Journalists' Perceptions about Truth in Press Reporting, Freedom and Gate-keeping in South Korea

EunSuk Sa[1]

[1] Teaching Professor, Hyehwa Liberal Arts College, Daejeon University, Daejeon, South Korea

Correspondence: EunSuk Sa. E-mail: suehojoo@dju.kr

Abstract

This paper examines journalists' perceptions about truth in press reporting, freedom and gate-keeping in South Korea. It is based on quantitative and qualitative survey responses from journalists in South Korea. A study of related theories and an assessment of empirical data result in the following findings: firstly, truth in press reporting connects basically to autonomy of the news production; secondly, the media play gate-keeping roles in every process of news production. With regard to journalists' primary activities, gathering news was the freest process. The peak-stress part for reporters was writing articles. Editing news was the least free process. A notable finding was that autonomy of the editing news process was predominantly less than it was for the processes of gathering news and writing articles. This means that gate-keeping roles were intensively played by managing groups during the news production.

Keywords: truth in press reporting, freedom, gate-keeping, news production, South Korea

1. Introduction

The media especially traditional media play a gate-keeping role for news production. The role of gate-keeping is a contentious issue because it has positive and negative aspects, and is inevitable in the process of producing news because this work is based on collaboration. Also, all daily issues cannot be delivered by the press as news because of limited time and paper space. In its news reporting, the press gives consideration to its role of arbitrating communication between news sources and news readers (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 6; Hallin & Briggs, 2015, p. 97). The press sometimes reports news differently from truth. This means that during news production truth can be distorted. However, the role of journalism is to seek truth and deliver it for citizens (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

Journalists ideally expect independence and editorial autonomy that include freedom from censorship, the pressure of advertisers, and other internal and external influential factors (Graber, 2003; Gunther & Mughan, 2000, in Kellam & Stein, 2016, p. 39; Sa, 2009a). Equally, journalists must cooperate with colleagues, information sources, and media laws/policies/ethics related factors. Therefore, their autonomy is based on collaboration because news production is not only an individual job but also a cooperative work among reporters, sub-editors, and desks. Traditionally, most journalists are indirectly connected to advertising or marketing, centering instead on making journalistic content. So, it will be necessary to scrutinize that media environments in news production facilitate truth in press reporting.

The aims of this paper are to examine journalists' perceptions about truth in press reporting, freedom and gate-keeping in South Korea (hereafter Korea) because truth in press reporting depends on journalists' will and philosophy. For news production, there are three main processes to journalists' jobs. Therefore, it explores four issues of journalism practice: firstly, how do journalists perceive the connection between truth in press reporting and autonomy of the news production; secondly, how free is the process of gathering news; thirdly, how free is the process of writing articles; and lastly, how free is the process of editing news.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Connection between Truth in Press Reporting and Freedom of News Production

According to Lippmann, journalistic power came from qualities of capability in coverage, contact with highly positioned professionals, and devotion to specialised standards (Dewey, 2012; Lippmann, 2008). Journalists continue to appeal to these norms to reinforce their reliability and right (Deuze, 2011; Larson, 2015, p. 442).

Journalists do much more than just deliver information. Nowadays, faced with challenges in reporting truth, due to the increase of management propaganda and the public relations business, reporters started to validate their situation as gate-keepers and suppliers of truth. What is truth? According to Pierce (2008, in Bentley 2014, p. 197), "Truth is the reality behind the facts." Moreover, Tsetsura and Kruckeberg (2017, p. 13) argue,

Truth: Accurate, complete, and unbiased information that has been gathered and verified conscientiously and competently and that is presented fairly and in good faith by those who are attempting to achieve the ideal of objectivity with complete transparency in gathering, analyzing, and presenting this information.

Journalistic truth is beyond simple correctness. It is a separating procedure that takes place between the opening narrative and the communication among the public, newsmakers and reporters. Furthermore, Laursen and Valentini (2015, p. 35) argue, "Telling the truth is not the same as giving the full picture, and not having specific agendas to push." This initial standard of journalism -its fair-minded search of truth- is eventually what sets journalism apart from all other outlines of communication (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

The function of journalism is significant because journalism is 'a central arbitrator amongst all areas' (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 6; Hallin & Briggs, 2015, p. 97). Journalism roles have been widely discussed by academics. Some academics argue that the ultimate function of news in the public division is to strengthen democracy by providing news to people, acting as a watchdog of those in power, and replicating a public sphere of free conversation (Magen, 2015, p. 248; Schlosberg, 2015, p. 230; Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). Furthermore, others include watchdog reporting, to reveal obvious corruption, and to alert the public to organisations that are excessively advantaged by policies, which bring suffering to others (Bennett & Serrin, 2005, pp. 169-188; Kogen, 2015, pp. 6-7). Brilliant journalism represents clearness, background, causality, relation, substance and correctness (Williams, 2014, p. 103). In recent views, Guerrero and Restrepo (2012, p. 41) argue, on the purposes of news and information for democracy in digital ages, media literacy shifts towards civic participation, manufacture and activism. Both journalism academics and practitioners concur that the news provides numerous critical roles in a democracy, including providing civilians with information they can utilise to talk about topics of community significance and to check the actions of those who rule them (Kogen, 2015, p. 3). Throughout these diverse arguments, journalism is a vigorous issue in events and not a simple spectator of them.

Discussions about notions of press freedom usually present a dichotomy between a "liberal" concept of press freedom and one that takes a "radical" viewpoint. The former assists press systems with little-to-no government interference, which advocates consider could negotiate the freedom of information flow and journalists' freedom. Indirectly, liberal concepts of press freedom denote a preference for diversity among information suppliers in order to create a market of ideas. Critics of the liberal idea of press freedom indicate the market's failure to deliver various viewpoints in most nations because of press commercialism and ensuing ownership concentration (Kellam & Stein, 2016, p. 42). Differently, where the press freedom is not guaranteed, "contestation" cannot happen and hence neither can democracy.

