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Emerging Chinese Theory and Practice of Media

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Hugo de Burgh, Emma Lupano, Bettina Mottura

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Hugo de Burgh, Emma Lupano, and Bettina Mottura

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The Study of a Journalism Which Is almost 99% Fake

Li Xiguang, Su Jing, and Wang Lianfeng

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of the media industry in China, fake news has become a severe problem. This paper identifies four types of fake news, with examples which include totally fake news, distorted fake news, fast news, and sensational journalism. The second part of the paper attempts to analyse the causes of fake news. The acceleration of the trend of media marketization, the loss of professional ethics by media practitioners, the influence of stakeholders, and the marketization of news value in university education, have all given rise to the emergence of fake news. The third part investigates the influence of fake news on society. Fake news can result in inappropriate policy making by the government. With the prevalence of fake news, public media literacy declines and social ethos becomes fickle. Finally, the paper attempts to explore possibly effective countermeasures, which involve establishing a fact-checking mechanism, calling for slow news instead of fast news, improving the public's media literacy, and reforming the news paradigm, in order to resist fake news in future.

Keywords: fact checking; fake news; media literacy; news value; slow news.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the disseminators of information in society and the inheritors of cultural symbols, the media play an important role in reflecting objective facts and recording social life. Adhering to the truth and objectivity of news is the basic requirement for the media and media workers. However, alongside the rapid development of the media industry in China,

fake news has already become a problem which cannot be neglected. It not only hurts the credibility of the media, but also has negative influences on government decision-making and social culture.

During the 2016 US presidential election, many fake news sources were seen spreading over Facebook and Twitter, potentially affecting the result of the election. Trump's surprise victory has further attracted attention to this issue. Some people believe that fake news was a key factor in Trump's victory (Bai, Jiang, and Chen 2017). While no evidence has emerged that fake news in Chinese news reports has affected the political agenda, there have been numerous fake news reports about people's lives in the daily news.

This paper divides fake news into "totally fake news" and "distorted fake news", based on how true it is. The following two categories are also regarded as fake news: "fast news" caused by the media's pursuit of a quick format of reporting, which results in a loss of the truth; and "sensational news", caused by extensive reporting of stimulating and hollow news, which excites people's interest, but is not based on fact.

1.1. *Totally false news*

In this paper, totally false news refers to a news item in which all "5W" elements are fake, the report having been fabricated by the news media. The term "totally false news" can apply to important social issues, public opinion focus, celebrity gossip, major events, and so on. Such news items tend to be sensationalized, provocative and sometimes pornographic, in order to attract attention and make an impact on the public.

Take the some sensational news reported in 2016, for example, "6.9-degree earthquake took place in Jiangxi" (Shen *et al.* 2016), "Shanghai girl fled from Jiangxi countryside" (Zheng and Ren 2017), "A Dongbei village's collapse in morality" (Li, Peng, and Ma 2016), "Secretary of the Discipline Inspection Commission of Shanxi Province Shanxi is removed" (Zhou 2016) and so on. Apart from the report that a "6.9-degree earthquake took place in Jiangxi", the items listed above are all fabricated stories.

Moreover, an analysis of these so-called "news" items reveals that widely-spread false news is often related to common social phenomena, which means that it will be a frequently discussed topic in people's daily lives. When journalists and media try to make up an exaggerated report, based on exaggerating some real problems prevalent in the develop-

ment of China, the report is likely to arouse public sympathy and spread quickly. So, the kind of topics related to articles such as “Shanghai girl fled from Jiangxi countryside” and “A Dongbei village’s collapse in morality” are actually the reflection of current social problems, including the inequality between rich and poor, widening disparities in regional economic development, ageing of the population, empty-nest syndrome in the countryside, and rethinking urbanization.

Online rumours have also become a major source of false news. With the development of Weibo and WeChat, “We-Media” and ordinary internet users are playing an increasingly active role in disseminating information to the public, and are now influencing public opinion. As a result, the boundaries between network posting and media news are gradually becoming blurred. Through the trend of “making network posting another kind of news”, some totally false rumours have become popular. Such “news” is widely circulated, with adverse effects on society.

