

Impediments to Journalistic Ethics: How Taiwan's Media Market Obstructs News Professional Practice

H. Denis Wu and Cheryl Ann Lambert

*College of Communication
Boston University*

Journalistic ethics becomes an elusive concept in Taiwan's overcrowded and highly competitive media environment, even though its press system has been regarded as one of the freest in Asia. To explore the lived experiences of media professionals in the island nation, in-depth interviews with 20 current and former media professionals were conducted. Study findings indicate that external, internal, and market forces obstruct the ethical practice expected of journalists. This study examines the alienation and powerlessness of individual reporters facing the structural and systemic impediments, and also impediments to Taiwan journalistic standards.

The threat to journalistic freedom and practice has been a constant concern in human history, and the usual suspects often come from political arenas (Schudson, 2002). This was precisely the rationale of the First Amendment in the United States to guarantee freedom of the press from government control. Multiple levels of government, for example, can exert influence on the angle, frame, or selection of information in news stories that media professionals pursue (Entman, 2004; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). One would naturally expect greater interference of journalism in authoritarian countries where the ideal of democracy is not embraced and criticism of governmental activities is seen as a threat to existing regimes (Hachten & Scotton, 2011). The media are less likely to suffer interference from outside interests in countries where press freedom is a guaranteed right and governmental intervention is illegal. However, this is not always the case.

As indicated in the 2014 report of Freedom House, a U.S.-based nonprofit organization that analyzes the conditions for potential violations of press freedom (Han et al., 2011), Taiwan journalistic ethics were threatened by private owners with political connections and vested interests who "altered editorial lines or dismissed key staff after acquiring previously independent outlets" (Karlekar & Dunham 2014, p. 1). Evidence of a lack of diversified discourse and evenhanded management in Taiwanese media also emerged during a *Washington Post* interview with Tsai Eng-Meng, a billionaire owner of Chinese enterprises and multiple media properties in Taiwan. When Tsai was asked about firing an editor who had published an article criticizing China's leading negotiator on future Taiwan reunification, he said journalists "need to think carefully before they write" and avoid "insults that cause offense" (Higgins, 2012).

Manuscript submitted December 2, 2014; revision accepted July 2, 2015.

Correspondence should be sent to H. Denis Wu, 640 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, USA. E-mail: hdw@bu.edu

Press freedom in Taiwan had been nonexistent for decades due to martial law imposed by the Nationalist regime since the end of World War II. The Nationalist authorities—retreated from China—aimed at using Taiwan as a base to fight against the Communists across the Taiwan Straits, thus implementing authoritarian rules on the island during the period of 1949–1987. The ban on press freedom and political parties in Taiwan was lifted by the then-ruling Nationalist Party (KMT) in 1987 (Huang, 2009) in the wake of mass protests. The following two decades have witnessed varied levels of press freedom permitted to media practitioners. The ethical principles of Taiwanese journalists, based on the document of the Association of Taiwan Journalists (ATJ), are similar to what one would find in any Western free press system.¹ Two of the five ATJ primary missions are specifically focused on protection of sound media practice and of press freedom in Taiwan.

Despite the protections, recent evidence suggests that Taiwan media professionals continue to experience obstructions to their ethical practice from external, internal, and market forces. These market-driven impediments have not been adequately discussed in the communication literature. The compromised practices of Taiwanese journalists have significantly violated ethics principles of the media, particularly *autonomy* of professionals and also generating no *harm* to the society (Plaisance, 2009). The significance of this study lies in revealing the expansiveness and gravity of obstructions to journalistic standards. Anecdotes from other democracies indicate that Taiwan's case may not be the single case in the world; other media systems in various parts of the world may have experienced similar ethical issues. Therefore, it is our hope in this article to demonstrate through the accounts of Taiwan media professionals that ethics in Taiwan journalism have been profoundly hindered in such an unprecedented fashion. The case of Taiwan's media system merits the attention of media scholars and practitioners in democratic nations around the world.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Press Freedom

Press freedom is the primary concept upon which our research interest is based. It encompasses a country's legal environment, political pressures, and economic factors that affect media operations (Freedom House, 2013). Among all democratic nations in the world, only a few of them (e.g., the United States and the Philippines) specifically have press freedom included in their constitutions.² The extent to which press freedom is exercised in each country has much to do with other laws and policies and depends greatly on contexts and professional traditions. Thus, the general shift toward press freedom has taken place at different rates in different countries (e.g., Hallin & Mancini, 2010). In the United States, freedom of the press consists of two equally important aspects: The government should facilitate the existence of a free press, and the government should not inhibit or censor the press (McChesney, 2012). Even though the U.S. media has been enjoying the best protection from political interference by the First Amendment, American journalists do face some barriers to press freedom under certain circumstances (Graber, 2002). In fact, news media in other democracies where no First Amendment kind of protection is in place can face profound infringement and suppression from various sources (Warren, 2007). For example, journalist safety can be a threat to press freedom. In

Taiwan's case, despite its Constitution (Article 11) that categorically addresses press freedom—"The people shall have freedom of speech, teaching, writing and publication"—its legal protection and professional code for journalistic ethical practice are not as robust as the U.S. counterparts. The professional associations in Taiwan such as ATJ are structurally loose and their membership body is insignificant. Taiwan's case may shed new light on the new scenarios where ethical media practice can be compromised and jettisoned.

