

Analysis of the Aphasia Phenomenon of New Mainstream Media — A Case Study of Gou Jing in Shandong

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doi: 10.63593/SSSH.2709-7862.2025.07.004

Abstract

This paper takes the Gou Jing incident in Shandong as the research object to explore the aphasia phenomenon of new mainstream media in hot events and the resulting media ethics anomie. By analyzing the phenomena of information distortion, public opinion reversal and collective silence of the media in the process of event communication, it reveals the structural dilemmas existing in the current media ecology: some media abandon fact-checking in pursuit of traffic, leading to public cognitive bias; the delayed voice of authoritative media has exacerbated the division of the public opinion field; the unbalanced reports driven by economic interests have damaged the foundation of social justice. The study points out that the anomie of media ethics not only weakens the credibility of the media and distorts the audience's cognition, but also may cause social order chaos. In response to these problems, this paper puts forward three countermeasures: strengthening the professional quality of media personnel, purifying the internal atmosphere of the industry, and promoting the "era-adaptive" transformation of investigative reports. The research shows that reconstructing a healthy media ethics system requires the collaboration of media, the public and institutions to reshape the rational foundation of the public discourse space.

Keywords: media aphasia, media ethics, public opinion reversal, Gou Jing incident

1. Media Aphasia and Reversal Events

On June 22, 2020, Gou Jing, a woman from Jining, Shandong, posted online claiming that she had been fraudulently replaced in the Shandong college entrance examinations for two consecutive years in 1997 and 1998. Among them, the person who replaced her in 1997 was the daughter of her senior year high school head teacher. According to the investigation results, in July 1997, Gou Jing took the college entrance examination as a rural fresh science student at Jining Experimental Middle School, with a score of 551 (out of 900), ranking 308th among 1,588 science students in Rencheng District, Jining. Gou Jing's 1997 college entrance examination score reached the commissioned training admission line for technical secondary schools (science) in Jining, but she did not fill in the application and chose to repeat her studies at her original high school. In July 1998, her college entrance examination score was 569 (out of 900), ranking 265th among 1,710 science students in Rencheng District, reaching the adjusted unified admission line for technical secondary schools (science) in Jining. Gou Jing applied to two technical secondary schools that year: Taian Population School and Wuhan Bioengineering School, and chose to accept adjustment. Finally, she was admitted to Hubei Huanggang Water Conservancy and Electric Power School through adjustment. Gou Jing studied in the Power Plant and Power System major at the school for 2 years, completed all her studies, and the school issued her a technical secondary school graduation certificate.

In 1997, although Gou Jing's college entrance examination score reached the commissioned training admission line for technical secondary schools (science) in Jining, she did not fill in the application. Her personal identity and score were fraudulently used by Qiu Xiaohui. In 1998, Gou Jing was normally admitted to Hubei

Huanggang Water Conservancy and Electric Power School through the system, and there was no problem of being fraudulently replaced by others in school. Fifteen people including Qiu Xiaohui, Qiu Yinlin, and Qiu Yinshui were given corresponding punishments in accordance with regulations, disciplines, and laws. Qiu Xiaohui was dismissed, Qiu Yinlin was expelled from the Party and deprived of retirement benefits, and the public security organs have filed a criminal investigation against the two for suspected crimes and taken compulsory measures. However, the detailed information and truth of this incident were not effectively conveyed in the first place, and many mainstream media remained silent, leading to multiple reversals in the development of the situation.

1.1 Online Reversal Events

The online space has become an important field for the public to participate in public opinion supervision. Netizens are accustomed to expressing their views on hot events through various social platforms and forming a wave of public opinion. As a unique communication phenomenon in the internet era, reversal events include both phased reversals of the truth in news reports and multiple shifts in public opinion stances, which collectively reflect the complexity and variability of information flow in the digital communication environment. This phenomenon not only reflects the gradual presentation process of news facts but also highlights the dynamic characteristics of viewpoint games in the online public opinion field.