Whereas many academics see freedom of the press as fundamental to democracy (Dahl, 1998; Norris, 2000, in Kellam & Stein, 2016, p. 39), other academics maintain that factors such as political culture and organizations may overtake the media's significance (Graber, 2003; Gunther & Mughan, 2000, in Kellam & Stein, 2016, p. 39). Furthermore, according to Reese (2012, p. 70), in accepting universal news processes, it is not always supportive to separate countries into free or not free, but rather we should deem the preface of new "spaces" for civic deliberation that are made probable by international interconnectivity and communication skill. Nevertheless, superior freedom of the press is related to less corruption and more transparent state power. So, for truth in press reporting, basically all processes of media activities in news production should be freely conducted in a democracy. Sa (2009c, p. 4) argues, freedom of the press is freedom from all compulsions throughout all processes of press activities. This includes establishing a media company- news production such as gathering news, writing articles, editing news- publishing/printing and distributing. Instead, under the freedom of press journalists have internalized self-censorship in each process of news production. "Regarding news value, a new scheme of regulation should not only stop mistreatment of the self-regulation by editors, but it should also deem the power especially capital power that editors handle through their judgments about news value" (Sa, 2013b). For truth in press reporting basically all processes of news production have to be freely operating including self-censorship. So, the first research hypothesis is:

H1: Journalists perceived that truth in press reporting connects to the freedom of all processes.

If the freedom of the press is compromised at any stage of news production, there can be no guarantee that the press will report truthfully. Therefore, the first research question is how journalists think that truth in press

reporting connects to the freedom of all processes because it depends on journalists' will and philosophy.

2.2 Playing the Role of Gate-Keeping in Every Process of News Production

Next, for news production, the media especially traditional presses are fundamentally needed in the process of gate-keeping as not all daily issues can be reported on as the news has limited time and paper space. Also, news production is based on collaboration. One problem is that during the gate-keeping process truth can simply be distorted if the media conspire with power groups. Many researchers (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Windschuttle & Elliott, 1999, p. 209; Sa, 2009a) state that various factors have influenced truth in news production. A mass of factors- at personal, common, managerial, socio-institutional, and communal-scheme levels- control those gates and gate-keepers. Gate-keepers determine whether information is news to publish or delete (Larson, 2015, p. 442). The foundation of gate-keeping theory: procedures fragment into pieces of information that must pass through a range of gates (Tandoc Jr. & Peters, 2015, p. 328). What are the gates? According to Nielsen (2017, p. 83).

A focus on combinations of and interactions between primary and secondary gatekeepers incorporates new digital intermediaries into our understanding of the flow of information without losing sight of the continued importance of conventional gatekeepers.

Editors are primary gatekeepers who by filtering information and deciding what to publish influence what we usually comprehend as 'news' (Nielsen, 2017, p. 82). Though gate-keeping choices are probably made by the subjective, grounded on individual beliefs and working habits, gate-keeping applies to macro, structural measurements when choices are made with regard to financial factors (Nee, 2015, p. 80). Gate-keeping power on a structural level also is strongly interlinked with economic authority, such that grassroots customer contribution is undesirable in business managed situations for fear of losing power over the news content (p. 81). Singer (2006; 2009, 2014, in Nee, 2015, pp. 81-82), who has researched the tendencies toward and away from gate-keeping roles by newspaper editors, more recently, discovered that gate-keeping has developed a two-step procedure where editors select the news that is issued, and then consumers perform as secondary gate-keepers by determining which components to redistribute on numerous platforms. Singer calls this procedure "user-generated visibility," which possibly allocates information on a broader scale than the original gate-keepers could have achieved. However, the gate-keeping role throughout conventional editorial range is tackled by public proposition (Xu, 2013, p. 771).

Although numerous studies have investigated role notions of reporters, role performance is an underexplored area (Tandoc Jr. & Peters, 2015, p. 328). In total, journalists build information choice in the civic interest, recognising related narratives and significant tendencies from the mass of news obtainable (Bennett & Townend, 2012, p. 60). Journalists' frameworks can be controlled by managerial restraints and forces, media habits, external components, and their individual values and beliefs (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Next, editors frame the news and guide the journalistic production process (Hickerson, Moy, & Dunsmore, 2011, pp. 791-792; Skovsgaard et al., 2013, p. 36). The chance of personal performers influencing news contents is readily restricted. Instead, it is the players' capability to connect the managerial and technical surroundings in which the information source is produced that offers them the chance to contribute vigorously to news making (Grünberg & Pallas, 2012, p. 216).

Moreover, the environment of the news system plays an arbitrating role regarding information communicated but at least as significantly, a determining role relating to how to arrange that information into a story (Kogen, 2015, p. 10; Gans, 1979; Handley & Rutigliano, 2012, p. 757; Tuchman, 1978). The common hypothesis of agenda setting theory is that the more display, the better the effect. That is, if the media represent a matter and/or issue characteristics more often than other issues and/or issue attributes, the spectators will recognize it(or them) as more significant (Lee, 2010, p. 764; McCombs, 2004). Baker (2007, p. 37) stresses how information narratives can be twisted by inside and outside factors: "The danger is that governmental or powerful private groups may be able and willing to use economic leverage over one portion of a conglomerate to induce its media 'division' to mute critical reporting." The more diversified the conglomerate is, the more diverse opportunities exist to exert pressure on its various businesses.

