

## **Distorted Democracy and Freedom of the Press under Capitalism**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the issue of standards of freedom of the press in democracy. Freedom of the press should benefit citizens in democratic societies, yet historically, the press has mainly served dominant group interests that are based on capital and power. The problem of serving special interests and collusion exists globally. It examines how well the principle of press freedom operates in democratic societies with a focus on a newly democratic nation. Combining analysis of theories of press freedom with the examination of empirical data three conclusions are drawn: firstly, freedom of the press has not properly worked in democracy especially non-Western countries. Secondly, democracy is understood widely as the best political system but it can be easily corrupted. Next, freedom of the press should act for citizens but it has been really belonged to elite groups. These three issues are crucial to understanding how well press freedom operates in democratic societies.*

**Key Words:** freedom of the press, journalists, democracy, citizens, globalization, capitalism, power groups.

### **1. Introduction**

Freedom of the press has long been a topic of research for academics and the concept has been used by many scholars. However, there is no single scholarly understanding of the global concept of press freedom. It is a complex concept, one that cannot be summarized simply. There are different models and theories of press freedom (McQuail 2005; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956). Some describe best practice (LaMay 2007; Baker 2007; Herman and Chomsky 1988). Some explain why press freedom works differently in different situations and from different point of views (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Merrill, Gade and Blevens 2001). One point of agreement is that press freedom is an essential element in democracy and also one of the basic rights of human beings. The argument is that it is indispensable for a working and healthy democracy. The purpose of press freedom is to encourage equal opportunity and a harmonious democratic society through seeking truth.

According to the logic of press freedom, the media must be independent and seek the truth. It should represent the views not only of powerful groups but also the voices of weaker groups. However, there have been serious critiques by communication researchers that suggest this is not the case. Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue, the media mainly serve dominant group interests that are based on capital and power. Justice and ethics are often overlooked and the truth can easily be distorted if the media collude with political power groups and big business. This problem of serving special interests and collusion exists globally in many countries. This article explores issues of press freedom, power and democracy through literature review and a Korean case study including journalists' survey.

The aim of this article is to examine how well the idea of press freedom operates in democracy. In many democratic countries, the media have mainly served elite group interests and freedom of the press has been abused by dominant groups. Given this situation, the article focuses on three key issues that affect the standard of press freedom: firstly, what press freedom itself is analysed; secondly, what democracy is; and finally, who is press freedom for? These three issues are interlinked in considering the question of how well the press freedom operates in democracy.

### **2. What Is Press Freedom?**

Freedom of the press can be characterized as journalism that is undertaken with independence from internal or external factors and all other elements, which might make journalists hesitant in carrying out their media work.

According to classical liberal approaches, “A truly free press would be free not just of state intervention but also of market forces and ownership ties and a host of other material bonds” (Nerone 1995, 22). Press freedom is freedom from all compulsions throughout the processes of press activities. Therefore, freedom of the press entails that all processes of press activities should be conducted freely. This includes establishing a press company, gathering news, writing articles, editing news, publishing and distributing. There are various understandings of press freedom that depend on the academics’ or user’s aim or will, and the particular country or region, where there are different systems and situations. It is important to understand that press freedom is culturally specific but the dominant concept emerges from Western philosophical theory.

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007, 30) state, the notion of press freedom is based on independence, “Only a press free of government censors could tell the truth.” Seeking truth is the first principle of journalism. Recently, the meaning of freedom has expanded to be independent from other factors such as political parties, advertisers, and business. The increasing conglomeration of news companies pressures the survival of the media as independent organizations as journalism becomes a subset inside big businesses whose basic intentions are not the media. As LaMay (2007, 26) argues, “The press must be dependent on something for its viability; the press cannot be free, but is locked into a cycle of interdependence.”

