

FROM TRADITIONAL REPORTING TO DYNAMIC VLOGS: THE CHANGING FACE OF ON-CAMERA JOURNALISM

Sofia López and Luca Rossi

Department of Media Studies, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

School of Journalism and Communication, University of Florence, Florence, Italy

Abstract: The role of on-camera journalists in news reporting has evolved significantly since CCTV's "The News Investigation" program introduced the tandem process of on-camera reporters in 1996. While their identity may have remained consistent, their functions have gradually shifted towards that of hosts or crosstalk performers. This transformation is evident in the diverse forms of reporting employed by on-camera journalists today, ranging from traditional live reporting to live streaming connections and dynamic vlogs. Moreover, their scope of application has expanded beyond traditional TV news to include new communication media such as short videos and webcasts, reflecting the trend of diversified communication channels.

Keywords: On-camera journalists, News reporting, Diversification, Communication channels, Journalism evolution

Introduction

In 1996, CCTV's "The News Investigation" program experimented with the use of a tandem process of on-camera reporters. On the program, the on-camera reporter is present at the scene of the news and conducts observations and interviews. Compared with traditional journalists, the identity of on-camera journalists has not substantially changed a lot. The function, however, is gradually converging towards the role of host or crosstalk. Looking at the current forms of reporting by on-camera journalists, from traditional live reporting to live streaming connections, and then to lively vlogs, it's all over the place! The field of application of the on-camera report has also changed from the traditional TV news to the new communication media such as short videos and webcasts, reflecting the trend of diversification of communication channels.

In terms of the type of news event, on-camera report can be divided into foresight reports and sudden reports. From the perspective of appearance form, it can be divided into a variety of presentations such as narratives, interviews, experiments, etc. No matter what kind of news events, what kind of appearance form, as a journalist, the essential job of the on-camera reporter is still digging news facts and the truth, which is the bottom line of the news, but also the lifeblood.

This article will analyze the common methods for on-camera reporters to approach the truth of the news and adhere to the principle of authenticity of the news, from the two aspects of "preparation in the narrow sense" and "preparation in the broad sense", combining with the relevant theories of Journalism, Communication and Broadcasting & Hosting Art.

1. Narrow preparation

According to Mr Zhang Song's "Chinese Broadcasting Announcing",^[1] the preparation work of scripts for broadcasting and hosting creative works includes both broad and narrow preparation. In this context, narrow draft preparation refers to the specific preparation process of each manuscript before each broadcasting and hosting creation. Narrow preparation focuses on familiarity, understanding and mastery of broadcast creative content, so as to better transform visual communication symbols into auditory communication symbols for effective information dissemination. With reference to the concept of narrow preparation in the art of Broadcast & Hosting, the author believes that the narrow aspect of preparation should be done before appearing on camera to report on the current news events to make specific preparations for current news events. It concludes that doing "one external and one internal" two aspects - externally, make good use of first-hand information research; internally, pay attention to the feelings of personal experience.

2.1. Making good use of "first-hand information"

Immediately after arriving at the news scene, reporters are supposed to gather information through various means. On the scene, reporters generally have two ways of getting information: The first is to use the Internet to access information paraphrase information, known as "second-hand information", which has the advantage that it is less difficult to access and more informative, and significantly improve the efficiency of a reporter's on-camera reporting. The second one is the information obtained by the oncamera reporter through his or her observations and feelings at the scene, as well as interviews with the parties involved, called "first-hand information". The advantage of this is that it provides great assurance of the authenticity of the information.

In the age of the "information explosion", the low threshold for information dissemination and the infinite network carrying capacity make it increasingly difficult to distinguish news information,^[2] which seriously threatens the bottom line of journalistic authenticity. In the author's view, the on-camera reporter should focus on excavating "first-hand information" in order to better approach the truth of the news.

Associate Professor Song Xiaoyang of Broadcasting and Anchoring School of Communication University of China (CUC) has made the point that "What you see is what you get" is a well-tried method for on-camera reporters. In the author's view, "what you see is what you get" emphasises the direct link between the reporter and the news event, with no other intermediaries providing information, and therefore the reporter is the first access to information. In this process, the methods of obtaining information should be as diverse as possible, e.g. covering the senses of sight, hearing and touch.