Freedom of the press is one of the fundamental freedoms expected in a democratic country (Himmelboim & Limor, 2008; LaMay, 2001). People often incorrectly assume that a laissez-faire economic operation of media will automatically work for press freedom and democracy (McChesney, 1999) and that the vibrant information marketplace will compete fiercely to unveil the truth. Unfortunately, as LaMay (2001) indicated, many governments in emerging democracies, including Taiwan, manipulate news coverage in the forms of subsidies and advertisement purchases. Also, as the channels of media increase and options for consumers expand, media content might become more homogenized and commercialized. The diversity of perspectives can decrease along with deterioration in quality of information provided by the media.

Notable for the present study is the fact that Freedom House lowered the press freedom rating of Taiwan in both 2011 and 2013. Financial incentives of media conglomerates transmitted via political entities and opaque governmental regulations regarding media-related issues such as licensing (e.g., Hung, 2013) likely played a role in this lowered rating. Lack of public support, media ownership concentration, and media commercialism can also limit press freedom in emerging democracies (LaMay, 2001).

Media Ecosystem

Taiwan is home to seven 24-hour news channels, more than 360 privately owned newspapers (four of which are nationally circulated), and satellite television systems carrying 281 channels (Freedom House, 2011). Recent developments in media mergers and controversial journalistic practices have caused an outcry on the island (Hung, 2013; Yu, 2005). Despite opposition to the alliance of media tycoons and politicians (Freedom House, 2013), powerful forces make use of considerable resources to hinder efforts to pursue press freedom at every turn. Cook (2014), for example, states "the Chinese Communist Party's transnational media controls affect news outlets around the globe in complex ways—both blatant and subtle" (p. 48). The Want-Want group³ that owns multiple media outlets in the island has sided with China to suppress Taiwan's press freedom (Freedom House, 2013).

Thanks to cut-throat competition, ambivalence toward journalistic standards among Taiwan reporters has been noted. An analysis of three major newspapers (Li & Lee, 2010) revealed that news content became similar as the market became more unstable, which means more pack journalism at the expense of independent, investigative reporting. According to Lee (2003), desperation to survive has led reporters to develop grandiose narratives that are not beneficial for the public interest. Taiwan reporters have also used sensationalized approaches to reporting for the sake of ratings, and added government and sponsored messages into regular news stories (Hung, 2013).

Taiwan reporters have also been accused of exploiting and reinforcing political divisions. According to Freedom House (2013), some media reveal affiliations with specific political parties by granting preferential treatment to specific candidates. The partisan media phenomenon

in Taiwan resembles the duel of FOX versus MSNBC in the United States; instead of red versus blue in the United States, in Taiwan it is blue versus green and few media, if any, would fall outside of either camp. In a stream of research related to partisan media, Rawnsley and Gong (2011) explored the work relationships between Taiwan political journalists and their sources; their results revealed a symbiotic relationship between journalists and politicians. Therefore, Taiwan political journalists have yet to fully fulfill their professional roles on politics.

Professionalism among Taiwan journalists has emerged as one of the primary concerns from another academic study (e.g., Lo, Chan, & Pan, 2005).⁴ Taiwan news professionals reported that they should not need to solicit advertising for their media companies or work for public relations branches of their companies or governments. Participants also said softening negative coverage of key advertisers was unethical. These study findings were compelling given that the potential for high ratings and advertising revenue are key drivers of Taiwan media coverage (Yu, 2005). In the wake of numerous unethical practices of journalists, the Association of Taiwan Journalists (ATJ) issued a call for greater self-discipline and also sought commonly accepted rules so that journalists can follow the rules, compete fairly, and conform to the public interest to serve democracy (Huang, 2009).

Impediments to Journalistic Ethics

Ethical practice is essential to every profession's sustainability in society. Media professionals, particularly, are subject to scrutiny of any ethical violation because of their pivotal role in providing information for political and other critical decisions for societal members. Therefore, it is imperative for media professionals to embrace common ethical principles (Plaisance, 2009), and the *autonomy* and *harm* principles are acutely relevant in the Taiwan case. According to the autonomy principle, Taiwanese journalists are supposed to exercise their professional roles as "rational beings with moral duties" (Plaisance, 2009, p. 137), which becomes virtually impossible in the market-driven environment. Furthermore, corporate interest-driven editorial content definitely results in tremendous harm in the Taiwanese society, deceiving and misleading the citizens, and thus hurting the young democracy.

Journalist associations in democratic nations always included ethical behavior in their codes. The extent to which the codes can be upheld in real practice varies. The Institute for Public Relations and the International Public Relations Association highlighted the importance of ethics when they commissioned a study to determine the likelihood that journalists will seek or accept cash for news coverage from news sources (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). Sixty-six countries were included in the research based on their global economic and political importance. Finland was ranked least likely to engage in the practice, while China was ranked most likely to do so, which might have influenced Taiwan's practice.

This alarming trend of accepting or seeking content subsidies is supported by empirical findings worldwide. "Envelope journalism" was unveiled as a common practice in Indonesia, whereby reporters would receive cash from sources for their coverage (Sinaga & Wu, 2007). Almost all journalists surveyed in Zambia and Ghana admitted to being paid to cover stories (Kasoma, 2009). Those who expressed discomfort in the practice blamed the media culture and their low salaries for their behavior. A U.K.-based study (Lewis, Williams, & Franklin, 2008) found that almost half of news stories come from agencies. Likewise, only 40% of Israeli news articles contained no direct involvement from public relations sources, and only 25% contained

no direct or indirect public relations input (Reich, 2010). In Slovenia, Štular (2009) also found that journalists used reproduced public relations information in more than half of all published news in a lifestyle magazine.