At present, academic circles have formed three main research directions around online reversal events: analysis of phenomenon characteristics, research on the evolution law of public opinion, and study on communication mechanisms. In terms of research methods, most studies adopt typical case analysis, such as selecting representative hot events like “Chengdu female driver being beaten”, systematically tracking the trajectory of public opinion development, and in-depth analyzing the driving factors of reversal phenomena. Some scholars, based on the theoretical framework of communication studies, focus on examining the interaction between communication subjects, communication channels, and audience feedback in the new media environment, revealing the internal mechanism of public opinion reversal. These studies have deepened the understanding of reversal events from different dimensions and provided theoretical support for online public opinion governance.

In-depth analysis shows that the frequent occurrence of reversal public opinion events is the result of the combined effect of multiple factors. From the perspective of communication subjects, some media relax content review in pursuit of timeliness and click-through rates; from the communication environment, information overload makes fact-checking difficult; from the audience level, the emotional expression of netizens exacerbates public opinion fluctuations. It is worth noting that while online platforms have broken the discourse monopoly of traditional media, they have also reshaped the relationship pattern between opinion leaders and ordinary netizens — opinion leaders may not only guide rational discussions but also promote public opinion reversal in specific situations. This complex communication ecology not only reflects the positive aspect of online democratization but also exposes the potential risks of information dissemination disorder, which urgently requires the establishment of a more perfect online information governance system.

1.2 Media Aphasia

The term “aphasia” originates from medicine, referring to a language disorder syndrome caused by acquired impairment or loss of language function. “In layman’s terms, it means difficulty speaking or loss of the ability to speak.” The “media aphasia” studied in this paper borrows the meaning of “aphasia” from medicine, referring to “a phenomenon where news media fail to report a newsworthy event in a timely or complete manner, fail to report it at all, or their voices prove ineffective.” “On August 18, 2014, the Fourth Session of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform reviewed and approved the Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Integrated Development of Traditional and Emerging Media. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the need to “strive to build a number of new mainstream media with diverse forms, advanced means, and competitive strength.” Mainstream media, endowed with abundant resources, are also known as “agenda-setting media.” The “new mainstream media” represent a new form of mainstream media in the new media era. “New mainstream media are media forms centered on media integration, characterized by ‘diverse forms,’ ‘advanced means’ and ‘competitiveness,’ specifically encompassing innovations in nine aspects: ‘concepts, content, genres, forms, methods, means, formats, systems, and mechanisms.’” Representative examples include “central-level media, regional media of provinces (autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the Central Government), urban media in large and medium-sized cities, and major news websites supported by the state.” Compared with traditional mainstream media, new mainstream media can engage in communication across various public opinion arenas, boasting public nature and interactivity. However, agenda-setting and the spiral of silence still exist in the internet, and new mainstream media are also prone to aphasia.

Media aphasia is related to media discourse. “Media discourse is not merely language; it also embodies contexts such as communication objects, reasons for communication, society, and the environment, and is closely linked

to the public.” The “agenda-setting function” of mass communication proposed by American communication scholars M.E. McCombs and D.L. Shaw points out the impact of information and discourse in mass communication on audiences. When media only report aspects they want the audience to know, such behavior constitutes “aphasia” in terms of news authenticity and the audience’s right to know. Since media possess communication resources, they should be accountable to the public.

The social responsibilities of media and industry norms impose more restrictions on media discourse, leading to the possibility of “aphasia”. Meanwhile, as media discourse is influenced by the environment, and media practitioners’ thinking is controlled and hinted at by multiple factors, a greater gap emerges between news reports and facts, making aphasia more likely to occur. Operating in the internet context, new mainstream media not only need to disseminate the mainstream social ideology but also convey the voices of the people. Their communication is faster and more widespread, with greater influence. However, when reporting events, they tend to be more “cautious”, even to the extent of “aphasia”.

2. Case Source Details and Report Comparison

On June 22, 2020, Gou Jing posted an accusation on Sina Weibo about being replaced in the college entrance examination, which aroused widespread concern from all sectors of society. In her Weibo post, she claimed that after taking the college entrance examination consecutively in 1997 and 1998, her admission places were taken by others through impersonation. This explosive news quickly spread online. In 1997, she said the score she got in the first college entrance examination was fake, and eventually, her homeroom teacher admitted that he had let his daughter take her name to study at China University of Mining and Technology in Beijing. After graduating, the homeroom teacher’s daughter taught at a middle school in Jining and currently works as a logistics department teacher.

