

# The Enlightenment of Communication as a Research Method to News Production

Research from “Study” to “Academics”\*

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**Abstract**—Communication is a summary of communication phenomena and the law of communication practice; news production is not only the communication practice of news, but also the social transformation of the effectiveness of news information. News can only maximize its value in communication. This paper discusses the relationship between communication and news production, analyzes the dynamics of “news practice” and the commonality of the two, and then explores the application logic, possibility and future direction of method practice.

**Keywords**—communication; research method; news production; enlightenment

## I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a scientific discipline that helps humans know the world. It is slightly narrow to take communication merely as a research perspective, and the research object of communication is the social information system itself. That is to say, the core of communication research is people, media and society. Taking communication as a research method to look at news production, then research on news production should not be limited to news media and news business, but should also be placed in the methodology of communication. That is to observe the people, media and society in news production, and provide a rational explanation for its practice, motivation and mechanism. As the attachment of social process and media attributes, the sociality, socialization and diversity of communication are the meanings of news information in the realization of effectiveness, which is used to observe the news production with subjective initiative.

## II. COMMUNICATION AS A RESEARCH METHOD

As an interdisciplinary, communication was generally formed in the 1920s. It is inextricably linked with many disciplines such as journalism, sociology, psychology, cultural anthropology, political science, information theory, system theory, and cybernetics, with mutual influence and mutual penetration. As an independent discipline,

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communication must have its own independent research object. There are many expressions about this issue in Chinese academic circles, which are summarized as follows: the first is “Communication is a discipline studying humans' information dissemination activities” [1], the second is a reference to Schram's words, “To understand human communication we must understand how people relate to one another”, [2] and the third is “The research object of communication is the ‘communication process’” [3]. Guo Qingguang has made an overall summary of the above three expressions that “the research object of communication is the social information system itself, and communication is the science that studies social information system and its operational laws”. [4] Communication is a scientific discipline that helps humans to learn the world. Any science that learns the world is a method, so it's slightly narrow to take communication merely as a research perspective; at the philosophical level, communication itself is an epistemology and methodology for learning the world. Methodology is the theory of how people learn the world and change the world, which analyzes and systematically summarizes a series of specific methods and finally puts forward general principles. Humanities and social sciences usually use qualitative research, quantitative research and other methods in specific researches, which are narrow-level methodologies. In a broader sense, methodology involves the way of using these methods to learn and understand the world, which is the sum of the categories, principles, theories, methods, and means that apply to and guide each specific social science. Almost all scientific research activities are carried out within the framework of methodology, and follow the logic given by the methodology. So communication itself is a research method.

In addition, with the development of new technology clusters such as Internet of Things, big data, cloud computing, machine learning, etc., a brand new discipline of computational communication has emerged, which is a more specific research method. Smart media and a growing number of smart tools will speed up humans' model thinking and dramatically change humans' research methods; smart data logging, tracking and analysis will speed up humans' understanding of the media industry and the trend of public opinions, and change the way of understanding these things; a scientific and meticulous research method is used as a

means for researchers to recognize, explore and construct communication itself. Computational communication provides a bottom-up inductive reasoning method, such as using data mining and analysis techniques to extract data from different media environments for analysis, to predict and cluster online users and behaviors, mine and judge relations, and analyze exploratory data.[5] Computational communication provides a more diverse set of new data analysis paradigms, such as analysis based on trends, time, frequency, chance, period, and system variables, and these new changes cannot be expressed by traditional linear data, which also help researchers find things they didn't know or expect before in research, explore the relationships and connections between different elements, and gain knowledge through induction.

### III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATION AND NEWS PRODUCTION

#### A. *The Relationship Between Communication and Journalism*

To talk about the enlightenment of communication as a research method to journalism, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between communication and journalism. First of all, journalism is an applied discipline of humanities, while communication is an applied science of social sciences, which belong to different fields. Humanity is a discipline, not a science. The humanistic manifestation of humanity shows its ultimate concern of human beings. It discusses the existence value of human beings and the spiritual manifestation of human nature, and regards issues such as belief, emotion, morality and aesthetics as research objects. Its position is subjective rather than objective. From this perspective, the news value as the core point of news is the embodiment of humanistic characteristics. The reason why social science is called science is because the human behavior and social phenomena it researches contain internal laws, which can be found by using objective observation procedures and analysis methods, and can be tested. What communication researches is the operational law of social information system.

Secondly, Mr. Dong Tiance comprehensively analyzed the similarities and differences between the two in his paper *Rational Examination of Journalism and Communication*. From the perspective of research object, journalism researches the news media, while communication researches the mass media, namely the news media and films, books, etc.; from the perspective of research level, communication is at an overall level based on the general rules of news, radio and television, public relations, and advertising, whose academic level is more abstract, more general and more summary than that of journalism; from the perspective of academic standpoint, journalism pays more attention to the indoctrination and cultivation of humanistic ideals and humanistic spirit, while the experiential school of communication believes that communication has an obvious behavioral science orientation and is a social science, however, the critical school believes that communication is an integral part of the entire social structure, and

comprehensively discusses the relation between communication and society from the perspectives of sociology, political economy, cultural studies, and philosophy; from the perspective of research methods, traditional journalism has never put forward research method as an issue alone, which indicates that journalism lacks the consciousness of research method. Journalism mainly uses the most basic logical reasoning methods such as induction and deduction to carry out researches, and focuses on business operations. The American experience communication has always emphasized using "scientific" methods such as social investigation, psychological experiment, and content analysis to study the effect of communication, obtaining empirical conclusions through the process of quantification and statistics, and making accurate factual judgments on communication practice, as a basis for improving communication activities. The critical school of communication pays attention to the value judgment of communication phenomena, and has an obvious feature of philosophical speculation in research method, so as to ensure that its theoretical ideas can grasp the meaning of communication from the macroscopic overall dialectical height. [6]

#### B. *Epistemology, Methodology and View of Practice*

"The epistemology explores the nature and structure of human cognition, the relationship between human cognition and the existence of objective material world, the premise and foundation of cognition, the occurring and developing process of cognition and its law, and the truth criterion of cognition." [7] As an epistemology and methodology, communication helps humans to understand the world, human society and humans themselves. However, human cognition is not only subordinate to the need to understand the world, but also subordinate to the need of practice. News production is a specific practice of human communication. Since communication has given a methodology to learn the world, news production is the practice of human communication under the guidance of this methodology.