Whether external pressures or economic constraints, no single factor is to blame for such lapses in professional judgment. Yang (2012) identified unequal development of democracies, economics, and each country's culture as contributing factors to incentives for news coverage. Erjavec (2005) and Jackson (2010) indicate that media practitioners are well aware of ethics violations. Reich (2010) was blunt in condemning the practice, stating that journalists have essentially "outsourced" their jobs to public relations practitioners (p. 810).

Commercialized News Content

A revenue-driven media operation abandons the role of social responsibility to inform, investigate, and uncover important issues for the general public, treating news simply as a commodity (Hamilton, 2006). In the market-based model of commercial news production (McManus, 1994, 1995), news is a commodity shaped by a collection of market forces based on a barter system. For example, citizens exchange either attention or money with media firms for information; sources provide information to reporters in exchange for attention in the news; advertisers pay money in return for attention of customers, and investors contribute capital in return for profit. Despite the concern about the dominance of business interests in newsrooms, scholarship indicates the ongoing presence of market-oriented news. Beam (2003) found significant content and style differences among 12 newspapers—half of which had a strong market-driven orientation. Market-oriented papers ran fewer items about government and public affairs because of less emphasis on public-interest stories. The papers also contained arresting visuals to engage readers with sports and amusement features. Likewise, based on a survey of journalists from 18 countries, Hanitzsch and Mellado (2011) indicated that the stronger the journalists felt about political influence, the worse the indicators of press freedom. Martin and Souder (2009) called for journalists to seek independence from economic pressures through interdependence with market interests. After analyzing journalistic norms in the media, a fundamentally economic industry, the scholars concluded that journalist interactions should convey respect for obligations of themselves and other parties.

We chose the market-based model of commercial news production as a framework for this study because the Taiwan media market corresponds to the reasoning of the model. We are not testing this model; instead, we are using it as a lens through which to view the phenomenon of study (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of the present study was to understand how press freedom impediments shape the occupational roles of Taiwan news professionals. We used the following as the guidance of our inquiry: What impediments to press freedom have Taiwan media professionals experienced? How have these impediments shaped their occupational roles?

METHOD

We used a qualitative approach to understand the lived experiences (Creswell, 2013) of Taiwan media professionals. Taiwan media professionals were chosen as the study population because of the knowledge they have about the particulars of the media market and their shared status within

the industry (e.g., Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, 2011). We used snowball sampling to recruit study participants: first we identified and contacted several Taiwan-based media professionals in varied media firms, and then we asked them to recommend other participants they know (Tracy, 2013). Additionally, various professors of journalism in Taiwan were reached for suggestions. All of the media professionals who agreed to participate in our study were interviewed.

We chose in-depth interview for this study because it is a natural, open communication process that allows participants to reconstruct their world (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), providing us access to participants' multiple realities (Guba, 1990). Because the method has been used infrequently in academic research about Taiwan (Lo, 2006), it addresses the call by Su (2010) for scholars to explore lived experiences of Taiwan news professionals. The interview method is well-suited to the sensitive nature of the phenomenon of study. For example, mutual mistrust remains among Taiwan journalists and political sources as they renegotiate their professional roles in a democratic Taiwan (Rawnsley & Gong, 2011). However, conducting interviews with media professionals poses a specific set of challenges.

Perhaps because they are so familiar with the rhetorical tools of interviewing and the now regular attacks over issues of alleged bias, journalists often avoid being interviewed or do so with great care. This defensiveness is only heightened when they are asked to reflect on their own reporting. Moreover, as busy professionals whose jobs have expanded and become more technically complex in the digital era, journalists—particularly those at elite organizations—are simply hard to pin down for an interview. (Lewis & Reese, 2009, p. 89)

Because of this, careful consideration was given to the aforementioned challenges as we sought out potential study participants.

We issued invitations to 30 Taiwan media professionals by telephone or email from April to June 2011. Twenty current and former media professionals from a variety of experience levels agreed to participate. We developed the data collection instrument, an interview guide with a semi-structured design. This kind of design enabled us to develop questions prior to interviewing yet allowed us to decide which issues to pursue in each one (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Additionally, the semi-structured design fostered dialogue in the direction of study goals (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) and yielded multifaceted data (Tracy, 2013) from completed interviews.

Face-to-face is the best technique for conducting long interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998); however, we conducted two interviews via video-messaging system due to accessibility. Individual interviews with 18 study participants were held at locations of each participant's choosing in Taiwan. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin to situate the data within each participant's social context.⁵ The interviews were digitally recorded upon consent of the participants, and lasted approximately one hour each. The interviews were transcribed and translated by a bilingual graduate assistant using an online translation system and subsequently transliterated by the lead author.

We used thematic analysis, an iterative process that involves gathering documents of individual's self-reported experiences and organizing them based on the meanings that emerge (Creswell, 2013). The analysis included grouping the interview transcripts by specific categories (Riessman, 2005). In qualitative analysis, *categories* are broad groups of constructs or concepts sorted according to the properties they have in common (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). We employed inductive and deductive reasoning to develop these categories. Inductive reasoning required

several close readings of the transcripts one by one, noting related “words, phrases, or sentences” (p. 246). To determine the authenticity of each category (deductive reasoning), we referred back to the categories with each successive transcript reading. Our analysis involved ongoing discussions about the contexts in which the interviews took place in order to determine the meaning of the categories from the participants’ realities. By labeling the categories, we generated a final set of *themes* (Creswell, 2014). Our interviews revealed that Taiwan media professionals experience external, internal, and market-based impediments to press freedom and ethical practice. We also found that media professionals have sought to resist some of the obstacles they face. It is important for researchers to balance interview quotations and their own insights during qualitative analysis (Brennen, 2013). Thus, quotes illustrating the thematic categories that emerged from analysis of transcripts are covered next, along with initial interpretations.