In 2003, Gou Jing’s high school homeroom teacher sent her a letter, in which he elaborated on the matter of her being replaced in the college entrance examination that year. He stated in the letter, “My daughter is not as intelligent as you; she is a bit lacking in IQ and is not motivated. As a father, it’s very hard for me. In 1997, I had no choice but to let her take your score to go to college. As a teacher, what I did is indeed against professional ethics, but please forgive me.”

In 1998, Gou Jing took the college entrance examination again, only to fail once more. According to her recollection, she had achieved excellent results in the district-wide mock exam, but ended up with a very poor score in the actual college entrance examination. She was unwilling to believe this score, so she suspected that she was also replaced in the college entrance examination in the second year.

As a personal statement from the person involved, the content of this Weibo post directly pointed to the sensitive social issue of educational equity, immediately touching a nerve with the public. In the short time after the information was released, the incident showed typical characteristics of online public opinion diffusion: first, the personal Weibo post triggered discussions, then various self-media platforms followed up with reports, and mainstream online media including Toutiao and The Paper also reprinted relevant news one after another, forming a multi-level and multi-channel communication matrix. This communication path reflects the standard evolution model of public opinion events in the new media era-starting with an individual revelation, amplified through social platforms, and finally entering the vision of mainstream media. As the attention to the incident continued to rise, various voices emerged in the public opinion field, including doubts about educational equity, discussions on the authenticity of the incident, and no lack of calls for accountability of relevant responsible subjects.

Faced with the escalating public opinion situation, the relevant departments in Shandong Province responded quickly. On June 24, 2020, a special investigation team was established, led by the Provincial Commission for Discipline Inspection and Supervision, with the participation of multiple departments such as the Provincial Department of Education and the Provincial Public Security Department, as well as relevant units in Jining City and Rencheng District, forming an inter-departmental and multi-level investigation mechanism. This rapid response mechanism reflects the degree of attention that government departments pay to online public opinion. The investigation work followed strict procedural norms, conducting a comprehensive and systematic verification of the issues reflected by Gou Jing by retrieving historical files, visiting relevant personnel, and verifying factual evidence. After careful investigation, the basic facts of the incident were finally confirmed, and corresponding penalties were imposed on the relevant responsible persons based on the investigation results. The following will introduce reports from The Paper on Weibo and reports from the Shandong Discipline Inspection Commission respectively. From The Paper on Weibo: [#Investigation team announces details of Gou Jing incident#: Altering files, fabricating household registration] On July 3, the website of the Shandong Provincial Commission for Discipline Inspection and Supervision announced the investigation and handling results of the “Gou Jing being impersonated” case, dealing with 15 relevant personnel including the impersonator Qiu Xiaohui in accordance with the law. Among them, Qiu Xiaohui was given a dismissal punishment, and a criminal case

was filed against her with compulsory measures taken. The investigation team announced details of the Gou Jing incident: altering files and fabricating household registration. The Paper's Weibo video #Shandong announces the situation of Gou Jing reflecting being replaced in school#.

However, before that, various self-media accounts had different voices in their reports. For example, common headlines on Douyin included: "Shocking! Shandong woman was replaced in the college entrance examination for two consecutive years, and her homeroom teacher's daughter went to college under her name #Gou Jing #college entrance examination fairness", "Daring to speak out after 23 years! Gou Jing tells the story of her stolen life, and the impersonator even became a teacher #social hotspot", "In-depth analysis of the Gou Jing case: How was a rural girl's college entrance examination quota stolen? #educational equity", "Latest! Shandong sets up a special team to investigate the Gou Jing college entrance examination replacement case, the person involved: I just want the truth #hotspot tracking". These reports played a role in confusing the public about the truth of the incident, leading to multiple reversals during the fermentation of the incident. It was not until the official media spoke out about it that the controversy over the incident came to an end.