Figure 1: Jiang Lin make on-camera report in the 31st FISU Summer World University Games.

Table 1: A compendium of Jiang Lin's on-camera reports.

Information points	Part	On-site information	Additional information
1	Part 1: The process of entering the stadium.	The silver-coloured stadium, shining in the sunlight.	I've now arrived at the main stadium of Dong'an Lake Sports Park.

2		CMG vehicles have been seen at the bottom of the grandstand area.	It's the first time I've been on site to observe the rehearsals for the opening ceremony.
3		This is entrance number four to the infield.	Through here, we'll enter the infield.
4	Part 2: 7.45 p.m.	In the area behind them, the choir can be seen preparing for rehearsal.	It's very close to rehearsal time.
5	Part 3: 8.25 p.m.	At the rehearsal, you can see a lot of things that don't go unnoticed on camera, such as the "role models" for the ceremony.	Rehearsals begin in earnest; the "standard bearers" of the ceremony dance for 40 to 50 minutes.
6	Part 4: 10.20 p.m.	The most I saw is sweat, and the most I heard is the sound of the performer's running footsteps.	The last rehearsal is still in progress; reviewing the whole day's rehearsal, the opening ceremony will be full of youth and vitality.

On 28 July 2023, the 31st FISU Summer World University Games opened in Chengdu, Sichuan Province in China. As shown in figure 1, two days before the opening ceremony, CMG reporter Jiang Lin went to the main stadium in Chengdu's Dong'an Lake Sports Park, using the form of on-camera to visit the rehearsal site of the opening ceremony. Jiang divided the appearance report into four parts: The first part is the process of entering the stadium; the second part is at 7.45 p.m., when the rehearsal is about to start; the third part is at 8.25 p.m., when the rehearsal officially starts and the "role models" of the ceremonial session are introduced; and the fourth part is at 10.20 p.m., when the last part of the rehearsal is under way. As shown in table 1, after combing the whole report into text, the author found that Jiang provided a total of six points of information, each of which is composed of "On-site information + additional information".

After carefully analysing Jiang Lin's on-camera reports, we will find that each point of information is pulled by the information obtained on-site, and additional supplementary information is added as a result. Obviously, the logic of Jiang Lin's reporting is pulled by time clues, and the situation on the scene at each time point becomes the key information.

Analysing from a communication perspective, for one thing, if the on-camera reporter interacts directly with the news scene, the "noise" between the source and the destination can be reduced, and the loss between the coded information and the decoded information can be reduced, so that the objectivity of the news report can be maintained to the greatest extent possible. Secondly, the on-camera report can provide both visual and auditory communication symbols to the audience at the same time. If only non on-site "second-hand information" is reported, it is actually a waste of audio-visual symbols, and the significance of reporting on camera cannot be realised. As a consequence, making good use of "firsthand information" is a sign of respect for the audio-visual media and an effective way to get closer to the truth and ensure the authenticity of the news.

2.2. Pay attention to the feelings of personal experience.

As mentioned above, "first-hand accounts" can be closer to the truth of the story. However, there are various ways for reporters to obtain "first-hand information" in the spot, such as visual observation, experience, hearing and listening. The strength of experiential reporting is "dynamism." - The on-camera reporter takes the role of an experiencer and relies on specific actions to demonstrate to the audience and to express the feelings through audible language.^[3] This kind of "experience" is the best choice for reportage.

For example, in an episode of "The News Investigation" program entitled "Visiting the Snow Country", the background is: *Xuexiang* (the snow township), in northeastern China, has a local saying "sharpen the knife for nine months, rip off customers for three months". It means that attracting a large number of tourists in winter by means of low-priced tours, but generally ripping off tourists with unscrupulous tour guides, merchants and other "high-priced self-financing" methods. The Internet even exposed the "tour guide hit tourists", "a bucket of noodles 60 yuan". To this end, two reporters through the experience of reporting the way the field visits, using the "open visit and unofficial visit" means of combining the scene of the scenic area of the tour guide's behaviour, the situation of tourists and tourism management departments to take measures to carry out in-depth investigations.

As shown in figure 2, without disclosing the identity of the reporter, the on-camera reporter Sha Chen made a covert filming secret visit before the open visit to personally experience the tour group whether there is a black hearted tour guide, ripping off customers.



