

The transformation of journalistic authority and expertise in three specific dimensions: Telegraph, Tabloidisation and Citizen Journalism

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Abstract: In this essay, key transformations will be discussed in terms of three specific dimensions: telegraph, tabloidisation and citizen journalism. The implications of how these transformed the role and performance of journalism will also be discussed. It will be argued through the essay that the development of the telegraph, tabloidisation and citizen journalism leads to the rise of journalistic authority and expertise, especially in terms of journalistic objectivity and professionalism. As a result, more a more comprehensive understanding emerged about how these implications impact the performance and role of journalism. This essay will use a combination of literature analysis and case studies for its research methods.

Keywords: Journalistic authority professionalism transformation

1. Introduction

What do we mean by journalistic authority and expertise? "Authority" refers to a cultural form of power that Bourdieu has called "the field of cultural production" (Bourdieu 1993). The paper discusses below and addresses some, though not all, of these multiple components of journalistic authority. Journalistic objectivity and journalistic professionalism have become the core concepts of the journalistic profession. In the development process, it has experienced establishment and doubt. In the remodeling process, the news language, form, and production have changed with the occurrence of certain changes.

2. The establishment of journalistic authority and expertise---Telegraph and journalistic objectivity

The telegraph caused a media change. It changed the habits of news language and communication habits. The telegraph led to an "inverted pyramid structure" to present news and facts, thereby causing the rise of journalistic objectivity (Maras, 2013:21). As mentioned above, objectivity is a form of journalistic authority; thus, technology caused the rise of objectivity as well as the rise of journalistic authority. In research into the history of journalism, one of the most often-mentioned conclusions is that the telegraph contributed to a shift in news language and news style that lead the "Inverted Pyramid Form" to become a more typical form of objective reporting. Telegraph technology itself was a change of modern media (Nolan, 1989:23). In 1844, Morse sent the first telegram in human history. This event meant that communication was no longer limited by time and space; a new way to spread the news appeared. This was an important milestone moment in the history of human communication (Chen, 2002:36). Meanwhile, the telegraph also has its own limitations but the limitations of the telegraph itself indirectly promoted the development of journalistic objectivity. In the early use of the telegraph, the cost of a telegram was high. For cost considerations, telegram contents were usually only the simplest facts. In addition, the telegraph was a new thing. Its technology was not mature enough and there were signal interruption problems frequently. Sometimes, it was only able to send the beginning of the message. Therefore, journalists has gradually developed a habit of putting the most important part of the news at the beginning. That is, they included the time, place, and characters and possibly deleted descriptive words and other evaluative words. Thus, news becomes shorter and the informational element was more prominent. The "Inverted Pyramid Form" is a significant symbol of the modern message text (Chen, 2002:36). These indirectly provided the conditions for the generation of journalistic objectivity. Telegraphs spawned a style of simplicity that emphasized the facts. There are many scholars that hold similar views. As Joseph A. Mirando points out (Mirando, 2001:24), in the late nineteenth century, US News textbooks specifically addressed the prevalence with objectivity. For example, with the emergence

of separate opinions and fair reporting, the principle of objectivity appeared. Besides, objectivity is the core concept of journalistic professionalism (Huang, 2005:71); the highest ideal of journalism is to spread the truth or facts. Facts mean credibility and journalistic authority. The rise of journalistic objectivity led to the rise of journalistic professionalism, which resulted in the rise of the authority of the news.