In addition, global and local performers struggle to manage the complexity of news reporting (Paterson, Andresen, & Hoxha, 2012, p. 117). One of the major significant managerial factors is whether the media is financed by the country or dependent on commercial incomes (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012, p. 607). News marketplace manufactures, whether it is a newspaper, a magazine, a broadcast, or internet platform. According to Sa (2009a) amongst the three influential factors such as internal, external and media related laws/policies/ethics, journalists were least positive about the possibility of press freedom in relation to internal factors. They were

most positive about the possibility of press freedom in relation to media related laws/policies/ethics. Journalists have internalized self-censorship in each process of news production. For news production, there are three main processes to journalists' jobs. The first process is the part of gathering news (external dealings/external factors), which involves dealing with issues mainly outside media companies (Sa, 2013b, p. 412). The process of writing articles is the next step of gathering news in news production. This writing stage (external and internal dealings/external and internal factors) usually is dealing with issues mainly outside media companies and with senior staff within media companies (p. 414). Editing news is the final process of journalists' activities in news production. The procedure of editing news (internal dealings/internal factors) is mainly dealing with senior staff within media companies (p. 415). Therefore, any narrative aired or published is possibly not just simple reporting of truth. So, the second research hypothesis is:

H2: The press plays a gate-keeping role in every process of news production, so the first activity of journalists, gathering news is the freest process and editing news as the last process is the least free part.

For the second hypothesis, research questions posed are: firstly, how free is the process of gathering news?; secondly, how free is the process of writing articles?; and thirdly, how free is the process of editing news? I will outline the reasons why these steps are considered the major processes related to journalists' jobs for news production.

3. Methodology

This study is an attempt to reveal and to probe the views that truth in press reporting connects to the freedom of all processes because the presses especially traditional media play a gate-keeping role through the hierarchy structure in every process of news production. Also, journalists have internalized self-censorship in each process of news production.

3.1 Study Survey

For exploring the relation between truth in press reporting and the media's gate-keeping role in every process of news production, the practical data comprise the survey data collected from journalism practitioners in Korea. The survey focused on Korean news journalists only in press companies nationally such as daily newspapers, broadcasting, news agencies and internet news media. The target group for the survey includes a range of journalists working in the news section. They are journalists in editorial sections. The survey was based on an in-depth structured survey and made up of a mix of closed and open-ended questions. Qualitative and quantitative ways were integrated into the study surveys to reinforce the research; both techniques complemented the other's limitations.

The survey process took about three months from 17 March to 13 June 2011. Survey questionnaires were emailed by the researcher to journalists almost every week, and the journalists sent the completed surveys back by email to the researcher as well. However, the ratio of response is difficult to calculate because the number of email failures emerged constantly while the reminder emails were sent from the first time to the last time. Also, there were no confirmation emails exchanged between the researcher and the journalists, so the total number of journalists who actually received the survey and opened the questionnaires is not known. The email addresses of the journalists were collected by the researcher from the news people of the online site in each media company and the membership database of Korean press companies, which are available through the Korea Press Foundation (KPF)'s online service. However, I am not sure that the email addresses are updated recent addresses. Also, many journalists ignored the email surveys; this lack of response is consistent with previous research that I have conducted. Those who did not respond continued to not respond to the further ten reminder emails sent until June 13, 2011.

Ultimately, in forty-five different press companies seventy-three respondents (twenty-one from Seoul and fifty-two from provincial areas) completed survey questions and re-sent them to the researcher. Of the diverse media companies represented, fifteen were in Seoul and thirty were local areas. Regarding research ethics in the survey, participants were informed by the researcher through "Information of Participants," which was sent to journalists along with survey questionnaires to explain the requirements for research conduct; it is based on guidelines from the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

3.2 Analysis

The analysis assumes that truth in press reporting connects to the freedom of all processes in news production. Journalists were asked to give information regarding nine categories including job sections, holding positions, kinds of media, service location, gender, age group, service duration, qualifications and major of highest degree. Most survey respondents gave diverse reasons for their selections, in qualitative statements which were classified

by the researcher. The qualitative information of respondents was translated by the researcher from Korean into English.

4. Findings

4.1 Connection Between Truth in Press Reporting and Freedom of News Production

For the study, reporters were asked about the connection between truth in press reporting and freedom of the news production process. Through the journalists' survey for this paper, 98.7% of the participants agreed, selecting "absolutely connect" (46.6%) and "connect partially" (52.1%). Only one participant said, "not connect." The results show that freedom in news production is absolutely important for delivering truth by the press.

4.1.1 Journalists Responded Connection Between Truth in Press Reporting and Freedom of News Production

Journalists were asked to give information regarding nine categories. There were no particular features in the proportion ratios of the participants but interesting variations in percentage ratios partially happened. First, concerning holding position, journalists were two times more ready to choose "connect partially" than editors; a much higher proportion of editors selected "absolutely connect." However, as a higher percentage of reporters participated in the survey than editors, these results show that the editors (higher position) were more strongly persuaded than the reporters (lower position) to mention a connection between truth in press reporting and freedom of the news production. Further, amongst the journalists, who studied Media/Communication and those who studied Economics/Business as their major in the highest degree at university, those who studied the former responded in greater numbers. However, the ratios were the same for both groups who selected "absolutely connect." This shows that journalists who studied Economics/Business more strongly inclined to "absolutely connect" than journalists who studied Media/Communication.

4.1.2 Reasons for Reporters' Choice That Truth Reporting Connects to Freedom of the News Production

98.7% of the respondents answered that truth in press reporting connects to freedom of the news production process, offering diverse reasons in qualitative comments (78.1%). First, 20.6% of the journalists stressed that various factors influence truth during news production, so freedom of the news production is important. Otherwise, truth can be easily distorted. Second, 17.8% of the participants thought that freedom of the news production is a basic premise of reporting the truth, if freedom of the news production is not guaranteed, truth can be easily distorted. Third, truth in press reporting is possibly completed by the balance of freedom and responsibility because news production is not only an individual job but also a cooperative work. That is, processes for news production involve gate-keeping.

4.2 How Free Is the Process of Gathering News?

In the survey, reporters were questioned, during media activities, how free is the process of gathering news. 93.2% of the respondents selected "free," which included "absolutely free" (43.8%) and "partially free" (49.3%). 4.1% of the participants selected "moderate." However, 1.4% answered, "mostly not free" in gathering news. 1.4% chose "other." These results mean that most Korean participants for this study enjoy freedom in the process of gathering news.

