions of their parents' communication with them and their political similarity. The authors found that political similarity was positively related to the conversation orientation but negatively associated with the conformity orientation. Furthermore, the association between conversation orientation and political similarity was mediated by a downward influence from the parents to the participants. However, like most existing studies on political socialization in adult children, this study did not collect data from the other side of the coin, namely, the parents.

The current study

Despite acknowledging that differences in political views exist and are negotiated in families, only a handful of studies have investigated the reciprocity of intergenerational political influences from an angle of familial communication (Shulman & DeAndrea, 2014; Graham et al., 2020). Two gaps are prominent in this line of research. The first gap is cultural. Seldom were the studies conducted in Chinese families where collectivistic family norms that put hierarchical harmony before personal interests and expression are salient. The FCPT could be useful in such research, as it is rooted in the basic, habitual cognitive and communicative processes among families that subscribe to a variety of socio-cultural beliefs about what a family should be like. The model has been adopted in traditionally collectivistic cultures such as China (Zhang, 2007) and Iran (Mohammadi et al., 2019) in addition to the 'Western' cultures. As Hong Kong families are at a junction of transformation in response to the tides of democratic movements in recent years, in addition to manifest communicative behaviors, the adoption of FCPT in our research will also inform whether a certain set of beliefs over families are more instrumental to communicating differences than others.

The second gap is methodological. McDevitt and Chaffee (2002) highlight that political influence between the parent and the child could be a two-way drive where both the top-down (from parents and children) and the trickle-up (from children to parents) paths are possible. In the context of adult children-parent dyads, researchers are handling two generations of adults who have, theoretically speaking, equal civil rights in the society. Hence, the dyadic design can mimic the default social reality which affords a level playground for both generations to reveal how they can influence and be influenced by each other. By delineating the effects from the parents to their adult children versus those from the adult children to their parents, this more comprehensive sketch of familial communication can help pinpoint communicative drivers of political influence on either side.

In response to the polarized political climate in Hong Kong, this study explored how perceived political similarity between young adults and their parents are influenced by each others' schemata regarding communication using actor-partner interdependence models (APIMs). The data of this study was collected between March and April 2020, a time during the anniversary of the introduction of the extradition law amendment bill (ELAB), before the National Security Laws (NSL) legislation, and at the height of the local coronavirus outbreak. The timing was conducive to participants' reflection of their engagement with politics, as on one hand the most 'heated' mass protests were halted by the pandemic-related public health orders; and on the other hand the threat of the pandemic and hints about NSL legislation render it a critical time for people to proactively reflect on their attitudes toward the government.

Based on FCPT, we conjectured that:

H1. The conversation orientation will be positively related to perceived similarity.

H2. The conformity orientation will be negatively related to perceived similarity.

However, since there has been a lack of literature on how political differences are communicated between adult children and their parents in Chinese families, we did not put forward a hypothesis stipulating the relative strengths of the adult children's and the parents' actor and partner effects. Hence, as recommended by Kenny and Ledermann (2010), we began with testing the model fit of a constrained model where the two parties' effects were assumed to be of similar magnitude. If the model fit was poor, we would proceed with testing a fully saturated model where all paths would be tested freely.

Methods

Design

This was a cross-sectional online survey with distinguishable dyads. As per the dyadic design, an adult child (or a parent) has to complete the study with one of his/her parents (or adult child).

Sampling and recruitment

Eligible participants were Hong Kong Chinese young adult children and their parents. Both parties could read traditional Chinese and had access to the internet. Adult children were required to have resided in Hong Kong for the past 7 years (i.e., permanent residence). There was no Hong Kong residence requirement for the parents. The convenient sample was recruited through university campus, dormitories, email lists, and social media (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram). Since studies that directly tested the effect of family communication orientation on perceived political distance are rare, we used the meta-analytic

effect size of the effect of communication orientation on psychosocial outcome ($r = .46$, see Schrodtt et al., 2008) as a reference to determine the sample size. Thus, our proposed study aimed to achieve the targeted power of 0.80 and the type 1 error at 0.50 with a conservative effect size of 0.35 for the actor effect and a slightly smaller partner effect at 0.25. The APIM power analysis recommended by Ackerman and Kenny (2016) suggests that a minimum of 123 dyads is needed to have adequate power to detect both the actor and partner effects. We have recruited 193 dyads. Thus, the current study was sufficiently powered.

