

Public Journalism in Cyberspace: A Korean Case Study

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Abstract

Media surroundings through the ubiquity of the Internet are changing as quickly and as broadly as it changed in the 1940s through the ubiquity of television. The popularity of the Internet news media that allows for both the preservation of the newspaper format and the prompt reporting of broadcasting is changing the characteristics of typical journalism. This tendency gives challenges to typical mass media that have been facing several limitations about public journalism.

The goal of public journalism is that mass media guide the public (people) to discuss and participate in public issues and give the public a chance to participate in making policy. This public journalism can be materialized more actually through utilizing the Internet. Therefore, public journalism can be formed, and Internet journalism can be a distinguished unique news media through having the characteristics of public journalism.

In the recent decade in Korea with development of the Internet, several Internet newspapers were established. Now, Korean media scholars assume that the Internet can be a good way of public journalism. Thus, this study will examine whether Korean Internet newspapers accomplish the function of public journalism or not, and how the Internet newspapers can be used to develop democracy through public journalism. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to research public journalism as a new journalism format and the characteristics of the Internet newspaper as a medium. To do this, I will examine the meaning and essence of public journalism, and then discuss the practical possibility of public journalism through the Internet newspaper.

Introduction

In South Korea, most Koreans hoped that the country would experience democratic reforms after the Director of the National Intelligence Agency of Korea¹, Chae-Gyu Kim, assassinated President Chung-Hee Park on the night of 26 October 1979. Hopes were quashed, however, after General Doo-Hwan Chun and his army cohorts assumed power. More than 50,000 students and others protested against increased military involvement in the weak interim government. They held a peaceful torchlight demonstration. The Kwangju massacre began on 18 May 1980, when martial law troops, reinforced by a special army called the “Black Berets,” were sent to Kwangju, a city of about 600,000 people located 170 miles south of Seoul. Soon, Kwangju became a battleground between soldiers and demonstrators. The Kwangju movement is regarded as a landmark in the struggle for South Korean democracy (Clark, 1988, pp.1-17).

After Doo-Hwan Chun took power as president of the military regime, he tried to consolidate his grasp with respect to Korean mass media. To do this, he made a special regulation (the so-called periodical publication law) about periodical publications including newspapers, and magazines. Through this law, he merged every newspaper company from each province into one newspaper company for all of South Korea.² In addition, he merged one broadcasting company (TBS) into another broadcasting company (KBS). His reason for merging these companies was to be able to control the mass media more easily. As a dictator, he thought that he could control the media more easily with fewer companies rather than more companies.

¹. The National Intelligence Agency of South Korea is similar to the CIA in the US.

². In this paper, Korea refers to South Korea.

Because of this unique historical background of the Korean press, marked by a constant struggle to preserve its integrity and autonomy from the forces of repression, Korean journalists looked for a means of maintaining the integrity of the free press in its confrontation with repressive regimes. During that time, “the press union of Korea was pursuing two goals: the rights of journalists and freedom of the press” (Son, 1994, p.22). Finally, through continuous demonstrations and movement of journalists and college students, Korean media have gotten more and more freedom of the press since the middle of the 1990s.

However, even though the Korean media eventually won freedom of the press from the military regime, they began to face new problems that have slowed the growth of democracy through the mass media: concentration of the media, domination of the media by the power elite, and distortion of communication. Therefore, to solve these problems, this study will both research public journalism as a new journalism format and examine the possibility of public journalism as a method to develop democracy. Specifically, to conduct this study, I will first review the literature on public journalism and study the cases of Internet journalism, and then I will discuss public journalism and its relationship to online journalism. Lastly, I will discuss the practicality of public journalism in developing a Korean democracy.

Research Problems

Korea is facing three problems that disturb the growth of democracy through the mass media: concentration of the media, domination of the media by the power elite, and distortion of communication.

The first problem facing the Korean mass media is media concentration. Bagdikian argues that all information in the U.S. is held by six media giants. He points out that the giant media firms try to exchange information as commodities (Bagdikian, 2000, p.x). In Korea, after the mass media got freedom from the military regime, they changed dramatically to become commercial media. As a result, today, the Korean mass media avoid reporting controversial issues such as political and environmental issues. In order to attract viewers, they focus on soft news and event-oriented reporting. In addition, they report public issues and problems not as continuous reports with follow-up investigations, but as one-time reports with no suggestions for solutions. In these circumstances, Koreans lack exposure to some important issues affecting the country. Because the Korean media do not function as watchdogs of political institutions and economic power and as a public sphere, Korean audiences do not have the opportunity to debate these current issues through the media.

