Truth in Reporting by the Media and Media Ethics: the Perception of South Korean Journalists

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Abstract

This research explores the relationship between truth in media reporting and journalists' ethics. People are one of the important elements in truth reporting in journalism practices. Survey data were collected from journalism practitioners working in the news section in South Korea. An analysis of relevant theories and an examination of empirical data regarding truth in reporting and journalists' ethics resulted in four conclusions: firstly, truth in reporting relates absolutely to journalists' ethics. All participants said that truth reporting relates to journalists' ethics; secondly, most journalists learned about media ethics, so they perceived it. However, a few of respondents admitted that they did not comprehend the concept because of a lack of experience or education; thirdly, the majority of respondents attempted to perform ethically but they cited difficulties in practices. Finally, many participants explained that they would not receive gifts from news sources. However, some journalists admitted that the "Chonji (cash in Korean) culture" still exists during South Korean festivals.

Keywords: truth, journalists, media reporting, media ethics, media education, media practice, South Korea

1. Introduction

To be perceived as credible, the media must deliver truth. However, truth is a complex concept and more complex as a phenomenon. According to Pierce (2008; qtd. in Bentley 2014, 197), "Truth is the reality behind the facts." People could be one of core elements in truth reporting by media: firstly, effective journalists must seek truth; secondly, media owners must support journalists' activities; thirdly, national leaders must guarantee freedom of the press. Also, journalists will internalize media ethics through continuous exposure to ethical standards. Moreover, a high level of ethics in the society should be supported so that journalists demonstrate a commitment to ethical practices.

Unfortunately, the environments in South Korea (hereafter Korea) are not conducive for delivering truth. The media, particularly major conservative media, have not played the role of journalism properly because they have colluded with the rule of the day to produce news that reflects the needs and opinions of the political party in power (Sa 2009b). Corruption exists in many sections of society because of prolonged authoritarian rule and military regimes (O-J. Kim 2004; Sa 2009c). Further, journalists and media owners are easily influenced by prevailing governments. Thus, many journalists experience internal conflicts, and perceived reliability of traditional media is declining because of new media developments. This problem is not recent because many media have distorted truth for their benefit (Y-H. Im 2002, 191). To restore credibility of the media, journalists must seek for truth, and the truth must be published under the free information flow.

The aim of this study has been to analyze the relationship between truth in media reporting and media ethics. Truth in media reporting could be begun with journalists. Therefore, this research explores journalists' perceptions about media ethics and their professional practices.

Possible answers are offered for the following questions: firstly, how do journalists perceive the relationship between truth in media reporting and media ethics?; secondly, what kind of process was it for journalists to construct their view of media ethics?; thirdly, how frequently journalists follow the journalists' code of ethics in their professional practices?; and finally, how frequently did journalists receive something (gifts/money) from news sources that could influence news production within the past year?

2. Theoretical Background

Ethical standards are ambiguously understood and ethical behaviors are rarely achieved, though many people desire to perform ethically (Pearson 2004, 301). Often, it seems, ethical behavior is synonymous for behaving in a morally good way. Many people, on the other hand, define "ethics" as the contemplation, reflection and/or study of moral norms and behavior. According to Dodig-Crnkovic (2007, 8), "Morality is first-order set of beliefs and practices about how to live a good life. Ethics is a second-order, conscious reflection on the adequacy of our moral beliefs."

In media practices, good journalists seek to do no harm to citizens or the public good. Generally, journalists try to avoid inaccurate reporting, not just correct harm resulting from it (Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance 1997, vi). Journalism ethics is dedicated to diminishing harm rooted in information distribution (Knowlton and McKinley 2016, 134). In the fair distribution of information, media ethics function as a significant element (Fairfield and Shtein 2014, 48-49). The core value of journalists' ethics is to seek the truth. The focus on journalism ethics is extremely vulnerable as news groups move quickly toward sensationalist journalism and selective news reporting (Jones 2009, 103).

Ethics codes emerged when commercial achievements made the media affordable. In 1909, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ 2014) in America was established. In 1973, its code of ethics was in place, and it was revised in 1984, 1987, 1996 and 2014. The SPJ's ethics code begins with the luminously brief definition of the journalistic task to "seek truth and report it" (Jones 2009, 105-106). Some of the ethics delineated in the code reproduce the liberal principles from models of free expression associated with the Enlightenment (Merrill 1974; qtd. in Mortensen 2014, 21; Merrill et al. 2001; Siebert 1956). A specialized job involves confirming and discovering facts, discrediting untruths, and guaranteeing increased dissemination of truth (Örnebring 2013; qtd. in Mortensen 2014, 21; Siebert 1956). An underlying philosophy of this function is recorded in the SPJ's ethics code, reminding journalists to seek truth and deliver it by proving the accuracy of information (Mortensen 2014, 21).

Many discussions of ethics are philosophical. Lately, there has been much experimental research regarding public ethics. Plaisance (2014, 321) discovered that journalism and public relations (PR) exemplars display approval for striving to follow key ethical principles. Further, Coleman and Wilkins (2009) examined 118 public professionals about the development of morals (Rest 1974; 1979). Moreover, Lee and Cheng (2011) researched leadership qualities that are important for developing and managing ethics. They discovered that ethical leadership is a professional peculiarity and truth, and it is based more on individual values rather than on *professional characteristics and general ethical values* (Lee and Cheng 2012, 81). Regarding truth and individual values, Sung (2013, 231-232) argued, the identifying act of bravery is to be honest in an any situation.

In general, a basic norm of the media is to seek for truth or truthfulness. However, this quest is not unique to the media but also to all communicators (Kim 2011, 180). Truth and truthfulness have different meanings. Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) noted that dissemination of truth is often difficult and influenced by opinions, the perfection of information, interpretation and perception. Many ethical issues are related directly and indirectly to truth in communication (Fitzpatrick and Bronstein 2006; Parsons and Fitzpatrick 2008; qtd. in Lee and Cheng 2012, 82-83; Seib and Fitzpatrick 1995). Truth is in accordance with a certainty and the situation of existence, but an individual has the limitation of capability in perception, therefore, truth cannot be guaranteed. However, truthfulness is accordance between a certainty and person's words (Hartmann 1962, 420; qtd. in Kim 2011, 179).

In 1690, Tobias Peucer stated that journalists must possess basic traits (Haller 2004, 24; qtd. in Kim 2011, 193). Interestingly, Friesen and Gangadharan (2013, 100) found that truthful reporting happened more frequently when a compulsory reporting rule, rather than a guideline regarding voluntary reporting, was in effect.