Procedures

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the survey began. The parents and the adult children surveys were hosted on two separate Qualtrics pages, such that the participants had no access to their partners' information, and the partners can work on their own survey independently. Once an adult child (or a parent) had completed the survey, an invitation message and a QR code with the parents (or adult children) survey link were generated automatically to instruct the participant to invite his/her parent (or adult child) to participate in the study. In an attempt to balance the genders of the parents and the adult children, the gender of the family member to be invited was randomized. For instance, after an adult child had completed the survey, he/she received a randomized instruction to ask his/her, specifically, mother to participate. However, if the mother was unavailable (e.g., divorced), the adult child may invite the father to participate. The QR code and the invitation message facilitated the invitation of family members into the study. After both partners had completed their surveys, and the surveys were matched by the child's birthday and the first five digits of the parent's phone number, the dyad received HKD\$100 (USD\$12.8) worth of supermarket coupons. The study was

approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Hong Kong Shue Yan University (HREC 19-09).

Instruments

Family Communications Styles

The Revised Family Communication Patterns (RFCP; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002) was used to evaluate conversation and conformity orientations of the participants. There were 15 items assessing the conversation orientation, and 11 items for the conformity orientation. There were two versions - (a) the adult children version which evaluated participants' perceptions on how they communicated with the parents who completed or were to complete the survey (e.g., 'I can tell my parent almost anything', 'In our home, my parent usually have the last word') and (b) the parents version, which was related to participants' perceptions on how they communicated with their adult children who completed or were to complete the survey (e.g., 'My child can tell me almost anything', 'In our home, the parents usually have the last word'). For both versions, participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability of the subscales were adequate (Cronbach alphas: Children's conversation: .95; Children's conformity: .91; Parents' conversation: .94; Parents' conformity: .92).

Perceived Political Similarity

Following the approach of Levinsen and Yngidegn (2015), we asked the participants to answer the item, 'How similar or different is your political view to your adult children (if you are a

parent) / your parent (if you are an adult children)' on a scale ranging from 1 (very different) to 10 (very similar).

Demographic variables such as age, gender, income, and educational statuses were collected and included in the analysis.

Data analysis

The APIM (Cook & Kenny, 2005) was used to examine the actors' and partners' effect of family communication styles on perceived political similarity. Following the advice of Shulman and DeAndrea (2014) and considering that the two orientations are conceptually independent dimensions (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002), separate models were fitted for the conversation and the conformity orientation. The model has two predictor variables (parents' and children's conversation / conformity orientation) and two outcome variables (parents' and children's perceived political similarity). The relationships among the variables are defined as actor effects, partner effects and covariance. The actor effects represent the effect of each partner's conversation or conformity orientation on his or her own perceived political similarity (e.g., $X_{parent} \leftrightarrow Y_{parent}$, $X_{child} \leftrightarrow Y_{child}$). The partner effects represent the effect of conversation or conformity orientation on their partners' perceived political similarity (e.g., $X_{parent} \leftrightarrow Y_{child}$, $X_{child} \leftrightarrow Y_{parent}$). Covariance between both partners' communication orientations and that between the residuals of both partners' perceived political similarity was included to account for a) systematic covariation of their communication orientations and b) covariation of perceived political similarity that was not explained by the predictors. Gender, household income, and educational status were entered as control variables. Chi square test, TLI, CFI, RMSEA and SRMR were used as model fit indicators to examine whether the constraint

model (whereas equal actor and partners' effect is assumed) would be adopted. The model was tested with MPlus 8.0. The Mplus code can be found in supplementary materials.

Results

One hundred and ninety three dyads were used in the analysis (Parents' $M_{age} = 52.80$, $SD_{age} = 6.51$; Children's $M_{age} = 21.96$, $SD_{age} = 4.29$). The gender ratio is similar for parents and adult children participants. Among parents (adult children), there were 54 (47) males and 139 (146) females. Among the parents, 7.3% (14) were university educated, 37.8% (73) were completed senior secondary education. 83.4% of the children were university educated. The median household income was HKD\$20,001 to 40,000 per month, which was comparable to the local average (HKD\$28,700; Census & Statistics Department, 2019). Table 1 also presents the descriptive statistics and correlation of major variables.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The effect of conversational communication orientation on perceived political similarity