The second problem of Korean mass media is that the media are dominated by power elites. Generally, elites control social resources, and as special problems and controversial issues occur, they actively organize and control the decision-making process (Knoke, 1990). Thus, if controversial issues occur, solutions are made by elites. Mass media in the U.S. also have tended to reflect the opinions of the elite, government, and power structure when reporting social events (Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990; Murdock, 1973; Schudson, 1989). In Korea, the existing media are also formed centering on social elites such as experts, high-class people, and power group; thus the public's voices and interests have been relatively neglected. The Korean

media are willing to use social elites, experts, and power groups' opinions as public opinions rather than seek out the opinions of general audiences (Kim, 2000).

For example, it is against the law in Korea for people who have the same last name and are from the same ancestral lineage to marry. This controversial issue is an old social custom in Korean society. Because of this legislation, people who break the law cannot register their marriage officially. Many people who have the same last names and ancestral lineages have married anyway, but because their marriages are not recognized, this means they cannot receive the welfare, service, and benefits that other married people are entitled to. Due to this problem, the Korean mass media have brought up this issue several times as a news item and issue. However, Korean mass media are forced to drop this topic immediately because one of the strong power groups in Korea, the Confucianists³, put pressure on media companies to stop reporting this issue. Korean media companies take Korean Confucians' opinions seriously because they have power. As shown by this example, Korean mass media allow power groups' and elites' opinions to have more influence than general audiences' opinions. Therefore, Korean mass media feature a lack of interaction with audiences and participation of audiences. In this circumstance, because of lack of interaction and participation, audiences cannot participate in mass media. In other words, the Korean mass media have a vertical communication system rather than a horizontal communication system.

A final problem with the Korean mass media is that media concentration has led to distortion of communication. What I mean by distortion of communication is that

³. The Confucianists in Korea are not part of the elite groups but one of the citizen groups. Usually, the Confucianists are old people (over 50 years of age) and have a strong organization in Korea. In addition, they actively express their opinions (including their benefits) and complain about news coverage to the public.

Korean media companies try to make positive images of special objects such as political parties and economic power groups in doing news reporting. In other words, the media companies subtly change facts for their purposes in the news reporting. In news reporting, they frame the special objects that they support in positive ways. Due to this distorted reporting, people (audiences) cannot get correct news (information) and understand the special objects correctly.

In addition, this distortion of communication is led by media concentration because Korean media giants join together in their opinions about power groups (e.g., political parties and economic power groups) to keep (or increase) their profits. In short, the Korean media giant groups form a cartel and agree to support the power groups by a tacit consent. Therefore, people (audiences) are deprived of their rights to be offered correct information by the media. In other words, people (audiences) forfeit their access right to information because of distortion of communication.

For example, during the most recent political election to select members of the National Assembly, all three anchors of the national main TV news programs were elected to the National Assembly. Moreover, many newspaper journalists were also elected to the National Assembly. As a result, more Koreans want to become journalists in order to eventually become members of the National Assembly. Many Korean journalists see journalism as a stepping-stone to a career in politics. Therefore, journalists who eventually want to become members of the National Assembly try to establish secret connections with political parties many years earlier. They promise to report positively on the political party until the timing is right to actually run for election. For this reason, these Korean journalists cannot keep objectivity of reporting; they subtly

use reporting to make good images of political parties that they support. As a result, the Korean public can get neither enough varied information on controversial topics nor even correct and objective reporting.

Furthermore, because the Korean public relies on getting information about current and political issues from media and journalists, this distortion of communication causes the public to suffer from a lack of political knowledge and estrangement from political activity. To overcome these problems, Korean society needs to develop horizontal communication and two-way communication systems through the mass media. One of the possible ways to do this is through public journalism.

Public journalism (or civic journalism) has been practiced experimentally in the U.S. since the late 1980s. Public (or civic) journalism started from some problems: a gap between politics and civil society, a social-cultural estrangement, and elite-centered mass media. Thus, public journalism aims to connect the mass media and the public and to activate discussion by the public about social issues (Rosen, 1999). In other words, public journalism emphasizes the necessity of active interaction between media and public, citizen and citizen, and elite and public.