In practice, the media cannot be free from governmental, political or economic control. It is easy to see media control in authoritarian societies because “governments employ strict censorship to control the flow of information to the general public, and journalists exist as mouthpieces for the government” (LaMay 2007, 26). Authoritarian regimes regularly censor or control the media before or after media production (Baker 2007, 5). However, in democratic societies there are many factors influencing freedom of the press and so it is a complex set of interrelationship (Sa 2009a). This is because “in part theory is less important to democracy than how freedom is lived and perpetuated” (LaMay 2007, 26). Further, Schneider (2012, 82) claims, “A number of factors conspire to make it very difficult for journalists to write differently.” The sources and citations journalists apply both tap into and maintain this larger storyline. Journalists are limited by these hopes and cannot just write anything they desire (83). Freedom of the press helps maintain the health of democracies. These two different systems, authoritarian and democratic can be seen in Korea.

Ostensibly, Korea is a democratic country, however, in practice the society has been strongly controlled by clientelism, which refers to a form of social organization characterized by personal relationships such as blood ties, regions and institutes (Yong-hak Kim 2008; Sa 2009b). In Korean society, an authoritarian style still exists in practice to different degrees because of the long history of authoritarian rule (Sa 2009c). Across the last fifty years governance has ranged from authoritarian rules to liberal governments, depending on the ruling style of political leaders such as the president. Therefore, Korea is a transitional state with a mixture of authoritarian and democratic features. As such it is a good case study for press freedom.

To guarantee freedom of the press in a democratic society is important because it is essential element to discover truth (Milton 1904); secondly, it ensures social benefits (Mill 1989, 36); third reason is the people’s right to know for a different view (Emerson 1962-1963, 881); fourthly, the media scrutinizes power groups as a watchdog (Curran 2002, 220); fifth reason is to maintain the balance between stability and change (Emerson 1970, 7); next, it helps citizens’ participate in the discussion of public issues (Harbermas 1989) and enhances citizens' roles and responsibility in news (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2007, 243-255); and lastly, press freedom is a basic right assuring individual self-fulfillment (Schnelling 1936). However, freedom of the press cannot be guaranteed all the time. According to the Article 29 (no. 2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations), individual rights and freedom can be restricted by law “for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.” Most states have exceptions that sometimes limit press freedom.

### ***2.1. Historical Development in the Concept of Press Freedom***

When the first newspapers appeared in the seventeenth century, English politicians started to talk about a new trend called public opinion. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, journalists and publishers started to theorise the need for free speech and a free press (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2007, 16-17). Around this time in America, Thomas Paine and Samuel Adams asserted the need for a bill of rights. Through this process a free press became the people’s first argument to their government (17).

According to Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956, 44), by the end of the eighteenth century, freedom of speech and of the press was enshrined in many Western countries by fundamental laws based on libertarian principles. Four main scholars contributed significantly to this transition: John Milton in the seventeenth century; John Erskine and Thomas Jefferson in the eighteenth; and John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth (44-50). The *Areopagitica* was published by Milton in 1644. It was a demand “for intellectual freedom in the libertarian tradition” and a powerful challenge to “authoritarian controls” (44). Jefferson said, “The principal function of government was to establish and maintain a framework within which the individual could pursue his own ends” (47). Erskine was “the most articulate of the eighteenth-century group in England,” and he developed “the libertarian principles of freedom of speech and press” (45). However, “the problem of authority versus liberty” was explored by Mill “from the viewpoint of a nineteenth-century utilitarian.” In 1859, Mill (1989, 5) wrote *On Liberty*, which emphasized the individual’s right to freedom of expression.

By the early twentieth century, a free press was understood simply to be free from government interference (McQuail 2005, 170). However, in the twentieth, this American concept of press freedom was questioned and needed to be rethought because news was concentrated in the hands of a few large media companies. The media were failing to give voice to the full meaning of freedom of expression including the opportunity of most people to access to the media. Instead the media tended towards seeking profits rather than developing freedom and democracy. This is the current situation in Korea (this will be discussed in more detail later) and many other countries affected by the combination of capitalism and globalization. In America, the Hutchins Commission was set up in 1942 in response to criticisms of the American concept of press freedom. Criticisms suggested the American press was sensationalist and too commercialized, and was politically unbalanced and displayed monopolistic tendencies. The Commission researched these claims. The final report made recommendations about the responsibilities of the owners and managers of the press to their consciences and the common good in the formation of public opinion (Commission on Freedom of the Press 1947).