4.2.1 Respondents Who Chose "Free" in Gathering News

Among those who chose "free" in the process of gathering news, some interesting differences in percentage ratios partly occurred. First, regarding position, a greater percentage of higher editors selected "absolutely free" than did reporters. However, a much higher percentage of reporters responded to the survey than editors. These findings indicate that the editors (higher position) were more strongly inclined than the reporters (lower position) to cite "absolutely free" in gathering news. Further, amongst the journalists, who studied Media/Communication and those who studied Politics/Administration and Planning as their major in the highest degree at university, those who studied the former responded in greater numbers. However, a lower percentage of Media/Communication than the latter groups chose "absolutely free." This indicates that journalists who studied Politics/Administration and Planning more strongly inclined to select "absolutely free" than journalists who studied Media/Communication.

4.2.2 The Reasons Why the Journalists Chose "Free" or "Not Free" in Gathering News

93.2% of the respondents selected "free" in gathering news. 61.7% of the participants gave diverse reasons for their selection. First, 27.4% of the journalists responded that they were free in the process of gathering news. Second, 15.1% of the participants said that they had directions by the editor or owner, so, they sometimes had conflicts regarding news values. On the other hand, news production is not only an individual job but also a cooperative work therefore, the process for news production involves gate-keeping. Third, 6.9% of the

respondents stated that they had difficulties in accessing news sources especially public organisations because of the system of press room.

4.3 How Free Is the Process of Writing Articles?

When the reporters were asked how free is the process of writing articles, 89.1% of the participants selected "free," which included "absolutely free"(41.1%) and "partially free"(48%). A small number of the journalists chose "moderate" (4.1%). However, 5.5% of the respondents answered they were "mostly not free." One respondent selected "other" as saying "I was sacked." Also, participants were asked "During the last year, were you ever under any pressure in the process of writing articles, which were against your beliefs as a journalist?" 74% of the respondents uttered they did not have any pressure (Free) in writing articles during 2010. However, 12.3% of the journalists argued that the articles were forced on them, and 9.6% selected "Yes but refused." 4.1% of the participants chose "other."

4.3.1 Journalists' Selections about Press Freedom in Writing Articles

To analyse freedom in the process of writing articles, first, regarding journalist positions, higher editors chose "absolutely free" than reporters. However, as there were a lower percentage of editors participated in the survey than the reporters, these specify that the reporters were less strongly inclined than the editors to refer to "absolutely free" in writing articles. The result shows that journalists in higher positions were more likely to feel free in writing articles. Next, amongst the respondents, who studied Media/Communication, and Language and Literature as their major in the highest degree at university, those who studied the former responded in greater numbers. Yet, a much higher proportion of latter groups chose "absolutely free." This designates that journalists who studied Language and Literature more strongly inclined to "absolutely free" than reporters who studied Media/Communication.

4.3.2 The Reasons Why the Journalists Chose "Free" or "Not Free" in Writing Articles

61.7% of the survey respondents provided qualitative answers when choosing "free," "moderate" or "not free" in writing articles. Journalists' reasons were diverse. First, 52.1% of the reporters responded that they were free in the process of writing articles. However, they answered that after writing, desks amended the articles in the editing process. 13.7% of the participants admitted that they should deem what was to the company's benefit. 6.9% of the journalists also stated that they must consider the company's philosophy and advertisers. Furthermore, diverse pressures during writing articles were forced by power groups.

4.3.3 Journalists Who Had Pressures in the Process of Writing Articles

21.9% of the reporters had pressure, or experienced "not free" in writing articles. This figure was comprised of 12.3% of the respondents who had pressure and 9.6% who selected "Yes but refused."

4.4 How Free Is the Process of Editing News?

When journalists were asked how free is the process of editing news, 60.3% of the reporters answered they enjoyed freedom. This number contained "absolutely free" (16.4%) and "partially free" (43.8%). 13.7% of the journalists selected "moderate." However, 16.4% of the reporters said they did not enjoy freedom in editing news, which included "mostly not free" (15.1%) and "absolutely not free" (1.4%). The results show that freedom in the editing process was largely less than it was for the processes of gathering news and writing articles. This means that managing groups had intensively played gate-keeping roles. Also, 6.9% chose "other," saying we were not the section of sub-editor, and I was sacked.

4.4.1 Journalists' Selections about Press Freedom in Editing News

Regarding the freedom of editing news, first, concerning the section in which the respondents worked, the same percent of the journalists in the business section and editorial writers felt free. However, a lower proportion of editorial writers responded to the survey, these show that the editorial writers were more strongly inclined than the business section to feel free in editing news. Next, with regards to the journalists' position, interestingly the higher positioned journalists (managing editors and editors) believed they were freer than did less lower positioned reporters (deputy editors and reporters). These outcomes indicate that those in diverse positions have different awareness of freedom in the process of editing news.

4.4.2 The Reasons Why the Journalists Chose "Free" or "Not Free" in Editing News

60.3% of the respondents gave qualitatively many reasons for their selections in editing news. First, 28.8% of the respondents responded that they have had free in the process of editing news. Also, news production is not only an individual job but also a cooperative work. Even though the editing activity belongs to desks and the section of sub-editorial that also should be respected. Second, 13.7% of the journalists said that the editing activity

belongs to desks and the section of sub-editorial, so they have felt "not free." They were understood to be directives or interruptions by desks or seniors. This is an interesting finding because the same reasons are differently interpreted by journalists. 9.6% of the respondents pointed out that in the system of editorials, their companies had 'directions' or 'intentions' that editors needed to abide by.