However, in almost every country (including America) active interaction between the media and the audience seldom takes place through typical media systems. This problem is structural (more accurately a technical limitation). Through typical media systems, it is hard for the media and the audience to interact. Only few ways (such as telephone and mail) allow to interaction between the media and the audience. Therefore, to solve this problem, new media structure (technical change) is necessary. One way to solve this problem is online journalism (such as Internet newspapers and broadcasting).

Through the Internet, the interaction between the media and the audience takes place more actively and easily.

For example, in the past decade in Korea, the Internet has grown rapidly and dramatically. With growth of the Internet, several Internet newspapers have been established. In addition, to deal with this growth of the Internet, the Korean media are changing as quickly and as broadly as they changed in the 1960s with the spread of television. The Internet news media have different characteristics from typical journalism such as quick reporting of news and interaction with audiences. This tendency creates challenges for the typical mass medium, which is limited in its ability to participation by the public.

Under these circumstances, there is strong reason to believe that the Internet can be a good vehicle for public journalism. Thus, this study will examine how public journalism can be used to develop democracy through the Internet, and whether Korean Internet media (especially, Internet newspapers) accomplish the function of public journalism or not.

Understanding Public Journalism

1) The Concept of Public Journalism

The idea behind public journalism is that the public (people) discuss and participate in public issues and have a chance to participate in making policy. Also, public journalism should make it easy for the public to participate in public issues and make their common opinion. In other words, public journalism can activate discussion of

political and social issues as a public sphere (Christians, 1999). Lambeth points out that public journalism can be viewed as a form of journalism that seeks to:

1) listen systematically to the stories and ideas of citizens even while protecting its freedom to choose what to cover; 2) examine alternative ways to frame stories on important community issues; 3) choose frames that stand the best chance to stimulate citizen deliberation and build public understanding of issues; 4) take the initiative to report on major public problems in a way that advances public knowledge of possible solutions and the values served by alternative courses of action; 5) pay continuing and systematic attention to how well and how credibly it is communicating with the public. (Lambeth, 1998, p.17)

In short, public journalism is concerned with the communities that journalists serve. In addition, Rosen argues that public journalism is also a reaction against the perceived inadequacies of representative government and its institutions. Public journalism emphasizes public action and the acquisition of information from different sources – in other words, the community that is served by journalists. Public journalism emphasizes public participation as a virtue that eventually enhances representative government. It is a democratic and participatory movement (Rosen, 2000, p.17).

In addition, this public journalism can be materialized more successfully through the Internet because the Internet is a different media format. Unlike in typical media, people have access and can give their opinions easily. In short, the Internet is an interactive medium that involves the audience to a great degree.

2) The Root of Public Journalism

Public journalism started as a newspaper movement, but it spread to every medium, including public and commercial broadcasting. The generative background of public journalism is explained by three facts: the decline of newspaper readers, research about the relationship between the public and mass media by journalism scholars, and the support of foundations related to the mass media.

First, newspaper companies tried to adapt public journalism for several reasons. One important reason was the crisis of a long-term decline of readers. To attract readers, the newspaper companies tried to change the form of newspapers. For example, the president of the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain, James K. Batten, a former reporter and editor who had worked his way to the top of the nation's second largest newspaper chain, emphasized newspaper's function for community connectedness. Batten argued that "[n]ewspapers grew up on the premise that people were connected to their communities and wanted to know what was going on, wanted to be involved, in many cases wanted to make a contribution" (Rosen, 1999, p.24). He also emphasized that newspapers have to investigate the main issues of the community and give a chance to groups that have different opinions to discuss them; also, newspapers should report the results of the investigation and the sense of the discussion (Rosen, 1999, p.21-27).

Second, the academic understanding of public journalism was started by an old but interesting argument between Lippmann (1922) and Dewey (1927) about the relationship between the public and mass media (Carey, 1997, 1999; Rosen, 1999). Lippmann (1922) in his book, Public Opinion, argues that an informed and engaged public – the kind we expect to have – is more or less an illusion. Lippmann also argues that the public does not have the ability to deal with information for managing the nation.

Thus, the function of the mass media is not for public discussion but is to act as a vehicle for transmission of experts' and elites' opinions (Lippmann, 1922). In Lippmann's view:

It was foolish to expect average citizens to have a reliable opinion on every public issue. Citizens did have a place in modern democracy, but it was a limited one.