According to McQuail (2005, 170-171), the Commission had four main effects that were important milestones in rethinking the notion of press freedom. Firstly, the Commission argued the media had functioned for elite power groups and the press had restricted the voices of the broader community. Secondly, the Commission was perhaps the first group, since the American concept of press freedom was developed, to admit the possibility of the need for interference by government to put right the problems in the media. These solutions emerged from the key free market, capitalist nation. Thirdly, the report was a powerful template for other countries after World War II. Fourthly, there was no actual evidence that the report really affected the media of the time but the results of the report contributed to future theorizing and to the practice of responsibility. It helped develop the concept of ‘social responsibility’ and the idea of maintaining a standard of journalism in the press.

## **2.2. Four Theories of The Press**

The book *Four theories of the press* written by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) has greatly influenced thought about press freedom. However, some argue, this book focused too much on the American agenda and its media during the cold war (Nerone 1995, 1). The four theories referred to are the Libertarian, Social responsibility, Soviet communist, and Authoritarian theories (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956). The Libertarian theory has over time evolved into the Social responsibility theory and the Authoritarian theory has developed into the Soviet communist theory.

There have been many criticisms of the four theories. Firstly, McQuail (2005, 178) claims the four theories do not explain the varieties of liberalism. Today’s society is complex and the four theories cannot explain this complexity. Many researchers point out, “Each of the theories is oversimplified” (Nerone 1995, 20). It has also been suggested the four theories cannot explain developing societies. Huang (2003, 455-458) argues that transitional varieties of society found within different political, cultural, and socio-economic contexts, may lead to different and often complex media systems. The developing world needs to have a ‘development theory’ for the media. This should include ‘transitional types’ because the normative approach of the four theories cannot explain societies in transition. Thirdly, the Libertarian theory classifies press freedom as being based on property rights. Press freedom in the Libertarian theory is too focused on property rights, and so has neglected the economic limitations to media access and the abuse of publishing power through monopolistic ownership (Nerone 1995, 133-134). Fourthly, in the Libertarian theory “the liberty of the press is too much framed as a negative concept-freedom from government” (McQuail 2005, 177).

Therefore, researchers who adopt the Libertarian theory as a model for press freedom need to consider that freedom of the press depends not only on journalists and practitioners being free from government interference but also other factors. Even though the four theories have its limitations, it is still based on good research of the media and democracy by many researchers.

### **2.3. Other Models of the Press**

Hallin and Mancini (2004) have explored three different press freedom models: the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model; the North Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model; and the North Atlantic or Liberal Model. The Polarized Pluralist Model is distinguished by a degree of politicization, with the state and political groups intervene strongly in certain areas of society, and broadly varying political ideologies are held by the population (298). The Democratic Corporatist Model is characterized by “a strong emphasis on the role of organized social groups in society, but simultaneously by a strong sense of commitment to the ‘common good’ and to rules and norms accepted across social divisions.” The Liberal Model is described by “a more individualistic conception of representation, in which the role of organized social groups is emphasized less than in the other two systems and is often seen in negative terms, as elevating ‘special interests’ over the common good” (298-299).

### **2.4. Dominant American Models of the Press**

Since the four theories were introduced, many new models of press freedom have been developed. New approaches to media research sought to solve the limitations of the four theories. The Libertarian and the Social responsibility theories were integrated into Western based theories such as the Liberal-pluralist or Market model and a Social responsibility or Public interest model of press freedom. The Liberal-pluralist or Market model is based on the original free press (Libertarian) theory and is characterized by an emphasis on freedom of ownership and operation that is “the means of publication without permission or interference from the state” (McQuail 2005, 185). However, as Guerrero and Restrepo (2012, 50-51) state, Market-based concepts of the press must take into account that the media are originally businesses surviving and expanding in a market through competing. This situation is seen in the survey of Korean journalists in this project. One journalist responded, “The existence of media company depends on the management of media company” (No.18). The other respondent answered, “A press company seeks profits to become a powerful institution, it is not a press company but a business company” (No.11).

