

The Challenges to the Boundaries of Journalism Under the New Media Environment

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Abstract: Going back to the origin of journalism, the nature of journalism has changed dramatically, in the beginning, journalists were unlike doctors or lawyers, they did not have professional knowledge, standard of requirement, or occupational norms. During the history of journalism, they always try their best to draw boundaries, journalism has become to a professional field with its legitimacy and authority. But the change in journalism is not stop, especially at the internet society, the boundaries became more and more blurry and there are too many factors that force journalism to keep changing, like free comments and participatory news. This essay will include three main parts, in the first part, I propose to illustrate the boundaries of journalism in the past, and how legitimacy and authority was brought by the process of boundary-drawing. In the second part, I propose to give two examples to explain how the boundaries of journalism were threatened. Finally, I will state how journalism responded to challenges and how the boundaries have shifted.

Keywords: Journalism; boundaries; social media; UGC

1. The processes of boundaries drawing of journalism

From the research about boundaries of journalism, it is too simple if we just evaluate boundaries of journalism from incomplete perspective, instead, what it needed is to understand different kinds of boundaries and analyses them within a cohesive structure^[1]. The processes of boundary drawing of journalism can be regarded as a pyramid. The first floor is distinguishing journalists from non-journalists, which means finding “who is suitable” “who can be regarded as journalists”. On the second floor, how to gather news and distribution is the main problem, which can be called “what is suitable” “what is suitable journalistic behavior”. The third floor is the processes of professionalism, at this stage, journalists want themselves to be regarded as a special organization with specialized knowledge^[2]. The three stages are corresponding to Gieryn’s generic boundary-work typology, which is expansion, expulsion and protection of authority.

In order to realize professionalization, journalistic workers need to accomplish two goals: “professional control” and “occupational closure”^[3]. It requires journalists to have more legitimacy and authority in their field. In the traditional journalism, the boundary between journalists and audience was clear, the responsibility of journalists is telling the truth to public, and audience responded with trust. Methods of news production was fixed^[4], the most of work was completed by journalists under non-public environment, they only show results to public.

2. The challenges of Journalism under Web 2.0

Each field need boundaries and professional knowledge to maintain their control, like lawyers and doctors, but the situation of journalistic field is quite different. The main reason is that journalism is not based on well-rounded knowledge, and people who wants to work at newsroom do not need official certificate^[5]. Compared with doctor and lawyer, knowledge of journalism is easily to acquire, so that journalistic boundaries are weaken. Consequently, boundaries and legitimacy of journalism are quite unstable and fragile^[6], especially after internet turn to Web 2.0 from Web 1.0. During Web 1.0 era, users just have one-way communication, but the Web 2.0 provides opportunities to users to have two-way communication. Users are free to upload content on the Internet. It is widely known that journalism has changed dramatically in the modern society, due to the popularity of internet media, generating varies factors that can force journalism to make change, for example, User Generate Content, free comment from citizen or non-journalist and emergency of “fifth estate”^[7]. In order to take a balance between mainstream media and those internet-based factors, journalism have to redraw the boundaries to maintain their authority^[8].

Social media platforms are the most popular production of Web 2.0, people can generate, share digital content by using social media platforms, and they can have interactive communication with other people on social media platforms^[9]. It provides opportunities to people to take part in gather information, shaping, and dissemination of news, instead of passive listening what journalists said, since content generated by online users also have attention of other users or even become popular. In other words, social media platforms encourage citizen to be a part of journalism, user generate content also can be used as a source of information. In order

to evaluate how social media reshaped and redraw boundaries of journalism, having a deep understanding about social media is quite indispensable. The features of social media platforms are communication, participation, interaction and publicity. Applications and websites of social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter and wikis are ideal space where people can generate user content, called UGC, such as, upload pictures, articles and free comments on it. The blurry boundaries between journalists and audience force journalists to make change.

3. How Journalism workers reply to challenges

Under participatory media environment, journalism has introduced new methods in how to gather information, editing and distribute news^[10]. Boundaries has changed to suit the society. In the first place, participatory media change the way of information gathering, public are invented to send video, pictures or stories to newsrooms and television. Social platforms like Facebook and Twitter allow journalists to report short, briefly content, pictures or videos to a large number of audiences in real-time^[11]. In the past, journalists need to gather information, pictures and integrate elements of events into a whole story, then they can publish news to public. This process may take several hours or even several days, which may lead news loses its pragmatically.

4. Conclusion

The development of journalism has experienced three stages. The first stage is the beginning stage, journalists try to find suitable ways to produce news, drawing boundaries, establish norms and regulations. The second stage is that journalists maintain control by themselves and operating effectively. When the third stage, traditional journalism meets the internet, the relation between them is confused, they want to be independent but have to work together. The combination of journalism and internet have both positive and negative effects on journalism. The real-time function of social media improves the effective of news, in addition, participatory media enable each people to upload “news” on the internet, as I mentioned about, free content generating will cause public to feel confused, public need to reads news objectively, but it is almost impossible to require public to evaluate news without emotion. So that, the emerge of social media does not means that the role of journalists will be instead, or the boundaries are losing power, controversially, it means that the responsibilities of journalists become more important, they need advanced media literature and abilities to evaluate objective and free value, providing correct guide to the public. In addition, they need to build more professional knowledge to teach journalism media literature and objectivity thinking. From my perspective, web 2.0 should not be regarded as challenge, instead, it should be regarded as opportunity.

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