

Liquid Community: Reflections on the Implementation Path of “Innovative Education” for Journalism and Communication Talents in the Era of Intelligent Media

Duopeng Zhang^{1*}

¹ School of Liberal Arts and Journalism, College of Science and Technology of Guizhou University, Guizhou, China

Email Address

619423606@qq.com (Duopeng Zhang)

*Correspondence: 619423606@qq.com

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Abstract:

With the development of digital technology, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data and algorithm have brought significant changes to the current social development and media industry. The technology-led media industry has greatly changed the positioning of journalism and communication discipline education and talent training mode in the future. In response to the dynamic changes in the media landscape, this article endeavors to tackle practical challenges and issues in the training of communication talents through pioneering educational models. The paper introduces a spectrum of collaborative entities engaged in nurturing talents, adopting a comprehensive perspective that integrates schools, businesses, related industries, government, and social organizations in a synergistic effort. The primary aim is to enhance the quality of training for communication talents across diverse dimensions. It emphasizes the fusion of future disciplines and the pragmatic significance and value of such education. The approach ingeniously facilitates a “two-way dynamic adaptation” between the demand and supply sides, with the overarching objective of fostering cutting-edge and inventive talents in communication studies to address the broader goals of social development and industry requisites.

Keywords:

Journalism and Communication, Innovative Education, Collaborative Education, New Liberal Arts

1. Introduction

As the new industrial revolution advances, modern information technologies represented by the Internet, artificial intelligence, big data, and others enjoy an integration with the media industry. Intelligent media has become a ubiquitous scenario linking everything in today’s social development, marking the era where

everything is media. In 2023, the impact of generative artificial intelligence technologies, exemplified by Chat GPT, on communication and society has garnered widespread attention in academia. The era of intelligent media, characterized primarily by terms like full-process media, holographic media, all-member media, and all-effect media, has caused a significant upheaval in the fundamental patterns of education in journalism and communication.

2. Development Background of the Intelligent Media Era

Media shapes the circumstances of individuals and society. In today's digital landscape, computer technologies featuring code, sensors, data, platforms, algorithms, block-chain, and others have redefined the spatiotemporal framework of humanity, reconstructing both individual subjectivity and social operational models. Scholars, including Accoto, characterize this era as the "data age." In the realm of new media research in 2023, four intriguing topics related to intelligent communication have garnered attention: the evolving human-machine relationships and interactions within the scope of generative artificial intelligence; the novel mechanisms of knowledge production catalyzed by AI; the emergence of intelligent machines as new entities in media and weaponry; and the artifacts of the intelligent era (encompassing technological and virtual elements). Foreseeably, in the era where "everyone has a microphone" for information dissemination, a myriad of research questions propelled by artificial intelligence is shaping a new interdisciplinary domain. The transformative journey of media education in the intelligent media era stands out as a vital discourse within the realm of the "liberal arts". As the interaction frequency and intensity between diverse platforms and media undergo qualitative enhancement, traditional news institutions find themselves relinquishing their "active discourse power" in the new media landscape. Traditional journalists, hosts, and editors are confronted with the risk of social exclusion in the wake of artificial intelligence development. The production boundaries between "UGC," "PGC," and "OGC" are becoming increasingly blurred, and emerging internet media platforms such as TikTok, Kuaishou, iQIYI, Bilibili become sources of intellectual property that surpass professional content producers. Intelligent applications in the media field are no longer a simple way to gain information, but an indispensable tool that attends human production and life. Traditional media are faltering under the influence of intelligent media and technology, and the appeal for reform in journalism and communication discipline education from the media industry is getting stronger.