According to Merrill, Gade and Blevens (2001, 5), the American concept of press freedom has been based on a private ownership and profit-driven communications system, and stemmed from the Enlightenment. However, there has been considerable debate on whether freedom of the press is unhealthy or dangerous for democracy, especially during transitional periods. This situation is seen in Korea (more discussion later). The American concept of press freedom does not work globally, and has received strong criticism in every developing country (33). Also, Zhao (1998, 9) was skeptical of the Western concept of press freedom because this model, which Zhao called the ‘press market model of editorial freedom,’ is equated with ‘the property right of media owners.’ Zhao argues that freedom of the press really belongs to the upper income elite and therefore the total community is not well served. Moreover, Gonzalez (1992) argues that many researchers in most parts of the world realize American-style press freedom is not democratic. This is because “democracy relates to participation in the decision-making for the whole communities and, as a line of thought, is foreign to the streams of constitutionalism and liberalism, either political or economic” (8). The problem with press freedom as a narrow anti-liberal concept is that it benefits only a small segment of society - the rich. From this point, in 1961, Liebling (1961, 7) claimed the problem of equating press freedom with property rights. Liebling argues, “The function of the press in society is to inform, but its role is to make money.”

There are numerous alternative systems and situations in diverse countries. The Social responsibility or Public interest model emphasizes the right to freedom of publication for the broad society that is “responsible media will maintain high standards by self-regulation but government intervention are not excluded” (McQuail 2005, 185). The argument here is that there is a legitimate place for public intervention and collective ownership to ensure media independence from various vested interests. The public good is seen by many countries as part of a healthy democracy.

### **3. What is Democracy?**

There are many ideas about the principles of democracy and theories of democracy but three key principles are: firstly, the principle of sovereignty - every individual holds the sovereignty of a nation, national power is based on every individual; secondly, the principle of human freedom - every individual has the freedom to decide on their hopes and to follow their desires; and thirdly, there is the principle of consent, contract or participation (Im 1984, 171-174). In real democracy, the majority of people can participate in the decision-making of societies and enjoy their life through the equal opportunity. Writing in the ancient world, Aristotle (1984, 122-123) thought real democratic societies were well-developed welfare countries. He believed that in a real democratic society a small number of extremely rich people do not coexist with a large number of poor people. Chomsky has revised Aristotle's view; Aristotle (1984, 127-128) has thought participatory democracy is ideal democracy. According to Chomsky (1994, 235), in a democratic society citizens should have "meaningful opportunity" to participate in decision-making about public policy.

#### **3.1. Aims of Democracy**

There are many but two key aims of democracy are that it works for the public good and citizens. According to Aristotle (1984, 122-128), in order to govern for the public good there needs to be correlative equality, reasonably sufficient property, and continuous development of all members of society. In order to meet the aim that democracy should be for citizens politicians must develop welfare systems for citizens. As Abraham Lincoln has suggested democracy is rule by the people, of the people and for the people. Since democracy entails popular sovereignty, citizens are responsible for returning administrations through elections this requires they have information for making knowledgeable selections (Meiklejohn 1960 / quoted in Guerrero and Restrepo 2012, 43). The ultimate goal of information in the public area is to strengthen democracy by giving information to citizens, serving as a watchdog of those in authority, and reflecting a release field of free debate (Guerrero and Restrepo 2012, 43).

#### **3.2. Problems of Democracy**

Democracy is understood widely as the best political system but it has been abused by power elites. O'Neil (1998, 1) claims, democracy is based on a political system that "allows for the dispersal of power and public access to it." However, democracy especially liberal democracy can be corrupted easily, "thereby undermining participation and voice." As Aristotle (1984, 183-184) states, if a small number of extremely rich people coexist with a large number of poor people, the poor will seize the property of the rich in the name of a democratic right. This behavior leads to instability and jeopardize democratic societies. Therefore, he has suggested two ways; firstly to reduce poverty and secondly to decrease democracy relatively. He prefers the first way to solve the problems. Also, Chomsky quoted Toqubil's warning, if inequalities of conditions continue, democracy will be a disaster because of inequality (Kang 2004a, 23). He argues that the principle of democracy is to avoid the concentration of power and wealth (Kang 2004b, 276-277).