3. Case Analysis

3.1 Manifestations of Media Ethics Anomie

3.1.1 Taking out of Context and Exaggerating

The media narrative deviation in the Gou Jing incident reflects the complex ecology of the current online public opinion field. In the early stage of the incident's fermentation, some media, in order to enhance the impact of their reports, concretized Gou Jing's college entrance examination score from "among the top few in the district" to a clear ranking of "fourth place". Although this artistic processing of details enhanced the communication effect, it laid hidden dangers of factual disputes. Gou Jing herself later clarified that some media had "uniformly adapted" the facts, and some self-media even created topic focuses by digging out exaggerated details. This progressive narrative deformation process typically reflects the "information processing chain" phenomenon in the communication of hot events—every time through a communication node, the facts may be reshaped to varying degrees. It is particularly noteworthy that Gou Jing, as the core person involved in the incident, was not familiar with the operation mechanism of social platforms such as Weibo at that time and lacked direct channels to voice to the public. This asymmetry in the right to express made the "second-hand facts" constructed by the media the main basis for the formation of public opinion, laying the groundwork for subsequent disputes.

As the incident gained momentum, the public opinion field gradually saw irrational expressions beyond the incident itself. Some scholars and netizens deviated from the scope of factual discussions and turned to criticizing Gou Jing's personal words and deeds, and even launched personal attacks. This alienation of public opinion presents three typical characteristics: first, online trials in the name of "evidence excavation", piecing together moral accusations through fragmented information; second, stigmatizing legitimate rights protection behaviors as "hype" by speculating on motives; third, malicious speculation under the guise of "rational discussion", which essentially undermines the seriousness of the incident. What is more alarming is that some media's excessive interviews and leading questions in the name of follow-up reports actually constituted secondary harm to the parties involved. This collusion between the media and netizens not only distorted the original intention of public opinion supervision but also turned a public event concerning educational equity into a witch-hunt-like trial of personal morality, completely deviating from the core issue of the right dimension.

The communication chaos exposed by the Gou Jing incident points to the in-depth proposition of online public opinion governance. At the technical level, it is necessary to establish a "fusing mechanism" for fact-checking. When there are disputes over key facts in media reports, the platform should suspend the traffic recommendation of related topics. At the ethical level, the media should abide by the "principle of minimal harm" and avoid sacrificing the accuracy of reports for the sake of communication effects, especially maintaining restraint in reports on vulnerable parties. For the public, it is necessary to cultivate "factual patience", maintain a moderate wait-and-see attitude in hot events, and be vigilant against the manipulation of immediate emotions. In terms of institutional design, channels for parties to directly reach the public should be established to reduce the distortion of information in intermediate links. This incident ultimately prompts us to reflect: a healthy public opinion ecology requires not only the media to adhere to professional bottom lines but also the public to maintain rational participation, and more importantly, the establishment of a checks and balances mechanism to prevent public opinion from losing focus. Only in this way can the online space truly become a constructive force for promoting social progress.

Imbalance and Silence in Media Reports Media reports should be objective and balanced. They should not only interview one party's views but verify from multiple sources, and make responsible reports after repeatedly verifying the facts and conducting multi-party investigations. However, in the Gou Jing case, first, there was an imbalance in media reports. After the incident occurred, "Phoenix Star" quickly responded and published an

article titled “Farmhouse Girl Suspected of Being Replaced Twice in School 23 Years Ago, Homeroom Teacher: I Let My Daughter Replace You, Beg for Your Forgiveness”. The entire article was from Gou Jing’s perspective, telling her experience of taking the college entrance examination twice. There was no official perspective in this report, nor any third-party views that could be used as evidence. Later, “Phoenix Net” conducted a video interview with Gou Jing, and the topic #Eight of Gou Jing’s classmates also suspect there was a problem with their college entrance examinations# rushed to the Weibo hot search. However, in this video, there was still only Gou Jing’s one-sided statement, and remarks such as “the first place in the class should have gone to Peking University but went to Qufu Normal University” were directly released without verification, which is not in line with the norms of news reporting.