On the other hand, many researchers (Fishman 1980; Gans 1980; Tuchman 1978; qtd. in Kogen 2015, 10) have demonstrated, "media products consumed by audiences are influenced by taken-for-granted practices and processes within the news system itself, such as editorial guidelines, newsroom hierarchies, career trajectory norms, and journalistic training."

The problem is the layers of power organizations covered up behind the process of news procedures, and the production of news in modern society is commonly led by elites (Manning 2001; qtd. in Magen 2015, 251).

Daily, journalists experience conflict regarding ethical issues associated with seeking truth in practices. Journalists need systematic and continuous education about media ethics to internalize the values. Furthermore, the support of high ethical standards by socio-cultural environments is required to motivate journalists to engage in ethical practices. The aim of ethical activities by journalists is to guarantee free and independent journalism (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014, 271-73; Sa 2009b, 28; 2016, 198-200). A significant value of journalistic ethics is to seek the truth and perform independently of all pressures (Kang 2004, 337). Journalism is based on the role of public that is important for a stronger democracy. Yang and Arant (2014, 45) found through sharing numerous, similar attitudes about the significant roles of journalism and the integration of ethical principles into news practices.

Today, if people wish to obtain truth from media, they seek out good journalists who pursue truth continuously; media owners who support journalists' activities; and national leaders who guarantee freedom of the press. These three principles as they relate to people must be consistently applied to ensure that truth is delivered to the public by the media. Bell (2012) noted, "The truth is, those streams of numbers are going to be as big a transformation for journalism as [the] rise of the social web. Newsrooms will rise and fall on the documentation of real-time information and the ability to gather and share it."

3. Methods

3.1 Study Issues

As an extension of journalists' ethics and ethics' management, this paper includes an analysis of the relationship between truth in media reporting and media ethics. The concept is an extension of Jae-Kyoung Lee's (2003) study citing three conditions regarding personnel associated with freedom of the press in Korea: the president's philosophy, media owners' values and professionalism of individual journalists. However, this paper focuses on the relationship between truth in media reporting and media ethics, with the emphasis on journalists. Therefore, it has some limitations including the absence of a comprehensive analysis of media owners and national leaders. It should be noted, however, that freedom of the press in Korea and its effects on media owners and national leaders has been discussed in a journal article published by Sa (2009a; 2009b; 2009c).

3.2 Study Survey

Key empirical data for this study were used in the examination of Korean journalists: The survey was based on an in-depth structured survey and made up of a mix of closed and open-ended questions, and it took about three months from 17 March to 13 June 2011. The survey focused on Korean news journalists only in news companies nationally such as daily newspapers, broadcasting, news agencies and internet news media in Korea. The survey questionnaires were circulated electronically by email to prospective participants (1,416 emails of 92 media organizations) almost every week, and the journalists sent the completed surveys back by email to the researcher as well.

Ultimately, 73 journalists (21 from Seoul and 52 from provincial areas) from 45 different media companies in Seoul (15), and also from local media (30), completed the survey questionnaires and returned them to the researcher. However, the ratio of response is difficult to calculate because the number of mail failures emerged constantly while the reminder emails were sent from the first time to the last time. 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 mixed approach tends to explain discrepancies between quantitative and qualitative method results. Also, qualitative and quantitative methods were incorporated into the survey questionnaires to strengthen the study; each method complemented the other's weaknesses. The survey was explained to the journalists by the researcher by "Information for Participants," which was sent to journalists with the survey questionnaires to explain the requirements for conducting the research, including research ethics. The "Information for Participants" was based on guidelines from the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

3.2.1 Survey questions (SQ)

SQ 1: Do you think that truth in reporting by the media relates to journalists' ethics? (☞please select no.:)⇒ please give reasons for your selection (☞please specify:)

        (1) Yes, absolutely relate
        (2) Yes, relate partially
        (3) No, mostly not relate
        (4) No, absolutely not relate
        (5) Others

SQ 2: Did you learn about media ethics? (☞please select no.:)⇒ please give reasons for your selection (☞please specify:)

        (1) Yes, learned enough media ethics and perceived it sufficiently
        (2) Yes, learned media ethics and generally perceived it
        (3) No, did not perceive media ethics because of a lack of education
        (4) No, never been educated about media ethics
        (5) Others

SQ 3: How often do you follow the journalists' code of ethics when you work as a journalist? (☞please select no.:)⇒ please give reasons for your selection (☞please specify:)

        (1) Yes, follow all the time
        (2) Yes, mostly follow
        (3) No, mostly could not follow it because of the situation
        (4) No, never follow because of the situation
        (5) Others

SQ 4: Within the past year, how frequently did you receive something (gifts/money-hereafter gifts) from news sources that could influence news production? (inappropriate gifts such as money, entertainment or expensive dinners etc: not include acceptable gifts such as small gifts, free tickets for performances of culture or art) (☞please select no.:)⇒ please give reasons for your selection (☞please specify:)

        (1) Yes, received (over 4 times)⇒ what (☞please specify:)
        (2) Yes, received a few times (from 1 time to 3 times)⇒ what (☞please specify:)
        (3) No, mostly would not accept (small gifts, free tickets for performances of culture or art)
        (4) No, would not accept anything
        (5) Others

3.2.2 Analysis

This paper includes an analysis of the relationship between truth in media reporting and media ethics in Korean news practitioners. Journalists were asked to give information regarding nine categories including job sections, holding positions, types of media, service location, service duration, gender, age group, qualifications and major of highest degree (see Table 1, 3, 5 and 7). Most survey respondents gave diverse reasons for their selections: also, in qualitative statements which were classified by the researcher (see Table 2, 4, 6 and 8). The qualitative information of respondents was translated by the researcher from Korean into English.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 The Relationship between Truth in Media Reporting and Media Ethics

In the survey, journalists were asked, "Do you think that truth in reporting by the media relates to journalists' ethics?" Respondents unanimously agreed (100%, 73 numbers- hereafter n.). Journalists selected the following responses (see Table 1): "absolutely relates" (68.5%, 50n.) and "relates partially" (31.5%, 23n.). Qualitatively, participants gave diverse reasons for relating truth in reporting with media ethics, and qualitative comments of respondents were categorized by the researcher (see Table 2).