3. Two Major Challenges and Dilemmas Faced by Current Higher Education in Journalism and Communication

In the era of intelligent media, there are two main challenges in the training of journalism and communication talents:

3.1. The Unclear Positioning of Future Media Talents Caused by the Internet's Entry into the Field of Media and Content Production

On August 28, 2023, China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released the 52nd Statistical Report on China's Internet Development in Beijing. According to the report, up to June 2023, the number of Internet users in China reached 1.079 billion, up 11.09 million over December 2022, and its Internet penetration reached 76.4%. There are more than 16,000 virtual private networks in the 5G industry nationwide, and the user size of instant messaging, network video and short video

reaches 1.047 billion, 1.044 billion and 1.026 billion respectively, with user usage rates of 97.1%, 96.8% and 95.2% respectively. It can be seen that the Internet has fully embraced the field of content production. The development of Internet information technology and media convergence have not only changed the communication mode and content production, but also changed the demand for news practitioners in the media industry. In the era of traditional media, news practitioners only need to specialize in a certain skill, for example, journalists are good at writing and photographers specialize in shooting, etc. In the era of media convergence, there are higher requirements for the knowledge structure, quality and ability of news professionals, and only grasping certain skills can not meet the needs of new media. In order to adapt to the data environment dominated by artificial intelligence technology, algorithms and platforms, employers tend to hire all-round journalism talents. Contemporary higher education in journalism and communication grapples with the task of nurturing future-oriented, specialized, and skilled professionals. The academic world encounters difficulties in keeping abreast of technological and social advancement. Urgent reforms are required in media education to align with the trends of the datamation transformation era. Current journalism and communication education faces talent cultivation issues, lagging significantly behind industry demands, and primarily aligns with vocational education objectives [1]. Consequently, the clarification of whether the education process aims to cultivate exceptional media practitioners or internet professional managers stands as a fundamental issue demanding attention in the academic discourse.

3.2. Severe Laceration Exists among the Intelligent Media and New Technology and the Current Higher Education System of Journalism and Communication

The paradigm shift brought about by intelligent media has necessitated a recalibration of the skill set required for media practitioners, signaling an imminent transformation in media education. This transformation poses formidable challenges to the development of traditional media platforms, including radio, television, and newspapers. The veracity of McLuhan's assertion, "The medium is the message", gains heightened relevance in this evolving landscape. In the domain of journalism and communication education, a discernible disconnection exists, akin to an "island" of educational behavior. The prevailing educational mindset, rooted in traditional ideologies where "content is king", significantly influences talent training and curriculum development. The educational system has been supplying an abundance of traditional journalists, editors, broadcasters, and hosts, tailored exclusively for traditional mainstream media needs. However, a shortage of talents in new media has resulted in the paradox of an oversupply of traditional media talents and an urgent demand for talents in new media and Internet technology [2]. Employers now seek a shift from a preference for a "unitary type" to an insistence on an "all-round type" of talent.

In 2013, significant transformations in media ownership unfolded, exemplified by notable acquisitions. Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, made a substantial investment by acquiring The Washington Post, one of the United States' most esteemed newspapers, for 250 million dollars. The Boston Globe, a subsidiary of The New York Times, underwent a sale amounting to 70 million dollars. Additionally, China's Newsweek bid farewell to the era of print media. In the era of mobile Internet, the real-time and rapid network transmission have dismantled temporal, spatial, and geographical constraints. This phenomenon empowers all Internet users to assume the

role of news producers, enabling them to promptly publish news and information through various media platforms. Consequently, news production and reporting are no longer exclusive to traditional media outlets. China's traditional media, in particular, grapples with a formidable crisis precipitated by the advent of new communication technologies. The pronounced decline of print media has become especially conspicuous. In order to survive, traditional media have made corresponding changes like opening up online media platforms except operating own professional platforms. In January 2017, the all-media platform of People's Daily, the "Central Kitchen", was officially completed and put into use, becoming an important symbol for traditional media and emerging media to move from the "addition" stage to the "integration" stage. The change of communication mode also changes our ways of life. In terms of curriculum setting, as Deuze (2006) [3] pointed, the majority of researches on journalism education starts at the curriculum, therefore, journalism and communication education should be reformed based on global AI news practice and provide journalism students a curriculum which integrates them and their coursework into a working newsroom led by professional journalists but housed in a university [4]. Accordingly, students can learn to shoot with live ammunition [5]. These important changes mentioned above will have a huge impact on journalism and communication higher education from the root, and the talent training mode and curriculum setting are also facing major adjustments.