5. Discussion

5.1 Connection between Truth in Press Reporting and Freedom of News Production

The press plays a determining role in the arrangement of information. Moreover, the media tend to serve power groups which politically control and financially support the media. The power groups systematically set important agenda and policies. They also have advantageous positions from which to decide media policies and control the media. Generally, they select media personnel who have the same opinions as themselves. Furthermore, according to Herman and Chomsky (2002), editors and journalists especially managing groups are forced to internalise primarily the standards of news values which must concur with the systems and policies of power groups. A serious issue is that the press cannot completely be independent from political systems and financial supporters.

News reporting by the press connects to freedom. As Sa (2009c, p. 4) argues, for there to be truth in press reporting, all processes of press activities should be freely conducted. Otherwise, during the processes of news making, information can be easily influenced or distorted by many factors (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Windschuttle & Elliott, 1999, p. 209), if the press conspires with power groups. This is confirmed by the journalists' survey for this study in Korea: 98.7% of the respondents said quantitatively that truth in press reporting connects to freedom of the news production process as they selected "absolutely connect" (46.6%) and "connect partially" (52.1%). As confirmed above, all respondents except one thought that freedom of the news production process connects to truth in press reporting.

They also gave qualitatively diverse reasons which mainly fell into three categories. Firstly, freedom is a basic premise for reporting truth. Numerous participants thought that freedom of the news production is a basic premise of reporting the truth, if freedom of the news production is not guaranteed, truth can be easily distorted. Also, one journalist said, "If one of three processes has been a problem, truth can be distorted. Therefore, all processes of news production must be freed for truth in press reporting" (No. 15) (Note 1); Secondly, balanced freedom and cooperative work style contribute to reporting of truth. Truth in press reporting is possibly achieved by the balance of freedom and responsibility because news production is not only an individual job but also a cooperative work among reporters, sub-editors, and desks. This means processes for news production involve gate-keeping. Also, one participant explained, "News is produced by cooperative works of reporters, desks and sub-editors. It is not an event occurrence but the result of production processes, so the freedom of processes absolutely influence truth in press reporting" (No. 8). Thirdly, truth reporting is affected by factors of influence. Many journalists stressed that various factors influence truth during news production. A reporter stated, "In considering the current situation that press companies are not completely free from capital pressure, if the freedom of processes in news production is restricted, truth in press reporting is almost impossible" (No. 45). As explored above, truth in press reporting connects to the freedom of all processes in news production. Therefore, the first research hypothesis is confirmed by journalists in Korea.

5.2 Playing the Role of Gate-Keeping in Every Process of News Production

As discussed in the previous section, the freedom of all processes in news production is absolutely connected to deliver truth by the press. However, for news production media, especially traditional media, are needed in a gate-keeping role because not all daily issues can be delivered by the press as news has limited time and paper space. Also, news production is based on collaboration. Therefore, the journalists' role is very important and deeply connects to truth in press reporting. During news production the press remains a dominant gate-keeper of news values and news standards. Even though it is a contentious issue, gate-keeping has been performed with positive and negative results. Many scholars (Lippmann, 1995; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014; Goldstein, 2007; Bennett & Townend, 2012) refer to the dilemma of the press and limitations of journalists to deliver news. The branding of the news group, the groups' political ideas, and the persons within those groups all play gate-keeping roles with regard to information, but, at least as significantly, a determining role with respect to how to arrange that information into a story. A journalist's plan is almost certainly controlled by managerial directs and compels, media routines, outside factors, and their own values and principles (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978; Hickerson, Moy, & Dunsmore, 2011, p. 790). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007, p. 231) stress the dilemma as independent messengers to produce news, arguing, "Innumerable hurdles make it difficult to produce news that is accurate, fair, balanced, citizen focused, independent minded, and courageous." Therefore, the media play

gate-keeping roles in every process of news production. This is also confirmed in Korea.

In the Korean journalists' survey for this study, degrees of freedom steadily decrease when journalists were working from the first process of news production to the next step. Amongst the journalists' major jobs, the most free aspect was gathering news (93.2%) as the first step- the next most free aspect is the second process of writing articles (89.1%)- and editing news is the last part of news production and was recorded as the least free aspect (60.3%). Compared to the processes of gathering news and writing articles, the degree of freedom in the editing process is remarkably decreased. These results indicate that journalists internalise self-censorship in each process of news production, managerial groups especially are playing the role of gate-keeping during news production because the process of editing news is mostly dealing with senior staff inside press companies (Sa, 2013b, p. 415). Also, it is qualitatively demonstrated by the journalists' survey for this study: a journalist explained, "Gate-keeping is mostly done by editorial meeting that is different from the process of gathering information. Therefore, articles are often written far from the will of gathering news" (No. 50); and a participant said, "Media practitioners admit some degree of order and obedience. Individual reporters can sufficiently gather information which but through a process can be tuned by company's policy, influence of advertisers, owner's decision" (No. 41).

Compared to editing news, many reporters were freer in the processes of gathering information and writing articles. However, they answered that after writing, desks amended the articles in the editing process. As confirmed in the results of journalists' survey, the degrees of freedom steadily decrease when journalists were working from the first process of news production to the next step, as gathering news was the freest process and editing news especially was the least free part. Therefore, the second research hypothesis is supported by the numerous Korean journalists.

5.3 Distorting Truth in the Journalism Practice of Korea

It is a long and complex process for truth in press reporting to reach the public. If any one of the processes during news production is not guaranteed freedom, truth cannot be published in public. Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995, in Lee & Cheng, 2012, pp. 82-83) remind us that confidence about truth is frequently blurred and is controlled by viewpoint, comprehensiveness of information, explanation, and awareness. Also, Weaver and Wilnat (2012) argue that journalistic culture has evolved contrarily in diverse countries, therefore academics should take into consideration the cultural traditions and historical experiences as well as political values. Moreover, media ethics seeking for truth is basically required. Lots of prominent ethical matters in civic relations focus on truth as an ethical necessity. According to many researchers (Jones, 2009; Lee & Cheng, 2012, pp. 82-83; Mortensen, 2014, p. 21; Sa, 2016b), numerous ethical issues concern truth directly and indirectly, as in subjects concerning correctness, preservation of information client privacy, clash of interests, media organisation, transparency, the Internet, and evasion of harm. The aim of ethical behavior of journalists is to achieve free and independent journalism. Then the press can play a watchdog role in a society. The core value of journalists' ethics is to seek the truth (Kang, 2004). However, in Korea many media owners and journalists have ethical problems (Chang, 2001; Kim, 2004; Sa, 2016b). Furthermore, Ok-Jo Kim (2004, pp. 279-280) has pointed out the general lack of awareness about ethical issues in Korea where greater emphasis is given to producing skilled, successful and knowledgeable graduates rather than ethical ones. According to Chang (2001), many Korean media owners are lacking in ethical and professional credibility, if their behavior in controlling media content is ethically compromised it can threaten not only individuals but also national development. This is easily seen in the journalism practice of Korea.

