Social Character Design in the Practical Teaching of Journalism & Communication

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Abstract. Digital technique completely changes media industry. Through using the digital technique, the communicator becomes more and more pluralistic, and the communication channel becomes more and more net-based. It is a typical character of current media; at the meantime, it causes series reformation and transition in the media industry. Also it requires the new practitioners to have such capability: to function as a professional reporter in such short time, or even without the process of adapting the social character-changing. Based on the reality of current media industry, this paper mainly focus on how to complete the process of social character-changing (changing from college student to professional reporter) during the practical teaching so as to thinking and functioning as professional reporter.

Research Problems
The film crews carrying the photographic equipments to shoot ritual ceremonies in the fishing village and were stopped by local villagers, as such professional equipments made them really believe this group of students from the news department who were there to complete their homework was real journalists. Therefore, villagers began to tell them about what had happened to them recently – their land and orchards were requisitioned by the local government, they expected to get more compensation and they expected the group of people with cameras could help them.

Technically, there was no difficulty to deal with this topic for these students who have completed two years of professional study. Challenge originates from the thinking level, whether they could make independent thinking and objective investigation like a professional journalist by casting the social emotional tendencies aside?

In fact, they assumed the existence of the social unfairness and underworld benefits without any investigation and verification in this case. Or to say, they had their initial social emotional bias in the absence of the factual basis of the topic: they had sympathy on the "social vulnerable group" that they’d identified. This group of young people who have gone through two years of news training was influenced by social emotional factors, and they failed to behave as a journalist with professionalism.

It seems that this is a simple technical problem and only a reminder on the students is required that is sufficient investigation on the facts must be done before making a judgment. However, what’s more worth thinking about is why students with two years of professional study still need the above-mentioned entry-level reminders?

Raise Questions for Research
This is the focus of this article: for most of the journalism students, the news theory is only literally rather than in their thinking, which determines that it’s difficult for them to think like a news practitioner. In the practical procedure of news communication education, it is an important factor to set up social roles in the cultivation of students' news thinking.
Proposition from the Journalism Professionalism

From the very birth of the mass media to the unprecedented prosperity of the media industry today, the ‘public information communication agency with social responsibilities’ has always been one of the essence of the media agreed by scholars. The above essence has never been questioned even when the marketization has brought more profit pressures on the mass media.

On the news comprehension and interpretation, two concepts are colliding with the guides of "social responsibility" and "market-oriented" respectively: that is, the concept of journalism and the concept of market news. Over nearly 30 years’ changes, market factors have been increasingly involved in China's media. It's worth noting that the Chinese media is actually trying its utmost to avoid the media itself to be too marketized. Therefore, we could find that most of the media has always been stripping the sectors closely linked with the market sector from the core editorial section, and even setting up a separate section.

A striking consistency has been reached between the media industry and the academism on this point: in the news institutions or majors, various news theories and concepts conveyed to the students are basically orthodox news professionalism.

Li Xiguang from International Communication Research Center of Tsinghua University has a summarized description on several important elements in China’s journalism education except the news practice skills in one of his articles: authenticity, objectivity, social conscience, the main theme, accuracy and comprehensiveness.

The news institutions (major) have set up so many courses on these contents that students can master them before graduation as long as they follow the syllabus. Furthermore, there are also the same number of courses to teach them of the usage.

The setup of these courses are so subtle that students can get the purest propositions on the news professionalism in the classroom, and these propositions even include the following items:

The use of objective, neutral words, but what we’ve seen in the media is too much emphasis on the feelings, full of passion and the use of a large amount of biased modifiers. The so-called biased modifier refers to adjectives, adverbs, verbs and nouns that have commendatory and derogatory meanings and these words would cause injustice news reports.

Another one is the comprehensive report, an event should be reported in a variety of perspectives and all questions concerned about this incident should be replied. However, we often can only hear a voice in actual news reports, which only stay on the surface of the news and the things behind the news could be investigated or seen by readers.

We’ve found that in facing the classroom or extracurricular homework, most of the students have a good understanding on the news operation skills of these ideas. However, what’s puzzling is that the news professional proposition and accomplishment seem difficult to find on these students outside the classroom or homework training. A senior from Changjiang Daily had complained that journalism students from the college lacked the ability to find news after working in the newspaper offices, and doubted whether the college had taught the students about the relevant contents. In fact, topics of news discovery have been elaborated in special chapters in several classic textbook materials of news practice.

Then an interesting question arises: what makes journalism students behave so unprofessionally like a layman in case of sudden news events?

Thinking Process Determined by Social Roles

Many experts and scholars from the two fields of journalism education and journalism practice have noticed the above issues, and most of them blame this to “lack of training” and "dislocation of theory and practice". In the directly related level, this solution is accurate and pertinent.

However, in a deeper level, the point of view of this paper is that the role positioning is an important factor to cause the above issues: students are too accustomed to the role positioning as a "student", determining that their thinking process is established in the framework of a student rather than a journalism staff.
We can refer to relevant theories on role expectations in social psychology. Any clear social role has been endowed with responding expectations by the society, others or themselves, and these expectations are often very clear. Specifically to the role of students, their expectations are often given as: good grades and becoming talents and so on. Students themselves also often belong to the group to be expected. In this sense, for students – whatever their majors - their logical process of thinking often points to a clear goal: good grades, And this can explain why student's performance is very professional in many training or assignments which aimed at improving their business levels.