The most we could expect is an occasional yes/no or up/down verdict – as in “throw the bums out.” But even these simple decisions could be manipulated, and often were. Against the soaring rhetoric of American democracy, Lippmann placed the limitations of the average citizen, the stubborn realities of human nature, the daunting complexity of modern life. He put his faith elsewhere, in well-informed experts, those who might provide leaders with better and better facts on which to base their decisions. (Lambeth, 1998, p.50)

On the other hand, Dewey (1927) expected the media to help recreate community life through the creation of local community that is able to engage in rational public discourse. Dewey argues that “[t]he notion of a participating, deliberating, learning public expressed a moral demand: that everyone have a chance to develop into a better citizen” (in Lambeth, 1998, p.51). Lambeth, in his book, Assessing Public Journalism, explains John Dewey's thinking:

[He reached] a very different conclusion because he started in a different place.

The reason we have governments at all is that we live in an interdependent world, he said. A public is simply a name for people who realize they share common problems. Democracy demands that these problems be discussed and understood.

And to give up on this hope is to give up on democracy itself. Dewey agreed that citizens had a difficult time in a complex world where they were blitzed with

misleading messages. The public, he agreed, was in deep trouble. He described it as “inchoate,” unformed. It was potentially there, potentially real. But it would emerge only if politics, culture, education, and journalism did their jobs well. Democracy for Dewey was not a system of government, but an entire way of life. And it was up to us to create a way of life that gave the public a fighting chance. (Lambeth, 1998, p.50)

Moreover, Lippmann and Dewey also had different ideas about what journalism should do in a democracy. For Lippmann, newspapers could not attempt to educate a public that has limited time, knowledge, and intellectual capacity (Eksterowicz, 2000). “The best that newspapers could do would be to inform the public makers, the experts and political leaders” (Eksterowicz, 2000, p.123). In contrast, for Dewey, the newspaper is a good educator of the public and a good participative vehicle for the public (Eksterowicz, 2000). That is to say, “newspapers help form the public, help the public understand its connection to decisions and their outcomes, and then help the public act on such understandings” (Eksterowicz, 2000, p.123). These two very different conceptions of democracy and journalism undergird a debate that has been conducted for some seventy years now without resolution. Between these two positions, public journalism originates in Dewey’s conception.

Third, under the support of mass media foundations, journalists and journalism scholars researched public journalism through practical experimentation. For example, in 1992, David Mathews and Jay Rosen, with support of the Knight Foundation, established the Project on Public Life and the Press (PPLP) at New York University. The PPLP functioned as a place where people who related with public journalism, such as scholars

and journalists, could discuss public journalism. The PPLP had a positive impact on the development of public journalism.

3) The Purpose of Public Journalism

The purpose of public journalism is to help news organizations “reconnect to their communities so they can engage their citizens in dialogues that lead to problem solving” (Fouhy, 1996, p.11). Thus, public journalism activates public debate and the democratic participation of the public (Glasser, 1999). Also, public journalism can provide a function for the public sphere that tries to find solutions to various problems that appear in society such as education, environment, and crime through deliberation of members formed by various social classes. In other words, public journalism is not a technical effort that tries to construct a new convention of mass media but has goals such as a healthy democracy, making a network of local communities, and participation of the public in public life. A representative characteristic of public journalistic report is the public-centered report and process-oriented long term report. Rosen (1994) explains that the purpose of public journalism “is not a settled doctrine or a strict code of conduct but an unfolding philosophy about the place of the journalist in public life” (Rosen, 1994, p.6). This philosophy has showed recently most clearly in the newspaper world where some journalists are trying to connect with their communities in a different way, often by encouraging civic participation or re-grounding the coverage of politics in the imperatives of public discussion and debate. In some of these experiments, newspapers have stepped out of an observer’s role in an attempt to make something happen in the ir

communities. This development suggests the need for a new rationale that would explain but also delimit the approach being followed (Rosen, 1994).

Therefore, mass media that pursue public journalism should not only serve to watch over political institutions and economic power but also to participate in community activities and act as assistants to solve the community's problems. In addition, public journalism pursues process-oriented reporting. In other words, during the reporting of controversial issues, public journalism reports continuously the process of problem solving through the discussion of different opinions, investigation, and solution plans.

Case Studies

1) The Internet and Democracy

The rapidly developing communication technology through the Internet has made possible community networks that address the needs of their community and help to participate in decision making. Computer networks, unlike traditional media, provide the opportunity for many-to-many communication, opening up immense possibilities for most of people.