However, under globalization or neoliberalism the life of economically weaker groups is more difficult because global economic systems have negatively influenced the living standards of citizens. On the other hand, a small number of extremely rich people have globally more power and this group are becoming more concentrated. There are wider gaps in wealth and power between the rich and the poor in the contemporary world dominated by capitalism and globalization. Soros (2004, 78-99) claims, a key factor threatening democracy is not communism but the expansion of a harsh form of capitalism around the globe. His view can be illustrated in practice in various sections of the globe through globalization or neoliberalism.

#### **3.3. Major Roles of the Media in Democratic Societies**

For healthy democracies, press freedom is essential. Democracies can be improved by the media. The media in democratic societies should inform, scrutinize, debate, and represent (Curran 2005, 120), allow participation and mobilization, and educate. Many people expect the media to fulfill these roles. Therefore, democratic societies must guarantee freedom of the press to enable these expectations to be fulfilled. However, there are different emphases placed on media roles depending on the kind of democracy in operation. This section will explore the ideals of the media's role and compare this with the survey results of Korean journalists working under market liberalism, a model that has been diffused worldwide through globalization or neoliberalism.

As noted above one of the important roles of the media for the working of a healthy democracy is to inform citizens truthfully about public issues and to facilitate citizens' participation in democratic decision-making and to make sure the people know their rights in self-government. However, this role is undermined by the free market. Journalists in the 2006-7 survey suggested that in decision making about what appeared in the news advertising was increasingly important. One journalist wrote: "Influence of advertisers has become the determining factor" (No.52).

Secondly, it is claimed the media have to scrutinize power groups. Even though the authority of the state is the result of legal choice by citizens, this power can be easily abused. This situation is ongoing in Korea (more discussion later). As Meiklejohn notes, a critical function that lookouts against the abuse of power and gives to the critical assessment of rule (Guerrero and Restrepo 2012, 43). However, private media has tended to be more focused on profit seeking rather than serving the public good. As one respondent in the print journalism survey answered, "Journalists at big newspapers in Korea serve not for the public good or the objective truth but for the profit of their companies" (No.71).

Thirdly, the media encourage debate and the formation of public opinion in the public sphere. However, Curran (2002, 226) claims, the free market restricts public debate because it produces "information-rich media for elites, and information-poor media for the general public. The result, in many countries, is a polarization between prestige and mass newspapers." Again to use data from the Korean survey, one journalist responded, "The power of capital is stronger than others" (No.37).

Fourthly, the media represent the voice of citizens, and provide a place for citizens to assert their opinions. However, core variables influencing how media representations are organized depends on their power within the political system and the degree to which the prevailing power network coheres (Curran 2002, 232). Artz (2007, 148) states, capitalists operate the media as "commercial, for-profit, and advertising and market-driven." They use a variety of power structures, and media systems in their societies. One Korean journalist noted, "Earning capital for management of media company is too highly dependent on advertising revenue rather than newspaper subscription fees" (No.16).

Finally, the media educate the people to reach for individual self-fulfillment as Emerson (1962-1963, 879) commented. Regarding media education, Christians et al. (2005, 31) argue, "In traditional democracies, education and information are the pillars on which a free society rests." However, under market liberalism the media focus on their own benefit as private businesses rather than the education of citizens. This belief was expressed by another Korean journalist who commented, "The media has become the owner's private company" (No.43).

So though in theory the major roles of the media are seen as important for healthy democratic societies, this Korean journalists' survey supports arguments that under market liberalism the major roles of the media are restricted. Most privately owned media seek for their own benefits rather than to serve the public good. Media content is chosen by a filtering mechanism, mainly based on capital and power. The roles of the media under market liberalism are more limited in practice, though "the notion of the marketplace of ideas is central to libertarianism's model of political communication" (Nerone 1995, 43). This problem is ongoing in many countries under capitalism and globalization.