Kenny and Ledermann (2010) suggested testing whether actor and partner effects are equal across partners (with 2 degrees of freedom). The constraint model with equal actor and partner effects should be adopted if it does not have significantly worse fit than the saturated model. We adopted the constraint model since the model fit was satisfactory, $\chi^2(20) = 5.28$, $p = .51$, RMSEA < 0.01 , CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.01, SRMR = 0.02. Figure 1 shows the estimates of actor and partner effects of conversational communication orientation. Both actor and partner effects were statistically significant after controlling for gender, education, and income level of both parents and children. In particular, conversational orientation did not only increase one's

own, but also one's interaction partner's perceived political similarity. Table 2 shows the path coefficients of the full model.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The effect of conformity communication orientation on perceived political similarity

We again adopted the constraint model since the model fit was acceptable, $\chi^2(20) = 33.05$, $p = .03$, RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = 0.88, TLI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.04. Figure 2 shows the estimates of actor and partner effects. The actor effect was statistically significant after controlling for gender, education and income level of both parents and children, but the partner effect was not significant. In other words, conformity orientation decreased one's own perceived political similarity, but it had no effect on one's child or parent's perceived political similarity.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Discussion

Since the UM in 2014, Hong Kong has been witnessing increasing political polarization. The conflict between the pro-democracy ('the yellow ribbons') and the pro-establishment ('the blue ribbons') camps escalated to new heights during the Anti-ELAB social movement in 2019. Applying the FCPT (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002), we studied how family communication patterns influence perceived political similarities among dyads of young adults and their parents in Hong Kong.

As expected, our findings show that higher conversation orientation is related to higher perceived political similarity. The effect was significant with both actor and partner effects as well as for both the adult children and their parents. This echoes with the findings of Shulman & DeAndrea (2014) where the conversation orientation was also found to be positively associated with perceived political similarity with the parents in their adult children participants. However, we added to their findings by showing (a) such an association is present among the parent participants too, and that (b) one's communication orientation influences the perception of political gap in the communicating partner, with the parents and the adult children of comparable magnitudes. In accordance with the previous literature on the positive links between a conciliatory conflict management approach, empathetic communication and perceived ideological malleability with the conversation orientation (Halperin et al., 2011; Lassetter & Neel, 2019; Shearman & Dumlao, 2008), we found that the habit of open and candid conversation tends to 'break the walls' between the parents and the adult children, and enable each other to feel more similar to one another on political matters.

Echoing with the results of Shulman and DeAndrea (2014), our findings show that the higher the conformity orientation, the lower level of similarity one perceives with the communicating partner. Nonetheless, we documented the process among both the adult children and the parents. No partner effects were significant in the model. That is, how much one feels the communication is dominated by conformity only influences one's own perception of political similarity, but not the partner's. Notably, the kind of conformity referred to in FCPT concerns only those involving the children conforming to their parents, but not the other way round. In short, in accordance to the literature on how the conformity orientation reinforces self-oriented speech acts and apprehension over communication (Koerner & Cvancara, 2002; Ledbetter &

Schrodt, 2008; Kelly et al., 2002; Avtgis, 1999), we found that conversations characterised by the objective to align the adult children with their parents tend to ‘build walls’ between the two generations when it comes to communicating political attitudes.

The current literature on familial political communication has two gaps - The first one is cultural, as there has been a lack of studies from the Asian cultures. Communicating political views often entails exchanging contested opinions on impersonal public matters, abstract ideologies, and personal interests, especially when differences in views are perceived or anticipated. Such discussion may not square with the collectivistic norms about families in the Chinese culture which tend to involve a vertically patrilineal hierarchy, put collectivistic concerns before personal interest, give precedence to interpersonal harmony over the expression of personal identity, and emphasize loyalty and cohesion (Hsu, 1985; Meredith et al., 1994; Xu et al., 2008; Yau & Smetana, 1996). The family structures (Shulman & DeAndrea, 2008) and ideology about family could be very different between western and eastern cultures. Such differences could change the preference for and the impacts of political communication. Thus, one may wonder whether the findings of family political socialization from the western cultures can be generalized to Chinese families. Nevertheless, the present studies seem to suggest the possibility for Chinese families in Hong Kong to adopt communication orientation, and the effect of which on political similarity is consistent with the findings in the Western literature. However, given Hong Kong’s colonial history and standing in the international markets, local families can be influenced by a dynamic flux of symbols and practices from different cultures. The co-performance of cultures may result in the creation of new norms through blending of those of multi-cultures, or displaying different dominant cultural norms by contextual requirements.

