

Relation Between School Journalism and Democracy

Boyoun Chen*

*Beijing New Oriental Foreign Language School at Yangzhou, Qinyou Road, Yangzhou, China
2518332703@qq.com
corresponding author

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Abstract: This article mainly studies the role of media on campus. Almost all schools have student organizations, but there is little to monitor them and report the truth. As one of the students, I founded the school newspaper We Say, which became the largest media in the school. Through this paper, I hope to explore whether the media can help promote democracy and the role of the media in social groups. Although the school only has a few thousand people, I still hope to use the school as a model for a small society. Whether it is of great significance to study our journalism through practice. Finally, I found the answer. Our journalism serves three very important functions in our schools: informing people, investigating and making the student's organization democratic, and building a forum for everyone.

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, people's life cannot be divided from information. We are now obtaining huge amount of information every day. They also change many aspects of society: shopping, driving and studying etc. Moreover, the most significant change should be in politics. New medias as Facebook, We Chat, Twitter, and Tiktok bring different perspectives to consider about political event. A lot of scholars have regarded the traditional medias and the new medias that can work together to monitor the government and ensure the democracy. However, at schools, students have similar organizations as well, but the question is whether students create media in order to monitor Student Union and Clubs? This is what I am researching for. I find the answer by creating a newspaper, We Say, at my school.

2. Background

Whatever the time is, there is a little articles about journalism at school. In history, only a few researchers research about the function of journalism in education. However, the school is also like a small society. The group of students require some organizations to serve for them. These organizations work as student union helping improve students' life and clubs holding activities, and there is always a media existing to inform people. In fact, this is an area that we should do more research about, because the school is like a minimal model of society. Researching on this model can assist us in knowing better about democracy at school.

In 1996, the article News decisions: Journalists as partisan actors written by Patterson, TE (Patterson, TE); Donsbach, W (Donsbach, W), concluded the journalists have personal partisanship through the research of five countries: the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Sweden. The journalists are strongly correlated with these countries political organizations. It had an opposite point of view of western journalists who believe they are the symbol of objective. A study of content diversity in online citizen journalism and online newspaper articles explained that the online source of obtaining information can satisfy people's needs of diversity about information. The essay's author Carpenter, Serena created a standard for judging whether the content of online newspaper is able to be volatile. In 2010, Michael Schudson wrote the book why democracy need an unlovable journalism clearly illustrate the reason for people to have an objective social media for monitoring. He mainly listed seven functions of journalism and explained in detail how these functions effect to the government and the society. Lewis, Justin; Williams, Andrew; Franklin, Bob wrote the article A COMPROMISED FOURTH ESTATE? UK news journalism, public relations and news sources and analyzed the quality of newspapers. They cast questions about the independence of press and whether journalists are qualified to become the fourth estate. Folk Theories of Journalism: The many faces of a local newspaper written by Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis proposed three ways to understand local newspapers. He offered other researchers new ways for researching journalism. Freedom of the Press and Public Responsiveness, written by Hiaeshutter-Rice, D, Soroka, S, Wlezien, C , provides me an view from sociology to study school journalism.

3. School Journalism having three functions can improve students life and secure democracy

In China, many schools include variable clubs and student organizations holding a variety of activities. Almost all the schools have their own medias such as newspaper, radio or online media. These medias have different and significant functions to serve for student organizations. Schools often create media to publicize activities. But is the role of school media only to inform people? The answer is far from simple. In order to verify the true role of school media, I specially created We Say as the newspaper of my school to promote the activities of the school community, and I hope to give a voice to students through the newspaper.

3.1. Informing people

To understand journalism, we need to understand how people understand journalism. We need to examine what I define as folk theories of journalism, actually existing popular beliefs about what journalism is, what it does, and what it ought to do that people use to make sense of journalism across sources of news, means of accessing news, and ways of engaging with news.¹ In modern day society, more and more people prefer using new media as internet for obtaining news. However, at some places where internet is limited to use, people must try to reuse some traditional methods for gaining information.