#### **4. Who is Press Freedom For?**

Freedom of the press should function for citizens in democratic societies that each member enjoys freedom as a basic right through the free expression of their ideas or their thoughts. It claims, the key player or claimant of press freedom should be citizens in democratic societies. This is also confirmed by the Korean journalists survey. When asked "Who do you think has the right to freedom of the press in a democratic society?", the majority of the Korean journalists chose that citizens should be first players in press freedom (75%), next journalists (17.9%), and the smallest percent chose the media (7.1%). However, in practice, the main group to benefit from press freedom are the powerful groups that includes media owners. There are three main players in press freedom: the state, media organizations and citizens. The key players in identifying and maintaining press freedom are the media and citizens because the state holds power (Sartori 1987).

Understandings of press freedom differ for each of these groups. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007, 51-77) stress that journalists' prime role is to serve citizens. However, as Baker (2007, 128) argues, "The proper meaning of press freedom varies depending on who its beneficiaries are assumed to be." Many academics around the world recognize that freedom of the press really has favored the elites. Barron (1973, xv) claims, "A new theory of freedom of the press is essential to restore public dialogue." Barron's basic argument is that "the First Amendment should be restored to its true proprietors - the reader, the viewer, the listener" (xiv). He strongly argues, press freedom should be more than a guarantee only for media owners' property rights. Extending Barron's argument Baker (2007, 279-280) has concluded the media and free press should serve "the people." This hope was confirmed in my analysis of the Korean journalists' survey in this project. However, freedom of the press really has belonged to elite groups and the media have acted in their interests not citizens. It also has been abused by the elite groups. These examples will be discussed in my analysis of the Korean case.

## **5. Major Emerging Issues**

Major ideas of press freedom in democracy have been based on the western context. These ideas have worked in the western countries and pre-globalization. However, there has been considerable debate on whether freedom of the press is unhealthy for transitional non-western states, and after globalization. This section will explore the impact of globalization and also flourishing press freedom and the propaganda of 'The Lost Decade' in Korea.

### **5.1. Globalization**

Discussions of press freedom in the twenty-first century need to consider the impact of globalization. Globalization encourages a worldwide business environment that crosses national boundaries and bypasses many states' regulations. Soros (2004, 94) notes, global capitalists have made international business organizations into powerful institutions, and also extended "the development of global financial markets, the growth of transnational corporations, and their increasing domination over national economies" (83). With this definition of globalization many areas are included in this international phenomenon. Liberal media structures and ideas are continually diffused through neoliberalism and globalization (305). In the media Artz (2007, 153) argues, "Transnational media are the ultimate in deregulation, privatization, and commercialization." National media capitalists reflect the existing social and cultural leadership and adopting an international capitalist media model. The globalization of information and media culture has spread these powerful influences even more broadly.

Nowadays, I suggest capitalism and globalization are the main factors threatening press freedom in democratic societies. As discussed, the media have limited public roles under capitalism and globalization. Also, in research undertaken with the Korean journalists many of the journalists responded that they have mostly felt powerless in their jobs and skeptical about the press being free press from the power of capital. One journalist argued, "It is impossible to be free from advertisers in a capitalist society" (No.9). Another respondent stated, "The political influence possibly can be changed. However, it is impossible to maintain independence from advertisers in capitalist society" (No.46). Press freedom is not guaranteed everywhere in the world because political power and business interests directly or indirectly influence the media.

Hamelink (2007, viii) argues, "The neoliberal ideologues pretend to march behind the banner of freedom. This requires their rather limited interpretation of 'freedom' as the lifting of regulations for cross-border trading but freedom is more than a notion found in trade-law books." Also, American scholar Dennis Hart notes, behind the rhetorical terms Globalization, Neoliberalism or FTA the life of economically weaker groups is more difficult. Global economic systems spearheaded by America have negatively influenced the living standards of citizens.<sup>1</sup>

According to Chomsky and Barsamian (2007, 61), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) tried to develop a new international information order in the 1970s, this idea was "to try to give third world countries some sort of input into the international media system, instead of having it totally monopolized by a few rich Western powers, America primarily." However, America strongly attacked this idea and also cut its funds, America have wanted to increase its influence via the media in the third world (62). Chomsky and Barsamian note, we often ignore "a voice that expresses the position of the vast majority of the world's population, at least to some extent, whereas we insist on an information system that is under the control of the rich and powerful and works for their interests" (63). The basic concept of the liberal global order is that American cooperation is needed to access resources, access markets and investment (170-171).