3.1.2 Media Silence

In the communication process of the Gou Jing incident, some media organizations exposed serious issues of violating professional norms. These media released information directly without sufficient verification, which not only violated the most basic principle of authenticity in news reporting but also promoted the spread of false information. What is particularly noteworthy is the collective silence of local media in Shandong. When the incident reached the peak of public opinion on July 28, 2020, local media such as Jining Evening News and Jining Daily, as well as provincial authoritative media like Dazhong Daily and Qilu Evening News, all failed to report in a timely manner. This abnormal “media silence” created a vacuum of authoritative information. The lagging practice of official media publishing statements only after the investigation results were announced stands in sharp contrast to their responsibility of public opinion supervision as a social public instrument. This misalignment in reporting timing directly affected the public’s cognitive judgment of the incident.

The imbalance in media reports directly led to the division and reversal of the public opinion field. When the official investigation report was released on July 3, public opinion took a dramatic turn. An analysis of 3,456 comments under relevant Weibo posts by Sina News shows that negative evaluations such as “lying”, “shameless”, and “hyping” became high-frequency words, reflecting the strong dissatisfaction of some netizens with Gou Jing’s exaggeration of facts. The mechanism behind this reversal of public opinion is worth pondering: on the one hand, the absence of previous reports by authoritative media left the public without a reliable information reference system; on the other hand, after the release of the investigation results, the media failed to conduct in-depth interpretations and follow-up interviews, resulting in a cognitive gap between the official statement and public expectations. What is more alarming is the binary opposition formed in the public opinion field — some netizens’ fierce accusations against Gou Jing and others’ continued sympathy for her situation. This division precisely reflects the social cognitive fracture caused by the media’s failure to effectively guide rational discussions.

The media reporting problems exposed by the Gou Jing incident point to a deeper proposition of media ecological governance. Firstly, it is necessary to establish a cross-media rapid verification mechanism to conduct joint verification of key facts in hot events. Secondly, local media should break through the inertial thinking of “reporting good news but not bad”, and actively fulfill their supervisory responsibilities in major public events. More crucially, authoritative media should not only release investigation results in a timely manner but also explain the rigor of the investigation process through in-depth reports to eliminate public doubts. At the operational level, it is recommended to establish a closed-loop mechanism of “reporting-feedback-explanation”: that is, continuously track public feedback after the first report and provide supplementary explanations for questionable points. Only by building a full-process and three-dimensional reporting system can the media truly play the role of a social voltage stabilizer, avoid the public opinion field from falling into an either-or extreme tendency, and provide a space for rational dialogue in discussions on complex social issues.

3.2 Causes of Media Ethics Anomie

3.2.1 Fading Awareness of Abiding by Professional Norms in the Post-Truth Era

In the communication ecology of the post-truth era, we are witnessing a worrying paradigm shift: the authority of facts is being replaced by emotional resonance and value identification, and the public opinion field is increasingly evolving into an arena for the confrontation of viewpoints and the venting of emotions. This alienation of the communication environment has given rise to a series of abnormal media behaviors — sacrificing verification for timeliness, abandoning objectivity for clicks, and disregarding fairness for profit — leading to the proliferation of clickbait and fake news. What is particularly alarming is that, at a time when technological empowerment has enabled everyone to become a communicator, the basic professional ethics of journalism are facing a systemic collapse. Professional media organizations, struggling to survive in the flood of information explosion, have to relegate the traditional pre-publication verification mechanism to post-publication correction. This inverted operational model allows false information to gain a precious window of spread opportunity.