Table 1. The relationship between truth in media reporting and media ethics

Categories	Details of categories	TR 100%	AR 68.5%	PR 31.5%
Sections of news in which they worked	Political	11	8.2	2.7
	Social	31.5	24.7	6.9
	Business	13.7	8.2	5.5
	International/North Korean	1.4	1.4	0
	Sports/life	2.7	2.7	0
	Culture	4.1	2.7	1.4
	Sub-editorial	11	9.6	1.4
	Photo journalism	1.4	1.4	0
	General reporting	4.1	2.7	1.4
	Editorial writer	8.2	2.7	5.5
	Others (including Managing editors or equivalent)	15.1	8.2	6.9
	No answer	1.4	1.4	0
Positions held	Managing editors or equivalent	19.2	9.6	9.6
	Editors or equivalent	27.4	21.9	5.5
	Deputy editors or equivalent	21.9	16.4	5.5
	Reporters	30.1	19.2	11
	No answer	1.4	1.4	0
Types of media	Newspapers	78.1	53.4	24.7
	News agencies	2.7	2.7	0
	Broadcasting	13.7	9.6	4.1
	Internet	4.1	1.4	2.7
	Others	1.4	1.4	0
Location of the company where they worked	Seoul media	28.8	21.9	6.9
	Provincial media	71.2	46.6	24.7
Gender	Male	97.3	67.1	30.1
	Female	2.7	1.4	1.4
Age group	From 20 to 29 years old	2.7	2.7	0
	From 30 to 39 years old	28.8	16.4	12.3
	From 40 to 49 years old	45.2	35.6	9.6
	From 50 to 59 years old	21.9	13.7	8.2
	From 60 to 69 years old	1.4	1.4	0
Length of service	From 0 to 4 years	11	6.9	4.1
	From 5 to 9 years	13.7	9.6	4.1
	From 10 to 14 years	13.7	11	2.7
	From 15 to 19 years	24.7	20.6	4.1
	From 20 to 24 years	31.5	19.2	12.3
	More than 25 years	5.5	2.7	2.7
Qualifications	Diploma 2 years	2.7	2.7	0
	Bachelor 4 years	60.3	45.2	15.1
	Master degrees	27.4	15.1	12.3
	Doctoral degrees	8.2	5.5	2.7
	No answer	1.4	0	1.4
Major of highest degree	Media and Communication	23.3	15.1	8.2
	Economics/Business	9.6	5.5	4.1
	Sociology/Philosophy/Psychology/History	12.3	8.2	4.1
	Law	4.1	2.7	1.4
	Politics/Administration & Planning	17.8	11	6.9
	Language & Literature	15.1	13.7	1.4
	Science	6.9	5.5	1.4
	Others	12.3	8.2	4.1
	No answer	1.4	0	1.4

TR: total respondents to the survey, **AR**: absolutely related,   **PR**: partially related

Table 2. Reasons for journalists' selection that truth reporting relates to media ethics

Relation	Qualitative comments of respondents
Yes	Truth in reporting is based on media ethics.
	Truth can be easily distorted without media ethics.
	Journalists' responsibilities and social values are very important to reporting truth.
	Others (there were some other personal opinions)

Sources: Qualitative comments of respondents were classified by the researcher

4.1.1 Journalists responded relation between truth in media reporting and media ethics

In each of nine survey categories, participants were asked to provide information on news divisions in which they worked, positions held, types of media, employment location, gender, age group, length of service, qualifications and major of highest degree. There were no specific distinctions in the percentage ratios of the respondents. However, interesting differences in percentage ratios partly occurred.

Firstly, regarding position, reporters were two times more likely to select "relates partially" than editors; further, a much higher percentage of editors chose "absolutely relates." However, as there were a similar percentage of editors and reporters who responded to the survey, these findings indicate that the former were more strongly inclined than the latter group to cite a relationship between truth in media reporting and journalists' ethics. Next, regarding duration of journalists' service, a comparison of those with 15–19 years and 20–24 years showed that a much higher percentage of the former group selected that truth in media reporting is absolutely related to journalists' ethics. Because a higher percentage of journalists in the latter group responded to the survey, this indicates that journalists with fewer years of experience felt more strongly about this issue than the group with more experience.

4.1.2 Reasons for journalists' selection that truth reporting relates to media ethics

Qualitatively, respondents gave various reasons for associating truth in reporting with media ethics, and qualitative comments of respondents were categorized by the researcher. Firstly, many journalists responded that truth in reporting is based on media ethics because "it is healthy and [makes] common sense," "if a journalist is not ethical, there is discrepancy in seeking for truth." Secondly, numerous journalists who said that truth can be easily distorted without media ethics explained that "an absence of ethics cannot prevent trials that distort truth." Additionally, they suggested that "truth or fact can be distorted" and "journalists' lack of ethics can distort truth." Thirdly, many respondents stressed that journalists' responsibilities and social values are very important to reporting truth. Finally, there were some other opinions: "there [is much] distorted information and news in reporting because of appeals or favors" and "if the news sources arrange junkets for journalists, the journalists are less prone to report anything negative about the news source."

The presentation of truth is difficult, and it is influenced frequently by diverse opinions, the perfection of information, interpretation, or perception (Seib and Fitzpatrick 1995). The deliverance of truth must be a priority of journalists and the media. Broad studies have been conducted in reporting, on the relation of truth between wide ethical issues and challenges in practice. However, it is difficult to evaluate how activists deal with ethical issues in their daily practices (Lee and Cheng 2012, 83).

However, this evaluative difficulty does not negate journalists' responsibility to follow media ethics. There are many reasons for seeking truth as journalism activists. The Code of Press Ethics regarding news and commentary in Korea makes this clear: "We the journalists pledge ourselves that we will report news to its full extent truthfully, objectively and in a fair manner" (JAK 1994/2006).

Most linked truth in reporting with media ethics, observing that without media ethics, truth can be distorted easily. Sa (2009a; 2013b) corroborated this observation through practical research. It also was confirmed for this study that truth in media reporting relates profoundly to journalists' ethical values, perceptions about media ethics, and professional actions. Participants for this study responded unanimously that truth in media reporting relates to media ethics. Survey respondents gave various reasons for their selections in the qualitative comments. Journalists acquire internal perceptions of a professional code of ethics for practical application through the management of media ethics by media companies or media-related organizations. Furthermore, a high level of ethics in the society should be supported.

4.2 Media Ethics Education and Journalists' Perceptions of Media Ethics

In the survey, journalists were asked, "Did you learn about media ethics?" Most participants said (see Table 3) that they had been educated in media ethics and comprehended the concept (91.8%, 67n.). Specifically, 43.8% (32n.) of respondents indicated that had learned "enough" about media ethics and "perceived it" sufficiently; 48% (35n.) stated that they had learned about media ethics and "generally perceived it." However, a few of respondents admitted that they did not comprehend the concept because of a lack of experience or education (4.1%, 3n.)." Also, 4.1% (3n.) indicated that their knowledge of media was unofficially taught or the result of self-study. The qualitative reasons for the variety of responses about the connection between media ethics education and perception were classified by the researcher (see Table 4).