4. The Discipline Transformation Approach of "Innovative Education" in Journalism and Communication Discipline

4.1. Fostering Integrated Diversity: A Collaborative Academia-Industry Educational Approach

Both Columbia School of Journalism and the School of Journalism of University of Missouri attach great importance to the training of media talents' professional knowledge and skills, as well as further cooperation and innovation with other media industries. The computer editing platform of the Journalism Department of New York University is connected to the CNN contribution system, and the TV station run by the University of Missouri School of Journalism is a branch of NBC. At the same time, the school also pays attention to providing students with a real practice environment. Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, the most famous and influential educational theorist in the early ancient Roman Empire of slavery, believed that the learning process includes three stages from imitation, theory to practice. In the real media education environment, journalism and communication education, media technology and industrial development should promote and benefit from each other. However, universities often lack a substantive "practice section" ignoring cultivating students' practical abilities. In order to solve this problem, Chinese journalism and communication departments have reconstructed and adjusted the mode of educating talents in journalism and communication through "co-construction", in response to the challenges brought by changes in media environment, media production and media technology updates.

Through the mode of "co-construction of schools and media", "co-construction of schools and media enterprises" and "co-construction of schools and government publicity departments", media departments and the media industry have been brought into the higher media education system, and the scope of school education has been broadened from content adjustment to institutional innovation. It extends the content

of media education and effectively realizes the connection between education and industry, which is an active exploration of China's higher media education in the age of all media. In the cooperation of many forces, such as government and enterprise, many new media phenomena and problems can enter the field of scientific research at the first speed; The research teams can also integrate the superior forces of the academic and industry circles, promote the high level of research results, and quickly transform them into media teaching content and media productivity. Students should have access to multiple education and training units of "institutions of higher learning + media industry + Internet enterprises + corresponding information dissemination industry", forming a diversified education body with schools as the leading units and industries as the key training units. In the orientation of talent cultivation, we should distinguish between "applied talents" and "research talents". At the undergraduate stage, we focus on training "applied talents", and cooperate with outstanding enterprises or media in the industry to jointly build a "Media Industry Institute". Through complementary advantages, we can stimulate educational vitality and let students experience and feel more realistic information dissemination scenarios. In the "research-oriented talent" training stage, undergraduates with backgrounds in computer science, artificial intelligence, and big data are encouraged to pursue master's and doctoral degrees in journalism and communication. We shall employ academic tutors and industry tutors to cultivate them together, set up master's and doctoral research mobile stations and joint innovation centers in the industry, so that research talents in the discipline of journalism and communication can truly understand the characteristics of information dissemination and technological innovation, and finally form a new situation of integrated development of production and education and cooperative innovation in education.

4.2. Based on Future Professional Quality, Optimizing the Design of the Curriculum System to Cultivate All-media Talents with Interdisciplinary Attributes

Since 2019, a collaborative effort led by the Chinese Ministry of Education and 13 other departments has officially launched the 2.0 version of "Six Excellence and One Outstanding" talent development plan. This initiative aims to comprehensively advance the construction of new disciplines, including engineering, medical science, agricultural science, and liberal arts. Wu Yan, Director of the Higher Education Department at the Ministry of Education, has articulated the role of liberal arts as follows: "The primary task of liberal arts is the study of human production modes, lifestyles, and value concepts." This perspective aligns with the evolution of university functions, progressing from the basic teaching model to the "teaching + research" model and further expanding into the "teaching + research + service" model. The media ecosystem, transformed by technological revolution, has significantly altered human production modes, lifestyles, and value concepts. These transformations manifest in the reshaping of communication concepts and the reconstruction of disciplinary systems within the field of media studies. Therefore, the evolution of media education under the backdrop of new liberal arts extends beyond the boundaries of this discipline, necessitating interdisciplinary considerations with other academic systems [6]. It evolves from educators strategically designing and planning the talent pool within the entire discipline category to the "1+X+Y" model, which puts the individual interests and differences of each student. In this model, the "1" module empowers students to gain a comprehensive understanding and mastery of foundational theories, encompassing principles of communication, introduction to journalism, basic professional courses like news interviews and news writing, as well