Such online rumours appear even more ambiguous and incomplete – or even improbable – when compared with the totally false news reported by the media. Take the topic of food safety, for example: in the first half of 2017 there were five major network rumours related to that topic. Among them were rumours including: “Seaweed is made of plastic” (Ruan 2017), “Dried meat flesh is made of cotton” (Chen 2017), and “Hot peaches and watermelon are poisonous when eaten together” (Liu 2018). These stories are completely fabricated with no scientific base, but they are widely disseminated to the public, and even clarification by the government makes little difference.

1.2. *Distorted news*

This paper defines “distorted news” as news reports that are made for a certain purpose and offer distorted truth, reported by journalists or news media. Take the fake news reported during 2016, for example, “A security with cancer fund a poor girl in Sichuan” (Luo 2016), “The President of Zimbabwe arrests the Olympic team for missing out on medals” (Ma 2016) and “Female employees line up to kiss the boss” (Wang 2016). In these reports, the media provided apparently complete information, such as dates, locations, figures and so on. Images of the scene were also attached, making the reports seem much more credible to the public. In fact, journalists had just combined different pieces of stories and distorted them to look as though they were about real people in

China, resulting in a contradiction between the actual facts and what was reported.

The “reverse news” that sparked discussions in recent years is an example of distorting news. Related news items include “Zombie meat incident” (Shi, Wu, and Ma 2015), “Male driver in Chengdu gave female driver a severe beating” (Xiao 2015), “Beijing old lady extorted foreigners” (San 2015) and so on. Because of the novelty, sensitivity and attractive nature – photos and videos attached – of such news, these reported incidents can quickly spread across the internet. This distortion of news means that public opinion on such matters can deviate widely from the truth.

1.3. *Fast news*

“Fast news” is the phenomenon whereby media reporters emphasize the rapid publishing of news, ignoring the fact-checking aspects of it in the process (Ellis 2018). The element of timely reporting has always been an important factor in the media industry. From the early days of newspapers and magazines to the era of all-media mobile internet, “catching every minute and second” to convey messages to people at the fastest speed has been an important news value. However, in the current practice of the news media, some media outlets tend to over-emphasize the pursuit of “minute by minute” coverage, while neglecting the equally important “truth”, resulting in the creation of fake news.

1.3.1. Basic characteristics of fast news

The simplification of the narrative model: because of the time restrictions on editing and writing, media workers cannot write interesting news to an early deadline. In order to publish as soon as possible, some journalists choose to set the model of news based on related materials. After doing interviews, and as related events unfold, they supplement the news accordingly. The narrative structure basically follows the sequence of “introduction-details-people’s activities”, but lacks innovation. The topics do not have a high content value. From the audience’s perspective, the biggest value of fast news is to satisfy their curiosity in a short time. Fast news is frequently updated, so that its life-span is relatively short, with the result that audiences easily forget the news that they have already read.

1.3.2. The misperception of fast news

The first point is that fast news falls into the vicious circle of “competing for news”. In the competitive market for fast news, once eye-catching news has been reported by a media source, that news item loses its reporting value for other sources. In order to maintain vitality in the market, sources have to look for other related topics, finally falling into the vicious circle of “competing for news”, keeping constantly on the run to produce new “news”. Secondly, there is the emphasis on timeliness, while neglecting authenticity. Timeliness is important, but reality must be at the heart of news reporting. In the current fast news markets, reporters are over-emphasizing timeliness and, in doing so, they are neglecting the authenticity of news. Some reporters do not check the authenticity of information in earlier publishing. They copy other reporters’ statements, or intentionally publish wrong content, which finally leads to the creation of fake news. Thirdly, the frame of the topic is set in advance. The writing of fast news is not completely based on a reporter’s fieldwork, but is intentionally or unintentionally based on its special position, context, and agenda. For the sake of publishing as soon as possible, fast news probably involves taking a part of the whole and using a pre-set framework to report. However, in traditional news production, checking, editing, typesetting, and proofreading are indispensable procedures. For example, in the “Just now” event (Yan 2018), three editors at the Xinhua News Agency were unable to identify typing errors in a very short news item.

1.4. *Sensational journalism*

Compared with traditional news, “sensational journalism” refers to the phenomenon whereby the standards and principles observed under traditional newswriting have been abandoned in favour of hollow and eye-catching topics that attract audience attention.