Table 3. Media ethics education and journalists' perceptions of media ethics

Categories	Details of categories	TR 100%	P 91.8%	NP 4.1%	O 4.1%
Sections of news in which they worked	Political	11	11	0	0
	Social	31.5	28.8	1.4	1.4
	Business	13.7	11	1.4	1.4
	International/North Korean	1.4	1.4	0	0
	Sports/life	2.7	2.7	0	0
	Culture	4.1	4.1	0	0
	Sub-editorial	11	11	0	0
	Photo journalism	1.4	1.4	0	0
	General reporting	4.1	4.1	0	0
	Editorial writer	8.2	6.9	0	1.4
	Others (including Managing editors or equivalent)	15.1	13.7	1.4	0
	No answer	1.4	1.4	0	0
Positions held	Managing editors or equivalent	19.2	16.4	1.4	1.4
	Editors or equivalent	27.4	27.4	0	0
	Deputy editors or equivalent	21.9	17.8	2.7	1.4
	Reporters	30.1	28.8	0	1.4
	No answer	1.4	1.4	0	0
Types of media	Newspapers	78.1	71.2	2.7	4.1
	News agencies	2.7	2.7	0	0
	Broadcasting	13.7	13.7	0	0
	Internet	4.1	2.7	1.4	0
	Others	1.4	1.4	0	0
Location of the company where they worked	Seoul media	28.8	26	1.4	1.4
	Provincial media	71.2	65.8	2.7	2.7
Gender	Male	97.3	89.1	4.1	4.1
	Female	2.7	2.7	0	0
Age group	From 20 to 29 years old	2.7	2.7	0	0
	From 30 to 39 years old	28.8	24.7	2.7	1.4
	From 40 to 49 years old	45.2	42.5	0	2.7
	From 50 to 59 years old	21.9	21.9	0	0
	From 60 to 69 years old	1.4	0	1.4	0
Length of service	From 0 to 4 years	11	11	0	0
	From 5 to 9 years	13.7	11	1.4	1.4
	From 10 to 14 years	13.7	12.3	1.4	0
	From 15 to 19 years	24.7	23.3	0	1.4
	From 20 to 24 years	31.5	28.8	1.4	1.4
	More than 25 years	5.5	5.5	0	0
Qualifications	Diploma 2 years	2.7	2.7	0	0
	Bachelor 4 years	60.3	53.4	2.7	4.1
	Master degrees	27.4	26	1.4	0
	Doctoral degrees	8.2	8.2	0	0
	No answer	1.4	1.4	0	0
Major of highest degree	Media and Communication	23.3	23.3	0	0
	Economics/Business	9.6	8.2	1.4	0
	Sociology/Philosophy/Psychology/History	12.3	9.6	0	2.7
	Law	4.1	4.1	0	0
	Politics/Administration & Planning	17.8	16.4	1.4	0
	Language & Literature	15.1	13.7	0	1.4
	Science	6.9	6.9	0	0
	Others	12.3	11	1.4	0
	No answer	1.4	1.4	0	0

TR: total respondents to the survey, **P**: perceived,   **NP**: could not perceive,   **O**: others

Table 4. Reasons for the connection between media ethics education and perception

Education	Qualitative comments of respondents
Yes	Most of survey respondents learned about media ethics from media companies, media-related organizations or universities, so they subsequently perceived it.
No	A few journalists did not have education about media ethics, so they did not have perceptions of media ethics.
Others	Individual reasons indicated by the selection of "others."

Sources: Qualitative comments of respondents were categorized by the researcher

4.2.1 Journalists who "perceived" media ethics

The survey showed that most participants had an understanding of media ethics. Therefore, there were no meaningful distinctions in the percentage ratios. However, small differences were noted. Firstly, the same percentage of journalists in the business and sub-editorial divisions stated that they "perceived" media ethics.

Because there were higher percentages of participants from the business section, this indicates that journalists in the sub-editorial divisions were more likely to comprehend the concept than journalists in business divisions. Next, the same percentage of journalists with 0–4 years of experience and those with 5–9 years stated that they had an understanding of media ethics. Because of the higher percentage of responding journalists with 5–9 years, this suggest that journalists with less experience felt more strongly about their perceptions of ethics.

4.2.2 Reasons for the connection between media ethics education and perception

The qualitative reasons for the variety of responses are categorized by the researcher. Firstly, journalists who had perceptions of the concept indicated that they had learned about it from media companies, media-related organizations or universities. Secondly, journalists who indicated that they did not have perceptions of media ethics related this disadvantage to a lack of formal training. Thirdly, individual reasons indicated by the selection of "others."

Christians et al. (2005, ix) have argued that media education can help journalists overcome the gap between theory and practice "in a high-pressure environment." Educating journalists about ethics is an important objective for media-related organizations because journalists must make ethical decisions when time is limited and pressure is intense. Media practitioners often find it difficult to translate ethical action in theory to professional practices. Therefore, journalists need training to overcome the challenges associated with making ethical decisions quickly.

Also, in some Western countries, there have been various attempts to develop media ethics through cooperation among media companies, media institutes and others. In Australia, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA 1997, 80) has included ethics among topics covered in seminars for members. Responsible media in America demonstrate a strong resolve to practice their profession ethically, and they incorporate this ideology effectively. Further, they strictly punish journalists who breach the standards of media ethics.

In Korea, journalists are more discerning in their perceptions of ethical practices than in the past. However, many academics point out journalists' lack of awareness of media ethics in Korea (Kang 1993, 166-167; Lee 2004; Lee and Kim 2006; Nam 2010, 73-74). According to the survey of Korean Society for Journalism and Communication Studies (KSJCS), of the 72 majors related to media/communication in 2001, about 32% did not incorporate media ethics as a unit. It was noted that 53% of the majors provided only one unit on media ethics (KSJCS "Curriculum of the Media" 2001; qtd. in Y-U. Kim 2004, 23). This situation was confirmed again at the survey of the Korea Press Foundation (KPF). The survey results from the KPF showed that low percentages of participants had studied media ethics before they became journalists (ibid. 81).

The above analysis shows that education in media ethics at university in Korea has not improved during the past decade. However, according to the 2005 KPF survey, many Korean journalists, especially those with longer experience, understood the importance of media ethics and the necessity for a code of ethics to follow (Oh 2005, 34). Also, there is a continuous requirement for reinforcement of ethics education by the media and other societal sectors. Ok-Jo Kim (2004, 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. Further, the Korean-American columnist Whal-Woong Lee (2007) has argued that the Korean educational system focuses on knowledge rather than philosophical education.