as fundamental courses in humanities and social sciences. Teachers with rich experience in academia are invited to give lectures to strengthen students' basic humanities knowledge. "X" is the customized curriculum and teaching procedure for students according to their interests, and they can complete the "X" module credits by taking interdisciplinary double degree or interest courses. Students of journalism and communication discipline are required to master the knowledge of philosophy, political science, economics, law, sociology, art, history, psychology, etc., so their ability of news gathering and editing and quality to adapt to future career possibilities can be cultivated. The "Y" module is the latest and most cutting-edge industry practice and discussion course tailored to the discipline of journalism and communication. The course module focuses on the cutting-edge needs of the industry and invites traditional and new media practitioners, Internet entrepreneurs, engineers and other elites in various fields to teach special courses. In the media communication environment of intelligent media ecology, the production concept of human-machine collaboration will be the main production mode for the future development of journalism, which requires a more cutting-edge and professional all-media journalism talent training mode. By setting up topics such as data journalism, algorithm technology, and data mining, students' all-media operation thinking and technical thinking can be formed and the traditional single-type talent structure will be changed. In doing so, students can adapt to the future intelligent and scenario-based information production scene. Generally, the new framework for the media talent training model in the context of integration should combine the dual significance of theory and practice [7].

4.3. Forming a "Double Qualification Double Ability" Faculty Team: Emphasizing Both Academic Knowledge and Technical Skills

The late 1970s witnessed the emergence of constructivism in education, leading to the development of the theory of "Teacher Development". This theory underscores teachers' self-construction and independent growth as individuals, supplanting the previous notion of "Teacher Training" that treats teachers as objects. Consequently, teachers transition to becoming the subjects of the education system [8]. Presently, whether in the highly developed media and information technology industry of the United States or in other countries, journalism and communication education faces a challenge. Academic teachers often lack comprehensive knowledge of new intelligent media technology, resulting in shallow and detached research from practical applications. This situation impedes students' ability to adapt to the demands of the future post-graduation workplace. As the main source of imparting knowledge, the development and training environment of teachers is particularly important. Looking at the global journalism and communication professional teachers, in the arrangement of the teaching staff, the source of media education teachers in American universities is quite flexible, which includes full-time teachers and part-time teachers. Full-time teachers are usually people with rich experience and high academic level, while part-time teachers are outstanding media agency workers, and the number of part-time teachers exceeds that of full-time teachers in many school departments. A number of major universities in the US have engaged in collaboration [9]. For example, Columbia Journalism School has about 17% full-time teachers and 83% part-time teachers; the School of Journalism of New York University has about 18% full-time teachers and 82% part-time teachers; Emerson College has about 48% full-time teachers and 52% part-time teachers [10]. In addition, journalism education actually is general skills training, and therefore, teachers engaged in journalism education do

not necessarily have high academic qualifications, but they must have rich media work experience. In order to tackle the issue of teacher development in journalism and communication, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China has issued a document entitled Excellent Journalism and Communication Talent Education and Training Plan 2.0, which requires “building a group of first-class journalism and communication majors with Chinese characteristics and world standards, forming an all-media and compound expert journalism and communication talent training system that follows the laws of journalism and communication and the laws of talent growth, and educating a large number of excellent journalism and communication reserve talents who can adapt to the deep integration of media and industry innovation development, tell China's stories well, and spread China's voice.”

It points out that teachers from institutions of higher learning should be sent to radio, television, newspaper and other media for one to three years to fully understand the production methods, laws and characteristics of the latest intelligent media. Today, the composition of teachers in media majors should not only learn from well-known universities such as Columbia University's School of Journalism. Part-time teachers in the off-campus industry also need to teach theoretical courses for half a year and go deep into the front line of the industry or industry think tanks for half a year to cultivate the ability of academic teachers on campus to explore and solve new problems in the intelligent media environment. In the process of “teacher training”, journalism should be given prominence to its special subject attributes. It is not limited to training in traditional media units, but also to Internet enterprises, information technology departments, courts, and hospitals according to the courses they teach. For example, teachers who lecture on *Media Ethics and Regulations* can exercise and spend time in the judicial branch, dealing exclusively with cases of this type. The lecturer of *Algorithm News* can enter leading Internet companies in China or the world to understand the market logic of information production and content distribution. Through the training of teachers, the first-class teachers can be trained, so that teachers who have the basis of theory induction have the professional quality and professional ability of sustainable development.