Hence, future studies may investigate how multicultural norms are dynamically applied in the context of political communication.

The second gap is methodological, where quantitative dyadic approaches have been generally underused in the literature of familial political communication. Traditional statistical approaches (e.g., ANOVA, t-test, multiple regression) inherently treat individual's scores as independent observations but in fact attributes of family members are usually non-independent. For instance, communication competence (Lakey & Canary, 2002), attachment styles (Campbell et al., 2001), and personalities (Robins et al., 2001) of family members are usually "linked". Indeed, our data also suggested that the communication orientation and perceived political similarity of parents and children are highly correlated. With the presence of non-independent observations, the test statistics of the traditional approaches are inaccurate. The APIMs used in the present study could account for the non-independence of parent and children's variables to provide more accurate estimations of the effect of communication orientation on perceived political similarity. Furthermore, this approach also allowed delineation of the top-down and the trickle-up paths of political communication between two generations. Thus, the present findings suggest that political socialization is a reciprocal process whereas both parents and children are influenced by each other.

Practical implications

This study is conceived out of the intention to find a solution to the family conflicts arising from the increasingly polarized political landscape in Hong Kong. The phenomenon of 'political homophily' (Huber & Malhotra, 2017) highlights that people tend to associate with like-minded others but withdraw interaction if disagreement is anticipated. Yet, the deliberation

of disagreement forms the cornerstone of a democracy. In fact, Grönlund et al. (2015) experimentally illustrated that the extent to which deliberation among like-minded people leads to a polarization of political opinions can be suppressed with a deliberative norm. Hence, instead of examining factors that facilitate the ‘actual sameness’ in political attitudes, which has been the inquiry in numerous studies on familial political transmission (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2018; Jennings et al., 2009), we investigated how a perception of ‘common ground’ can be achieved from communication, regardless of whether the family members subscribe to different political ‘camps’.

Hierarchical harmony as a common Chinese family practice might be able to sustain familial ties through silencing or being silent to differences in opinions. However, our findings suggest it does not bring family members closer to each other in terms of their political views. Conformity orientation will drive family members, especially those at the bottom of the family hierarchy, to find and express their political views elsewhere outside the family (Ho et al., 2018). Conceivably, these family members will seek approval from like-minded cohorts. The local adult children and parents participants we have interviewed were exposed to distinct sets of ‘enlightening’ socio-political events. While the key events igniting of the former group’s interest in politics tended to be the National Education protests in 2012, the UM in 2014, or the recent AntiELAB movement, the latter group could have been heavily influenced by the Cultural Revolution, the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, and the fast economic growth entailed by the open-door policy of China in 1980s/90s. Underlying these two sets of events are distinct schemata regarding the relationship between the governed and the governments and between Hong Kong and China. When the family fails to contain the opposing views, these views find their place in easily accessible ‘echo chambers’ (e.g., peers, the internet), further polarizing the

socio-political landscape. Whereas, egalitarian exchanges between parents and children can close the perceived political distance and hence address political polarisation, at least within the household. While Kong and Ho (2016) argued that Hong Kong Chinese families were seeking a new modality to contain and enable communication of political differences between two generations groomed under strikingly different socio-political landscapes, our study shows that communication orientation can be a contributor to this transformation.

Study limitations

First, despite our attempt to randomize the gender of the family members to be invited into the study, males were underrepresented among both the parents and the adult children. On one hand, this may have confirmed the stereotypic assumption of family communication as a feminine matter. On the other hand, previous studies have shown unequal magnitudes of socialization effects from (or to) mothers versus fathers, and onto (or from) sons versus daughters (Levinson & Yndigegn, 2015; Shulman & DeAndrea, 2014), which warrant careful investigation with a gender balanced sample. Hence, future studies were encouraged to sample both genders equally, in order to differentiate the gender-related effects. Second, as the study required the participation of both dyad members, our sample would have excluded the most conflictual dyads or those who have severed their ties due to (political) disagreement. Third, due to the length of the online questionnaire (about 20 minutes long), we would have sampled a group of parents, in particular, of relatively high education levels. However, the literacy of the adult children was more likely to be homogeneous due to Hong Kong's free education policy. Fourth, the current research studied political communication using only a dyadic design and within the parent-child relationship. Indeed, the nuclear family has only become the norm in Hong Kong in the recent decades. The average household size decreased from 4.5 in 1971 to 2.8

in 2018 (Census and Statistics Department, 2011, 2018). However, due to the close proximity between households, traditional family practices such as regular meals and gatherings with the extended family are well-preserved. Hence, it will be of practical and theoretical interest to explore how political differences are communicated and managed across the extended family. Lastly, due to the correlational design, the present study could not eliminate the alternative causal sequence. For instance, a high initial ideological similarity encourages families to adopt a conversational communication style. Indeed, the relationship between communication orientation and political similarity could be dynamic and bidirectional. Future longitudinal studies could further establish the causal sequences.

