

The impact of digital technology on journalism in China today

Hang Yuan

University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
hyuan23@sheffield.sc.uk

Keywords: Journalism; China; Digital Technology; Government Investment; Innovative Changes; Mindset of Media Journalists

Abstract: As digital technology continues to evolve, journalism is undergoing disruptive changes. Journalism in China is thriving in its way in the digital media age. There are many opportunities and challenges. This study is to summarise the development of Chinese journalism under the art of digital media in the government's investment in developing digital news platforms, changes in news content innovation on online media platforms, and changes in journalists' attitudes towards journalism practice three aspects through literature analysis. This study shows that in the Chinese government has provided a lot of money to support the transition of traditional media to new media. Meanwhile, in terms of content innovation, journalists will pay more attention to the visual presentation of news, but the change of news culture is not much at present. Finally, in terms of journalists' mentality, some journalists have a positive attitude, but some journalists keep a negative attitude.

1. Introduction

Data overload has become a reality today. With today's young people referred to as "digital natives" and most of the population has grown accustomed to digital life, such a highly digitalised society has undoubtedly affected the journalism industry (Tong and Lo, 2018)[5]. Data journalism has been called the "future of journalism" (Berners-Lee, 2010)[1].

In the last five years, Chinese traditional media, like Western media, has faced an existential crisis. Newspaper advertising revenues had fallen precipitously (38.7%, 32.5%, and 30.3% in 2016, 2017, and 2018, respectively), prompting media outlets to consider media convergence and digital transformation (Sparks et al., 2016; C. Wang and Yu, 2016; Yin and Liu, 2014, as cited in Fang and Repnikova, 2021)[3]. Newspapers in other countries respond to this situation primarily economically, but China's political dimension is central (Sparks et al., 2016)[4].

As Fang and Repnikova (2021) pointed out in their review essay, the case of Chinese media management is rarely placed in a broader and comparative context of journalistic practice, owing to China's authoritarian political system[3]. However, in China, data journalism exhibits a continuum of journalistic innovation, widely acknowledged as challenging history in the digital age and thus constantly bursting with new ideas, new times, and new products (Bai, 2016, as cited in Zhang and Feng, 2018)[10]. Digital innovation, on the other hand, is widely acknowledged as a critical solution to journalism's current crisis (Fang and Repnikova, 2021)[3].

Based on the background of China's digital media development and social reality, this paper describes the impact of digital technology development on media journalism, as exemplified by the government's investment in developing a digital news application. These effects are primarily reflected in the government's investment in developing digital news platforms, changes in news content innovation on online media platforms, and changes in journalists' attitudes towards journalism practice. The term "technology" refers to the medium through which humans communicate in modern society, including computers, social media, smartphones, software, and algorithms (Tong and Lo, 2018)[5].

2. Government investment in digital news platforms

Data journalism is becoming a more established tool for telling complex stories and translating complex information so audiences can understand government documents. Many have reported on the importance of actively promoting media convergence, have proposed WeChat, Weibo, and other apps as essential ways to integrate traditional and digital media in China (askci.com, 2017, ascited in Zhang, 2018)[10], and are willing to pay for financial assistance to assist traditional media in producing digital products (Sparks et al., 2016)[4].

Since the policy's implementation, newspapers, radio, and television stations across the country have attempted to combine traditional and new media (Wang, 2021)[7]. Traditional media outlets such as Xinhua News Agency, CCTV, and People's Daily were quick to respond positively, indicating that they would increase their digital media integration and innovation efforts (Sparks et al., 2016)[4]. In just a few years, digital media product apps (along with Weibo and WeChat) have become another standard mobile Internet platform for media channels (Wang, 2021)[7]. As of 2018, approximately 74% of China's party newspapers had apps (People.net, 2018). The Chinese government's representative digital product (Zhang, 2018)[10], Paper News, formerly the Oriental Morning Post, represents a successful transition from traditional media to digital apps (Jiulianhuan 2017, as cited in Zhang, 2018)[10].

It has undoubtedly infused new life into journalism, enabling China's official media to quickly transition from traditional to new media and facilitating media transformation. For example, the People's Daily app quickly grew a large audience, which is the most direct response to new technology (Van der Haak et al., 2012)[6]. Subsidies from the government are becoming more prevalent in the new economy, and there is evidence that they are being used as part of a deliberate strategy to promote a stronger online presence in newspapers (Sparks et al., 2016)[4].

3. Innovative changes in news content for online media platforms

Following the establishment of "two W (Weibo and WeChat) and one app," there was a surge in online news production.

On the one hand, digital platforms provide more direct data feedback, allowing for real-time monitoring of the effects of news distribution and timely adjustment of news production and distribution strategies. User interaction is regarded as a KPI on these platforms, and clicks, likes, retweets, and comments are critical indicators for assessing news communication power (Wright and Nolan, 2021)[9]. Technological advancements have altered the industry's evaluation criteria and journalists' copywriting habits. Pictures, graphics, video, and audio are regarded as four essential elements because they enhance visual appeal and are widely used in innovative writing online (Wang, 2021)[7]. According to the survey, over half of the online reports include information icons and interactive visual presentations such as dynamic map animation effects (Zhang and Feng, 2018)[10]. At the same time, when writing, journalists are expected to satisfy the interests of digital readers, and interesting, compelling, and brief content is more likely to capture their attention (Tong and Lo,

2018)[5]. According to Wang (2021), when compared to traditional paper media, app stories have more lines in the headline and are more likely to use punctuation with emotional markers[7]. Online articles are also more likely to split paragraphs and insert visual tables of images to break the article into smaller chunks, allowing readers to read more quickly. As a result, the overall visual picture becomes more intuitive and fragmented.