As Reese (2012, 70) states, in the contemporary world information processes, what is important is global interconnectivity and communication technology. Through exposure to the constructed and orchestrated character of global information, journalism is a vigorous factor in events and not a simple witness of them. While there are indications that global governments, such as America, control the orchestration of the events, the main player seems to have been in local hands (Paterson, Andresen and Hoxha 2012, 117). Regarding the extra media stage, Guerrero and Restrepo (2012, 50) argue, marketable pressures and deregulatory trends enforced media groups to lodge new more severely aggressive information markets, this situation does not essentially result in the making of better quality information. However, critical, rapid, helpful and excellent information cannot be taken for granted just because new and more players are participating in the determining of information nowadays (58).

Some scholars hope this new century will be more focused on the social order, harmony, cooperative development and citizen-based press. Merrill, Gade and Blevens (2001, 26) stress, "Freedom, for one thing, must be restricted for the press and spread to the public. Individualism must be tempered and community must be enshrined." Moreover, to ensure press freedom, they argue, "Order and social harmony must be inculcated, with community solidarity stressed, and the whole realm of mass communication must be democratized so as to promote civic participation." One of ways for civic participation in journalism is new media. Internet media Ohmynews in Korea is a good example of a format that enables citizens to participate in writing news articles. Also, blogs in western countries have a similar function. These new media and more recently SNS are much more democratized and enable citizens to participate in news production rather than depend on newspapers or broadcasts. Also, these new media are relatively more independent and freer to check power groups than traditional media.

## ***5.2. Flourishing Press Freedom and the Propaganda of 'The Lost Decade'***

During the last century, the Western concept of individual freedom has penetrated many traditional non-Western societies and has shaped the press, but not all concepts have worked in traditional non-Western countries especially transitional periods. As Merrill, Gade and Blevens (2001, 32) argue, "the Western contention of a free press's compatibility with democracy is an illusion." This situation is confirmed in Korea. Korea is still a transitional country moving between a long authoritarian rule and a new and still short liberal rule. Media environments are unhealthy because the media have often been partisan in their reporting - attacking one side or supporting the other side rather than presenting objective reports as is journalism's role. Even today the conservative power groups, including major newspapers, are based on groups that were pro-Japanese colonial rule and supported the dictators' regimes. Today their power is greater than liberal voices (Sa 2009c). Even after democratization, as Young-Jae Choi (2010, 174) argues, the media has become aligned with political power and conservative voices based on an anti-communism ideology because of the divided Korea. It is an unusual situation in developed countries, that even after democratization, conservative and partisan newspapers still dominate newspaper markets. During the first appearance of liberal rules, major newspapers have aggressively and seriously attacked the liberal governments.

There is some evidence that, during the Moo-Hyun Roh government, freedom of the press was flourishing in Korea. Two international organizations: Freedom House (2008) a US-based press freedom monitoring organization and Reporters Without Borders (RWB 2007) a Europe-based press freedom-monitoring organization confirmed that Korea was a free press country. In 2006, the RWB (2006) assessed Korea as one of 'the Asian continent's best performers' in press freedom and reported, "New Zealand (19th), South Korea (31st) and Australia (35th) scored best in the region." Most Korean journalists enjoyed press freedom. This fact was confirmed by the Korean journalists' survey. In the survey journalists were questioned about press freedom of Korea in general. The majority of the respondents answered that Korea was a free press country (81%). This included those who chose 'mostly free' (46.4%) and 'absolutely free' (34.5%). A number of the respondents chose 'moderate' (11.9%). Several percent of the respondents chose 'mostly not free.'

However, this flourishing freedom of the press was not continued to develop along with democracy for citizens in Korea because it was abused by existing conservative power groups including major newspapers. As Herman and Chomsky (1988, 299) state, "The media have gone too far in their exuberant independence and challenge to authority, so far that they must be curbed if democracy is to survive." Also, propaganda campaigns normally have been intimately adjusted to benefit elites (32). This is seen in Korea, where the power of major newspapers is very strong and they aggressively and partisanally attack liberal governments.