In the US and UK, there are several democratic project cases within the Internet including Public Electronic Network (PEN) and UK Citizen Online Democracy (UKCOD) that were designed to improve participatory democracy.

In Santa Monica, California, in the late 1980s, the city government instituted a landmark experiment in promoting community-oriented, participatory democracy within their city by establishing the free Public Electronic Network (PEN) system, one of the

first civic networks of online discussion group in the early 1990s (Dutton, 1996). This project to allow town officials to work from home via modem was extended to give all citizens the right to access debate and information about city politics via their home PCs and then further extended into PEN. Not only that, PEN also provides access to city government information including city council agendas, reports, public safety tips, the library's online catalogue and to government services such as granting permits or registering petty thefts. There are conversational venues as well. Citizens can send e-mail to public officials and city servants and to each other. They can also participate in electronic conferences that cover a wide variety of local civic issues (Schuler, 1996).

PEN has also served as an important case study for understanding issues of electronic democracy as they play out in the real world. Some important cautionary tales have emerged from this pioneering system as it was subjected to every day use from a variety of Santa Monicans (see Dutton, 1996; Schuler, 1996).

In this case study, participation of the public and providing access to debate and information are key elements of success in the Santa Monica project. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) through the Internet played a specially important role in this case. In short, computer-mediated communication can be used to encourage active political citizenship. "This heralding of the Internet as the new 'third sphere' of free public deliberation, untainted by state or commerce has been accompanied by a boom in experiments using CMC to encourage democratic participation" (Tambini, 1999, p.306). In addition, this case study suggests using new media such as the Internet to offer new channels of access to the main transactions of democracy: information provision, deliberation, and group organization.

Many information-based services are also being delivered through the Internet. Initiatives range from using local government web sites as a more efficient means to make political information available to the public who use the Internet to encouraging all citizens to use interactive media to organize interest groups and neighborhood alliances (Tambini, 1999).

These two key elements, participation and access to information, can be adapted to form public journalism. Because the Internet is interactive, the public institutionalizes citizens' right to reply, to select information, and to communicate directly with one another or their representatives without the gate keeping influence of editors. Furthermore, as Tambini argues, "rather than receiving a diet of what journalists and editors deem to be important information, the public can seek the information that interests them and serves their interests" (1999, p.311).

Another case study is that the most successful national example of public participation via the Internet has been UK Citizens Online Democracy (UKCOD) which was formed in 1995, and by 1997 was conducting the first ever online scrutiny of proposed law (in this case the Freedom of Information White Paper), to submit comments online to the Cabinet Office and interact online with the minister in charge of the White Paper who agreed to answer questions online during a specific period. Almost half of the submissions in response to this consultation were made online (via emails submitted to UKCOD); all submissions were published online; 30 percent of these came from individual citizens, who previously would never have had a chance to participate in pre-legislative consultation. Tens of thousands of people hit the site (see Coleman, 1999).

This case study revealed that this application of the new media (Internet) ranged from simple information provision through interaction between councilors/officials and citizens, to informal discussions, formal consultations and even joint decision-making initiatives (Stubbs, 1998). According to this case study, online civic involvement is important factors in developing democracy through the Internet. In the Internet as interactive medium, online participation is very important and works well. In addition, interactive media (Internet) need to be controlled “neither by government nor corporations, but by citizens operating within a neutral public space, regulated by scrupulously nonpartisan public-service bodies” (Coleman, 1999, p.72).

Through this case study, I found two elements to adapt to my project: online civic involvement and media operation by citizens and non-profit organizations. These two elements are useful in forming a public journalism to develop Korean democracy.

2) The Internet and Media

In recent years, since the Internet was introduced, online journalism has grown quickly. What is meant by online journalism is the process whereby independent web sites and existing media companies such as newspapers and broadcasting companies release news to users through the Internet.

I looked at two cases of online journalism to find some elements for adapting my research project because my project examines the possibility of public journalism to develop Korean democracy. In doing so, online journalism is one of the possible ways to form public journalism.

First, I focused on web-radio stations. Nowadays, there are between about 2500 and 3800 web-radio stations world-wide (Mühlenfeld, 2002). This figure varies because there is no single definition of what a web radio really is (Barth and Münch, 2001). For instance, web radios perform live streams, where the program is broadcast live via the Internet. The most common application is the so-called jukebox, where the web-radio station provides a database with a multitude of mp3 files that can be downloaded and listened to. Most of the web-radio stations in Germany are jukeboxes (Mühlenfeld, 2002). There are hardly any textual contributions or presentations, not to mention content-based political discussions. What presentations there are, are like the presentations in commercial radio and are mainly the introduction of pop songs (Barth and Münch, 2001).