4.4. Multidimensional Assessment: Evaluating Students Through Diverse Criteria and Exceptional Course Work Scores

The assessment for courses in the field of journalism and communication predominantly rely on traditional exam formats. At the Chinese Academy of Journalism and Communication, 90% of courses determine final grades through a combination of “50% for final exam scores + 50% for regular attendance scores.” However, it is evident that in the current media landscape, which is largely shaped by audiovisual media, such assessment methods and evaluation frameworks fall short in cultivating students' adaptability to the evolving environment. Journalism and communication is a discipline with strong technical and applied characteristics. In order to better cultivate talents, we should carry out in-depth reform to the basic teaching inspection unit—course assessment and the final export unit—graduation thesis (graduation work) assessment and evaluation methods. Students should be assessed and evaluated from multi-dimension on the principle of “standardizing the evaluation criteria, expanding the evaluation subject and optimizing the evaluation method”. Based on the discipline characteristics of journalism and communication, a multi-dimensional evaluation method of “20% of usual performance (class discussion, etc.) + 30% of practice + 40% of academic papers/course works + 10% of disciplinary

competitions” can be designed. Students may apply for exceptional scores (full marks or near full marks) by submitting outstanding course works related to the curriculum. While the evaluation system is comprehensive, it is not confined to system limitations, aiming to maximally stimulate the creativity of media talents.

4.5. International Perspective in Communication Talent Development: Collaborative Solutions to Real-World Industry Challenges through Overseas Study and Exchange

In our highly globalized society, the interconnectedness and interactions between regions, nations, ethnicities, and civilizations have become increasingly intricate. The relative distance between different cultures is constantly shrinking in today’s globalized world, and our population also exhibits cultural diversities [11,12]. This characteristic is particularly prominent under the intelligent media environment with the explosion of information. The new round of information technology revolution has also brought new perspectives and opportunities to various cultures in the world. Students majoring in journalism and communication need to have the ability of disseminating information in terms of embracing the world. Therefore, courses such as *Cross-cultural Communication* and *International Communication Practice* can be set up for the fourth year of undergraduate students and the first year of graduate students. At the same time, the higher education needs to cultivate journalism and communication talents from an international perspective. Through overseas communication and learning and visiting programs in media and information technology companies, students can feel the future trend of the media and the difficulties faced by the industry. After the project is completed, write a research report or personal reflection on a cutting-edge problem or difficulty. The research content may not necessarily be deep and professional, but it can cultivate students’ vision and frontier awareness and future media talents with an international perspective, and establish the academic discourse system of journalism and communication, finally, teachers and students become think-tanks in the field of information communication.

5. Conclusions

In the future, media education will realize the true meaning of “educational innovation”, which will be a “model” of the new liberal arts education reform. Faced with the crisis that artificial intelligence and the future trend of intelligent information technology may replace this traditional industry, in order to realize root-and-branch reform of journalism and communication education, we must first grasp the two key subjects in education, namely, “students” and “social environment”. In fact, both are essentially “variables”, people change with the accumulation of time and experience, and the social environment changes with the development of industry and thought. In the face of the two variables, the biggest innovation that higher education needs to do is to cultivate students’ ability to face various changes, so that they will not be eliminated from the industry and the times. As a typical representative of the “new liberal arts” and inter-discipline in higher education, the educational teaching mode of journalism and communication must form a “community of production and learning” with new information technology and modern media industry. Through the construction of academic and practical “double-qualified” teachers, media industry and higher education collaborative cultivation dialogue platform, and the data observation center of students’ area of interest, we can realize the classroom reform of

traditional teaching method. Higher education faculties are recommended to engage in the media industry in an open and open-source manner to nurture high-quality technical and research talents. This involves the real-time joint of cutting-edge technology and industry theories into the curriculum of journalism and communication. The academia can contribute to the industry's development by regularly organizing various topic-specific training courses and establishing a high-end think tank aligned with the needs of the media industry. Through the profound innovation of the education model, journalism and communication in higher education, coupled with the advancements in modern information technology and the media industry, can form a "Liquid Community", thereby addressing the challenges faced by journalism and communication education in practice.

Conflicts of Interest

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