FINDINGS

External Impediments to Press Freedom

Although participants say people who work in journalism tend to hold a traditional belief of the principles of fair and objective reporting, the obstacles to journalistic standards of professional conduct are substantial in Taiwan media circles. Study participants encounter impediments from government officials, who limit their “freedom in the honest collection and publication of news” (International Federation of Journalists, 2015). A cable/broadcast television anchor (participant 20) recounted two instances in which the Taiwan government directly influenced broadcast media coverage. In one case, the anchor was granted all-day access to the Minister of Education, the Minister of the Interior, and the Minister of Justice because the agencies wanted to promote an upcoming policy. In the second case, the Taiwan Council of Agriculture sent funding to the station so that it could air a special series of reports on agriculture. The fact that the station complied by devoting a designated time period to broadcast stories about the policy reveals how deeply ingrained such behaviors have become in the news environment. Considering such external and internal pressures, Taiwan media professionals understand the importance of complying with such requests. A current issues talk show commentator (participant 10) said, “Journalists who anger the ruling party may not be promoted.” Clearly, media professionals understand the consequences of noncompliance.

Some of the external impediments to press freedom occurred frequently during election cycles. These situational pressures correspond to the market-based model of commercial news production in which media executives avoid offending established interests and seek avenues for corporate gains with content selection and production. Study participants said such guidelines have been extended to their personal social media channels as well. “Colleagues who are blogging or on Facebook or other social networks must speak with caution and be very careful during the election campaign cycle. I think we have very strict requirements” (participant 14). Political parties have a media budget to promote their particular candidates; some even provide incentives to media who would then designate a broadcasting team to travel with the candidates

to ensure constant television news coverage. Candidates benefit from a boost in image, a perception of public interest, and the misperception that policy change takes place via media.

China also interferes with Taiwan's press freedom, continuing its documented history of influencing media professionals in multiple platforms (Cook, 2013). A senior print editor (participant 4) and a cable television reporter (participant 7) both noted how difficult it is to report about issues of relevance to China. The cable television reporter said interviewing sources from China require extensive initial discussions so that the country can gather sufficient background information. Before agreeing to participate in a media interview, China requires the reporter to provide a company profile, detailed information about the interview purpose, the planned story title, and exactly when the story will air. Each additional guideline these journalists are subjected to further restricts the freedom Taiwan media professionals need to function independently.

Journalists are expected to hold "respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth" (International Federation of Journalists, 2015), but, ironically, some Taiwan citizens limit their own access to information by challenging press freedom, according to a freelance reporter (participant 15). Reporters have difficulty serving the public interest because they are under constant pressure to deliver news stories in a highly competitive marketplace, despite earning a meager salary. Some citizens openly criticize television reporters for being too subjective, according to a cable/broadcast television anchor (participant 19). The citizens who express outrage about discrimination, bias, or bad language in the news seem unconcerned about government intervention in media coverage, however, according to an agency staff reporter (participant 13). Media professionals thus experience obstacles at multiple work stages, from information gathering to reporting to information dissemination. An agency staff writer (participant 9) recounted what happened when political talk shows openly criticized ruling parties: Campaign officials conducted so-called public opinion surveys whose results indicated that talk show viewers disagreed with media criticism of the ruling party. Study participants doubt the veracity of the findings because survey population data was never released to the public. But advertisers continue to use the suspect ratings to determine where to place ads to reach the audience, thus generating pressure for those talk shows. To survive, media professionals must accept the reality that the parameters of the Taiwan media profession have been reshaped according to corporate interests.

Internal Impediments to Press Freedom

It is common for executives and top editors to make news decisions that shape norms in a given market. In Taiwan, media bosses impede "fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents" (International Federation of Journalists, 2015) through the boundaries they set. Alignment with political parties seems to be a determining factor for media owners. According to a former print reporter and editor, now a college professor (participant 6), Taiwan reporters are expected to align their coverage with the political stance of media owners. Moreover, these media owners expect the coverage to reflect their personal political views no questions asked. A vice editor-in-chief of a major newspaper (participant 16) said when an owner wants a political story covered, rank-and-file producers/reporters are simply expected to comply. The unfortunate result of higher-up management's direct interference in news operation

is a preponderance of slanted political news and a dearth of balanced, impartial coverage in Taiwan's media.

Threats to job security present another form of impediment to press freedom. According to a print magazine reporter (participant 5), it is common for media owners to replace an editor-in-chief if a story they deem "offensive" gets published. This awareness places enormous pressure on senior-level media professionals to censor themselves and their employees. A vice editor-in-chief of a major newspaper (participant 16) said that executive input increases gradually, sometimes taking years to fully take hold in news coverage. The reporters will eventually develop a list of topics of concern to the media owner, and develop news stories in accordance with those concerns. A cable/broadcast television anchor/editor (participant 17) has also experienced influence from media owners, but the origins of those influences are not always evident, according to the anchor/editor: "Every day we have an editorial meeting. Sometimes the main focus of the meeting will be the fact that we are not going to cover a certain issue. I do not have any evidence about who said we could not cover that issue." Participants recognize that certain topics, such as Tiananmen Square, the Dalai Lama, or human rights issues, should not be covered in the media. It is unclear whether these media professionals have censored themselves or have yielded to direct input from political leaders on the island and across the Taiwan Straits.