During the presidential election in 2007, a propaganda campaign called, 'The Lost Decade' and referring to the liberal governments, was planned by the conservative power groups. Yung-Wook Kim (2011) claims, these power groups deliberately found intellectuals who have held the same views as the power groups, such as development focused on big businesses and deregulation. These intellectuals have solidly theorised their arguments through conservative research centers and business institutes. Further, these power groups used the idea of 'The Lost Decade', to describe a period when the Korean citizens had difficulties in their ordinary life after the IMF intervention in Asian economic crisis (hereafter IMF crisis) in 1997. The One Nation Party (now 'Saenuri Party') had continuously argued, the liberal governments had caused this failure. Major conservative newspapers supported this argument. However, this propaganda was not matched by reality because the One Nation Party has been the major political ruling party since the liberation of Korea from the Japanese colonial rule until 1997, and had been the main cause of the IMF crisis in 1997. Also, as Sung-Ho Kim (2008) claims, during the Roh government, the Korean economy was not as bad as voters were led to believe during the 2007 presidential election.

However, the propaganda was surprisingly effective and caused increasing doubt about the liberal government. Korean society has become more conservative as the One Nation Party was elected to overcome the difficulties of the Korean economy on the 19th December 2007. Myung-Bak Lee won the election by the largest margin ever. Why did the conservative power groups collude? They had lost political power since the IMF crisis in 1997 "resulting in a very low level of social trust" (Park 2008, 132-133). As a result, there had been the unusual situation in Korean political history because of the appearance of liberal rules of Dae-Jung Kim and then Moo-Hyun Roh. Dae-Jung Kim as a symbolic figure from Jeolla(or Honam), his unique career politically inspired the people of the region, above all, the ruthless crackdown of the Gwangju Democratization Movement in 1980 led the Jeolla people to be much more politically engaged (Man-Heum Kim 2008, 101-103). The Jeolla-based political camp seized power for the first time in history.

However, since 2008 political power has returned to the conservative group in Korea. The grassroots democracy and press freedom that developed during the liberal rules (1998~2007) have been jeopardized by despotic leadership. Evidences of this recession have been recognized internationally and nationally. In 2009 press freedom in Korea was rated by the RWB (2009) as 69th. This is a vast drop from being ranked 31st in 2006. National evidence of the threats to press freedom are available from the media practice. Since the Lee government, many journalists of various media companies have struck for freedom of news production, independence and fair reporting. Media academic Jin-Bong Choi claims, major media have open reported distorting news and partial reporting.<sup>2</sup> In 2012, there were simultaneous strikes on several media companies especially major broadcasters like KBS, MBC, YTN and Yonhapnews agency etc. Moreover, many journalists have been sacked and punished by their media companies. As, one parliament member of opposition party wanted to institutionalize a law for the sacked journalists who had fought for freedom of the press and independence under the Lee government.<sup>3</sup>

Under the Lee government, the major media in Korea could not properly play their roles in journalism and also the media has lost its reputation for reliability. As a result, an interesting phenomenon has emerged of new media. One example is 'Nanen Ggomsuda or I am a Weasel' in media practice. 'I am a Weasel' is a totally different communicative form utilizing podcast, a type of internet radio format. This program has increased in popularity and notice since its emergence on the 28th April 2011, because it dealt vigorously with sensitive political issues in challenging the leader groups especially the president.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper explored freedom of the press in democracy. It discussed how well the press freedom operates in democracy focused on three issues: firstly, it explored freedom of the press; secondly, what democracy was; and thirdly, who was press freedom for?

It explored how well freedom of the press operates in democracy. Unfortunately, freedom of the press in democracy has not operated well. The dominant American concept of freedom has not all worked in non-Western societies, and it acts for mainly the elite groups who also has abused it in democracy. It is very dangerous and threatening for democracy applying from the Western concept of freedom to non-Western societies especially during transitional periods like Korea.

Also, it is very considerable debate on whether freedom of the press is unhealthy or dangerous for democracy. This problem is aggravated worldwide under capitalism and globalization. Therefore, new ideal standards of press freedom need to embrace global differences and change and also it should be based on citizens.

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