1.4.1. Basic characteristics of sensational journalism

In the traditional interview and writing, both interview and writing should be true, correct, complete, objective, and balanced. Authenticity must be the essence of news. Sensational journalism emphasizes the provocation of audiences’ emotions. It is similar to fast food in the era

of information. In traditional journalism, the choice of topic focuses on reporting positive news, as well as tracking and reporting public opinion. It is often referred to as “gold-panning”. Before and after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, several excellent news reports about successful people and good initiatives emerged, such as “Why the suoma flower is so red” (Zhang and Tian 2014), “Who are the most lovable people?” (Wei 1951), “Jiao Yulu: a model for county secretary” (Mu, Feng, and Zhou 1966), and “Great warrior Lei Feng” (Xinhua News 1963). In addition, a series of TV programmes, represented by “Topics in Focus”, played an important function in media monitoring of public affairs and guiding the government on the public’s mood and opinion. These programs exposed certain problems with public development projects, and became important bridges between the government and the masses. Sensational journalism often chooses what is referred to as “dirty news” when selecting topics. Such topics are provocative, violent, bloody, or something unheard of or abnormal in society. In practice, “human bites dog” is news. Examples include: the Shenzhen public security defendant’s rape case in 2011 (Yang 2011); Lei Zhengfu’s case in Chongqing in 2012 (Wang 2013); the killing of a baby in Beijing Daxing in 2013 (Zhang 2013); and the murder case at McDonalds in Shandong Zhaoyuan in 2014 (Zhu 2014). On the front pages of Weibo and WeChat, the latest updates on stars and TV dramas always occupy the top positions, while news about the nation and people’s livelihoods cannot be found.

1.4.2. Rethinking sensational journalism

First, the ideas of traditional journalism have been abandoned. In traditional journalism, the production of news should follow the principles of objectivity, justice, reality, and wholeness. News reports should be as close to reality as possible. However, in the current news environment, “fake news”, “paid news”, “news blackmail” and other such phenomena are often observed. The motivation of news-workers in producing certain content over other content is becoming complicated. Many cases of journalists who make profits for themselves and their workplaces occur regularly. Furthermore, current news production over-emphasizes the timeliness of production, so that not enough attention is paid to the reality of the facts, which results in the spreading of rumours. Traditional procedures, such as proofreading, examination and verification, are abandoned. The quality of news reports is therefore deteriorating as a whole. Secondly, there has been a change from gold-panning news

to muckraking news. The Chinese traditional news standards advocate “gold-panning news”, with the purpose of setting an example for society to emulate and form unified social values, ideals and beliefs. On the contrary, “muckraking news” aims to satisfy individual desires, providing topics of conversation, and psychological fast-moving consumer goods. In the context of fiercer competition in the news market and the saturation of information, the media market prefers to report a variety of negative news, so as to grab readers’ attention and compete for ratings. Some media sources even abandon professional ethics and a moral baseline to distort the facts or produce fake news, in order to satisfy public demand. Swayed by interest and competition, some newspapers may lose their value orientation and professional position. Sometimes, they make profits their top priority.

2. THE CAUSES OF FAKE NEWS

2.1. *The acceleration of the trend to media marketization*

With the continual reformation of China’s media system and the continual opening up of media markets, competition among the media is growing and becoming fiercer, as a result of which media organizations need to take serious account of their financial situations. In order to survive this intense competition, they are forced to pursue a higher circulation and click-rate, and attract more advertising revenue. For the sake of “attractiveness”, some media groups have begun to produce fake news or to distort the reality of events, regardless of news authenticity, and thus news is becoming increasingly controversial. Commercialization has begun to permeate all aspects of the news media, while some news practitioners, to benefit themselves, have started prioritizing the sensational and entertaining elements of news, and are neglecting authenticity. This is the primary cause of the creation of fake news.

2.2. *The lack of professional ethics by news practitioners*

The lack of professional ethics by news practitioners is the direct cause of fake news. On the one hand, current news practitioners come from a variety of backgrounds, some of whom have not received professional

news training, and lack basic professionalism and professional ethics. On the other hand, some news practitioners, without self-discipline, are motivated by economic benefits and competition to intentionally produce fake news that will attract receivers' attention. In such an atmosphere, the authenticity of news is abandoned, interviews by these reporters become one-sided and shallow, and the examination by editors is not taken seriously. This not only increases the amount of fake news, but also boosts unhealthy competition in the market. In addition to such marketization, the public media may also have a moral deficiency that is often not limited to market-based media. In order to gain a particular propaganda coup, journalists' editors may also appear to ignore the ethics of journalism.