Complex above situations have been demonstrated in the journalism practice of Korea. Bang (2014, p. 14) and Pae·Ha·Lee (2014, p. 419) claim, due to a disregard for safety issues and human life to maximise profits in Korean society under capitalism, big disasters have continuously occurred for many years such as the Sinking of Seohae ferry in 1993, the Collapse of Sampoong department store in 1995, the Daegu subway fire in 2003, and the Sewol ferry disaster in 2014. One recent example is the case of the Sewol ferry disaster in Korea. On April 16, 2014, the Sewol ferry disaster, one of the Korea's worst maritime disasters which killed 304 people, occurred on the nation's southwestern coast. Many victims were high school students, which prompted widespread criticism of Korea's inadequate safety standards and botched rescue efforts. Particularly, the Sewol ferry disaster highlights the corruption and cronyism in Korean society. It was attributed to the ship owner's corrupt ties with safety regulators and government officials, which led to the total disregard of safety measures to maximise profits from the ferry service.

Regarding the press reporting, the Sewol ferry disaster is a good example of the collusion of external and internal factors (the state and media managing groups) undermining media ethics and destroying journalism through

distorting truth. This disaster completely needed the media to play a meticulous role because it was a social disaster, caused by disregard for the government system of safety management for ferry service and ship operation, and botched rescue efforts, rather than a general natural disaster (Kim, 2014a). However, the Korean media had delivered subsequent distorting news and misinformation, also an inadequate manner of reporting attitudes and interviews. In this situation, KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) as the state-run network had been controversially criticised because KBS is the main public media for reporting disasters but it was not doing so. Therefore, the Korean people's criticism to KBS was further enkindled when the chief managing editor of the KBS news section (Si-Gon Kim) disclosed that the director of KBS (Hwan-Young Gil) had forced into the airing of news stories that they were reported from pro-government viewpoints (Lee & Song, 2014, p. 8). According to the KBS branch of the Journalists Association of Korea (JAK), "Gil interfered with the lineup of the network's primetime evening news four times from May 1 to 8, 2014, with one of these instances involving the coverage of the Sewol ferry disaster. He allegedly barred criticism of the Coast Guard and its rescue efforts in the sinking" (Lee, 2014). Furthermore, Si-Gon Kim asserted, "CheongWaDae (the official residence and workplace of the President) had controlled KBS through Gil" because "ranking officials from CheongWaDae frequently called him to stop airing reports critical of the Geun-Hye Park administration" (Jung, 2014). Since Si-Gon Kim's disclosure of the interruption, KBS staff, opposition lawmakers and liberal civic groups demanded the resignation of Gil because of his pro-government stance. The conflict between reporters and the managing group at KBS was interfering with its primetime news. On May 20, 2014, the KBS Nine O'clock News, the broadcaster's main news program, was cut to 20 minutes, one third of its normal running time because of the staff strike against the company director Gil, who was accused of yielding to obvious government interference in the public broadcasting coverage (Kwon, 2014).

Korean media received great criticism from the Korean people because of distorting truth and misinformation. For example, regarding the reporting of the Sewol ferry disaster, on April 16, 2014, 11:01am MBC (Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation) as one of main public broadcasters firstly reported that all students had been rescued. However, the MBC reporters of Mokpo branch office called 4 times to the Seoul MBC (headquarters) about that the "rescue of all" was wrong and many of the people were still on the sinking ferry. However, this information of Mokpo branch office was disregarded by the managing group at the Seoul MBC that continuously released this wrong information "rescue of all" 8 times to the Korean people nationally during one and half hours (MBC, 2017). In addition, victims' families provided the materials of Sewol ferry disaster such as video to MBC but those could not be delivered by the MBC because of the directives of the managing group.

Furthermore, Gans (1979, pp. 176-181) and Graves (2015, p. 114) state, one strong factor for the dislike of conventional journalism is competitive pressure, both professional and commercial. This is also demonstrated in the journalism practice of Korea, and especially, regarding the reporting of the Sewol ferry disaster in 2014. Korean media exacerbated the grief of the victims and their families due to competition to be the first to break stories (Bang, 2014; Cho, 2014; Pae, Ha, & Lee, 2014, p. 419). On April 16, 2014, 11:01am MBC reported that all students had been rescued. Then other media YTN (11:03am), Channel-A (11:03am), News-Y (11:06am), and TV-Chosun (11: 06 am) followed the "rescue of all students" story. Korean media reported subsequent wrong information because of the breaking news competition (Yoo, 2014). As a result, Korean journalists have received great criticism being called 'Giregi' (Korean word for the mixture of journalist and rubbish) and also they were prevented approaching the scene of the disaster by victims' families (Kang, 2014, p. 198; Kim, 2014b; Lee & Song, 2014).