Beyond this logical process, however, students often do not know what to do in a framework beyond their own expectations, such as the context mentioned in the beginning of this article. Referring to relevant theories on social role conflicts and confusion in the social psychology, role confusion would occur when there is a contradiction between self-awareness of his role and his actual role, and the final evolution of the results may become retreat. Specifically to the group of students given high expectations by the villagers, their final choice just follow this result, and they failed to persuade themselves to give up tracking on this news event with the excuse that they had no interviewing rights and communication channels.

To the opposite, the expectations of journalists’ social role are often to spread the truth, reveal the darkness and maintain social justice with public opinion tools. Therefore, for a professional journalist on this very newsworthy event, his first consideration should be trying to figure out the truth of the matter on this very newsworthy event. He would verify the villagers’ words through a variety of information channels and even make investigation to the official organizations. When the investigation is sufficient to turn the "event" into a "fact", what he has to do is to present facts. There is no such judgement of "social injustice" in news practitioners’ subjective will during this process. When the audiences have read the report, they would have independent judgement on the fact, rather than requiring the journalists to make judgments for them.

In the perspective of social roles, journalism students would still fail to complete the role conversion in the level of self-awareness after engaged in media work for a quite long period of time after graduation, as they’ve got accustomed to defining their social roles as a "student". This is also one of the reasons many media managers found many of the journalism students could not meet their expectations, as they are not always used to the thinking like journalists.

Get Used to Thinking as Journalists

Suppose to make a simple explanation on "theory" and "concept" mentioned in the beginning of this article, the theory is the words of the book, while concept is the thinking habit after the interpretation of these words. It is noteworthy of how to make students still in the professional learning stage start the thinking in the role definition as journalists?

In fact, many scholars have given the answer to this question in their writings from a perspective of ‘strengthen the practical exercises’. Still, many scholars suggest that news institutions or news majors should maintain adequate association with the media industry. On the one hand, this could keep the updating of knowledge points, and students could get more in touch with the industry operation in reality on the other hand. But unfortunately, this approach is not easy for many institutions. Till now, the development of the media has made it become an organization which is increasingly emphasizing on the commercial interests, whether it admits or not. On the commercial interests, cooperation with institutions would not bring it real benefits easily. Many media organs’ cooperation model with the institutions is that, institutions provide the training of serving personnel for the media, and the media should accommodate college students’ internships or even employment. Fudan University in Shanghai and the Haixia Daobao in Xiamen have taken such a similar model, Fudan University opened a master's degree course for Haixia Daobao, and the Newspaper promised to receive a number of interns annually and recruit a number of graduates into the newspaper office.

Strictly speaking, this model does not break through the tradition, as news institutions or journalism majors have special time to arrange internship for their students, and with no doubts, this
process has played a role of cultivating students to get accustomed to the role as a journalist. However, this process actually does not exist when students receive the professional learning at school. Or that’s to say, no such situation would make students think in the perspective of journalists. Therefore, institutions’ cultivation of having students think and observe in the perspective of journalists should allow students to fully practice in a journalism practice environment.

In this regard, many practices in the Western, especially the American journalism education are worth learning.

Take the example of the University of Missouri, USA known for its journalism as the example, in this institution attaching great importance to the cultivation of students’ practice abilities, the students here should practice in the genuine media from the undergraduate stage.

It is noteworthy that these Medias do not come from the media industry, but the media established by the school itself. The most critical thing is that these media are not just a simple internal school newspapers or journals established by the students themselves, as they’re newspaper and television stations open to the society.

When tracing the history, when the famous American newspaper Walter Williams opened the world's first journalism school - the Missouri School of Journalism in Columbia City of Missouri in 1908 hundreds of years ago, he also imitated a newspaper Columbia Missouri Newspaper, which was distributed open to the society.

However, it has become one of the two mainstream newspapers in Missouri. For the daily print media, student would work in the newspaper office. There’s also one periodical besides this. Missouri Institute has its own television station, which has become the TV station of Missouri City with very advanced equipment. For example, there are three fully automatic camera series in the studio, students could practice there, not only in the collection and preparation, but the news hosting with professional hosts. For the staff in the television station, some of them are full-time teachers in the Institute and students would participate in most of their daily work, so students can get sufficient practice.

You can imagine that the role positioning is not limited to student by working in the public offered publications.

It is fair to say that the practice of the University of Missouri is difficult to be achieved in China currently, and it is not easy to set up a publication open to the society. However, it is possible to set up a publication publicly issued on campus. In fact, many news institutions or journalism majors have similar publications. Unfortunately, these publications are not real news publications, as there’re too many factors beyond news from the management system to the content, and they look more like the chowder with mixed types of a literary book or fashion, literature or pictorial readings.

Of course, it is only one possible solution to this proposition of ‘making students think as journalists’ by establishing professional news publications and maintaining their operation with the corresponding management system. In reality, this proposition also concerns the issues of curriculum setup and major coordination, requiring more scholars and experts to discuss in a broader level.

**Conclusion**

News communication is not only a reflection of the degree of civilization, but also an important force to promote social stability and development. Its status and influence are more and more concerned by the whole society. Media convergence, which has made media industry enter a new era, should ensure the healthy development of news communication and meet the needs of news communication in all media era. Journalism education is facing great opportunities and challenges, only sticking to the ideal, reform and innovation can adapt to the change in new media era. However, regardless of the media form and the ways of reporting, the indispensable professional spirit and quality are engaged in the basic conditions of journalism, and this is also the core of journalism education. Any curriculum construction and improvement of training mode are all
developed around the core. Training the occupation ideal for public service and ensuring the occupation spirit of true, objective and impartial news, as well as the occupation literacy which is necessary for the realization of these ideals, all the above are still the fundamental elements for cultivating journalism talents. Furthermore, it is the key way to meet changes with constancy.

References