2.3. The influence of stakeholders from public relations and some industries

On the one hand, with the rise and flourishing of We-Media, some individuals, industries, professionals and other We-Media act as opinion leaders. Their increasing influence then allows them to garner a vast access to audiences, which they exploit to circulate their opinions to the masses. Once the news media lack caution, objectivity and comprehensive investigation in their approach, it is easy for them to be influenced by such interest groups. Thus, they often become spokespersons for these interest groups. On the other hand, the public relations service industry has started to play a major role in helping enterprises to reach certain goals. Through the medium of public relations, interest groups can pass their interest requirements to the news media. Consequently, media reporters conduct coverage without examination in order to gain personal benefits, such as the "incidental allowance" provided by public relations bodies.

2.4. The marketization of news values in university education

The shaping of a value system during college learning is essential for college news majors, who will become the future news practitioners. During the News Public Opinion Work Symposium, President Xi Jinping emphasized that "news value is the heart of news public opinion work" (Du 2016). Yet current news education has not established a news value system at its core; instead, it has taken the wrong path of

“market-oriented” news production, which will lead to further chaos in the news industry. For example, in various colleges and universities, media economics has now become a popular course. Through data and case analysis, the media’s business status is evaluated by ratings. Current education takes entity economic interest as the starting point for the news industry, and weakens the social responsibility awareness of media workers. News education puts the incidental before the fundamental, attaching massive importance to practical skills which could attract the interest of netizens, meanwhile ignoring the teaching of a news value system to students of journalism.

3. THE INFLUENCES OF FAKE NEWS

3.1. *Faults in government policy making*

Because of the rise of various opinion platforms, the government is showing increased concern about the opinions of media netizens. The prevalence of fake news means that the government cannot accurately garner public opinion and assess reality. First, fake news is unable to depict reality. On the one hand, the prevailing fake news and instant news intentionally clash with the truth, overstating and exaggerating controversial elements in order to concoct false news. On the other hand, due to the pursuit of timeliness of distribution, an investigation into the truthfulness of the distributed content is avoided, and thus the authenticity of reported content cannot be guaranteed. Content that involves individual subjectivity, reporters’ attitude bias, standpoint selection and event description all degrade its truthfulness. It is therefore difficult for the government to assess the reality or to monitor public opinion. Secondly, interests of all parties are involved. Compared with traditional news, fake news can be manipulated and designated. Media organizations and news reporters, for the sake of individual or group interests, can concoct the desired news according to the requirements of specific interest groups, or they can continue to highlight specific news items to create public pressure and force the government to make a compromise.

The Chinese government has now taken some measures to control fake news, such as establishing a rumour platform, increasing the punishment of false reports in the media, and responding promptly to fake

news. The emergence of fake news has made it impossible for the government to have an accurate understanding of public opinion through the data on the internet. However, while the government is busy dealing with false news, it is unable to carry out other work, thus affecting the government's agenda.

3.2. Decline in public media literacy and social ethos

At present, very little news is entirely fabricated, but what there is, combined with the increase of fast news, destroys the media advantages created by the traditional media.

First, news products present a fast-food style of news-reporting and lack enduring appeal. News represented by instant news and fake news has very limited reading value. The core of instant news, with limited coverage, is merely telling a straightforward story, with some additional information attached. Meanwhile, the depiction and structure of instant news is fairly stereotypical, and to the public it appears to lack freshness. Although fake news can stir the public's curiosity, interest and feelings of excitement, joy, anger or grief, all these stirrings are short-lived and barely touch the soul of the receivers. Consequently, fast-food styled news products ignore producing emotional resonance and thinking at the cognitive level with the receivers, and attract little long-lasting appeal. Secondly, the news topics covered are transient and inconsistent. The lifespan of recent hot news topics is becoming shorter and shorter. When a hot event happens, the press quickly flood to it and bombard the public with coverage, thus successfully gaining the public's attention within a short time. However, while the truthfulness of the hot event remains unidentified, the intense competition in the media market means that the press have already caught other hot topics and managed to attract public attention once again. The rapid change of hot news gives rise to the receivers' incomplete perception of the events, and makes the public take the initial fragmented report as the whole fact.

