

# Implicit Media Anomie of News Entertainment Oriented: A Social Media Content Study on Jiang Ge Case

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## ABSTRACT

Media code of conduct media credibility. However, with the development of the market economy and the changing media environment, a small number of media blind pursuit of the "eyeballs" effect, the value of economic benefits to abandoning the norms. As we are living in the age of the internet, the trends of information explosion are urging the media to explore more information more frequently to get people's attention. Thus multiple transmission and multi-channel transmission are common for journalism nowadays, which caused more and more news reversal events to appear and decreased the media's credibility. In addition, the right of the discourse given by the internet transferred people's character from message recipient to communicator and evaluator. This intensified the media trail's effect and accelerated the post-truth era's process. This article will use Jiang Ge's case as an example to reveal how the concepts of trial by media, news entertainment-oriented and the Spiral of Silence are intertwined. This research will also give suggestions to help to correct media ethics.

**Keywords:** Media Anomie, Media Credibility, Jiang Ge Case.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Media ethics anomie is a common phenomenon, especially in the post-truth era. The development of media is burgeoning in recent years. More and more people can get the information they want from the media. If some people cannot identify the information, they will mislead by fake information. In Hector Macdonald's book, he came up with a notion which is called "competing truths". He said that "In many cases, there are different kinds of ways, even equally-legal ways, to describe a certain person, event, thing or policy" [1]. The different expressions of an event may cause different results. Some authoritative media have an objective overview of the news. They just state the truth of the event and lead the audience to think rationally. Compare with these authoritative media, some media are irresponsible and lack the awareness of authenticity. They just focus on chasing clout and gaining popularity. They report anecdotes and personal affairs on the news, instead of telling the truth. Media

ethics anomie is caused by these irresponsible media. Yu mentioned in his article that "Media ethics anomie means the violation of media ethics when reporting by journalists" [2]. Stephen J.A.Ward researched media ethics and clarified that media ethics are principles that should guide journalists to take responsibility when reporting and regulate their interactions with other citizens [3]. Media ethics anomie happens all over the world. In China, the discussion of the Jiang Ge case has lasted for almost six years from November 3rd, 2016 to now. People focused on the truth of this case and the final verdict of Chen Shifeng, who was the murderer in this case. This case also included the personal feud between Jiang's mother and Jiang's good friend Liu Xin. Many media continuously reported this well-known case. Some of the media focused on reporting the personal feud and ignored the fact which happened in this case. They overstated and even misrepresented the case. The audience was led to focus on the personal feud as well. Some audience cursed Liu angrily after reading the reports of how sad and miserable Jiang's

mother was. They even sentenced Liu and Chen to death according to their own emotion and judgment. In Xiao's paper, she summarized the Jiang Ge case and said that "Netizens criticized Liu Xin's behavior and morality, mainstream media and we media's reports intervened in this case. All sides joined in the crusade against Liu Xin's morality and forgot the truth of the case" [4]. All these acts of the audience are the typical results of media ethics anomie.

As for the research of media ethics anomie, this is a communal issue in the world. Both China and western country has been researched for decades since the phenomenon of media ethics has existed for more than a century in the world. Xiong pointed out the status quo of media ethics anomie, he mentioned that "The unsolved problems of media ethics anomie of news reporting in the past have aggravated on the Internet now, which affect the modern network dissemination environment just like chronic diseases" [5]. Many scholars analyze the formation of media ethics anomie and come up with practical and reasonable proposals to alleviate the severity of the influence which is caused by media ethics anomie. And as for the research on the Jiang Ge case, in China, there has been a large amount of research on it over the past six years. Chinese scholars point out various issues which are reflected in the Jiang Ge case. They research gradually from the event itself to the general phenomenon. They consider this case as an example and illustrate the present situation of the news report and the audience's reaction in China. In western countries, scholars are not familiar with this Chinese case, so the research has not gotten as much attention as in China. This case shows plenty of media phenomena directly and it is a good example to discuss the media ethics anomie in recent years.

This research aims at summarizing the typical reports which cause media ethics anomie in the Jiang Ge case by combining the concepts of trial by media, news entertainment-oriented, The Spiral of Silence, and other communication theories. This research also discusses the status quo of media ethics in China and the suggestions for mitigating the media ethics issue. This research uses a case study to analyze the topic.