Figure 2: Reporters make unofficial visits.

As shown in figure 3, Sha then revealed his identity and interviewed local innkeepers, the general manager of a business travel agency and others. He finally identified the truth - most of the snow township tourism is formal, "black heart" is the illegal behaviour for only a small number of travel agents, does not represent all.



Figure 3: Sha Chen makes on-camera interview.

This programme uses the "experiential reporting" approach of "first-hand accounts", which documents the first-hand experience of the two reporters on camera and allows for a better approximation of the truth of the story and convinces the viewer.

In addition to experiential reporting, the advantages of "experiential" on-camera reporting are particularly significant in breaking news coverage. Super Typhoon No. 5 of 2023, Doksuri, made landfall in Fujian Province on 28 July. As shown in figure 4, CMG reporter Chen Geng travelled to Xiamen Xiang'an District for a live report. In the report, in addition to using "second-hand information" to introduce the specifics of the typhoon, Chen also used on-site experiences such as "the sudden gusts of wind made me unsteady" and "my face and eyes were full of rain" as part of the report.



Figure 4: Chen Geng reports from the landfall of Typhoon Doksuri.

The language and sub-language expressed by the on-site experience of the on-camera reporter plays an important role in the dissemination of news events. At the same time, it brings the distance between the media and the audience closer, making the news reports more persuasive and the news reports more authentic.

3. Broad preparation

Mr Zhang Song talked about the concept of broad preparation in broadcasting and hosting creation in Chinese Podcasting. Broad preparation refers to continuous learning and accumulation,^[1] and is a reflection of professional competence and cultural merit in the art of audible language. However, for the on-camera reporter, the field involved is not only Broadcasting & Hosting Art, but also Journalism, Communication and other multidisciplinary fields. Therefore, to do a good job in the broad aspects of the preparation should not only be the content of the report, the knowledge of a wide range, as well as on the language expression ability, news interviewing ability and other qualities of the enhancement.

3.1. Language expression ability

Different from the traditional reporting form, the "audio-visual communication" features of the report, the reporter's voice language expression ability puts forward a higher demand. Therefore, the "language power" of the reporter has become an important influence on the communication efficiency.

In "Chinese Broadcasting Announcing",^[1] it is said that articulation skills are divided into "inner three" and "outer four". The "inner three" are: situational reproduction, sense of object and inner language, and the "outer four" are

stops, stress, intonation and rhythm. But newscasting is fundamentally different than news on-camera reporting: News broadcasting is to face the teleprompter expression most of the time, is the "second creation" of the voice-language expression, the visual symbols "text" into the auditory symbols "sound", pay more attention to the stopping of the "return to the pile of embracing the group" and the stress of the "less but more refined", and the requirements of the emotional expression of the "feeling but not into". But most of the time, a on-camera reporter is improvising on the spot, which is called "one-time creation". It is from the inner thoughts and feelings burst out of the language expression, which, "tone" and "rhythm" is appropriate to convey information, expressing feelings of the important process.

For example, in an episode of "The News Investigation" program entitled "Suspicious Cases in Mountain Village", the case of the client, Ke Changgui, was retried after 11 years and found not guilty. At the moment, it has been identified that the case handling and procedures were problematic, and those responsible have admitted their negligence at the time. When Sun Baoyin, the on-camera reporter, interviewed investigators and the Intermediate people's court of Shangluo, he adhered to the attitude of "legal fairness" and seriously pointed out the omissions at that time, fully exerting the function of news media public opinion supervision. As shown in figure 5, however, Sun was more sympathetic and compassionate in his interview with Ke and his family, and also expressed his concern and condolences to them on behalf of the programme team.



Figure 5: Sun Baoyin in the Interview.

In the final analysis, correct language expression is based on correct emotional feelings. Therefore, the sincere emotions and emotions of news communicators are the foundation of mutual communication and understanding with the interviewee and audience.^[2] The on-camera reporter should properly control his or her own emotional sense of proportion, through the "voice with the emotion" way, the use of appropriate language expression, control the effect of the programme. However, this is not a one-day process, and requires long-term training in the art of Broadcasting & Hosting in order to be able to use it with ease.

