

Article

The Changing Jobs of Journalists  
and the Function of Journalism  
in South Korea:  
Focus on Political Recruiting

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## Introduction

The media play a significant role in addressing many issues arising from national and international changes in complex environments. Particularly, one core function of journalism is monitoring power to ensure a stronger democracy (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014, 171-84; Sa 2009c; 2013, 165-66). Therefore, the media and journalists must maintain a certain level of tension with power groups to maintain journalism's role. However, relations among political and capitalist powers and the media are becoming too close for growing organizations to survive in an increasingly competitive media environment (Sa 2014). National and international movements and the overflowing of capitalism threaten and narrow the function of journalism (Sa 2013, 167; 2014). In rapidly changing societies, a journalist's job is unstable because of the increasing number of new media and the overflowing competition of journalism in media industry.

Journalists' roles are important to a stronger democracy. However, journalists cannot successfully fulfill public roles if the journalists are not satisfied or do not take pride in their jobs. Journalists' professionalism, which is based on expertise, develops in an atmosphere of ethical media activity. Journalists' ethics are the basis for public media roles and lead to a free press and the success of independent journalism (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014, 271-73; Sa 2009c, 28). The core values of media ethics are seeking truth and guaranteeing an independent press (Kang 2004, 337). However, the number of journalists hoping to change jobs has gradually increased in different countries (Ahn 2009, 212; Becker et al. 2006; Pew Research Center 1999).

The purpose of this paper is to analyze journalists changing jobs in an atmosphere of power and the function of journalism. For an assessment practical data were collected from news journalists in South Korea (hereafter Korea). The paper first explores journalists' responses regarding job offers from government or political-economic<sup>1</sup> circles; second, the paper examines why journalists want to change jobs; and finally, this paper examines differences in journalists' desires to accept job offers in Seoul compared with the provincial media.

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1. Economic circles were added from the second survey.

## **Professionalism and the Function of Journalism**

### ***What is Professionalism?***

Professionalism means that professional capability and authority should be recognized and respected, including the critical concept that authority should not be abused (Kang 2009, 782-83). The authority of journalism has been based on professional independence in choosing what generates the news (Abbott 1989; qtd. in Anderson 2013, 133). However, this specialized autonomy is becoming damaged as people use their own liberty not only to create their own informational material but also to expand access to an extensive selection of unpackaged informational choices (Anderson 2013, 133-34; Marchionni 2015, 220). Professionalism can repress faith in or the appearance of gender distinctions not only in journalism but also in other areas (Liao and Lee 2014, 460).

Many academics have suggested standards for professional jobs; according to Wilensky (1964; qtd. in Yoon 2004, 14), there are basic requirements for professional jobs: full-time employment, establishing an educational organization, organizing an association, and establishing a code of ethics. Gross (1958; qtd. in Yoon 2004, 14) stressed attitudes towards the profession, the condition of extensive participation in a job, responsibility based on internal rewards rather than economic rewards, and solidarity through a professional association. Larson (1977; qtd. in Im 2008, 30) categorized three internal characteristics of a profession: recognition, regulation, and evaluation. Recognition is professional knowledge, technique, and training; regulation is professional ethics; and evaluation is autonomy and the special rights of professional groups. However, Hunter (2015, 275) argued, "Journalism is a profession that is different from occupations such as medicine or law, in that there is no set exam that must be passed, or strict professional guidelines that must be followed, neither is there a requirement for formal education."

In a study of journalists' professionalism, McLeod and Hawley (1964, 531; qtd. in Yoon 2004, 34) observed that strong professional journalists desire to use their professional skills and knowledge and the autonomy of self-expression. Professional journalists are also influenced by capable senior journalists and colleagues. Alternatively, less professional journalists are more influenced by wages, stability, promotion, and human-relations. According to Pihl-Thingvad (2015, 394), "The journalists' professionalism is legitimized

through journalism's role in society." Although there are many opinions regarding "good journalism," all academics agree that there must be truth in reporting. Journalism requires the professional capability and ethical perceptions of journalists because journalism must differentiate among known facts and address the concept that known facts can be differently understood (1964, 531; qtd. in Yoon 2004, 34).