From the perspective of practice, it is necessary to link cognition, environment, conditions, objectives and other complex factors in consideration. Scholar Zhao Jianguo mentioned in his book *The Double Observation of Philosophy and Communication* that "the overall process of human beings understanding the whole world is practice — cognition — practice — recognition. Humans' understanding of something generally start from practice, to rationally understand the world, practice is the source; the driving force for rational understanding to move forward is practice, and the way to test whether this understanding is correct is still practice." [8] Li Liangrong and Li Xiaolin put forward in the paper *Journalism Needs to Turn to Mass Communication* in 1998 that "the transformation of journalism to mass communication is not only a theoretical issue, but also a practical issue." [9] Traditional practical philosophers including Aristotle had two basic views on practice: the first is that practice is inseparable from objective law, and this law must be recognized and mastered by people; the second is that practice has obvious goals or objectives. As a practice,

news production is inseparable from the objective law of learning and understanding the world summarized by the methodology of communication, which can guide news production to adjust its activities to meet the objective needs and raise the subject experience to theory.

#### IV. THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF COMMUNICATION AS A RESEARCH METHOD TO NEWS PRODUCTION

Communication is a way for human beings to learn the world. Its research object is the social information system itself. That is to say, the core of communication research is people, media and society. Regarding news production with communication as a research method, then research on news production should not be limited to news media and news business, but should be placed in the methodology of communication; that is to observe the human, media and society in news production.

##### A. *News Production*

News production refers to the process of production subject selecting, processing and disseminating production object, and the social relationship between people formed in this process, which is the sum of productivity and productive relations. In traditional news production, production subjects included news organizations and journalists. The emergence of artificial intelligence has expanded the scope of journalists and realized the diversification of the subjects of news production, and news production "now adds user-produced content from relying solely on contents produced by professional journalists in the past, and will add new content produced by algorithm." [10] Entering the digital media era, the objects of news production present a diversified trend. In the traditional sense, the objects of news production refer to the facts, which are obtained through investigation and interview, while the news objects in the digital media era turn to data, and the production of news content is completed through information capture, analysis and reorganization of big data.

##### B. *Interaction Between News Production and Society*

1) *Regarding news production from the perspective of political economy*: Economic terms such as "production", "productivity", and "production methods" are introduced into news production, and the school of political economics in communication is used to research news production. In the process of selecting, processing and disseminating news production objects by the news production subjects, there must be its unique production methods. The news production methods include the production methods of elements such as news products, news production subjects, news production resources and news production relations. Production method is the unity of productivity and productive relations, and understanding productivity and productive relations is the premise of grasping production method. The development of modern technologies is the first among productivity factors. Major revolutionary technological changes will promote the transformation of

production methods to higher levels, human society will also enter a new form, and there will be overall structural changes in society. The evolution of media technologies will have a fundamental impact on news production, change the basic form of media, change the core links and elements of news production, and construct a new look of humans' news production activities.

2) *Interpreting social relations in news production from the perspective of space production*: The American philosopher Henri Lefebvre once said that "space is a social relationship, and it is closely related to productivity. Like other things, it is a product of history." [11] News production, as an important link and practice of social communication activities, has become a new spatial form that shows various social relationships. First of all, news production is an important link of information transmission and a social space for the re-creation of relationships between people. However, the space products constructed by news production are not neutral, but debugging and reorganization of social relations under the control of capital and power, with a purpose of accomplishing the value output of ideology through the social construction of news production. Secondly, news producers use new technologies to produce news, and also break barriers between people and society, so the boundary between production subjects disappears. New media technologies change the spatial state between the disseminator and the recipient, and the spatial orientation of the two is exchanged. Finally, the news production space of new media is shared under the influence of flow, thus linking the relational network of producers, media agencies and the public.

3) *News production observes social development*: China is still in the period of social transformation, and Chinese media are in a multi-layered context and complex field. There are problems such as the lack of value center, lack of consensus, prominent conflicts of interest, ambiguous news value standards, and the slack of journalists' identity in news production. Under such circumstances, news production should especially pay attention to social development. News production presents the most real content to society and reflects representative social form and status quo. Entering the new media era, news production should be combined with social reality to build cyberspace. It is necessary not only to investigate the production, dissemination and consumption of information through the network, but also to have an in-depth understanding of the network structure it relies on, and to complete the news production that can observe the social development with the help of algorithms.

#### V. CONCLUSION

From today's perspective, the current and future news production has undergone or will undergo tremendous changes, and the concept of news production has no longer been limited to the news media as the production subject. The mode of news production has changed from monopoly production to social coordination mode. The concept of news

is no longer limited to the category of news products, and news has become a process that is not led by news media, but becomes a process of public dialogue. As a methodology, communication guides human's communication practice of news production, and applies the objective law summarized by social sciences to the field of journalism in humanities. Introducing communication as a research method into the research of news production can open up research horizon, break away from the traditional research thinking of news media and news business, and enhance the understanding of news production as a social behavior and imagined social structure.

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