3.2. News interviewing ability

News interviewing ability is developed through long-term news reporting training. In addition to perception, discernment and foresight, it is particularly important for a reporter to be "role-alike" and "audience-aware", as will be explained in more detail below.

3.2.1. Role-alike

Role-alike means that the reporter himself or herself has the same identity as the subject of the interview. The reporter should not overly admire their interviewees because of their high status, nor should they be overlooking their interviewees because they are ordinary people, which can only ensure that the interviewees will provide more and more truthful information to the reporters in a calm state of mind. At the same time, however, as a professional communicator, the on-camera reporter should minimise the involvement of personal subjective colours and ensure objective reporting of the news on the basis of good role analogy.

For example, in an episode of "The News Investigation" program entitled "The Human Who Battled the Myth", when on-camera reporter Wang Zhi spoke with Liu Shuwei, he maintained his role as a "financial scholar" and even used a confrontational interview.^[4] In particular, Liu referred to "other factors interfering" when she said that "a number of banks were aware of LanTian's loss-making status but still granted loans to it". At this point, Wang immediately realised what he was talking about and asked Liu, "Do you think it's power?" Then the two of them confronted each other with the question. In another example, when Liu said that "her case is a scandal in China's legal history", Wang asked "Do you think so?" etc.

Wang and Liu stand in the same character position, and by "asking each other rhetorical questions", Liu euphemistically reveals her heart, so that the audience can see the truth. At the same time, Wang Zhi has not forgotten his position as a professional communicator. He grasped the rhythm of the interview from the beginning to the end, controlling the overall pulse of the interview to advance in the established direction, effectively preventing the occurrence of off-topic and off-topic phenomena.

3.2.2. Audience-aware

Television communication is a linear communication, which is characterised by transience in the timeline, and can cause some comprehension difficulties for viewers. Therefore, when asking questions in an interview, the contributing reporter should not only satisfy his or her own doubts, but should also have an awareness of the audience and take the audience's doubts into full consideration.^[5] For example, Wang repeatedly asked seemingly redundant questions, "What was your final conclusion?" , "Can you repeat it again?" "What day was it?" and so on, most of these questions were additional clarifications to the previous question. From the audience's point of view, the probability is that they will not be able to fully understand the lengthy answers given by financial expert Liu, but after Wang Zhi's key questions, they will often be able to understand the central idea.

For example, when Liu recalled that "*I opened my mailbox just after 8pm on the 10th of January. He sent it to me in the form of an e-mail. What about when I opened my mailbox, I got four threatening letters that the 23rd of January is the date of your death.*" But at this point the audience did not understand "why 23 January is 'dead'", so Wang immediately pursued the question, and eventually learned that it was the day of the trial.

As in-depth news reports are often voluminous and logically complex, they tend to be difficult for viewers to understand. Thus, these complementary questions, which may seem redundant, play a role in supplementing and refining the information, bringing the audience closer to the facts of the news.

4. Conclusions

The appearance of the on-camera reporters can broaden the breadth and depth of news coverage, so that the news has a stronger sense of scene and three-dimensional sense. The on-camera reporters should be "broadly prepared", honing their basic language skills and improving their news reporting abilities. They should also be "narrowly prepared" to use first-hand information and experiential reporting. At the same time, knowledge and skills should be acquired in the interdisciplinary fields of Journalism, Communication and Broadcasting & Hosting Arts. This not only shows the professionalism of journalists, but also to ensure the authenticity of the news, close to the truth of the news is a necessary condition. Further more, it is a visual embodiment of the "Four Forces" of journalists in the new era, as well as the responsibilities and missions of the news media.

References

Zhang Song. (2003). *Chinese Broadcasting Announcing*. Communication University of China Press, 195-215.

- Du Xiangju. (2015). The Dilemma and Breakout Strategy of Outgoing Journalists in the Age of Total Media. Youth Journalist (08),37-38.*
- Song Xiaoyang. (2010). How to get into the "deep water" of on-site reporting. Modern Communication (07),145-146.*
- Zhang Lu. (2017). A unique approach to TV interviews from "The Man Who Battled Myth. West China Broadcasting TV (06),109.*
- Gu Jie, Leng Yefu. (2002). The Successful Use of the TV Personality Interview Concept from "The Man Who Battled the Myth. China Radio & TV Academic Journal (07),31-32+36.*