Directives about coverage are also made at the micro level. A former cable television reporter (participant 8) said media executives are directly involved in decisions about guests to television programs, even if a person has previously appeared: "If a guest cannot speak well, make clear points, and discuss issues that have not appeared in other media, that guest will not be invited to return." The political inclinations of guests are a decisive factor too – executives definitely screen them before invitations are made.

Market Impediments to Press Freedom

The stories Taiwan media professionals cover are also determined by the competitive market, according to a cable/broadcast television anchor (participant 19). Broadcast media professionals in particular noted persistent pressures from the competitive marketplace. A current issues television talk show commentator (participant 11) said broadcast stories typically repeat what newspapers cover because television journalists usually do not have the needed time to explore new topics and investigate deeply: "Today's TV news has to go along with the newspaper, according to newspaper layouts and headlines." Reporters are expected to confirm the accuracy of the stories they copy. Competition can also determine what stories will not be covered in a given news outlet. A television producer/former print reporter (participant 12) said that in-depth, important news issues sometimes go uncovered for fear that the resources necessary to report such stories would exceed the market appeal.

Professional ethics seem impossible within a system in which reporters are paid based on the number of words they produce per month. These reporters must make the difficult choice between writing an investigative piece that will be heavily edited and result in less money and professional backlash, or writing a dispassionate story that enables the continuation of their financial and professional status. Timeliness has also become an important factor in news coverage. Broadcast reporters are asked to cover speeches mere moments after they have been delivered. The limited time precludes detailed analysis of some important issues.

Media organizations regularly forgo issues of importance for the community in their quest for news. *The Apple Daily*⁶, a significant player in the news media market, was designed in direct response to cut-throat competition. The mammoth publication started using splashy visuals, blown-up figures, photographs, and bright colors because at the time, Taiwanese newspapers were all black-and-white (participant 18). Several participants recounted a blatant appeal to pathos rather than rhetoric or ethos within media circles. Magazines and newspapers deliberately place sensational stories upfront in publications, what one participant called a *fast food* technique, to boost circulation. Readers might never even get to the stories of public interest because sociopolitical news articles are buried behind pages of soft stories like celebrity interviews.

The importance of advertisements in the competitive Taiwan business environment is well understood by study participants. News has become a “commodity to fit the market demands of a collection of special interests” (McManus, 1994, p. 37). A senior business magazine editor (participant 2) said some Taiwan media professionals write sensational headlines for online stories solely to generate high click-through rates, enabling marketing departments to use artificially boosted viewer ratings to attract advertising dollars. Tactics to grow advertising are not limited to online stories, however. A cable/broadcast television anchor (participant 19) has been pressured to report on sensationalistic news stories to attract viewers, ratings, and, most importantly, sponsors. News about social policies of potential value to viewers will not be covered if it cannot draw additional viewers, and thus, ratings. News stories about the presidential election can become quite superficial. By implementing business-centered decisions, thus embracing a market-driven model, these media executives are discarding traditional journalistic standards and ethical principles.

The only journalism norms allowed in the Taiwan market are those that are compatible with business norms, effectively preventing press freedom and journalistic standards from coexisting (Hamilton, 2006). Taiwan media professionals now serve a dual role, according to a cable television reporter (participant 7), that is, maximizing profit for the company and serving the public interest. Even seasoned media professionals might grudgingly include highly unethical “product placement”⁷ in their news copy, according to several participants. The standards by which Taiwan journalists operate have shifted to align with marketplace demands. Television news stations are rarely sanctioned for such placements, said an agency staff reporter (participant 13), indicating that journalistic ethics have been set aside in favor of commercial interests. Considerable consequences exist for those who do not adhere to market-driven expectations. Advertisers could demand that their ads appear alongside positive news stories, according to an online media practitioner/part-time college professor (participant 1). Participants said companies could simply stop their advertising if the media run stories that do not cast them in a positive light. Several advertisers have already begun directing the media to report on company information under the guise of news on their behalf, thus limiting journalistic autonomy. The editorial and sales sides of Taiwan media firms have become irreversibly integrated due, in part, to substantial financial incentives from these companies.

Resisting Impediments to Press Freedom

A freelance multimedia reporter (participant 15) said Taiwan reporters should find a way to directly confront media executives who require how and whether certain issues will be covered in the news. This reporter appears to be in a small minority when it comes to taking such a bold

stance. It is rare for Taiwan media professionals to express overt disagreement with company policies, according to a former cable television reporter (participant 8). Participants are acutely aware that the risks of speaking out are substantial. Governments have maintained a grip on media through direct relationships with multinational businesses that own most of Taiwan's media. Media, then, are forced to accept pressure in order to continue their news business. Regardless of the political party that is in power, the business model is nearly insurmountable.

Taiwanese reporters have faced considerable resistance when speaking on the principles of media ethics and press freedom in the past. An agency staff reporter (participant 13) noted that reporter associations working to expand press freedom have faced accusations of political motives and dishonesty. Additionally, those accusing the journalist associations managed to refocus public attention on unprofessionalism among some disreputable reporters. With powerful interest groups and members of the public speaking against them, media professionals actually had less independence than they did prior to speaking out about the issue of press freedom.