Soon after the 'Sewol ferry disaster' many journalists and media in Korea who had shied away from the victims apologised for their misinformation and inadequate manner of reporting attitudes and interviews. Regarding the reports of the 'Sewol ferry disaster,' 40 reporters and cameramen at KBS also voluntarily submitted a repentant note confessing their lack of professionalism. One journalist confessed, "We made up reports without visiting the disaster site in Jindo. We feared families of victims might beat us out of angst, since journalists rushing headlong to make our reports exclusive were once blamed by the public" (Ko, 2014). Media articles regarding the Sewol ferry disaster were over flowing but these rarely covered the issues such that Korean people could solve questions or problems. With ever-rising criticism of the Korean media, the Korea Broadcasting Journalist Association and the JAK announced quickly their intention to improve reporting behaviors (Kim, 2014). In addition, until today truth such as why did this disaster happen or who was an original owner of this Sewol ferry has not been disclosed.

6. Conclusions

This research explored journalists' perceptions about truth in press reporting, freedom and gate-keeping. A theory test and an evaluation of practical data in Korean journalism result in the following findings: firstly, all

participants except one thought that truth in press reporting connects to freedom of the news production process, so H1 is confirmed; next, the press played gate-keeping roles in every process of news production. Among journalists' main activities in news production, the process of gathering news was the freest process. Journalists felt great stress during the writing of articles. The last process of editing news was corroborated as the least free process. Degrees of freedom steadily decrease when journalists were working from the first process of news production to the next step. Therefore, H2 also is demonstrated by the numerous Korean journalists.

Even though the gate-keeping role is a contentious issue as having positive and negative points, it is an unavoidable process in news production because this job is based on collaboration. All daily issues cannot be delivered by the press as news because of limited time and paper space. Also, journalists accept some degree of collaborative works for news production. Some journalists understood gate-keeping as directives or interruptions by desks or seniors but some reporters did not feel that. This is an interesting finding because the same reasons are differently interpreted by journalists. Moreover, many reporters answered that the editing activity belongs to desks and the sub-editorial section; therefore, their autonomy is based on collaboration. Also, journalists continuously conducted self-censorship. A prominent result for this paper was that the freedom of editing news was remarkably less than the freedom of gathering news and writing articles. This indicates that during news production, managing groups have powerfully played gate-keeping roles. However, if any of the processes in news production is not guaranteed freedom, truth can easily be distorted. Also, for truth in press reporting not only is freedom of the news production process essential but also media ethics. Without media ethics truth cannot be published to the public such as the case of Sewol ferry disaster in Korea.

Acknowledgements

References

Baker, C. E. (2007). *Media Concentration and Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bang, M. S. (2014). Problems and Lessons from the Report of the Sewol Ferry Disaster. *Kwanhun Journal, 131*(Summer), 13-26.

Bennett, D., & Townend, J. (2012). The Scandal of Selective Reporting. *British Journalism Review, 23*(2), 60-66. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956474812450672

Bennett, W. L., & Serrin, W. (2005). The Watchdog Role. In G. Overholser, & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Press* (pp. 169-188). Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

Benson, R., & Neveu, E. (Eds.). (2005). *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bentley, C. (2014). U.S. Citizen Journalism and Alternative Online News Sites. In P. J. Anderson, G. Ogola, & M. Williams (Eds.), *The Future of Quality News Journalism* (pp. 184-201). New York: Routledge.

Chang, H. S. (2001). The Right of Editorial Section should be Separated from the Right of Management. *Kwanhun Journal, 78*(Spring), 72-78.

Cho, S. H. (2014, July 4). Problematic Reports 11 Items after the Broadcast of the Sewol Ferry Disaster. *Korea Broadcasting Journalist, 19*(7-8), 16-19.

Deuze, M. (2011). What is Journalism? In D. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Cultural Meanings of News* (pp. 17-32). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Dewey, J. (2012). *The Public and its Problems*. Pennsylvania: The Penn State University Press.

Dimitrova, D. V., & Strömbäck, J. (2012). Election News in Sweden and the United States. *Journalism, 13*(5), 604-619. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911431546

Gans, H. J. (1979). *Deciding What's News*. New York: Vintage Books.

Goldstein, T. (2007). *Journalism and Truth.* America: North Western University Press.

Graves, L. (2014). Blogging Back then. *Journalism, 16*(1), 99-118. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884914545740

Grünberg, J., & Pallas, J. (2012). Beyond the News Desk-the Embeddedness of Business News. *Media, Culture & Society, 35*(2), 216-233. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443712469138

Guerrero, M. A., & Restrepo, M. L. (2012). Media Literate "Prodiences." In P. Mihailidis (Ed.), *News Literacy* (pp. 41-62). New York: Peter Lang.

Hallin, D. C., & Briggs, C. L. (2014). Transcending the Medical/Media Opposition in Research on News Coverage of Health and Medicine. *Media, Culture & Society, 37*(1), 85-100. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443714549090

Handley, R. L., & Rutigliano, L. (2012). Journalistic Field Wars. *Media, Culture & Society, 34*(6), 744-760. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443712449500

Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (2002). *Manufacturing Consent*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Hickerson, A. A., Moy, P., & Dunsmore, K. (2011). Revisiting Abu Ghraib. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 88*(4), 789-806. https://doi.org/10.1177/107769901108800407

Jones, A. S. (2009). *Losing the News*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jung, M. H. (2014, May 18). KBS Lurches Deeper into Chaos. *The Korea Times*. Retrieved from http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2014/05/113_157406.html

Kang, J. S. (2014). Toward a Changing of Media Education Paradigm. *Communication Theories, 10*(3), 195-221.

Kang, M. K. (2004). Media War and the Crisis of Journalism Practices. *Journal of Korean Society for Journalism and Communication Studies, 48*(5), 319-348.

Kellam, M., & Stein, E. A. (2015). Silencing Critics. *Comparative Political Studies, 49*(1), 36-77. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414015592644

Kim, J.-W. (2004). *Media Ethics in the Global Age*. Seoul Korea: Communication Books.

Kim, K. H. (2014, May 9). The Sewol Ferry Disaster and Disaster Reports. *Newspaper & Broadcasting*, (521), 6-9.