### ***The Function of Journalism and the Journalists' Changing Jobs to Political Circles***

The function of journalism is significant because journalism is a key mediator among every fields (Benson and Neveu 2005, 6; Hallin and Briggs 2015, 97). The ultimate function of journalism in a society is to strengthen democracy by providing news to people, acting as a watchdog of those in power, and replicating a public sphere of free conversation (Magen 2015, 248; Schlosberg 2015, 230; Siebert et al. 1956). When journalists change jobs to political circles, they influence the function of journalism. Therefore, the function of journalism must be analyzed, particularly in the areas of media ethics, reliability, and impartiality.

#### **Media ethics**

Many ethical issues are related directly and indirectly to truth in communication (Fitzpatrick and Bronstein 2006; Parsons and Fitzpatrick 2008; qtd. in Lee and Cheng 2012, 82-83; Seib and Fitzpatrick 1995). Journalism ethics is dedicated to diminishing harm rooted in information distribution. In the fair distribution of information, media ethics function as a significant element in instituting management over business and educational information hoarding (Fairfield and Shtein 2014, 49). The aim of ethical activities by journalists is to ensure free and independent journalism (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014, 271-73; Sa 2009c, 28). A core value of journalistic ethics is to seek the truth and perform independently of all pressures (Kang 2004, 337). Journalism is based on the public's role, which is important for a stronger democracy.

The media have more opportunities for public roles than other companies (Park 2004, 437). When journalists state that their movement to the political

arena is “freedom of job selection,” Kang (2008, 36) refutes this excuse: “It is an awkward defense because journalists occupy special positions.” Journalism is based on objectivity and fairness that must be free from any personal benefits (Anderson and De Maeyer 2015; Bas and Grabe 2015, 162; Mellado and Humanes 2015). Therefore, when journalists suddenly change jobs, their objectivity and the fairness of their articles will be questioned (Kang 2008, 36; Im 2008, 63).

Concerning time gaps, many journalists, media academics, and citizens’ groups in Korea agree that journalists should wait for a certain length of time after their retirement, because the close relationships they have with politicians can be utilized for private benefits when they change jobs. Also, according to Article 53 (no.1) of the Public Official Election Act (regarding candidates for public service, etc.) in Korea, public servants and journalists must quit their jobs 90 days before an election if they want to move into political circles. In addition, 2008 journalists’ surveyed by the Journalists Association of Korea (JAK) confirmed this (Jang 2008). An interesting finding was that most journalists perceive the need for longer time gaps than the Public Official Election Act requires. According to a survey of journalists conducted by the Korea Press Foundation (KPF) regarding appropriate time gaps, the largest number of participants responded “more than 1 year- less than 2 years” (Ahn 2009, 118-20). Although most Korean journalists advocated “more than 1 year- less than 2 years” after journalists’ retirement, some journalists have changed their jobs in a day.

On 5 February 2014, Geun-Hye Park nominated Kyoung-Wook Min as a spokesman for CheongWaDae (the official residence and workplace of the President in Korea). At that time, Min was a news anchor and culture editor for the news section of KBS. Moreover, until one day before his nomination, he was reporting a segment of a news program at KBS. According to the KBS branch of the National Union of Media Workers (NUMW), on the morning of the nomination day, Min was enacting his role at KBS by participating in an editorial meeting, and he notified his team leaders just 10 minutes before CheongWaDae announced the nominated personnel (Choi 2014). Also, Nam-Ki Lee, the owner of SBS Media Holdings, has moved to CheongWaDae, on the nomination day as the first secretary of public relations; Lee had just attended normal SBS Media Holdings. This type of journalistic behavior is not just a current problem in Korea (Song 2014).

Journalism education is a significant process during which persons obtain not only the skills but also the values and standards of the field (Lo and Chan 2004; Splichal and Sparks 1994; Weaver and Wilhoit 1986). Journalistic ethics begins with a set of regulations and standards regarding what journalists should and should not do. Compared with other conventional jobs, journalism does not have a cognitive association with a final body of awareness; thus, ethical standards and values are debatably the central material of journalistic professionalism (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014, 271-73; Soloski 1997; qtd. in Liao and Lee 2014, 460).