3.3. Traditional media authority is missing

Under the current news circumstances, the discourse power of traditional news has been destroyed. On the one hand, while the changing rate of news topics is becoming faster and the lifespan of news is becom-

ing shorter, receivers are becoming more and more inconsistent about certain news topics. The authorities need time to test the veracity of news, and the “slowness” of the authorities naturally conflicts with the “quickness” of the media and receivers. On the other hand, there are different interest groups and various voices in the current news atmosphere. But for those with limited knowledge and media literacy, it is difficult to distinguish each kind of voice. Furthermore, specific scientific knowledge has a threshold standard, and cannot be easily understood by most of the audience. It takes some time to popularize authoritative scientific knowledge.

Influenced by the circumstances of the news agency, audiences care greatly about news information. They tend to pursue “pleasure first”, as a result of which “clickbait with unusual headlines” becomes quite popular. The lower the audience’s media literacy and scientific literacy, the ficker is the overall atmosphere of public opinion. This manipulation of the public opinion field – which originally belonged to the public – by certain interest groups is a critical way for them to make profits, and thus finally leads to the colonization of the public’s life. The culture of constructive criticism is on the decline, while consumerism and the homogenization of individuals has become increasingly prevalent, and will eventually make “slaves” of the public at the cognitive level.

4. COUNTERMEASURES TO FAKE NEWS IN THE FUTURE

4.1. *Establishing a fact-checking mechanism*

The fact-checking mechanism originated from factual reality checks in reports by the Western media before publication. In the 1920s, *Time Magazine* set up a fact-checking group consisting of women, and its competitor, *The New Yorker*, later set up a fact-checking department too. In the mid- and late-twentieth century, with the rise of the media social responsibility theory and media professionalism, more newspapers and magazines established fact-checking departments, and eventually European media outlets in Britain and Germany did the same.

Since the 1990s, some of the traditional media have been taking a wide range of budget-reducing measures, such as employment cuts, resulting in a limited capacity for establishing strong fact-checking

mechanisms (Starr 2009). In recent years, with the arrival of social media and the era of post-truth, fact-checking has attracted renewed attention, creating debates on third-party fact-checking mechanisms and establishing procedures based on internet big data technology.

Theoretically, fact-checking the news adds to the cost of telling lies for politicians, which enables political debate to stand on a more solid basis and helps people form accurate perceptions (Wen and Zeng 2016). In the long-run, the popularity of fact-checking the news will phase out the unreliable news sources (Owen 2017a). But the role of the current fact-checking mechanisms of news is limited or even counter-productive. Facebook's fact-checking system tagged the fake news on an article from the *Newport Buzz*, but afterwards the articles went viral. Christian Winthrop, an editor of *Newport Buzz*, believed that Facebook's tagging of fake news would have the opposite effect, because the audience in this case thought that Facebook was blocking that news (Levin 2017). A research report by the New America Foundation shows that continuous denial of specific news will make it more attractive to audiences. The report also says that a psychological mechanism in humans allows them to differentiate the information, based on their inherent conception and beliefs, and true information is sometimes unpopular (Yu and Chen 2016).

“Position preceding truth” is the typical characteristic of the post-truth era, so there are socio-psychological factors behind the unpopularity of fact-checking the news. Poll data released by the mainstream media before the 2016 US General Election went completely against the historical outcome, bringing the objective results drawn from so-called “data statistics” into question. Some scholars assert that objectivity and rational principles are disappearing. Objective value is only used for different political positions. Preferable data analysis is used for specific political gains, while data supporting opposite claims is often thrown out. So the idea of “truth preceding position” is set aside, and extracting facts from objective data is no longer important (Lan 2017). Shi Anbin puts forward a concept of “reality bias” to illuminate the flood of fake news during the process of the US General Election. “Reality bias” means that people are inclined to believe the information that conforms to their own personal opinions. Trump's slogans of anti-globalization, anti-political correctness, and “America First” struck a chord with ordinary Americans suffering high unemployment (Shi and Wang 2017a). On the other hand, the mainstream media representing the so-called “real news” often exhibits the characteristics of “white elitism” (Shi and

Wang 2017b). The difficulties faced at the grassroots were therefore not channelled through the mainstream media and élites, and this deprived them of any means of expressing their grievances at the national level. Wang Weijia believes that Brexit and Trump's US presidency show the complete disconnect between the cultural establishments represented by mainstream media and the bottom of the social ladder (Wang 2017). With this confrontation in mind, it is easy to understand why the fact-checking mechanism upheld by the mainstream media, higher education institutions and academic circles failed to have a substantive effect.