On the other hand, most transformative digital media innovations do not appear to go very far. The commenting feature in most digital news media apps is ineffective, or some only allow users to enter comments without displaying other comments. Only a few faint compliments can be found in some comment sections (Fang and Repnikova, 2021)[3]. Meanwhile, Zhang and Feng (2019) discovered that while Chinese data journalists frequently use visual presentations, they do not actively access original data[10]. That is not a problem that only Chinese journalists face. Additionally, data surveys have revealed that animation in application news is not as prevalent as one might believe (Wright and Nolan, 2021)[9], accounting for only 10% (Zhang and Feng, 2018)[10]. Furthermore, on the digital media side, there is little change in the logical writing style of the news line, and the innovation is superficial (Wright and Nolan, 2021)[9]. Of course, this is a phase in the evolution of digital news media (Van der Haak et al., 2012)[6].

4. The changing mindset of media journalists in their practice

According to Zhang and Feng (2018), there were significant differences of opinion among practitioners in the early stages of the digital era[10]. Most journalists were optimistic, but many were sceptical and wanted to wait and see.

Many journalists are optimistic about technological advancement and digitisation, believing that using technology to innovate journalism can benefit personal development. Technological innovations have made it necessary for journalists, not only to produce multimedia content in their work but also for the desire for immediacy. A high click-through rate has pushed journalists to acquire multimedia skills and transform themselves from journalism specialists to generalists skilled in all tools (Tong and Lo, 2018)[5]. They are eager to enter the data journalism era because of the new job opportunities available in the field. Simultaneously, data technology can expand journalists' freedom, and its use can be powerful in telling stories that other types of journalism cannot tell, enriching the shape of journalism (Berners-Lee, 2010)[1]. Data journalism is becoming a more established tool for telling complex stories and translating complex information for audiences to comprehend (Du, 2019)[2].

Journalists can use data journalism's good visualisation and accessible content innovation to win awards (Wright and Doyle, 2019)[8], and some studies have shown that journalists can enjoy a certain degree of resource favouritism if they have a high reputation or excellent grades (Zhang and Feng, 2018)[10]. Furthermore, awards can justify journalism's value while failing to attract media investment (Wright and Nolan, 2021)[9]. For example, Caixin Media's data group won the Global Editors Network (GEN) 2018 Data Journalism Award in the category of "Best Data Journalism Team (large newsroom)" (Du, 2019)[2]. In the article, Du (2019) cites Zhimin Huang, founder of Caixin VisLab, as an example. Zhimin Huang is "the first person to do data journalism in China." [2]

At the same time, while many journalists recognise the innovative benefits of digital news, many remain sceptical, believing that digital journalism is incompatible with today's media systems (Zhang and Feng, 2018)[10]. This group of journalists believes that data journalism is nothing more than public relations or cosmetics (Wright and Nolan, 2021)[9]. Journalism necessitates storytelling over programming and interaction design with technology. Some journalists will become overly focused on programming skills and interaction design, losing sight of what good storytelling entails (Wright and Nolan, 2021)[9]. According to Wright and Nolan (2021), many data journalists are now considered accountants and programmers, which puts additional pressure on them[9]. When journalists discover that their job has shifted from developing specialisation in specific areas to mastering the ability to produce various media content, their professional self-esteem suffers (Tong

and Lo, 2018)[5]. Moreover, Chinese journalists frequently have to complete high-pressure tasks within tight deadlines, and access to high-quality data is extremely difficult; accessing public data by submitting a request "rarely succeeds," and they frequently do not have the time and motivation to experiment with time-consuming data journalism or to test innovative narratives" (Zhang and Feng, 2018)[10]. According to Zhang and Feng (2018), most journalists will sacrifice innovation to complete their daily tasks successfully[10]. While it is difficult to advance the skills of the average journalist, data journalism is becoming "more and more specialised" (Wright and Nolan, 2021)[9]. The production cycle for high-quality, "heavyweight" data-driven work "takes at least about a month" and usually necessitates extensive collaboration between journalists, editors, and designers (Zhang and Feng, 2018)[10]. However, not every news organisation has this capability. In reality, many journalists relay offline and online information (Van der Haak et al., 2012) [6].

5. Conclusion

Overall, the state provides a lot of policy and financial support, allowing media digitisation to take off quickly in China. This provides strong upfront support for the transformation of traditional media.

This aspect of innovative changes in news content on online media platforms has resulted in stronger visualisation of digital news online, with higher emotional prices and greater interactivity. However, many current innovations are superficial and formal rather than content and cultural innovations.

In terms of the mindset of field journalists, some are actively embracing opportunities and changes, improving their data-enabled capabilities, and innovating their approach to journalism to advance their careers. Some journalists have a wait-and-see or rejecting attitude because the audience is too narrow, the data source is too challenging to obtain, and the excessive work pressure causes them to prioritise quantity over quality. They also believe that current media innovation is merely a "cosmetic product" for self-congratulation and external public relations, as opposed to the true meaning of news innovation.

This article examines the impact of technological change on Chinese journalism from three perspectives: state financial support, news content innovation on online media platforms, and journalist mentality change. However, technological advancements have had a far more significant impact on the growth of journalism in China.

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