Technology not only brought about the rise of journalistic objectivity and professional journalism; it also changed the role of the journalism in the changed patterns of political and social culture. Of recent theorists, Zelizer argued that journalistic authority proceeds primarily from cultural, symbolic sources operating simultaneously inside and outside the professional era (Zelizer, 1992:45). Let me anticipate the critique of this by noting that while she draws our attention to cultural aspects of authority, one should nevertheless also discuss questions of interest and power. Telegraphy's profound impact on journalism is that it brought a baptism of market culture to the increasingly changing society. In short, rethinking the role of journalism changes the political and social relations. The birth of the telegraph promoted the objective reporting of journalism, but it wasn't until after the 1920s that journalistic objectivity was established as a professional norm for journalism in the United States. (Chen, 2002:36) One reason for this is that during this exact historical period, all kinds of social relationships in United States were in the progress of nationwide adjustment. American political culture experienced dramatic changes during this period. Advances in information technology represented an important strength to promote the reality of this transformation. Meanwhile, the media itself was repositioning itself within this change structure. Throughout the 19th Century, the share of the telegraph component in journalism was not high (Chen, 2002:37). However, the telegraph brought a market culture baptism and deeply influenced news production and news culture. News became "standardized" and, therefore, news must be produced in an "objective" language and through a standardized organizational process. Journalism in this case was clearly expressed as a profession and as a site of truth and authority.

3. Journalistic authority and expertise has long been questioned---"Tabloidization" and "De-Professionalization"

"Tabloidization" is now becoming a global phenomenon in the news business (Zelizer, 2009:73). Tabloid style news has penetrated various media. From my perspective, there are many issues of journalistic ethics resulting in journalistic authority being increasingly questioned. Journalism in the process of "de-professionalization". The former refers to the fact that the tabloid size is only half that of the broadsheet newspapers and more tabloid news articles are short, sensational, and make extensive use of pictures. The main content of tabloids is entertainment news, sports news, gossip, scandals and other soft news; they have less interest in public issues and political and economic events. Besides, although some newspapers have large formats, their main content is entertainment news that has shallower and shorter horizons that try to please the public with claptrap; it may even incite a social mood and deviate from journalistic objectivity in such a way that it may also be regarded as a tabloid (Chama, 2015:106). Therefore, "Tabloidization" refers not only to newspaper revision, but also the conversion of news value and style. The world's first tabloid paper was the Daily Mirror. Founded in 1903, the Daily Mirror stressed short articles highlighting the sensational and made extensive use of pictures. Its main content is entertainment news, sports news, and gossip news (Bingham & Conboy, 2015:13). Tabloidization is a global phenomenon affecting all media. It began with the "Exaggerated News" and constantly spread throughout the world. The root causes of the phenomenon and the continuation of Tabloidization is the pursuit of high profits. It follows principles of market-oriented capitalism and without any restrictions on the news it can result in vicious market competition. Due to the economic principles and market mechanisms of free competition, one of the salient features of this social phenomena is the flooding of commercialization. Everything becomes a commodity and news is certainly no exception. The spread of tabloid journalism is eroding and endangering the quality of our news and making the market and profit-oriented news media and practitioners lower their professional journalism standards. It is impacting the journalistic authority and expertise.

The reduction of the level of journalistic authority and expertise thereby affects the change in the role of journalism. The purpose of journalism is to entertain the public. As the US news historian Emery considered, "Tabloid get the audience, but at the same time, blocking news channels which ordinary people rely on, making the major questions of life into a cheap farce", "Not only would not achieve the role of effective leadership, but for the sin, and justify violence" (Emery, Emery & Roberts, 2001:185). Franklin proposed that media editorial policy has changed: entertainment occupied the space of information, rational judgments were replaced by sensationalism, celebrity gossip from soap operas and the royal families were made more valuable than international events, traditional news values have been replaced by new values, and "infotainment" became popular everywhere (Franklin, 1997:35). At this

time, the role of journalism has become public entertainment. In addition, these implications of tabloidization and commercialization that have impacted journalistic authority and expertise also changed the performance of journalism in terms of news value. According to Xu (1994:16), there are five elements of news value: timeliness, importance, proximity, significance and interestingness. From this, the news value is a standard selection of news. This criteria will change according to different social values, editorial policies of different media and restrictions of different social environments. The media phenomenon of the "Tabloid" is the result of different news media having totally different judgment standards for news value. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many serious newspapers started to rethink the standard of news value and increased the news values of tabloid newspapers. The changing value of these serious newspapers reflect specific presentations of journalistic style (Peng, 1994:30).