Consequently, many people do not consider ethical issues as important in Korea. For example, in 2007, the Korean president Myung-Bak Lee was elected on the platform of economic prosperity "despite questions about his ethical soundness." Lee had legal and ethical problems during the presidential campaign, "Lee faced serious setbacks amid allegations of his involvement in the so-called BBK financial scandal" (*Korea Times* 2007). Lee faced a special legal investigation regarding this financial scandal (Sa 2009b). However, many Korean people supported Lee because of his promises regarding economic prosperity and the image of economic success. However, since 2008 Lee became the national leader, the grassroots democracy and freedom of the press have been seriously retrograded. Evidences of this recession have been recognized internationally and nationally (Sa 2013a, 169; 2013b, 412; 2014, 217).

Two international organizations, Reporters without Borders (RWB) and Freedom House, press freedom-monitoring organizations evaluated Korea a free country during the Moo-Hyun Roh government (Sa 2009b; 2014, 168). In 2006, the RWB (2006) assessed Korea as one of "the Asian continent's best performers" in press freedom. However, since the Myung-Bak Lee government, freedom of the press has fallen sharply that Korea ranked 69th (partly free) in freedom in 2009 (RWB 2009).

The following comment from Sung-Deuk Hahm highlights the focus by Korean people on economic issues: "Voters are becoming more and more interested in who can help them put more cash into their wallet" (Kang 2007). The focus on economic issues rather than on ethics or awareness may have its roots in Korea's chaotic history of war, severe poverty, and political propaganda associated with the rapid industrialization of society. The observation by Hart (2001, 14) provides further enlightenment. Military regimes did not focus on ethical issues because their origins were unethical. They had focused on the economy.

As a result of complex environments in Korea, many leaders are professionally well qualified or powerful, but their ethical knowledge and behavior do not align with these characteristics. *Noblesse oblige* is not evident in Korea, as verified by the 2009 Seoul National University study of leader groups (Lee et al. 2009, 93). Results of the research illustrated that the n*oblesse oblige* of leader groups in Korea was assessed negatively. The Korean people generally offer the same negative evaluation.

Findings from this study confirmed that journalists must receive educational training in media ethics to report truth. However, survey results indicated that journalists do not learn about media ethics systematically and continuously; qualitative results showed that journalists recognize media ethics through different means. Many respondents received educational training regarding media ethics primarily from media companies or media-related organizations: the KPF received numerous comments from respondents. Further, not many journalists explained that they understood media ethics through their association with the Journalists Association of Korea (JAK) or through overseas' training. Some participants knew of media ethics from their own studies. Media companies or media-related organizations are more proactive than universities in offering core training in media ethics. Participants majoring in media/communication for their highest degree at universities (23.3%, 17n.) did not have a greater understanding of media ethics during their major study. Only a few of these respondents said that they learned about media ethics from their university majors, indicating that media-related majors at many universities in Korea do not include media ethics as a core unit.

4.3 Frequency of Adherence to the Journalists' Code of Ethics

In the survey, journalists were asked, "How often do you follow the journalists' code of ethics in your professional practices?" Most (97.3%, 71n.) said that they followed this code (see Table 5). This percentage includes those who indicated that they followed it "all the time" (28.8%, 21n.) and those who said they "mostly follow" the code (68.5%, 50n.). However, one journalist cited a media situation for not following it. One participant did not answer this question. Qualitative results included various reasons for following or not following the journalists' code of ethics. The qualitative comments of respondents were categorized by the researcher (see Table 6).

Table 5. Frequency of adherence to the journalists' code of ethics

Categories	Details of categories	TR 100%	F 97.3%	NF 1.4%	NA 1.4%
Sections of news in which they worked	Political	11	11	0	0
	Social	31.5	30.1	1.4	0
	Business	13.7	13.7	0	0
	International/North Korean	1.4	1.4	0	0
	Sports/life	2.7	2.7	0	0
	Culture	4.1	4.1	0	0
	Sub-editorial	11	11	0	0
	Photo journalism	1.4	1.4	0	0
	General reporting	4.1	4.1	0	0
	Editorial writer	8.2	6.9	0	1.4
	Others (including Managing editors or equivalent)	15.1	15.1	0	0
Positions held	Managing editors or equivalent	19.2	17.8	0	1.4
	Editors or equivalent	27.4	27.4	0	0
	Deputy editors or equivalent	21.9	21.9	0	0
	Reporters	30.1	28.8	1.4	0
	No answer	1.4	1.4	0	0

Types of media	Newspapers	78.1	75.4	1.4	1.4
	News agencies	2.7	2.7	0	0
	Broadcasting	13.7	13.7	0	0
	Internet	4.1	4.1	0	0
	Others	1.4	1.4	0	0
Location of the company where they worked	Seoul media	28.8	28.8	0	0
	Provincial media	71.2	68.5	1.4	1.4
Gender	Male	97.3	94.5	1.4	1.4
	Female	2.7	2.7	0	0
Age group	From 20 to 29 years old	2.7	2.7	0	0
	From 30 to 39 years old	28.8	27.4	1.4	0
	From 40 to 49 years old	45.2	45.2	0	0
	From 50 to 59 years old	21.9	20.6	0	1.4
	From 60 to 69 years old	1.4	1.4	0	0
Length of service	From 0 to 4 years	11	11	0	0
	From 5 to 9 years	13.7	12.3	1.4	0
	From 10 to 14 years	13.7	13.7	0	0
	From 15 to 19 years	24.7	24.7	0	0
	From 20 to 24 years	31.5	31.5	0	0
	More than 25 years	5.5	4.1	0	1.4
Qualifications	Diploma 2 years	2.7	2.7	0	0
	Bachelor 4 years	60.3	60.3	0	0
	Master degrees	27.4	26	1.4	0
	Doctoral degrees	8.2	6.9	0	1.4
	No answer	1.4	1.4	0	0
Major of highest degree	Media and Communication	23.3	23.3	0	0
	Economics/Business	9.6	9.6	0	0
	Sociology/Philosophy/Psychology/History	12.3	11	1.4	0
	Law	4.1	4.1	0	0
	Politics/Administration & Planning	17.8	16.4	0	1.4
	Language & Literature	15.1	15.1	0	0
	Science	6.9	6.9	0	0
	Others	12.3	12.3	0	0
	No answer	1.4	1.4	0	0

TR: total respondents to the survey, **F**: followed, **NF**: could not follow, **NA**: no answer

Table 6. Reasons for following or not following the journalists' code of ethics

Follow	Qualitative comments of respondents
Yes	Most participants tried their best to follow an ethical code because [the] media company and they try to follow media ethics.
	Many participants followed an ethical code because of their duties as journalists.
	Journalists followed media ethics because of media credibility.
No	Some participants found it difficult to follow an ethical code because of a current situation such as bad habits *Chonji*.
Others	Other individual opinions included "my sense of values."