So, in reality, the fundamental question lies in the representativeness of the topic for fact-checking the news. Judgements controlled by the mainstream media establishments and higher education institutions representing the white élite class cannot be widely accepted by the people. Google, Facebook, Twitter and other internet companies have no public power, so they lack legality as gatekeepers of true or fake information.

To resolve problems of subject representativeness of fact-checking the news, one optional route is the crowd-sourcing model, which allows wide participation by citizens. China's factual verification has only just started, and its work experience in this area is very weak. With the development of mobile internet and big data technology, the participants in fact-checking the news are no longer limited to practitioners of professional journalism, and the crowd-sourcing mechanism through mobile internet and social media can be adopted to check the truth behind events. This would allow the public to become participants in the fact-checking process (Xu 2017). The decline of the public credibility of the mainstream media also reflects the public's call for new kinds of media, representing all levels of the social strata. The development of internet technology enables people from the lower and middle levels of society to be brought into the public opinion fold. But due to the platform control of the internet media by internet capital groups, it is very difficult for the lower and middle levels of society to effectively make their voices heard. If this continues, the public's trust in media organizations and their so-called pursuit of truth will further decline. The other main defect in the fact-checking of news lies in the effectiveness of its communication. At present, the fact-check technique consumes a large amount of personal participation with a lengthy procedure and ineffective timeliness. The communication of rumour-hacking is ineffective and results in floods of fake news going viral. John Greenberg, the fact-checker for the website "Political Truth", said: "A frequent problem and challenge is that a statement is channelled to hundreds, thousands or millions of people and it

is very difficult to correct the wrong information by the original speakers. So you are always behind the curve. Sometimes you lack a little bit, but sometimes a lot” (Wu and Kasinitz 2015). “To resolve the problem, relevant computer technology can be adopted to shorten the time before the fake news goes out of control. The relevant computer technology means AI. At present, some investigation agencies have used positioning, portrait-checking, data evidence-collecting and other multiple technologies to conduct fact-checking to improve its efficiency” (Zhang and Jin 2017). Meanwhile, the use of big data technology also facilitates the data integration of the checking agencies to prevent repetitive checks and to improve the communication efficiency of fact-checking the news. Daniel Sieradski, a New York technician, invented a plug-in called “Chrome” to alert users to fake news websites through labelling the browsers and other forms. The Hackathon Team developed “Nadim Press” programmes, using smart calculation to check fake news. When the users use Google to browse websites, the Alexa ranking, emotion analysis, bounce rate, geographical location and title clickbait scores will appear automatically, in order to assist people to rapidly decide the level of truth and friendliness of the news website. Geofeedia is a location-based social media monitoring software that provides intelligence analysis for public affairs, corporate security, etc. (Zheng 2017). The website “Fake News Challenge” is adopting AI technology, mainly by machine learning and language-processing technology, to resolve the problem of fake news (Owen 2017b). British NPO Full Fact is developing an auto fact-checking tool which has two models. One is to distinguish the checked content to make a judgement, and the other is to automatically check the new content, based on statistical analysis technology (Han and Wang 2017). Full Fact has also developed a fact-checking App, based on statistical analysis and language-processing tools, to facilitate media editors in the process of checking information (Zheng 2017).

4.2. A call for slow journalism

“Slow journalism” is characterized by a combination of investigation and verification to reveal the reason, trend and influence of the news through thorough analysis. Specifically, slow journalism enjoys three features. First, it emphasizes the authenticity of news, and encourages reporters to do a number of interviews and repeatedly research and verify the authenticity of the news at the expense of speed, to ensure that each stage of

the report is convincing. Secondly, slow journalism has more profundity. It not only embodies truth, but more importantly advocates the excavation of further information from the facts as the basis of the news. It calls for an explanation of the reasons for and development of the news, in order to analyze its trend and influence. Thirdly, slow journalism is presented in a variety of ways. It has abundant and appropriate methods of presenting the news, including data visualization, integrated media and storytelling, with the aim of gaining a complete understanding of the news. At present, fake news, information explosion and fragmentation of news have raised the concerns of many media workers. The continual development of We-Media has had an enormous impact on professional media workers and the media agencies. Thus, an increasing number of people have started to re-examine news values and vocational concepts, and pursue a new path, because of the impact of new media.

