

ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the development of professional journalism through journalist blogs in China. I describe a two-step process: first, the construction of journalistic professionalism; second, the collective and public interpretation of the professional journalism by bloggers and readers through their communication on blogs. In this sense, this research is committed to understanding the specific meanings of blogging in journalism.

The weblog, or blog, is a periodically updated journal, providing online commentary, with minimal or no external editing. Blogs are usually presented as a set of "posts," individual entries of news or commentary, in a reverse chronological order. With its appearance in China around 2002, blogs have been used by journalists in various ways, such as a source of story, an indication of popular interest in a subject, or a platform for the exchange of opinions and ideas within the profession. Such developments indicate that blogging is becoming increasingly important to reporters, and may have the potential to transform journalism in a variety of ways.

The development of blogs has brought journalists closer in the blogosphere as they interact frequently through linking, commenting and citing each other. As journalists' participation in blog discussions continues to grow and increasingly extends into their routine work, there is a pressing need for a conceptual framework to help explain the relationships between blog users within the context of the internet, and how they talk about their profession, which are key issues this dissertation seeks to address. Specifically, this study explores how journalists on blogs negotiate meanings regarding professionalism, and how new meanings depend on the effort of

individuals entered into the collective narratives regarding professionalism. It is argued that blogs have enhanced the development of professional journalism in mainland China, even though this process is compromised by certain cultural and organizational factors.

Two years of continuous online observation on the journalist blogs, as well as extensive interviews and text analysis, form the basis of this dissertation. The findings reveal that journalists build online relationships and discuss issues on journalistic professionalism through blogging. In various online activities, three primary mechanisms contribute to the formation of journalistic professionalism in China: selective citations, on blogs, of good articles written by reporters; discussions on blogs around critical incidents that help define journalistic professional roles; and the sharing of fieldnotes or autobiographical narratives on blogs which are unlikely to be published in the newspaper. The study of various cases related to these mechanisms provides a base to theorize about how professionalism is built and experienced through blogs and in the Chinese society at large. The findings indicate that blogging appears to be changing journalism in different ways. For one thing, blogging represents a cultural arena that contains traces of the profession's collective imagination; for another, blogging may stimulate democracy, in view of journalists' constant battle over autonomy against the state.