The most successful web-radios in Germany are *Das WebRadio. de*, with 410,000 listeners, followed by *Internet Radio. de* (390,000) and *Chart Radio. de* (280,000) (Mühlenfeld, 2002). Six or seven percent of German Internet users⁴ use web radio on an occasional basis; three percent of Internet users tune into web radio on a regular or daily basis. Most of these frequent users use web radio while doing other things, for instance, surfing the Internet (Mühlenfeld, 2002). According to this case, one cannot say that web-radio in Germany contributes to an alternative method of mass communication as much as the technological possibilities would suggest.

There are limitations in adapting this case to my research project because the web radio stations in Germany produce programs with more music and less talk to attract people. Thus, these web-radio stations leave no room for real two-way mass communication. However, there is a possible element -- the possibility of user

⁴. In the first quarter of 2001, approximately 24 million Germans were online (Mühlenfeld, 2002).

participation -- to adapt to my project because this case reveals that using Internet journalism is a good way to encourage people's participation.

Another case I looked at is the online newspaper. "The construction of online newspapers has been replete with processes that mediate between the technological input and the editorial output" (Boczkowski, 1999, p.111). Boczkowski (1999) described an example of online newspapers: In order to have new editorial content for its weekend edition -- the print newspaper is only published on weekdays -- in mid-1996 *The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition* requested two of its columnists, Walter Mossberg and Thomas Petzinger Jr., to ask for reader feedback via email in their weekly columns and then write a second column exclusively for the Internet edition to be published during the weekend.

The weekend pieces were called *Mossberg's Mailbox* and *The Front Line Forum*, respectively. To accomplish this goal, a set of devices was introduced: private electronic mail exchanges with readers to receive comments, and public exposition of those exchanges' results in the Internet edition of the newspaper. Both journalists had some electronic mail contact with their audience before, but it was not routinely integrated into their print column. Interestingly, "as of December 1996, the same goal and technological input did not generate similar editorial products, but different ones resulting from the mediation of cognitive factor" (Baczowski, 1999, p.111). Mossberg quoted readers anonymously and sometimes changed the phrasing of the questions or clustered several related inquiries into a single reformulated question; moreover, the topic of the weekend piece was unrelated to the weekday column. Thus, *Mossberg's Mailbox* acquired the form of a regular 'Question and Answer' column, like many that exist in print

publications -- despite the fact that “it was originally conceived to exploit the seemingly unique conversational potentials of Internet publishing” (Boczkowski, 1999, p.111).

This case suggests how the Internet works as a participative medium. Through interaction with readers, the newspaper developed new active column. It shows that the Internet is a good vehicle to encourage participation of use and to help form public journalism. I want to choose two elements (interaction between readers and editors and using people’s opinion in newspaper) from this case study to adapt to my research project. This case can be a good example of public journalism. Active participation of people and reporting people’s opinions of newspapers through the Internet develops and improves the quality of newspapers. Moreover, these people’s participation and opinions not only show the possibility of two-way communication but also suggest the possibility of public journalism. The question that now needs to be answered is ‘what is the relationship between the Internet and online journalism’.

The Internet and Online Journalism

The research of new communication technologies in various fields has been a very interesting topic in the past 10 to 15 years. Even as researchers grapple with the many issues involved, they are faced with a new phenomenon: the Internet -- a web of an estimated 70,000 networks (Lewis, 1995) connecting an estimated 30 million users (Watson, Barry, Dickey and Padgett, 1995) in about 130 countries (Donlan, 1995). A 1997 *News Link* survey showed 3622 online newspapers worldwide (Meyer, 1998). It enables access to and transmission of information across national borders instantly; it is

as yet largely unregulated, and it empowers individuals to much more than any other medium has done so far (Rao and Natesan, 1996).

In Korea, until September 2001, Korean newspaper companies with online news services through the Internet were about 70 companies including 12 national newspapers and 36 local newspapers (<http://www.krf.or.kr>). The Internet is no longer a secondary source of news for Koreans in comparison with newspaper and broadcast news.