A deeper issue is that the core values on which the news industry stands, such as a sense of integrity, moral conscience, and social responsibility, are gradually being eroded under the dual pressure of commercial logic and technical rationality. The decline of this professional spirit directly undermines the social foundation of the media. The Gou Jing incident, like a prism, reflects the full picture of this communication alienation: the professional anomie of the media in reporting and the wanton spread of gossip are intertwined, ultimately transforming the focus of the incident from the public issue of the fairness of the college entrance examination system into a witch-hunt-like trial of the parties' moral flaws and conspiracy theories about official announcements. This substitution of issues not only diminishes the seriousness of the incident itself but also exposes the collective failure of the media in guiding public discussions. When media organizations abandon their basic duty of fact-checking, and when news reports become tools for competing for emotional traffic, the cost is not only the bankruptcy of credibility in a single report but also the vacillate of the entire social cognitive foundation — the public gradually loses basic trust in the information environment and falls into a cognitive dilemma where it is difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehood. The spread of this trust crisis will ultimately erode the consensus foundation on which a democratic society operates, making rational dialogue in the public sphere increasingly difficult. To reverse this dangerous situation, there is an urgent need to rebuild professional journalism ethics centered on fact-checking and find a balance between spreading speed and reporting accuracy, between the pursuit of traffic and social responsibility. Only in this way can the media regain their role as “social watchdogs” rather than becoming emotional inciters in the post-truth era.

3.2.2 Driven by Economic Interests

Beneath the deep logic of media market-oriented operations, major mainstream media, including self-media, have to confront an increasingly severe industry alienation: in pursuit of maximum commercial interests, some media organizations are systematically breaking through the bottom line of journalistic ethics, transforming news reports that should adhere to the principles of objectivity and fairness into a blatant traffic-driven business. This distorted operational model manifests in various forms: some media deliberately blur the line between news and advertising, converting news pages into purchasable ad spaces through “soft article columns” and “sponsored features”; others completely abandon their responsibility of content review, allowing reporters to exaggerate facts or take quotes out of context to create a sensation, and acquiescing editors to fabricate sensational clickbait headlines. From the emotional reports of mainstream media like The Beijing News to the speculative articles of online influencers and self-media, these “one-sided remarks” lacking factual basis thrive precisely because they understand the communication code of the post-truth era — by deliberately amplifying specific emotions and value stances, they can ignite online discussions in a short time and create astonishing opportunities for traffic monetization. However, this self-destructive business model is causing irreparable harm: on one hand, it reduces news reports to tools of emotional incitement, seriously violating the public's right to know and the basic rights of those being reported; on the other hand, such disorderly communication continuously creates false public issues, leading to persistent misfocus in public opinion, which not only fails to clarify the truth but also exacerbates cognitive confusion and value fragmentation in cyberspace. A more far-reaching impact is that when media organizations prioritize commercial interests over public interests, the legitimacy of their role as social public instruments is undermined, ultimately dragging the entire society into a “bad money drives out good” vicious cycle — media adhering to professionalism struggle to survive, while those keen on creating gimmicks flourish. To break this deadlock, it is necessary to both rebuild media's professional ethical norms and strengthen industry self-regulation mechanisms, and integrate social benefits into media evaluation systems through institutional design. Only in this way can the escalating profit-driven impulse of the media be curbed, and a healthy and orderly communication ecology be reshaped.

3.3 *Impacts of Media Ethics Anomie*

3.3.1 Impacts on the Media Themselves

Decline in Credibility: As the core carrier of social information dissemination, the credibility of the media is the cornerstone of maintaining public trust. However, acts of media ethics anomie will severely erode this trust, and even trigger fundamental doubts from the public about the role of the media. Take the Gou Jing incident as an example. Some media, when the facts were still unclear, were eager to one-sidedly exaggerate and amplify the parties' statements, attracting traffic through sensational and labeled reports. This disregard for the authenticity of news eventually led to a strong backfire after the truth reversed — the public not only questioned the professionalism of the involved media but also developed a “boy who cried wolf” psychological defense mechanism, preset a stance of distrust towards similar reports in the future. This trust crisis is contagious. When the anomie behaviors of individual media are repeatedly exposed, the public may extend their doubts to the entire industry, falling into the “Tacitus Trap”, where even if the media report the truth, it is difficult to gain recognition. A more profound impact is that when the media lose their authority as “social watchdogs”, an information vacuum will appear in the public opinion field, providing space for rumors and prejudices to grow,

and ultimately damaging the cognitive foundation and rational dialogue ability of the entire society.