4. Rebuilding of journalistic authority and expertise——Case study: 2015 Tianjin Explosion and citizen journalism

"Citizen journalism" refers to the news dissemination activities in which "everyone is a reporter" and followed the birth of new media technologies. Stephen J.A. Ward proposed that "journalism, at its best, is one of the arts of democracy"(2010:9).

Citizen journalism will not affect the following aspects of journalistic professionalism. News facts can be roughly divided into three different levels. The first level involves news facts. These relate to the appearance of events. For instance, on August 12, 2015, two massive explosions in the port of Tianjin killed more than one hundred people; the event became the focus of media attention. Many users uploaded photos and videos through social networks, including images of the mushroom cloud, the shattered windows, cars that were burned and injured people running into the street (The Beijing news, 2015). The second level of facts needs to more in-depth investigation, such as the number of casualties in the accident and whether the explosion was due to technical reasons or manual errors. The third level involves more hidden facts, such as the existence of corruption and administrative omission and how the incident has had direct and indirect effects on society. The main scope of citizen journalism involved in news production often stops at the first level. As for the second and third levels of news facts, only professional media like the mainstream media can provide deeper and more reliable professional reports. Therefore, the rise of citizen journalism will not affect the status of journalistic professionalism. As mentioned above, journalistic professionalism is a component of journalistic authority, so citizen journalism will not affect journalistic authority and expertise. Secondly, citizen journalism also has its own shortcomings. There are inevitably a lot of rumors and false information spread in the production process. This weakens the dominant position of traditional media and has an impact on the core concept of journalistic professionalism. Citizen Journalism and professional journalism complement each other and form a new ecosystem in the journalism field. Dissemination of citizen journalism in social media has obvious periodic characteristics: before 24 hours news of events spread, after 24 hours rumors begin to spread. There are positive and negative effects of the coexistence. After the event caused widespread concern, some users began to spread such rumours on Sina weibo as "The death toll of at least 1,000 people in Tianjin explosion", "Tianjin has become a ghost town" to create panic (The Renmin, 2015). In this case, the mainstream media not only strengthened the positive reports and also refuted rumours. Moreover, after the explosion, Tencent news first released the reports in the form of rolling news with the clues and site portfolio from users on the evening of 12th at 23:49 (Tencent news, 2015). Headline news established a micro-blog topic by integrating disclosure at 0:18 on the 13th (Headline news, 2015). Sohu's official website started an interactive live broadcast at 0:26 on the 13th (Sohu, 2015). Citizen journalism is responsible for broadening the content while professional media maintain the depth of content and create news value.

Citizen journalism relies mainly on the Internet, mobile phones and other new media to be its carrier. On the open platforms provided by new media, ordinary citizens can easily implement community participation in public affairs, therefore changing the performance of journalism in the following two ways. First, the biggest difference between citizen journalism's audience and traditional media's audiences are no longer just what information products are consumed; audiences must also be able to participate in the production and dissemination of information (Bruns, 2010:2). The most important feature is the audience-centered, citizen journalism that pushes traditional media to build a new communication platform on the network to interact with the public. Many newspapers, radio stations, and television stations have set up their own websites offering column blogs and public forums. They search for news tips via released information, conduct online interviews or communicate with the audience to make news reports broader and more in-depth. Moreover, citizen journalism promotes the formation of the supervisory role of journalism. Some news events cannot be reported due to local

protectionism. While the regional media kept silent, citizen journalism revealed events unexposed by professional media and triggered public opinion support. Thereby it affected the media to restore its supervisory role.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the key transformations in this essay indicates that journalistic authority and expertise has been changed under the influence of different key transformations; it also experienced a process of establishment, being questioned and rebuilding. Further, key transformations changed the form of news reporting. Linguistic features, news value, and the role of journalism totally changed in the social context. Faced with any new transformation, it is really important to see not only the positive or negative factors that such changes bring to journalism, but also to recognize the changing role of journalism and its impact on social life and the cultural market. For journalism, the complexity of the problem is that shape and digestion of journalistic authority are carried out in the same field. When a de-professional force is menacing, journalistic professionalism has not yet been completed. This will be the future direction of research and development of change in journalism.

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