Conclusion

As the internet is increasingly a homophilic environment, the home becomes the arena where distinct political attitudes are encountered and discussed. Using a dyadic approach and situating our inquiry amidst the recent democratic movements in Hong Kong, we found that the conversation orientation promotes own's and communicating partners' perceived political similarity, while the conformity orientation aggravates perceived political distance. If a democratic society is about containing and communicating differences, instead of building walls and hostility, family communication can be a site for cultivating this much needed capacity in the members of the society.

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Table 1

Correlations, mean and standard deviation of major variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. P-Conversational	-	.56**	.10	.01	.39**	.25**
2. C-Conversational		-	-.01	-.02	.31**	.31**
3. P-Conformity			-	.61**	-.21**	-.26**
4. C-Conformity				-	-.13	-.21**
5. P-PPS					-	.61**
6. C-PPS						-
Mean	4.53	3.96	4.29	4.16	5.13	4.93
SD	1.01	1.18	1.02	1.07	2.50	2.61

Note. P = Parents; C = Adult children; PPSD = Perceived political similarity.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Path coefficients of the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) that relates conversational orientation to perceived political similarity

Effect	Path	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	95%CI
Actor	Conversation-A → PPS-A	0.60	0.12	<.01	[0.34, 0.83]
Partner	Conversation-A → PPS-P	0.28	0.12	.02	[0.05, 0.51]
Actor	Income-A → PPS-A	<0.01	0.04	.99	[-0.08, 0.07]
Partner	Income-A → PPS-P	0.03	0.04	.46	[-0.04, 0.09]
Actor	Education-A → PPS-A	0.23	0.12	.06	[-0.02, 0.46]
Partner	Education-A → PPS-P	0.20	0.12	.11	[-0.04, 0.44]
Actor	Gender-A → PPS-A	0.07	0.35	.84	[-0.62, 0.77]
Partner	Gender-A → PPS-P	0.25	0.35	.48	[-0.44, 0.93]
	Conversation-A with Conversation-P	0.67	0.10	<.01	[0.49, 0.89]
	PPS-A with PPS-P	3.06	0.44	<.01	[2.30, 4.02]
	Education-A with Education-P	0.05	0.09	.57	[-0.16, 0.19]
	Income-A with Income-P	4.43	0.82	<.01	[2.92, 6.15]

Note. PPS = Political similarity, A = Actor, P = Partner.

Table 3

Path coefficients of the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) that relates conformity orientation to political similarity

Effect	Path	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	95%CI
Actor	Conformity-A → PPS-A	-0.34	0.15	.03	[-0.63, -0.04]
Partner	Conformity-A → PPS-P	-0.20	0.14	.18	[-0.49, 0.10]
Actor	Income-A → PPS-A	-0.02	0.04	.59	[-0.10, 0.06]
Partner	Income-A → PPS-P	<0.01	0.04	.95	[-0.08, 0.07]
Actor	Education-A → PPS-A	0.32	0.13	.02	[0.05, 0.57]
Partner	Education-A → PPS-P	0.28	0.12	.03	[0.03, 0.51]
Actor	Gender-A → PPS-A	0.12	0.38	.31	[-0.62, 0.77]
Partner	Gender-A → PPS-P	0.33	0.35	.34	[-0.36, 1.00]
	Conformity-A with Conformity-P	0.66	0.10	<.01	[0.49, 0.87]
	PPS-A with PPS-P	3.43	0.49	<.01	[2.58, 4.48]
	Education-A with Education-P	0.05	0.09	.58	[-0.16, 0.19]
	Income-A with Income-P	4.43	0.82	<.01	[2.92, 6.15]

Note. PPS = Political similarity, A = Actor, P = Partner.

Figure. 1.

APIM of conversational communication orientation and political similarity.

Note. P = Parents, C = Adult children.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure. 2.

APIM of conformity communication orientation and political similarity.

Note. P = Parents, C = Adult children.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.