Dual Collapse of Professional Image and Social Responsibility: The professional dignity of journalists stems from their reverence for facts and adherence to public interests, but ethical anomie will fundamentally disintegrate this professional identity. When the media get used to arbitrarily selecting facts out of context, distorting the original meaning with sensational headlines, or filling in the gaps in investigations through “reasonable imagination”, their products have deviated from the essence of news and become tools to attract attention. This operation mode not only reduces the professional self-esteem of practitioners-when journalists find that what they produce is just “traffic fast food” rather than truth records that can stand the test, their professional sense of honor will inevitably fade; it will also trigger a cognitive downgrade of the public towards the role of journalists, equating them to ordinary content producers rather than guardians of social public instruments. What’s more serious is that this image collapse has an intergenerational transmission effect. Young practitioners may form distorted professional perceptions in the bad atmosphere of the industry, regarding opportunism as the law of survival in the industry. For news organizations, when the audience equates them with marketing accounts, their brand premium and social influence as professional organizations will continue to depreciate, eventually leading to a vicious cycle of brain drain and resource shrinkage in high-quality news production. The deterioration of this professional ecology harms not only the industry itself but also the healthy information environment needed for the social democratic process.

3.3.2 Impacts on the Audience

Misleading the Audience: The anomie of media ethics can lead to information distortion and mislead the audience. For instance, in the Gou Jing incident, some self-media outlets, in order to gain traffic, continuously exaggerated the incident of Gou Jing being impersonated and used sensational writing techniques to arouse the sympathy of ordinary viewers. This caused the audience to develop biased perceptions of the incident, making it impossible for them to understand the truth comprehensively and objectively.

Triggering Emotional Communication: Anomic media reports often trigger emotional reactions from the audience. The emotional communication in the Gou Jing incident stems from two aspects: first, the “generalization” of news reports and public opinion guidance; second, the inherent flaws of social networks. The Gou Jing incident involves educational equity and almost every basic moral feeling on social media, so emotional communication can cover the entire social network. Under the emotional outcries in the social network, emotional groups formed by promoting the “rush into the rule of law” political mechanism and driving the political process are characterized by rapid spread and widespread dissemination.

3.3.3 Impacts on Society

Social Disorder: That is, behaviors that violate media ethics can lead to social unrest. For example, in the Gou Jing incident, unethical reports on it, coupled with the strong response of public opinion, could easily lead to a “collapse” phenomenon, thereby causing social disorder.

Violating Social Justice: It refers to the fact that ethical violations in media reports, such as aphasia (inappropriate behaviors), imbalance (overemphasis on certain aspects), and distortion (inaccuracy), go against the spirit of mission and fail to fulfill the professional responsibility of information dissemination. For example, some media, amid the noisy public voices, threw doubts and insults at the parties involved, Gou Jing, which is a process of extensively deducing disorders and contributing to the evolution of malicious public opinion, a process of jumping to conclusions and misjudging the essence of things.

4. Countermeasures

4.1 Enhancing the Literacy of Media Personnel

Journalistic ethics and moral codes must be kept in mind by journalists at all times. The arrival of the new media era does not mean the demise of the print media era, but traditional journalism has indeed suffered an unprecedented impact. In the new media era, journalists should adhere more firmly to the professional ethics of news practitioners. Faced with the complex online public opinion and the fast-paced “news production industry”, media workers should consciously study Marxist views on news, strengthen their moral cultivation, and strictly abide by the Code of Ethics for Chinese Journalists. They should enhance their sense of social responsibility, adhering to the principle of “being responsible to society, responsible to the people, and putting social benefits first”, striving to be thoughtful, capable of writing, and astute in judging the situation. At the same time, in the process of news gathering, writing, editing, and commenting, they must adhere to seeking truth from facts and uphold journalistic professionalism. Continuously learning and applying Marxist views on news, practicing Xi Jinping’s thought on news, serving the people and the Party, they should strive to produce reports that are true, objective, accurate, and socially significant with depth.

4.2 Purifying the Internal Atmosphere of the Media Industry

The anomie of news media is not limited to rights protection reports but exists in various public opinion events in society. The causes of such phenomena are multifaceted: on the one hand, factors related to the news system and mechanism; on the other hand, some media ignore ethical principles for economic interests. The lax internal checks of a few media outlets, neglect in managing journalists and editors, and the formalization of internal mechanisms are among the major factors contributing to journalistic ethics anomie.