The term “online journalism” has several different meanings. In a broad sense, it includes news reporting through use of a computer, but in general, online journalism is the process whereby independent web sites and existing media companies such as newspaper and broadcasting companies release news to users through the Internet. The technological features of the Internet have provoked a change of the tradition, organization, and system of journalism little by little, and the reporting, producing, organizing, and conceptualizing of news have been changed as well. Online journalism makes use of the technological features of the Internet, namely, the use of hypertext, simultaneity, and interaction.

First, online journalism, unlike typical newspapers, allows users to more using hypertext links to other places on the Internet and to see various information right away. Second, simultaneity means that online journalism can restore two-way communication through immediate feedback of users (readers and audiences). Third, due to the ability of people on the Internet to interact with each other in two-way communication, online journalism can give chances to people to participate in producing the news, unlike the traditional media, which give information to people in a one-way communication system.

Online journalism has characteristics of both newspapers and broadcast media. Newspapers have to decide which news to put on which page, whereas the television and radio newscasts need to decide in which order to present the news. For example, in producing a news program, the program director chooses news to present and in what order. However, on the Internet, print information can be put on the screen like a newspaper, and visual and audio information can be broadcast, as well. However, there is a difference. Though broadcasting media rely on one-dimensional order, online broadcast media use hypertext to create multi-dimensional order. In other words, although television viewers get information according to a schedule that a program director made, online media viewers can get information out of order, through various routes by clicking a mouse.

Hyperlinks make it possible to report one news event from several different perspectives, creating a kind of multi-dimensional news. In addition, through online journalism news users can become news producers as well. Due to technological characteristics of online journalism, people can easily post their opinions and concerns on the Internet. In short, people participate actively in public discussion and form their opinion on issues that they face. Furthermore, in this sense, two-way communication, which is a problem for traditional mass media, is possible through online journalism.

Online Journalism and Public Journalism

1) Public Journalism and the Internet

As explained in the previous section, the characteristics of online journalism that are contrasted with typical print and broadcast journalism are similar with the characteristics of public journalism. In online journalism, news sources and receivers are hardly divided because people give their opinions to online media and take information from online media easily and actively. This characteristic of online journalism coincides with a characteristic of public journalism: the active participation of the public.

Another characteristic of online journalism, the horizontal system of news producer and receiver, is similar to a characteristic of public journalism as well. Because it is possible that people express their opinions about social issues publicly through the Internet, journalists' formerly superior relationship with people is changing to one of an equal level relationship (Shapiro, 1999).

As I explained in the section on case studies (PEN and UKCOD), in online journalism, audiences make public opinion through discussions with other people, finding solutions, and forming cyber community, and then exert influence on government and political and economic institutions. Because of interaction through the Internet, making public opinion and influencing power groups is possible through email to journalists, bulletin boards, discussion and forums, online votes, chat room, and netizen reports.

As a result, these technical characteristics of the Internet support public journalism to function smoothly. In other words, online journalism provides a chance to society to form public journalism through the fact that it responds quickly audiences' requests and makes two-way communication.

Nowadays, people have limitations to access to the public sphere, to interact with journalists, and to dialogue with other audiences. To overcome these limitations, the

characteristics of the Internet are good ways and the overcoming of these limitations is an aim of public journalism. Eventually, the most important technical basis of forming public journalism is interaction.

2) The Limitations of Online Public Journalism

The representative characteristic of the Internet, interaction, has limitations. To connect to a web site and click a mouse does not mean interaction. It is not highly interactive to connect to the Internet for a long time or to visit many different web sites. In 1999, Lee et al. researched online newspapers and readers. According to their study, only 18.2% of respondents had experiences to send e-mail to journalists (Lee et al., 1999). This result points out that interaction between journalists and readers is not necessarily active.

In addition, bulletin boards and discussion sites also have limitations. Even though freedom of speech grows through the Internet, if the chance of listening to people's opinions does not take place, it does not work.

As a result, the participation of people, the equality of communication, and the similar communication ability are important things for overcoming these limitations.

3) The Possibility of Public Journalism through Online Journalism

Although some limitations of online journalism exist, online journalism is still valuable as the form of public journalism. For example, people who have similar hobbies and interests made an Internet community in South Korea. They created a web site to

share information and to discuss issues related with their hobby and interest. They use the web site and participate actively.

This example indicates that the formation of a community in cyberspace shows the possibility of public journalism because through the community in the Internet, people's participation can be increased.

In addition, as I mentioned in the case study of the UKCOD project, people actively participate to solve their community's problems through making new legislation. This case shows that if a community faces problems, people actively participate to solve their problems through any way possible. Based on this, it is possible that if public journalism provides space (or method) to people, they might participate actively.