## **2. NEWS ENTERTAINMENT-ORIENTED: THE DISLOCATION OF NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT**

Generally, news and entertainment should be two different concepts. Stephanie Edgerly and Emily K Vraga distinguished the differences between news and entertainment. They said "News concerns reality and facts, while entertainment is based on fiction and hyperbole. News is informative and rational, while entertainment is uninformative and emotional" [6]. According to these principles, in the Jiang Ge case, news should focus on the truth, like who murdered

Jiang, why the murderer committed a crime, what the final verdict and its legal basis were, and other facts that happened in this case. Some media disobeyed these principles to report the news. They focused on entertainment. They caught the audience's emotion and thought the audience may concern about the personal feud between Jiang's mother and Liu more than the facts. They used grossly exaggerated titles to draw the audience's attention. With these attractive titles, the media can gain more hits and views. When the audience read this kind of article, they can't get any information about the reality. They will even be instigated to curse Liu and sympathize with Jiang's family. The most well-known we media in this case, which is named Mixing, posted several articles to criticize Liu. Her article "Jiang Ge and Liu Xin: The law can sanction the murderer, but who will sanction humanity and morality?" gained more than 100,000 views. Many audiences followed her to curse Liu so which cause the severe digital mobs' bullying. According to The Supreme People's Court of The People's Republic Of China, the circumstances are serious enough to constitute a crime if specific defamatory information have been viewed over 5,000 or been relayed over 500. Reports which will be discussed in the next part exactly meet the above-measured sentence requirement.

Edgerly mentioned that "The distinction of news and entertainment becomes more unfixed and ambiguous" [7]. Many factors trigger it. Especially some reports, which can deliberately mislead the crowd, are the main factor causing the ambiguity between news and entertainment. Since the rapid development of media, more and more people start to register their accounts. They become we media and post their opinion on the Internet. Some of them can state the truth and share their perspectives objectively. Others may lack professional knowledge about communication and shirk their responsibility to avoid news entertainment-oriented. From their perspective, a piece of good news seems to be measured only by hits and likes. They report some serious events without considering the quality and facticity of contents. In the Jiang Ge case, many audiences were deeply stirred up by the reporting of we media. We media emphasized the personal feud between Jiang's mother and Liu. They fanned the flames in this case. They incited the audience to support Jiang's mother and swore at Liu. These exaggerated and misleading reports were mainly to blame. Due to this factor, it has become more difficult to discriminate the differences between news and entertainment. It also causes the phenomenon of news entertainment-oriented more severely. Indeed, it is unnecessary to distinguish the difference precisely. The direct and effective ways to alleviate the evil consequence of news entertainment-oriented are respecting the facts, thinking rationally, and posting objective comments. These tips can help the media regulate themselves and take news reporting more seriously.

### **3. CARNIVAL OF EMOTION: CHANGE OF PEOPLE'S ATTENTION IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA**

Post-truth was the word of the year 2016 selected by OUP, which means the effect of emotion is stronger than truth when journalists report news and represent the spirit of the era [8]. As science and technology develop, online applications provide people with many platforms that can share their opinion or comment on others anonymously. Moreover, as everyone can make their voice heard, the center of discourse power no longer exists. Based on this, a group situation is easy to be found when numerous individuals express their emotions simultaneously. Many of them just read the information that fits with their value and comment on anything they want, regardless of correctness or fairness. Apart from that, the opinion of "the law does not punish numerous offenders" and the anonymity online can also spur them to make unwise comments. Professor Peng Lan of Tsinghua University also agrees that it's difficult to make the general public, who have the power to communicate while haven't received professional training, select information according to facts and values. Most of them can only choose a message according to their own emotion and intuition [9].

Jiang Ge's case embodies this concept well. After numerous reports of this case appear online, the majority of people criticized Liu Xin without any doubt or objection. People have great empathy for Jiang's family, which impels them to release their anger and uphold justice by abusing Liu Xin, although she was not the killer and it is unclear whether she locked the door. "Hope cyber-bullying can hound Liu Xin to death as soon as possible" was a comment that has been given 20 thousand thumb-up by others [10].

Post-truth era was not only created by the audience but also by have media's contribution. As the audience gradually moves to the dominant position of media, their preference decides whether an article would have clout. So to do the clout-chasing work, many media practitioners would do anything to cater audience's taste. Thus false information and inflammatory report be produced. A piece of the article said that Liu Xin went to a party merrily so soon after Jiang Ge's death with a picture as proof, which gained attention by leading Liu Xin to the center of public opinion. But then it was proved to be fake news, the picture was an old photo that have gone through image processing. More inflammatory articles can be found in the we-media account. Liu Xin, are the wontons with Jiang Ge's blood delicious and Jiang Ge, Liu Xin bought a new bag and got her hair dyed in 100 days after your death for her are some examples. These titles violate the objectiveness principle, which is one of the most important principles of journalism.

### **4. CYBER-BULLYING AND ECHO CHAMBER: THE CONVERGENCE PROPERTY OF PEOPLE'S OPINION**

Cyberbullying is becoming more and more common nowadays. Two kinds of cyber-bullying exist in this case. One is focused on Liu Xin, the other is focused on people who have a different opinion from the majority.