No matter what kind of media is, the first and the most basic function is to inform others. In a traditional school, students are not allowed to use cellphones, so the newspaper is really important for knowing information. We Say publishes 1,000 copies every two weeks for people. All the students and teachers can read the fresh new information about our campus. Although we can reach to one day one edition, it is enough for all of us. As Schudson puts it, the press has seven functions to the society². In modern day global world, more and more people are willing to choose Internet as the most popular social media to communicate and obtain information. However, at some Chinese school, students are not allowed to use cellphone in campus. I, a student in Beijing New Oriental Foreign Language School, am also who are restricted of using phones. But people still need to get information and to know what

happens around us, especially for my school having over 4000 students who can only go home every two weeks. We really need a media to function as investigative reports and analysis. There are 30 clubs at school, and not all of them have the right to publish advertisements and articles on school online social media. In addition, for some small clubs such as Mock Court and Visual art club, they only have less than twenty club members, and they definitely cannot afford to make enough posters for advertising efficiently. Since our campus is very big, most of time, club leaders often post their ads on over 30 classes' bulletin boards. Some online announcements are read when students go home after 12 days, and that will be too late. In fact, this is not a news at all.

Less publicity also causes trouble for holding activities successfully. The biggest and the most powerful club---Model United Nation Club has nearly one hundred members. Because of its matured system which requires members to pay 100 RMB for attending every conference, the funding ensures the club to maintain basic ability for operation. The school pay much attention and preference for MUN Club as well, and this really enhances the power of it. Nevertheless, it is totally different scene for small clubs. Those clubs not only have no enough funds but also no approaches for propagandizing. As a result, my mind came up an idea that our school really need a traditional and papery media on account of limiting use of cellphone and long time isolated from outside world. I once considered about a bigger public bulletin board, magazines and so on, whereas I finally choose newspaper.

As a explorer, producing a newspaper is a hard process. Firstly, I persuaded the dean of Administration Department to offer financial support for the newspaper. Then, I recruit 20 reporters and editors for gathering articles from clubs and editing. Finally, our editors gave a name to it as We Say and defined the gist: We See, We Think, We Say.

3.2. Investigating and making the student's organization democratic

Journalists in the Western democracies define themselves primarily as news professionals who are committed to a form of journalism marked by its objectivity and political neutrality. Yet they are also partisan actors whose political beliefs affect their news decisions.³ School as a mini society also requires students to monitor their organization for preventing possible problems causing inconvenience or privilege

Before Essa's article, we never thought to challenge the authority, because it kept power for many years. However, when the Student Union did not make any reaction to students proposal, should not students to fight back? We Say onsets a new era for school democracy. If the leaders are not responsible for their duty, we can expose your behavior to the public. It will never happened that the student leaders can utilize some means to deceive voters and get the votes.

At the beginning, I thought We Say is just responsible for informing people, because it is true that our initial hope is to create a platform for more and more clubs to convey their information. However, one of the We Say editors wrote an report less than two hundred words greatly changed our intention and students' view about campus life. This article was mainly about the cafeteria. The school divided students into two groups for having lunch. Since there are many students, this decision can help reduce the congestion of cafeteria. But, the fact was the group of students who have lunch earlier take too much food, and it caused the meal is less diverse than the first. Several types of food bottomed out, and later students had to eat less versatile foods. They sent a letter to the Student Union e-mail address and hoped something can be changed.

In order to solve the problem, the Life Department of Student Union provided questionnaires to verify the situation for students, and We Say was responsible for that work.

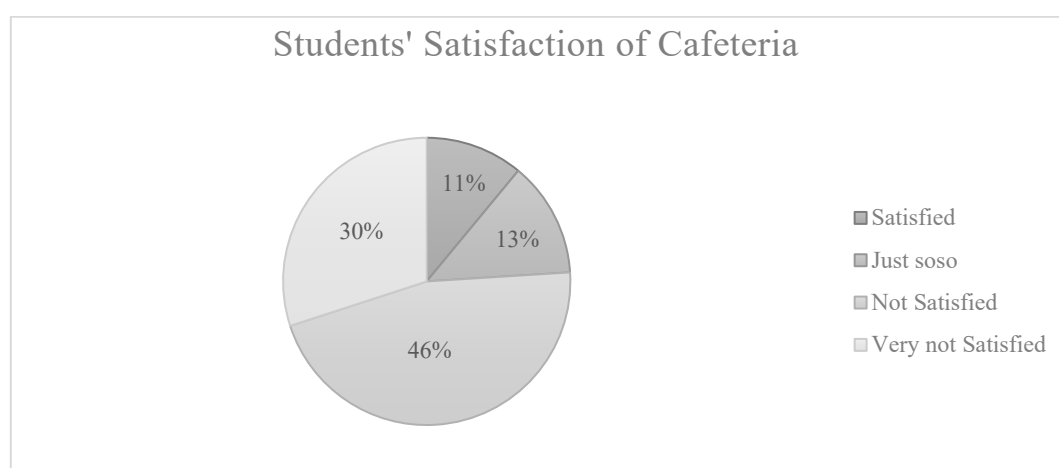


Figure 1: This graph shows students' satisfaction about cafeteria's service

As the graph points out, most of the students were not satisfied with the cafeteria, and they really hoped to see the Student Union to do something change. However, at a conference in Student Union, the president just said: I don't want to pay attention on this kind of thing. Why don't these students eat snacks?