Citizen journalism, freelance reporting, and independent news websites have emerged as alternatives to compete head-to-head with commercial news media in Taiwan. Many well-known, disappointed veterans have left mainstream Taiwan media firms to create their own blogs or websites, but few have been able to sustain themselves financially. The cloak of online anonymity has enabled some media professionals in Taiwan to avoid the impediments to press freedom they would encounter if their names went public.

Citizen journalists and independent online professionals have upheld journalistic autonomy by expanding the boundaries of the media profession in Taiwan. Citizen reporters, for example, launched their own investigation to expose the truth about government officials hiding money, according to a print magazine reporter (participant 5). The online public, many of whom are unemployed and younger with different interests than their gainfully employed peers, have indirectly influenced the nature of press freedom as well. Millions of seemingly spontaneous voices have contributed to the marketplace of ideas, forcing politicians to respond to issues they might not otherwise have addressed.

To pursue a more ethical practice in Taiwan, some participants indicate working independently is the only way to achieve that goal. One seasoned reporter (participant 3) has worked in an online media community since resigning from a newspaper following repeated requests from executives to frame the news a certain way. Veteran journalist Dennis Huang also resigned from a major newspaper—according to his own blog—so that he can tell the truth to make the public fully informed.

DISCUSSION

It is imperative for communication scholars to ponder the shortcomings of the media system that is supposedly free of any intervention. Based on study findings derived from Taiwan, the media on the democratic island have been impeded by many hidden factors and have failed to serve the young democracy well. The market-based model of commercial news production (McManus, 1995) proved useful for helping us frame reporter experiences in a market-driven media world. It also lays a good foundation in finding the connections between journalist beliefs and social actions. In response to the central research question, Taiwan media professionals experience external, internal, and market impediments to press freedom. It is worth noting that study

participants want themselves and their colleagues to embrace press freedom and practice ethical journalism, despite the inherent difficulties of speaking out. Unfortunately, their resistance to such impediments has been of little help in the increasingly competitive media market. Reduction in Taiwan press freedom has had negative consequences for study participants, including their alienation toward the profession and public criticism of journalism (Lee, 2003). When study participants are pressured to report stories in ways not aligned with journalism ethics, they are entirely at odds with the principles and tenets they are supposed to uphold (Association of Taiwan Journalists, 2013). It can be argued that Taiwan media professionals in effect facilitate unethical practice and self-censorship (LaMay, 2001) when they adhere to the guidelines determined by media executives.

The external impediments to press freedom that study participants experience correspond to previous research (Huang, 2009; LaMay, 2001), revealing the press as less of a watchdog and more of a lap dog. Ironically, governmental leadership and legislators, engaging in political intervention, might be needed to improve the media market structure and subsequently the performance of the media. Perhaps more progressive laws and sound regulations regarding merger and media practices in Taiwan should be considered. Laws and policies, for example, can be made to require a minimum of nonrepeated, nonsubsidized news stories per day, per media outlet. The adherence to existing laws and policies about media practice is crucial. Public media systems also can fill the gap left by commercially funded media.

The pressure study participants experienced from inside and outside their news organizations suggests an orchestrated collaboration between media management and outside forces (Hung, 2013). In these situations, citizens' rights to truthful information are compromised and democracy suffers. Unlike previous scholarship indicating lack of media understanding regarding the role media professionals play in democracy (e.g., Rawnsley & Gong, 2011), participants in our study indicated an acute awareness that ethical practice and professional freedom were being threatened by the current system. They struggle constantly with the powers that be to retain the professional ideal role they envision for journalists.

It is notable that our study participants described the Internet as a limited enabler of press freedom. The websites being set up for distributing independent reporting have gained a substantial following and serve to supplement the mainstream media's surveillance function via platforms for conscientious, serious media professionals. Alternative media outlets under special circumstances could actually force the mainstream media to cover critical issues against their corporate interests; alternative media also might take on a leadership position in setting the news agenda for mainstream media.

Journalists new to the profession will likely be disillusioned by the initial perceptions they had about their profession versus the unfortunate realities they experience. For example, Taiwan and U.S. reporters who have produced news perceived as unfriendly to China tend to not get the necessary travel visas because China approves which media can enter the country (Shear, 2004). Veteran journalist Dennis Huang resigned from the *China Times* in 2010 to protest embedded marketing, that is, advertisements disguised as regular news stories (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2014; Freedom House, 2012; Wang, 2012). The news media were not bound by Taiwan's legal amendment prohibiting embedded marketing or product placement in political contexts (Freedom House, 2012), so the practice continued. Taiwan journalists who are required to cover certain stories have essentially become spokespersons and campaigners rather than traditional reporters.

Strategies to resist impediments to press freedom in the present study indicate that some journalists continue to express support of professional standards. This finding is supported by Lo, Chan, and Pan (2005) who noted Taiwan journalists had clear perceptions about ethical behavior in the newsroom. According to our findings, some media professionals continue to pursue press freedom despite knowing the limited chances for success. It is encouraging that members of the ATJ view their roles as serving on behalf of public interests (Association of Taiwan Journalists, 2013; Huang, 2009); ATJ-led citizen protests against powerful media mergers have prompted government officials to deliberate cautiously when reviewing such proposals (Hung, 2013; Yu, 2005).

Media professionals need sufficient resources to develop comprehensive content. The ideal business model would foster the production and dissemination of public-interest issues as well as shun impediments to reporting such news. Consistent support from media executives and/or non-profit entities that are conscientious about society's well-being and keen on media's social responsibilities could help reduce impediments to press freedom and foster the ethical practice of journalism.