Sources: Qualitative comments of respondents were classified by the researcher

4.3.1 Journalists who "followed" or "could not follow" media ethics

Most survey participants responded that they followed the media ethics code. Instead of major distinctions for each of the nine categories, there were small differences in percentage ratios. All participating editors and deputy editors stated that they followed the journalists' code of ethics. However, some managing editors and reporters stated that they could not follow the code, or they offered no response. This indicates that all participating editors and deputy editors followed the ethics code, but not all managing editors and reporters followed it. All Seoul media journalists stated that they followed the journalists' code of ethics. However, some provincial media journalists admitted to not following it, or they did not respond. The weaker inclination of provincial journalists toward following an ethical code may reflect the poorer economic situation of journalists at provincial media companies. This condition could lead to difficulties in following media ethics.

4.3.2 Reasons for following or not following the journalists' code of ethics

Qualitative results included various reasons for following or not following the ethical code. Firstly, most participants responded that they tried their best to follow an ethical code.

A reason for compliance included "because [the] media company and I try to follow media ethics." Secondly, many participants responded that they followed an ethical code because of their duties as journalists. Thirdly, journalists said they followed media ethics because of media credibility. Fourthly, some participants responded that they found it difficult to follow an ethical code because of a current situation such as bad habits *Chonji*. Finally, other individual opinions included "my sense of values."

Ethical activities of journalists promote free and independent journalism (Sa 2009b, 28). Ultimately, the media should perform a watchdog role in society, motivating journalists to seek truth, committed to the public good.

Wrong information or distortions of truth not only depreciate the credibility of individual journalists but also the media in general (Y-U. Kim 2004, 25).

Most media ethics guidelines by overseas and Korea regulate the media's responsibility regarding people's right to know rather than ethical techniques (Kim and Cheong 2011, 15). On 7 April 1957, the Code of Press Ethics was firstly established, and the Korean Association of Newspapers was assigned regulatory responsibilities; since then, the code has been revised and supplemented. On 8 April 1996, the Code was regulated broadly by the Korean Association of Newspapers, Korea News Editors' Association, and the JAK. Today, different associations or media companies have their own codes of press ethics.

In Korea, there are many arguments for the importance of media ethics. However, compared to developed Western countries, most media ethics and practical codes of media companies in Korea are lacking both qualitatively and quantitatively (Choi 2008; Kim and Yang 2007; Nam 2006, 45; 2010, 73). In extreme cases, some media companies do not have a code of ethics. According to the 2013 survey of the newspaper industry by the KPF (Sim et al. 2013, 147 and 160), in 2012, 535 print media (52.0%) had ethics codes for gathering news, but 130 print media companies (12.6%) did not. Further, 657 Internet media (60.7%) had ethics codes for gathering news. Though many respondents did not answer the survey question regarding this issue, the situation of media ethics is still a serious problem for media companies. Moreover, survey results indicated that respondents lacked sufficient perceptions of ethical and practical codes. In the journalists' survey about media ethics by Nam (2006; 2010, 73), respondents felt generally that following a media code of ethics was a good idea, but it was impossible to follow completely when gathering and reporting news. Regarding this situation, Rhee (2013, 127) has pointed out that both conditions of the norms about truth seeking are no strong bases neither the restrictive ideology of Lichtenberg that can accept a breach nor the journalist responsibility of Kovach and Rosenstiel that truth reporting is stressed as the duty of journalists.

Nam (2010, 90-91) has identified the urgent need to establish a media ethics code among Korean journalists to minimize gaps between journalists' perceptions and professional activities. In today's environment, many journalists perceive needs for editorial independence, freedom of the press and a public role by the media. However, they are forced to be tame employees for media owners. Therefore, many journalists experience internal conflicts regarding their public roles versus their roles as employees or breadwinners. As a result, they may be forced to compromise their values to remain breadwinners for their families (Sa 2014).

Previous and present studies have confirmed that journalists must follow media ethics to report truth. Comparing past practices to present ones in Korea, the media are focusing more on ethics, and journalists are attempting to incorporate ethical values into their professional practices. For example, most participants stated that they followed principles of media ethics or made a sincere effort to do so. However, a distinction must be made between following ethical principles and attempting to follow them, as journalists described. Qualitatively, many respondents commented that they were appreciated for attempting to follow guidelines for media ethics even though they did not always succeed in doing so. Journalists specifically mentioned that it was often difficult to follow such principles in practice because of bad habits and their environments.

4.4 Frequency of Journalists Receiving Gifts

Regarding the issue of gifts received during the past year, many journalists (86.3%, 63n.) stated that they had not received gifts from news sources (see Table 7). 54.8% (40n.) selected that they "mostly would not receive" gifts, although they considered acceptance of small gifts. Additionally, 31.5% (23n.) said they "would not receive" any gift. However, 9.6% (7n.) of the participants admitted to receiving gifts." Additionally, 4.1% (3n.) selected "others" because they had accepted an invitation to meal with news source representatives to improve relations. Qualitative results included diverse reasons for receiving or not receiving gifts. Journalists' comments were classified by the researcher (see Table 8).