At the beginning of the disputation on the Jiang Ge case, people criticize Liu Xin for her ruthlessness to uphold justice. Moreover, Jiang Ge's mother publicized Liu's family information online, which not only caused Liu Xin to get fired but also lead people to create disturbance in Liu's grandparents' home. Such behavior has a bad influence and even broke the red line of the law.

As the concept of the Spiral Of Silence mentioned, an individual tends to express more bravely once he discovers his opinion belongs to the 'prevailing opinion. However, he would keep silent or change his mind to avoid pressure others may put on him when his original opinion was not supported or even opposed [11]. Public opinion is too strong to resist and key opinion leaders' attitude is easy to spread wildly and supported by fans, as well as the anonymity online gives people convenience, and the individual who expresses different opinion may go through cyber-bullying. When a heated discussion occurred in the field of public opinion, some people may dox the personal information of others who have a different opinion from them (such as Liu Xin and her family shouldn't go through cyber-bullying). Personal attacks also appear online, such as words like 'you should die together with Liu Xin'.

These malicious attacks have influenced many people's lives as well as the disturbed environment of rational discussion. The convergent tendency of voice online also intensified the phenomenon of the Spiral Of Silence and Echo chamber, which is unhealthy for online media development.

### **5. FRAGMENTED READING ERA**

"Fragmented reading refers to people's easy and obvious reading of amateurish content without a clear purpose in their spare time through newspapers, mobile phones and other media" [12]. Nowadays, people get information mainly from fragmented and amateurish reading. The content of the text is often short and fragmentary. To capture people's attention to a greater extent, the content presents the characteristics of entertaining and sensational. In the era of fragmented reading, both the media's way of producing and offering information and the audience's way of acquiring information are characterized by fragmentation. The characteristics of fragmented reading lead to the emergence of various media anomie [13].

For the reporting of news events, in the era of fragmented reading, people get to know news mainly through microblogs and news apps, which generally describe news events in 200-1000 words and usually only select individual bits and a very one-sided picture of the issue to report, making it difficult for people to truly and objectively understand the whole picture of events. To cater the reading habits and needs of the audience in the fragmented reading era, news reports need to be eye-catching in a short period and make the audience empathize with the people and content in the news. News reports always choose the view which is more attractive and more consistent with the audience's cognition.

## 6. MEDIA TRIAL

Media trial "refers to the use of news reports or comments disseminated publicly by the media to interfere with and influence judicial independence and justice. It guides the audience with its obvious tendentiousness and forms a public opinion atmosphere to affect the independence of the judicature trial so that the trial lost its impartiality to a different degree. Its essence is that freedom of the press interferes with judicial independence, replaces judicial trial by moral judgment, and replaces supervision by public opinion with 'discourse power' of media" [14].

In Jiang Ge case, Chen Shifeng's intentional homicide is without a doubt. With Jiang's mother questioning Liu's responsibility and attitude, the public quickly captured the excitement of public opinion in this criminal case, and the focus of news reports and public opinion gradually turned to Liu. A television show questioned repeatedly the detail of "Did Liu have to lock the door" (Locked the door means Liu left Jiang outside the door alone to resist Chen's violence and this indirectly led to Jiang's death) and began to discuss Liu's responsibility in the case and pay attention to the story between Liu and Jiang. Later, there is continuous news focused on Liu's life, the public held the opinion that Jiang dead because of Liu's cowardice and heartlessness. A we-media account uploaded a review article Jiang Ge case: The law can sanction the murderer, but who will sanction humanity and morality made a review of this event in Jiang's mother's shoes. This has made a huge impact on the trial. This review article was posted before the judgment of the department of justice and angers the public. Public opinion was full of moral judgment and criticism since then. There were cyber-violence, cyber manhunt, and even offline intimidation and threats against Liu everywhere. The public rapidly made comments on the events through the we-media platform and guided public opinion and this eventually became social pressure, which will exert pressure and influence on judicial trials to a greater or lesser extent. There was even public

opinion: bad things happen to good people, why should we be good people, which shows people's moral anxiety and discontent that Liu did not take any responsibility for the death of Jiang. Most of the media keep on reporting Liu's coldness and ungratefulness and even questioned Liu's innocence. The media does not have the power to trail or judge, but what the media and the public opinion did replace judicial trial with moral judgment.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Information explosion in the age of the internet is a challenge as well as an opportunity for journalists. More valuable information is hiding in the corner of websites, waiting for the media's discovery. But at the same time, attention-chasing behavior should be based on journalistic ethics, and find a balance between the public's right to know and the private rights of the litigant. The audience should also keep rational when judging for news. To create a healthy environment for discussion, everyone needs to be patient and calm when coming across some opinion that disagrees with yours. While it is necessary to express your own opinion bravely to break the echo chamber. It is further suggested that despite the lack of willingness to cooperate with media, if media maintain their professional morality consciously, while audiences remain sober-minded undetermined events will be more peaceful and rational eventually.

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