CONCLUSION

Although Taiwan has been a democratic nation since 1987, study participants continue to experience a variety of impediments to press freedom in an increasingly dense marketplace. Media managers under constant pressure to cut production costs and generate revenue have resorted to contracts for coverage from various branches of Taiwanese and foreign governments and commercial entities. For those media, accepting funds to air and publish slanted stories has become a more viable option than spending money on audience research or investigative reporting of serious societal issues. The present study reveals how the failure of marketplace mechanisms informs the roles of Taiwanese media. Changes of media laws and policies initiated by lawmakers, interest groups, and media experts are in need.

As is recommended by McCracken (1988) for interview research, we sought to uncover media issues that current and former journalists encounter in Taiwan, which may or may not be found in other democracies. However, the experiences of our participants do serve to inform the current understanding of the nature of ethics in Taiwan, which could facilitate further investigation and understanding of similar issues in countries elsewhere. More effective strategies to resist impediments to journalistic standards could emerge from a better understanding of the Taiwan market. McManus (1994), for example, noted potential solutions to the problems emerging from the market-based model of commercial news production: educating journalists to become professionals, appeals to the social conscience of media executives and nonprofit entities, increasing government regulation or funding, new technologies, and reshaping public demands and media choices. The present study should serve as a wake-up call for media practitioners in other young democracies grappling with impediments to journalistic standards.

FUNDING

This work was supported by Boston University.

NOTES

1. See www.atj.org.tw
2. Scholars including Jamieson (1993) and Mathewson (2009) have stated differing perspectives on whether or not the U.S. Constitution expressly provides freedom of the press.
3. Want Want group, owned by Tsai Eng-Meng, is a China-based corporation that has been particularly strong in foods and hotels. The group, financially subsidized by China, has purchased a great number of media firms in Taiwan in the past decade.
4. The scholars interviewed journalists from Mainland China and Hong Kong as well. We have included only findings most relevant for the current study.
5. Language and social interaction researchers have strong differences of opinion regarding how to gather, analyze, and even report research results (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).
6. *The Apple Daily* is the newspaper with largest circulation in Taiwan, which is known for its criticism of the Communist Party (Cook, 2013) and pro-China Taiwanese politicians, investigative journalism, and sometimes salacious reporting (Freedom House, 2013).
7. *Product placement* is a term used in Taiwan to describe the practice of placing advertising information in editorial content without informing the audience/reader. There are variations to it (such as *convergent practice* or *embedded marketing*) but it all pertains to the same unethical practice.

REFERENCES

- Association of Taiwan Journalists. (2013). Code of ethics: Eye on ethics. Retrieved from <http://www.eyeonethics.org/journalist-code-of-ethics-in-asia/code-of-ethics-issued-by-the-association-of-taiwanese-journalists/>
- Bagdikian, B. H. (1983). *The media monopoly*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Beam, R. A. (2003). Content differences between daily newspapers with strong and weak market orientations. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 80(2), 368–390.
- Becker, L. B., Vlad, T., & Nusser, N. (2007). An evaluation of press freedom indicators. *The International Communication Gazette*, 69(1), 5–28.
- Brennen, B. S. (2013). *Qualitative research methods for media studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Committee to Protect Journalists. (2014). Journalists in Hong Kong and Taiwan battle Beijing's influence. Retrieved from <http://www.cpj.org/2014/02/attacks-on-the-press-hong-kong-analysis.php>
- Cook, S. (2013). *The long shadow of Chinese censorship: How the communist party's media restrictions affect news outlets around the world*. Washington, DC: Center for International Media Assistance.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Daymon, C., & Holloway, I. (2002). *Qualitative research methods in public relations and marketing communications*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Entman, R. (2004). *Projections of power: Framing news, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Erjavec, K. (2005). Hybrid public relations news discourse. *European Journal of Communication*, 20(2), 155–179.
- Freedom House. (2013). Freedom of the Press 2013—Taiwan.
- Freedom House. (2012). Freedom of the Press 2012—Taiwan.
- Freedom House. (2011). Freedom of the Press 2011—Taiwan.
- Graber, D. A. (2002). *Mass media and American politics*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Guba, E. G. (1990). The alternative paradigm dialog. In E. G. Guba (Ed.), *The paradigm dialog* (pp. 17–27). London, England: Sage.
- Hachten, W. A., & Scotton, J. F. (2011). *The world news prism: Challenges of digital communication*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hallin, D., & Mancini, P. (2010). The forces and limits of homogenization. In D. K. Thussu (Ed.), *International communication: A reader*. New York, NY: Routledge. pp. 154–187.