In China, the first slow journalism App has been online since December 2016. The slogan of “Chongqing Evening News”, “Take products to excellence as a craftsman”, attempts to pursue in-depth and creative news whilst slowing down the pace (Wangyi Xinwen 2016). And so how should we go about producing “slow news”?

First of all, journalists should adopt the right attitude towards work and place the current news environment under serious examination. The rapid development of new media technologies has accelerated the flow rate of information. Following the general trend, some journalists ignore news ethics with the aim of obtaining first-hand information. In the current new media era, news ethics should not be abandoned, but further developed. Truth is the life-blood of news. Once it is distorted, any news produced, even at the fastest speed, is meaningless. We need to “slow” down not only the depth of the report, but also the general news, which should not depend on its timeliness, but on its authenticity. This should be done, not only to improve the credibility of the media and the news industry, but also to take responsibility for society.

Secondly, journalists should cultivate their capacity for critical thinking. In an age of information explosion, it is more difficult to disclose falsification, with network rumours spreading everywhere. In recent years, the media have blindly copied information from some We-Media-like forums and microblogging sites, and have published it without verification. This was later identified as fake news, but had already had a negative impact on the public, who tend to remember information as it was reported the first time. Thus, it is difficult to redeem its impact. Faced with complex information, journalists should, on the one hand,

undertake a careful verification and patiently implement an investigation into the truth. On the other hand, they cannot confine their investigation to the phenomenon itself, but need to consider a few related questions, conduct an in-depth analysis, and analyze the crux of the problem. Only in this way can journalists present society with genuine news. Next, journalists should look for new methods of news coverage. Now that the fragmentation of information has become so common, journalists need to provide a unique perspective on news reporting. The implications are that they have to meet certain requirements: highly specialized knowledge, abundant life experience, a high sensitivity for news, and an ability to discover an interesting standpoints for traditional and general events. Finally, journalists need to improve the richness of the content and form of a report. This era, full of large data and financial media, presents reporters with a lot of information in a short time, but also sets higher standards for their abilities. As to content, empirical data are playing a more important role in the news, and journalists should have the ability to obtain, analyze and explain data, in order to make the news more sophisticated and credible. With regard to form, full media coverage will become mainstream in the future. As for important news, team co-operation should be welcomed to complete the procedures of news gathering and processing in a timely way. Other channels must be employed to complete the report in order to improve the dissemination of news.

4.3. Improve public media literacy

“Media literacy” refers to the ability of people to understand and criticize media information, as well as the ability to use media information for the development of individuals and society (Hoffmann 2004). Public media literacy is the fundamental factor and the most active force in socialized media. In the defense against fake news, it is essential to raise public media literacy.

Public media literacy is not a new concept, but has enriched itself with time. The original concept of media literacy has now changed in the following two ways. First of all, the subject has been expanded. In an era of omni-media, the requirement for high-level media literacy is not only restricted to journalists, but extends to everyone. As anyone can now be a producer and receiver of news, everyone is obliged to acquire an in-depth understanding of news and improve their media literacy.

Secondly, object has become complicated. What we have learned about the traditional theories of news and media cannot catch up with the changing times. The creation of new media and We-Media have given rise to the ubiquity of the media, which are no longer a scarce resource. All the information we receive is in the form of news, which we need to understand through media literacy. The era of we media has come, however, the public lack the basic concept about what is media and what is news. The lack of news ethics, increasing rumours rising from a large amount of unclear information, an excess of media trials, frequent changes of public opinion on news, and other maladies are reminders that the improvement of public media literacy is imperative.

Although members of the public may not be formally trained in journalism, it is an integral part of their lives. A mass production of fake news is not conducive to daily work and life! On the other hand, the public are also, to some extent, the producers and disseminators of news, utilizing networks and connecting with the network. Thus, we are all responsible for improving our media literacy.