Negroponte pointed out that the important value of computer networks is the construction of a community. That is, the information superhighway constructs another new community in world- wide virtual space (Negroponte, 1995). In addition, through online journalism, virtual communities can be constructed. In other words, as I explained in the case study of *The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition*, through online journalism, people (audiences or readers) actively and easily participate and discuss the issues of their community in the virtual community.

The National Conference of Editorial Writers (NCEW) emphasized that the merit of online journalism is that it can respond easily and quickly to readers' requests and provide the possibility of two-way communication. Because of this, media have a chance to lead public journalism.

Finally, Merritt stated that only the technical characteristics of online journalism do not contribute to activate public journalism. The more important thing is that online

media and journalists try to open cyberspace to the public as a place where people from any social class can participate and discuss community issues (Merritt, 1997).

Conclusion: Forming of Online Public Journalism

Mass media are an important for the social organization of democracy as a motive power of democracy. Thus, sometimes, freedom of the press is considered as the standard of a country's democracy. Until the middle of the 1990s, South Korean media did not have complete freedom of the press comparable to Western countries. After continuous demonstrations and movement of college students in South Korea, Korea acquired a great deal more freedom of the press; however, Koreans are facing new problems of media concentration, domination, and distortion. To overcome these problems I focus on public journalism as a solution. To form and practice public journalism, I choose the Internet as a medium and online journalism as the practical form of public journalism.

However, as I mentioned before, although online journalism has several merits, it also has some limitations (barriers). Thus, in order for this project to succeed and to form public journalism, it will have to deal with these limitations. I will point out the solutions and suggestions of barriers that Korean online journalism has.

First, there is no limitation of space on the Internet though Korean online journalism lacks in-depth reporting. For example, one study of Korean online newspapers revealed that one Korean online newspaper, *Joins Dot Com*, reported only eight articles about a controversial issue (educational immigration) for 8 months, whereas

readers posted 762 opinions about this issue in the discussion site of the online newspaper (Youn, 2001).

As shown in this example, as compared with readers' active participation, this online newspaper's reporting did not function as public journalism. The cause of this problem is a lack of professional journalists who can recognize readers' requests and needs and reflect this in planning of reporting. To do this, online media have to recruit more professional journalists.

Second, to overcome one of the limitations, lack of people's participation, Korean online media need to report various different perspectives of a controversial issue. To encourage people's participation, Korean online media, as public journalism, should put various news articles with different viewpoints reflecting the government's viewpoint, an expert's opinion, citizen's perspective, etc. By showing various perspectives of an issue, the public can have a chance to acquire more information and understand the issue more deeply.

In addition, Korean online newspapers should not report an event-centered straight news article but investigate the core issue of an event. By providing the core issue and different opinions of the event and counterproposal, the Korean online media can induce active public discussion.

Third, to encourage participation and to satisfy people's demands for information about social issues, online media as public journalism needs durability of reporting unlike typical news media. In other words, online news media should do follow-up reporting instead of one-time reporting. For example, one of the Korean online newspapers, *Oh! My News*, was reporting only one week about iniquity money of the National Intelligence

Agency of Korea (Youn, 2001). At that time, this was a hot issue and people were eager to know much more about it. Nevertheless, the online newspaper did not follow up nor any in-depth reporting.

To practice public journalism, online newspaper reports should report different and serious issues deeply and over a long period. Through this in-depth and continuous reporting, people can get enough information that typical media cannot provide because of their limitations of space or time or access.

Finally, online journalism as public journalism needs to be a diverse source of news. Because of its technical characteristics, online journalism as public journalism, people can get various information through many different sources such as people who have connections with the issue and people who know the stories behind the issue. In other words, by opening space to users of the medium, online journalism as public journalism can use people's opinions and information that are missed and uninvestigated by journalists.

Tambini argues that "as new media are interactive they ... communicate directly with one another or their representatives without the gate keeping influence of editors" (1999, p.311). Thus news media (particularly the Internet) can improve freedom of the press. Especially in South Korea, the media need to improve the quality of journalism to solve the problems that they are facing.

Therefore, I propose a move towards public journalism through online journalism to help solve these problems. Even though online journalism has some limitations, it can be a good vehicle to improve citizens' understandings of the important issues their

country faces. Eventually, through the practice of public journalism, may help South Korean achieve a higher level of democracy.

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