The We Say's journalist was also at the meeting. The president might just think the reporter would only inform people. But this reporter, Essa, She hated the Student Union's negative act. Essa wrote an short article and gave it to me, and I thought it can be really impressive and useful for changing the situation in campus. Then I let the editors put this article under the headline news which was the data about students' satisfaction about cafeteria. The article was not very long, but it let our students feel angry about the Student Union especially the president. In fact, the problem existed for several months, and the Student Union always answered in the same way: we are solving it, please wait. Many students were angry.

Moreover, I let four editors to collect every monitors' opinions and students' comments on this event. Next edition, I put them into the headline. It became a forum, and many students sent a message that we are not like what president's action and regret to elect him. The Student Union was really embarrassed. Before the We Say, the Student Union was always a powerful organization that no one could make a remark on it. However, time changes. Social media can be a model for democratically governed space⁴.

In addition, the principle even joined this event, and he claimed that it is true the cafeteria need some progress and the president of Student Union should correct his fault. This is a democratic victory. Now We Say already has two functions, informing people and investigative reports.

The journalism at school effectively ensure the democracy among students by making investigation and questionnaires. Probably, the new medias controlled by school do not provide such service for protecting democracy, because their main functions are just informing people.

3.3. Building a forum for everyone

A newspaper can also function as a platform for everyone to cast their thoughts and opinions. The real media should be not only determined by those journalists about what article to press, but everyone can join in and express freely.

Students often face the situation that I have an idea to improve our school, but how can I express that? The social media could fulfill that. For each issue, we post students comments about clubs, Student Union and Club Association. These organizations are susceptible to the pressure of public

opinion, so they will not choose to do something badly. That prevent the misuse of funds from school and offer more transparency of student organizations.

After the scandal of Student Union, the Club Association(CA) made a great reformation. In Club Association, there are one Presidium, Activity Planning Department, Propaganda Department, Supervision Department and Public Relation Department. This institution was kept for over ten years, but the new chairman Victor hoped to change it. Because he thought the Club Association's main purpose is to manage clubs, and those departments were unable to be responsible for this function. These departments sounded like working for the CA instead of clubs. Also, many students criticize the electoral system of CA, since its next management team is chosen by the former team. On the other hand, CA is not democratic at all.

Nevertheless, Victor believed he can make the innovation come true. But he did not have a ideal tool to help him. As a result, Victor asked We Say to gather advice of club leaders and publicize it. We Say was very happy to see that, since we also hoped the newspaper can function as a forum. From interviewing the club leaders, we had plenty of plans and publish them. That caused more and more common students to join the discussion too, so Victor knew how to achieve his goal now.

He firstly changed all the departments into five institutes including Art, Culture, Sport, Technology, and Social Welfare. Each club would be managed by the institutes that have similarities. For example, the Soccer Ball Club is controlled by Sport Institute. The chairman also decided the next group of management team would be selected by the club leaders. The members of CA have the right to vote as well.

It seemed to be very attractive, but people were doubt whether this can be realized. Consequently, We Say Newspaper started a long report for analyzing the policy of CA. Reporters entered each of the club to survey if the CA is efficient enough for assisting, and some of them continued to observe the CA. We wrote articles for seven issues just for analyzing the effectiveness of new system. Fortunately, the result is positive. Many problems that former CA had are all solved by the new one. We Say is glad to see a more democratic institution is built with the media's help.

Even for the school newspaper, it can function as the real one. Any schools, no matter universities, colleges, high school or primary schools, they are all like a small society and some powerful organizations.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, in order to verify the functions at Chinese schools, I have created a real newspaper for students. It is true that students are benefited from the function of monitoring the democracy of We Say. My essential personal experience makes sure the reality of the paper. However, I still believe there is some drawbacks of it. I do not use too much data to investigate. Because of the limitation of school, the questionnaire is much simple than those made by professional researchers. I am going to improve the comprehensiveness of investigation in the future, so that I can bring the research more reliability.

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