On the subjective level, the public should raise their levels of knowledge and strengthen their legal consciousness. Take WeChat as an example: in the early half of 2017, the series of rumours about food safety emerged, such as “plastic rice”, “plastic seaweed”, and “dried meat flesh”. These rumours were transmitted in large numbers, with negative results. In this era of information explosion, it is important for people to be able to assess the quality of news provided to them. The internet seems to broaden people’s horizons, but it uses models like “algorithm bubble” and “information cocoons” to solidify public information channels and content.

At the objective level, relevant government departments should attach importance to the revision of laws and regulations and strengthen supervision. Until now, China has not had laws and regulations on media literacy, and needs improvement at the legal level. In addition, media literacy awareness should be taught in education, so that it is a basic knowledge for everyone. The negative behaviour caused by lack of media literacy can thus be avoided at the grassroots. Young students are a new generation growing up with China’s web and new media, and they particularly need to master media literacy.

4.4. *Reforming the paradigm of news*

For a long time, news professionalism has been penetrating all aspects of news education and news production, and has become the general paradigm of news reports. However, the concepts of news professionalism such as “objectivity”, “independence”, “reality”, and “first time” are abstract concepts which cannot be practically realized. The Western media are now completely controlled by capitalism. China’s Party media and official media (Miazhevich 2007) have shown traits of capitalization during the reform of the Party media and the information revolution. The independence of the news media and journalists has been weakened. Alongside the development of the mobile internet and social media, internet capital has completely controlled the internet media platforms, manipulating the whole process of production, distribution, communication, and all the data.

In fact, objectivity and neutrality in news reporting may not exist either. Nowadays, every piece of news is ultimately influenced by social class. The producers and communicators belong to a certain class and have political affiliations. Choice of source materials, reporting frames and communication channels are based on certain political values and class. It is difficult for the media to be absolutely objective and neutral. The views of various stakeholders will influence the views of the media in some way. News is produced in certain social circumstances. Today, the news media are thoroughly commercialized and controlled by market forces. Although the media always claim to hold values of “freedom” and “democracy”, in a media environment dominated by the market economy, the guiding force is not truth, but high ratings and sensationalism. In the era of all-media, the guiding force is the click-rate behind every audience. The news which we usually see is not objective, but constructed. The news conveys opinions, not the truth; the news has a position, and does not regard people’s right to know as a primary objective. The news may cover the truth, if necessary. Media are a business and news reports are goods. The media’s top priority for news is to earn money; it has nothing to do with people’s right to know. Media of different ideologies, cultures and countries adopt different reporting frames, news contexts, and news positions. Fewer media now report the news neutrally, completely and objectively.

Because of the development of new media, some media will choose to sacrifice the value of their news, in order to obtain benefits, and will eventually become the mouthpiece of others, thus destroying the

excellence adhered to by the traditional media. Furthermore, with the triumph of news professionalism, the types of media product are highly standardized. Streamlined production mechanisms have been developed. The same content, thoughts, aesthetic tastes and value systems are spreading in different media forms, cultural contexts and media markets. Behind the news values of “objectivity”, “neutrality” and “freedom of speech”, different social classes are unequal in terms of the power that they hold over the media environment. The voices of the proletarian class and disadvantaged groups are neglected by the mainstream media. Newspaper offices, TV stations, and social media platforms are in the hands of large financial groups, and the will of capital controls the field of public opinion and mainstream ideology.

“News professionalism” has been unable to realize its goals of “objectivity, reality and independence”. News products following the so-called standards of “news professionalism” are not the reflection of reality. In order to change the status quo, whereby fake news is spread and media credibility lowered, a new news paradigm must be advocated. The new news paradigm will not only satisfy procedural justice, as prescribed by “news professionalism”. It will pursue the substantive justice and the result justice of the equal expression of various social groups. It will not be relegated to the achievement of partial and mechanical truth in news, but will pursue the holistic and dialectic truth of news. It will not satisfy the objectivity and neutrality of a single news report, but will pursue the objectivity and neutrality of the whole news production process and agenda setting.

Most fundamentally, the new news paradigms will be based on the nature of publicity and the public welfare of the news agencies. The ownership of news should be in the hands of the collective, and should not be owned by private or minority interest groups. Therefore, the ultimate goal of news work should benefit the whole of society, and must not cater to a particular class’s economic or political interests.

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