Kim, K. S. (2014a, July 3). The Role of the Media to Prevent 'Social Disaster', In-depth Investigative Reporting. *Korea Broadcasting Journalist, 19*(7-8), 28-31.

Kim, K. S. (2014b). Current Situation and Problem of Disaster Broadcasting Regarding the 4-16 Sewol Ferry Disaster. *The Report of Korea Communications Standards Commission, 9*(2), 12-24.

Kim, O. J. (2004). *Media Ethics* (Reviewed.). Seoul: Communication Books.

Kim, R. (2017, March 23). Sewol Raised as Park Geun-Hye Sinks. *The Korea Times*. Retrieved from http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2017/03/113_226227.html

Ko, D. H. (2014, May 8). KBS Reporters "We Shied Away from Angry Sewol Victims". *The Korea Times*. Retrieved from http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2014/05/113_156831.html

Kogen, L. (2014). Not up for Debate. *The International Communication Gazette, 77*(1), 3-23. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048514556973

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2007). *The Elements of Journalism.* New York: Three Rivers.

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). *The Elements of Journalism*. New York: Three Rivers.

Kwon, M. Y. (2014, May 21). KBS Dispute Clips News. *The Korea Times*. Retrieved from http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/culture/2014/05/135_157632.html

Larson, C. (2015). Live Publishing. *Media, Culture & Society, 37*(3), 440-459. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443714567016

Laursen, B., & Valentini, C. (2014). Mediatisation and Government Communication. *The International Journal of Press/Politics, 20*(1), 26-44. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161214556513

Lee, C. (2014, May 20). Reporters' Strike Cuts KBS Primetime News. *The Korea Herald.* Retrieved from http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140520000938

Lee, G. H. (2010). Who Let Priming Out? *The International Communication Gazette, 72*(8), 759-776. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048510380814

Lee, S. H., & Song, G. (2014). Inter-media Agenda-Setting between Social Media and Broadcasting News. *Journal of Korean Society for Journalism & Communication Studies, 58*(6), 7-39.

Lee, S. T., & Cheng, I. H. (2012). Ethics Management in Public Relations. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 27*(2), 80-96. https:// doi.org/10.1080/08900523.2012.694317

Lippmann, W., & Roazen, P. (Ed.). (1995). *Liberty and the News.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Lippmann, W., & Roazen, P. (Ed.). (2008). *Liberty and the News*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Magen, C. (2014). Media Strategies and Manipulations of Intelligence Services. *The International Journal of Press/Politics, 20*(2), 247-265. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161214556514

MBC. (2017, December 12). *MBC's Downfall, the Record of Seven Years*. [PD Notepad]. Seoul: MBC.

McCombs, M. E. (2004). *Setting the Agenda*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Mortensen, T. (2014). Comparing the Ethics of Citizen Photojournalists and Professional Photojournalists. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 29*, 19-37. https://doi.org/10.1080/08900523.2014.863125

Nee, R. C. (2015). Gatekeeping the 2012 Olympic Games. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 92*(1), 77-98. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699014560517

Nielsen, R. K. (2017). News Media, Search Engines and Social Networking Sites as Varieties of Online Gatekeepers. In *Varieties of Online Gatekeepers* (pp. 81-96). Oxon/New York: Routledge.

Pae, J. K., Ha, E. H., & Lee, M. N. (2014). Experiencing the Traumatic Event of Sewol Ferry for Journalists. *Journal of Korean Society for Journalism & Communication Studies, 58*(5), 417-461.

Paterson, C., Andresen, K., & Hoxha, A. (2011). The Manufacture of an International News Event. *Journalism 13*(1), 103-120. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911400846

Paterson, C., Andresen, K., & Hoxha, A. (2012). Global News Literacy. In P. Mihailidis (Ed.), *News Literacy* (pp. 63-80). New York: Peter Lang.

Sa, E. S. (2009a). Factors Influencing Freedom of the Press in South Korea. *Asian Social Science, 5*(3), 3-24. https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v5n3p3

Sa, E. S. (2009b). Development of Press Freedom in South Korea since Japanese Colonial Rule. *Asian Culture and History, 1*(2), 3-17. https://doi.org/10.5539/ach.v1n2p3

Sa, E. S. (2013). The Process of News Production and Journalist Autonomy in Practice. *Pensee, 75*(10), 403-421.

Sa, E. S. (2016). Truth in Reporting by the Media and Media Ethics. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Review, 2*(10), 16-32.

Schlosberg, J. (2015). End of Story. *The International Journal of Press/Politics, 20*(2), 228-246. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161214560267

Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the Message* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four Theories of the Press.* Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Skovsgaard, M., Albæk, E., Bro, P., & de Vreese, C. (2012). A Reality Check. *Journalism, 14*(1), 22-42. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884912442286

Tandoc Jr, E. C., & Peters, J. (2014). One Journalist, Two Roles. *Journalism, 16*(3), 324-340. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884913520199

Tsetsura, K., & Kruckeberg, D. (2017). *Transparency, Public Relations, and the Mass Media*. New York: Routledge.

Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making News*. New York: Free Press.

Weaver, D. H., & Wilnat, L. (Eds.) (2012). *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*. New York: Routledge.

Williams, M. (2014). Quality Journalism in the UK, in Print and Online. In P. J. Anderson, G. Ogola, & M. Williams (Eds.), *The Future of Quality News Journalism* (pp. 103-126). New York: Routledge.

Windschuttle, K., & Elliott, E. (1999). *Writing, Researching, Communicating* (3rd ed.). Sydney: McGraw-Hill.

Xu, Q. (2013). Social Recommendation, Source Credibility, and Recency. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 90*(4), 757-775. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699013503158

Yoo, S. A. (2014, May 21). The Sewol Ferry 'Rescue of All Students' the First Report of Misinformation was broadcast by MBC Why? *Ohmynews*. Retrieved from http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0001994002

Note

Note 1. This number means the order of reporters who completed study questions and re-sent them to the researcher.

Copyrights