Table 7. Frequency of journalists receiving gifts

Categories	Details of categories	TR 100%	R 9.6%	NR 86.3%	O 4.1%
Sections of news in which they worked	Political	11	1.4	8.2	1.4
	Social	31.5	5.5	24.7	1.4
	Business	13.7	2.7	11	0
	International/North Korean	1.4	0	1.4	0
	Sports/life	2.7	0	2.7	0
	Culture	4.1	0	4.1	0
	Sub-editorial	11	1.4	9.6	0
	Photo journalism	1.4	0	0	1.4
	General reporting	4.1	1.4	2.7	0
	Editorial writer	8.2	0	8.2	0
	Others (including Managing editors or equivalent)	15.1	0	15.1	0
Positions held	Managing editors or equivalent	19.2	1.4	17.8	0
	Editors or equivalent	27.4	1.4	26	0
	Deputy editors or equivalent	21.9	4.1	15.1	2.7
	Reporters	30.1	2.7	26	1.4
	No answer	1.4	0	1.4	0
Types of media	Newspapers	78.1	8.2	68.5	1.4
	News agencies	2.7	0	2.7	0
	Broadcasting	13.7	1.4	9.6	2.7
	Internet	4.1	0	4.1	0
	Others	1.4	0	1.4	0
Location of the company where they worked	Seoul media	28.8	1.4	24.7	2.7
	Provincial media	71.2	8.2	61.7	1.4
Gender	Male	97.3	9.6	83.6	4.1
	Female	2.7	0	2.7	0
Age group	From 20 to 29 years old	2.7	0	2.7	0
	From 30 to 39 years old	28.8	4.1	23.3	1.4
	From 40 to 49 years old	45.2	4.1	38.4	2.7
	From 50 to 59 years old	21.9	1.4	20.6	0
	From 60 to 69 years old	1.4	0	1.4	0
Length of service	From 0 to 4 years	11	0	11	0
	From 5 to 9 years	13.7	1.4	11	1.4
	From 10 to 14 years	13.7	2.7	11	0
	From 15 to 19 years	24.7	4.1	17.8	2.7
	From 20 to 24 years	31.5	1.4	30.1	0
	More than 25 years	5.5	0	5.5	0
Qualifications	Diploma 2 years	2.7	0	1.4	1.4
	Bachelor 4 years	60.3	5.5	53.4	1.4
	Master degrees	27.4	2.7	23.3	1.4
	Doctoral degrees	8.2	1.4	6.9	0
	No answer	1.4	0	1.4	0
Major of highest degree	Media and Communication	23.3	4.1	16.4	2.7
	Economics/Business	9.6	1.4	6.9	1.4
	Sociology/Philosophy/Psychology/History	12.3	0	12.3	0
	Law	4.1	0	4.1	0
	Politics/Administration & Planning	17.8	1.4	16.4	0
	Language & Literature	15.1	0	15.1	0
	Science	6.9	1.4	5.5	0
	Others	12.3	1.4	11	0
	No answer	1.4	0	1.4	0

TR: total respondents to the survey, **R**: received,   **NR**: would not receive,   **O**: others

Table 8. Reasons cited by journalists for receiving gifts or not

Receiving	Qualitative comments of respondents
Yes	Not many participants received gifts during certain festival events in Korea. These gifts were usually identified as "special favors" or "cash for festival days."
No	Most participants would not receive gifts.
Others	A few journalists selected "others."

Sources: Qualitative comments of respondents were categorized by the researcher

4.4.1 Journalists who "received" or "would not receive" gifts

For those who received or who would not receive gifts, there were no notable differences in response patterns, of interest was the finding that managing editors were more likely to have received gifts than deputy editors. Since there was a greater percentage of deputy editors who responded to the survey, this indicates that managing editors were more strongly inclined to receive gifts than deputy editors. Further, amongst the journalists, who studied media/communication and those who studied politics/administration/planning 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 would not receive gifts. This indicates that journalists who studied media/communication were more strongly inclined to receive gifts than journalists who studied politics/administration/planning.

4.4.2 Reasons cited by journalists for receiving gifts or not

Qualitative results included various reasons for receiving or not receiving. Firstly, not many participants received gifts during certain festival events in Korea. These gifts were usually identified as "special favors" or "cash for festival days." Secondly, although most respondents declared that they would not receive gifts, some admitted, "I have [received] [small] gifts," and "I received gifts during the festival days." Thirdly, a few journalists selected "others."

To internalize ethical values and translate those values into journalistic practices, the socio-cultural environment must support adherence to ethics codes. According to LaMay (2007, 24), an unsupportive culture or a lack of public support is a limiting factor for the press freedom. There are many temptations in the real world that entice journalists to act unethically (Hendtlass and Nichols 2003, 55). This situation can be easily confirmed in Korea.

Corruption is a major cause behind the country's weakened competitive status. The corrupt culture in Korea may exist because of the strong influence of powerful personal ties rather than systems or laws. Myung-Koo Kang (2012, 53) has pointed out that power blocs of existing power groups are superior to laws and political parties. Existing power groups are based primarily on education, regions and blood, and these personal ties influence Korean society very strongly (M-H. Kim 2008; Y-H. Kim 2007; 2008; Sa 2009b, 19-22; Shin and Cameron 2003). These groups offer special favors or special rights and protect each other. The Korean people are familiar with these kinds of activities that operate in society and involve special favors or special rights. For instance, many Koreans also know why the MBC journalist who reported Samsung's X-file scandal (slush fund scandal), was arrested rather than the lobbyist who had lobbied broadly for Samsung before politicians and government officials. Furthermore, the Korean people have known that Yong-Chul Kim, who exposed Samsung's slush fund scandal as corporate lawyer-turned-whistleblower, was prosecuted for illegal activities. Moreover, Kun-Hee Lee was sentenced for three years and stopped execution for five years, but Lee was pardoned in a year (Kang 2012, 57). This situation in Korea is corroborated by a foreign assessment—the Corruption Perceptions Index (see Table 9), Transparency International has used this index to determine that conditions in Korea are not especially positive. The Korean economy has stayed around the world's top 10, but the Corruption Perceptions Index for Korea is not so bright.

Table 9. The corruption perceptions index of Korea

	1995	1997	2002	2007	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total number of countries	41	52	102	180	176	177	175	167
Ranking per Corruption Perceptions Index	27	34	40	43	45	46	43	37
Score	4.29	4.29	4.5	5.1	56	55	55	56

Sources: Transparency International

The general lack of awareness about ethical issues in Korea can be attributed to long periods of authoritarian rule and corrupt military regimes (O-J. Kim 2004, 279-280). According to Jae-Kyoung Lee (2003, 72), some aspects of Korean culture may provide the basic conditions for the limitation of press freedom. For example, *Chonji* was used to entice Korean journalists. Corrupt culture and bad habits ("*Chonji* culture") within the media industry emerged during military regimes, especially the Doo-Hwan Chun regime (Lee 2003, 64) that gained power through a military coup characterized by brutality. This regime needed the media's support to persuade people.

Chonji was used as a tool to encourage journalists to write supportive articles. Subsequently, the use of *Chonji* to influence journalists became a depraved cultural practice in the Korean media industry. For example, during the civilian Young-Sam Kim government, presidential secretaries or their equivalents regularly dined with media owners, managers and editors (Lee 2003, 62). In some areas, this practice still exists today. This was confirmed by the journalists' survey for this project. Some respondents indicated that *Chonji* still exists as a silent practice in some part of the Korean media industry. A respondent said that he had received it "for special favors" from a news source.