- Hamilton, J. T. (2006). *All the news that's fit to sell: How the market transforms information into news*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hanitzsch, T., & Mellado, C. (2011). What shapes the news around the world? How journalists in 18 countries perceive influences on their work. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 16(3), 404–426.
- Higgins, A. (2012, January 22). In Taiwan, a Tycoon's influence. *Washington Post*, p. 13.
- Himmelboim, I., & Limor, Y. (2008). Media perception of freedom of the press. *Journalism*, 9(3),
- Huang, C. (2009). *The changing roles of the media in Taiwan's democratization process* (Working Paper). Brookings Institution Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, Washington, DC.
- Hung, C. (2013). Media control and democratic transition: Ongoing threat to press freedom in Taiwan. *China Media Research*, 9(2), 83–93.
- International Federation of Journalists. (2015, February). IFJ declaration of principles on the conduct of journalists. Retrieved from <http://www.ifj.org/about-ifj/ifj-code-of-principles/>
- Jackson, M. (2010). Publicising the news: Publicity and Australian commercial television news *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network*, 3(1), 1–15.
- Jamieson, K. H. (1993). The First Amendment is alive and well. *Political Communication*, 10(1),
- Karlekar, K. D., & Dunham, J. (2014). *Freedom of the press*. New York, NY: Freedom House.
- Kasoma, T. (2009). Development reporting as a crumbling tower? Impact of brown envelope journalism on journalistic practice in Zambia and Ghana. *Global Media Journal*, 3(1), 1–14.
- Kruckeberg, D., & Tsetsura, K. (2003). *A composite index by country of variables related to the likelihood of the existence of 'cash for news coverage'* (Research Report). Retrieved from http://www.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Bribery_Index_2003.pdf
- LaMay, C. L. (2001). *Journalism and emerging democracy: Lessons from societies in transition*. International Roundtable on Journalism, Aspen Institute, Washington, DC.
- Lee, C. (2003). Liberalization without full democracy: Guerrilla media and political movements in Taiwan. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, San Diego, CA.
- Lewis, S. C., & Reese, S. D. (2009). What is the war on terror? Framing through the eyes of journalists. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 86(1), 85–102.
- Lewis, J., Williams, A., & Franklin, B. (2008). A compromised fourth estate? UK news journalism, public relations and news sources. *Journalism Studies*, 9(1), 1–20.
- Li, S., & Lee, C. (2010). Market uncertainty and mimetic isomorphism in the newspaper industry: A study of Taiwan's mainstream newspapers from 1992 to 2003. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 20(3), 367–384.
- Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lindlof, T. R. & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lo, V. (2006). Communication research in Taiwan. In K. L. Leung (Ed.), *Global trends in communication education and research* (pp. 177–187). New York, NY: Hampton Press.
- Lo, V., Chan, J. M., & Pan, Z. (2005). Ethical attitudes and perceived practice: A comparative study of journalists in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 15(2), 154–172.
- Martin, H. J., & Souder, L. (2009). Interdependence in media economics: Ethical implications of the economic characteristics of news. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 24, 127–145.
- Mathewson, J. (2009). The long and strong tradition of state protection of freedom of the press. *American Journalism*, 25(4), 81–112.
- McChesney, R. W. (1999). *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois.
- McChesney, R. W. (2012). Farewell to journalism? Time for a rethinking. *Journalism Studies*, 13(5–6), 682–694.
- McChesney, R. W., & Nichols, J. (2010). *The death and life of American journalism: The media revolution that will begin the world again*. Philadelphia, PA: Nations Books.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview: Qualitative research methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- McManus, J. H. (1995). A market-based model of news production. *Communication Theory*, 5(4), 301–338.
- McManus, J. H. (1994). *Market-driven journalism: Let the citizen beware?* Thousand Oaks, CA:
- Nevinskaitė, L. (2009). EU structural funds' publicity and the practice of journalism and public relations in Lithuania. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 2 (1/2), 149–164.
- Plaisance, P. L. (2009). *Media ethics: Key principles for responsible practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rawnsley, G. D., & Gong, Q. (2011). Political communications in democratic Taiwan: The relationship between politicians and journalists. *Political Communication*, 28, 323–340.

- Ray, T. (2012). Globalization, democracy, and journalism education: Some thoughts for India. *Asia-Pacific Media Educator*, 22(1), 107–114.
- Reich, Z. (2010). Measuring the impact of PR on published news in increasingly fragmented news environments. *Journalism Studies*, 11(6), 799–816.
- Riessman, C. K. (2004). Narrative analysis. In M. S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman, & T. Futing Liao (Eds.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of social science research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp. 705–709.
- Schudson, M. (2002). The news media as political institutions. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 5, 249–269.
- Shear, M. D. (2004). White House urges China to act on journalists' visas. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/31/world/asia/white-house-urges-china-to-act-on-journalists-visas.html?_r=0
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message: Theories of influences on mass media content*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Sinaga, S. T., & Wu, H. D. (2007). Predicting Indonesian journalists' use of public relations-generated news material. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 19(1), 69–90.
- Society of Professional Journalists. (1996–2013). *SPJ code of ethics*. Indianapolis, IN: Eugene S. Pulliam National Journalism Center.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Štular, K. (2009). Hybrid messages in magazines: A case study of the lifestyle magazine *Obrazi*. *Media Research*, 15(1), 61–77.
- Su, H. (2010). Conceptual challenges to the paradigm of communication research in national and local contexts: A critical analysis of the existing studies in Taiwan. *China Media Research*, 6(3), 1–12.
- Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. West Sussex, England: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Tran, H., Mahmood, R., Du, Y., & Khrapavitski, A. (2011). Linking measures of global press freedom to development and culture: Implications from a comparative analysis. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 170–191.
- Wang, M. (2012). The fourth estate under siege: The making of a democratic institution and its pressing challenges. *National Taiwan University Law Review*, 7(2), 385–420.
- Warren, C. (2007). Defending journalism and the foundations of democracy. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 13(2), 9–16.
- Yang, A. (2012). Assessing global inequality of bribery for news coverage: A cross-national study. *Mass Communication and Society*, 15(2), 201–224.
- Yu, X. (2005). The state of press freedom in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.