As disseminators of social information and watchdogs of social public opinion supervision, news media must fulfill their social responsibilities. They should deconstruct and purify the news production process from within, strengthening the professional ethics of internal staff. Moreover, with the rapid development of the Internet and 5G technology, media can use high-tech means to prevent fraud, strengthen the review of the gatekeeping process with technology, and apply blockchain technology to audit all links of news sampling and editing. This will strive to make the news production process efficient and transparent, thus purifying the internal atmosphere of the media industry.

4.3 “Era-Adaptive” Transformation of Investigative Reports

In the print media era, investigative reports were “elite writing for elite reading”, and in-depth reporting made media the “observers” and “deep explorers” of that era. However, in the era of self-media discourse, people are accustomed to fragmented reading, and lengthy in-depth investigation reports have lost their competitive edge. Coupled with policy changes, excellent in-depth reports have become even scarcer. In the past, in-depth reports from media such as Southern Weekend were once extremely popular; many major news events’ causes, inside stories, and outcomes were revealed through in-depth investigations by outstanding investigative journalists. Although investigative journalists and in-depth reporting seem to have been abandoned by the times amid changes, investigative reports can still utilize the convenience brought by technological development. Under the conditions permitted by policies, they can produce high-quality reports that clarify the truth and address people’s doubts, enabling news to truly fulfill its supervisory responsibilities.

5. Conclusion

The Gou Jing incident, as a typical case of media ethics anomie, profoundly reveals the structural dilemmas and systemic risks in the current media ecology. From the information distortion in the early stage of the incident’s fermentation, to the emotional communication in the public opinion field, and then to the collective silence of authoritative media, this series of phenomena not only reflects the collapse of professional norms in some media organizations but also exposes the deep-seated crisis in the public discourse space in the new media era. When facts give way to emotions, rationality succumbs to traffic, and responsibility is defeated by interests, the legitimacy of the media as a social public instrument is jeopardized, and the resulting trust crisis will directly threaten social stability and progress.

Facing this severe challenge, reconstructing media ethics has become an urgent proposition of the times. Media organizations must re-anchor their value coordinates and find a balance between commercial interests and social responsibilities. News reports should not be appendage to traffic, but should adhere to the principle of “facts first”. By establishing multi-level verification mechanisms and improving internal review processes, they can ensure the authenticity and fairness of the disseminated content. Secondly, journalists need to regain professional reverence and internalize Marxist views on journalism as the compass for professional practice. In an information-overloaded communication environment, the core value of journalists lies not in the speed of breaking news, but in the depth of exploring the truth and the accuracy of presenting facts. Finally, the entire industry should actively explore new reporting models empowered by technology, using tools such as blockchain and big data to build a transparent and credible content production chain, so that investigative reports can be revitalized in the “era-adaptive” transformation.

For the public, this incident also provides important cognitive enlightenment. In the post-truth era where emotions are easily manipulated, cultivating media literacy and critical thinking is crucial. The audience should learn to identify emotional traps in information, maintain reasonable doubts about one-sided narratives, and form independent judgments through multi-channel verification. Only when the public transforms from passive recipients to active participants in rational dialogue can they effectively check the anomie behavior of the media and promote the public opinion field to return to a healthy track.

The Gou Jing incident clearly presents the chain reaction that media ethics anomie may trigger — from the damage to individual rights and interests to the collapse of social trust, from the disorder of the public opinion field to the reduction of governance efficiency. To break this vicious cycle, it is necessary to build a comprehensive governance system integrating media self-discipline, public supervision, and institutional guarantees. Only in this way can we reshape a public discourse space that respects communication laws while adhering to value bottom lines, enabling the media to truly become promoters of social progress rather than creators of chaos. In this sense, the reflection on the Gou Jing incident should not be limited to case reviews, but

should become an important opportunity to promote the transformation and upgrading of China's media ecology, providing practical wisdom for building a clean cyberspace and a mature civil society.

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