

A New Viewpoint on the Concept of Public Opinion and Its Significance – Connection to Luhmann’s Discription of Public Opinions –

Hiroshi NAKAAKI

(Summary)

In modern societies of fast-changing public opinions, it is necessary to have a viewpoint to look at the “functions” of public opinions; how they work and impact. This article introduces Niklas Luhmann’s description of public opinions as such a viewpoint. Since Luhmann’s description of public opinions is on the premise of his theory of social systems, it is difficult to comprehensively grasp it, but the author tried to summarize the concept, by avoiding complicated terms as much as possible. Simply put, public opinions are regarded as something that emerge from the process of communication and are described as having specific functions in relation to political systems or mass media systems.

The propose of this article is not only to introduce Luhmann’s description of public opinions but also to elucidate that Luhmann’s description is the first of its kind even in the field of public opinion study where academic approaches to public opinion or to its concept are conducted. To do so, the author examines Luhmann’s description of public opinions in the context of public opinion study and uses preceding studies to show what is new and what has a commonality. Through these works, the author considers the significance of Luhmann’s description of public opinions to further examine the possibility of functional analyses of public media.