Chonji culture within media industry can trigger social evils because it can influence journalists' news writing. Journalists may distort truth or hide information accordingly. In the 2005 KPF survey (Oh 2005, 118), many journalists admitted that *Chonji* influenced the tone of their articles. Moreover, according to Ok-Jo Kim (2004, 278), money may be the biggest problem because its exchange can lead to distortion in articles based on covering up or changing the truth. For eradicating *Chonji*, JAK President Il-Yong Chung revised the Ethics Code of the JAK in 2006. The revisions included stipulations that journalists could not accept money, special favors, entertainment, expensive dinners, free travel or golf tickets. Nam (2010, 74) believes, however, that an individual journalist who practices ethics is tended to be overlooked in Korean society because media ethics problematically originated as a system for social responsibility.

Nam has argued that social requests are needed to consider the situation of the media in Korea, and journalists' perception about ethics is not aggressive roles of ideals but realization of conductive model as a defensive job.

Various attempts to mitigate *Chonji* culture in Korean media industry have been somewhat effective. This is corroborated by the journalists' survey for this study. When asked if they had received something that could influence gathering, writing, or editing news articles within the past year, 86.3% (63n.) of the respondents said they did not receive gifts from news sources. However, 9.6% (7n.) of the participants admitted that they had received gifts. This figure is much lower than it was during 2006 (Sa 2009d, 200). Additionally, 4.1% (3n.) selected "others" to identify that they had meals with representatives from news sources to improve relations.

In the qualitative findings, one journalist disclosed to declining gifts within the past year, but admitted that "In the past, I sometimes received them. However, I can say that I would definitely not receive gifts that influence news production." Another respondent indicated that in today's democratization, the exchanges of gifts for special favors have not existed. Yet, during festive days in Korea, journalists continue to be provided with gifts by news sources. A few participants commented that they received gifts as "cash for festive days." Respondents who said they "would not receive gifts" in quantitative findings admitted that "during the festive days, I used to receive gifts." These days, the *Chonji* culture in the media industry is not as prevalent as it used to be, but it has not been eradicated completely. However, in September 2016 Korean society was hit hard by a revolutionary anti-corruption law, the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act (2015/2016) called the "Kim Young-ran Act":

> The purpose of this Act is to ensure that public officials and relevant persons fulfill their duties uprightly and to secure public confidence in public institutions by forbidding improper solicitations to public officials and relevant persons and by prohibiting them from accepting financial or other advantages.

The term "public institution" means any of the following agencies or organizations such as the National Assembly, courts, public service-related organizations, schools of various levels, media companies, and others. The foremost goal of the law should be positive, to contribute to putting an end to the chronic corruption in Korean society including the media industry.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored four issues: the relationship between truth in media reporting and journalists' ethics, media ethics education and journalists' perceptions, frequency in following media ethics and frequency of journalists receiving gifts.

Concerning the first issue, findings of this study confirmed that truth in media reporting relates absolutely to media ethics. Participants for this project recognized this relationship unanimously. In their qualitative comments, journalists tied truth in reporting to media ethics, noting that without an ethical code, truth could be easily distorted. Additionally, many respondents stressed that journalists will be inclined to deliver truth if they have a sense of responsibility and a value system based on media ethics. Therefore, the journalists' code of ethics is essential for reporting truth.

Regarding the second issue, journalists must systematically and continuously learn about media ethics to internalize ethical principles and apply them naturally in practice. Most participants in this study stated that they had developed their perceptions regarding media ethics before or after they became journalists. However, a few respondents indicated that they had not received training in media ethics and could not comprehend the concept. Many respondents had learned about ethical principles through training offered by media companies and media-related organizations. Further, university majors do not focus sufficiently on media ethics. The results of this project showed that journalists had come to recognize media ethics through varied means, indicating they had not had systematic and continuous media ethics education.

With regard to the third issue, journalists' following of media ethics as the starting point for applying them practically to report truth, it was gratifying that most respondents in this study stated that they followed, or seriously attempted to follow ethical principles in practice. Some journalists, however, explained that their attempts to follow an ethical code were unsuccessful because of bad habits, the culture and the media environment. As journalists engage in ethical activities, they are aiming for free and independent journalism so that the media can ultimately play the role of watchdog; thus, journalists must pursue truth for the public good. Wrong information or distorted truth depreciates the credibility of individual journalists and media in general.

Finally, regarding journalists who received gifts, an ethical culture in society is important for supporting journalists as they internalize the principles of media ethics and translate them into professional practices. Unfortunately, a history of corruption in Korean culture and a general lack of awareness about ethical issues both socially and culturally prevail because of long periods of authoritarian rule and military regimes. In the media, bad habits typified by the *Chonji* culture are becoming less prevalent, but they have not been eradicated entirely. Most participants for this study stated that they would not receive gifts from news sources. Yet, some respondents admitted that they had received gifts during Korea's festive days or from representatives of various news sources.

As an extension of journalists' ethics and ethics' management, this study has focused on Korean journalists, who generally were the least possible parts to distort truth among many elements in Korea. However, they are forced to be tame employees for media owners. Therefore, many journalists experience internal conflicts regarding their public roles versus their roles as employees or breadwinners. As a result, they may be forced to compromise their values to remain breadwinners for their families. The result can be seen that journalists are not fully supported their activities by media owners, and they are not guaranteed freedom of the press by national leaders. Further, a high level of public support is required to promote truth in media reporting and to internalize the journalists' ethical code for actual practice. However, corruption still exists in many areas of Korea. Compared to past practices in the media industry, current practices of Korean journalists show improvements, although the *Chonji* culture has not been eradicated completely. To strengthen democracy and national competitiveness, cultural corruption must disappear and the watchdog function of journalism must be implemented. Additionally, the *Chonji* culture must be eliminated from Korea's media industry. The Improper Solicitation and Graft Act in 2016 should be positive, to contribute to putting an end to the corruption of Korean society including the media industry. Moreover, systematic and ongoing ethics education is required. Korean universities should incorporate media ethics into majors pertaining to media/communications. Efforts to improve citizens' consciousness of ethics would improve Korea's competitive status and the Korean economy because of an anticipated decline in corruption. Korea is needed to develop not only knowledge or techniques but also awareness of ethics, especially systemically, managerially and within leader groups. *Noblesse oblige* is not apparent in Korea; therefore, leader groups must focus on ethical standards. Korean society must develop an inner maturity through cultural improvements and ethical awareness rather than through external growth. Again, the media must focus on improved content regarding ethics management for journalists and media owners. The management of ethics needs to change from attention to mere systems and managerial plans to natural perception by journalists. Therefore, values and ethical issues in Korean society must be in place to achieve ethical standards.

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