### **Media reliability**

The changing of jobs from journalism to political circles influences news reliability. To be perceived as credible, journalism must deliver truth. However, if journalism conspire with those in power, truth can easily be distorted (Sa 2009b; 2013). Distortion of the truth is a core reason for the public's declining trust in the press. A lack of faith in the press and in the politicians they inform on weakens the idea of knowledgeable consent that is the basis of democracy (Steel 2012, 56). According to Tsfati and Ariely (2014, 760), "Levels of political interest, interpersonal trust, and exposure to television news and newspapers are positively correlated with trust in the press, whereas education and exposure to news on the Internet are negatively associated." The declining trust in news is a serious problem in journalism (Marchionni 2015, 223). According to Gallup (qtd. in van der Wurff and Schoenbach 2014, 436), in America, "the percentage of people with little to no trust in the news media grew from 26% in 1976 to 60% in 2012." This situation is seen in Korea.

In Korea, media credibility has been decreasing (Ahn 2009, 21). Credibility about news reporting by the media was 3.28/5 points in 2014. Regarding media credibility in each media type, "TV Broadcasting" is the highest point (3.90), followed by "Specialist News Channel" (3.70), "General Channel of Broadcasting" (3.60), "Portal News" (3.50), "News Agency" (3.47), and "Business Newspaper & Specialist Newspaper" (3.45). Generally broadcasting media are higher credibility than other media, next followed newspaper and Internet media (except for Portal). Compared to the result of credibility between 2014 and 2013, all types of the media were reduced, the most decreasing media was "TV Broadcasting" (-0.23), next followed "Newspaper" (national, -0.22), "Specialist News Channel" and "News Agency"

(each -0.14), and “General Channel of Broadcasting” (-0.12) (KPF 2014, 129).

When special issues were simultaneously reported by the media such as newspaper, TV, radio, magazine, and Internet media, Korean people most believed the “TV news” (65.7%). Next followed “Internet news” (23.9%), “Newspaper” (8.1%), “Radio” (1.6%), and “Magazine” (0.6%). Compared to the results of 2013, the ratio of TV reduced to 7.7%, but Internet news increased to 6.0%. There were no differences in the results of newspaper, radio, and magazine (KPF 2014, 131). Since 2008, the reliability of newspaper tends to decrease (KPF 2013, 135).

Some Korean journalists have helped power groups from military regimes and have become over politicised (Kang 2004, 326). This type of behavior can damage media credibility by influencing truthful reporting. Also, media academics have had extremely low credibility regarding the media and journalists. This lack of credibility was confirmed by the 2008 public poll of *KyunghyangShinmoon* (Hong 2008). According to their findings, 65.8% of media academics did not believe the media. Journalists’ credibility was even worse than the media’s credibility. None of the media academics answered “very trust,” and only 29.5% of the respondents selected “moderately trust” with regard to journalists’ credibility. However, 70.5% of the participants chose “do not trust,” and 41.1% of media academics noted that the most urgent issue in recovering credibility is “media ethics of journalists and reinforcement of professionalism,” followed by “impartiality towards a certain political party” (36.3%), “the improvement of the media market and the oligopoly-like environment” (13.2%) and “to be free from the subordination of economic power” (8.4%). A media without credibility must decline. When journalists feel a responsibility and professionalism towards society, media credibility increases. To restore credibility of the media, journalists must seek for truth, and the truth must be published under the principle of free information flow.

### **Media impartiality**

Journalists’ becoming politicians may cause problems with regard to media fairness. The top four characteristics of the quality of content are accuracy, impartiality in reporting, analytical activity, and professional staff abilities (Anderson 2014, 19). Impartiality in reporting is a core element of quality content and also relates to media trust. Also, Schudson and Anderson (2009;

qtd. in Olsson and Nord 2015, 346) commented, news “coverage should be objective and balanced, which on a general level refers to the fact that political actors should be treated with equality in the news.”

According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014, 243), “Thinking of journalism as map making helps us see that proportion and comprehensiveness are key to accuracy. This goes beyond individual stories.” Persons in the political field have access to mostly pro-attitudinal content and may combine their attitudes; however, the shape of their attitudes varies by partisanship (Garrett and Stroud 2014, 680). This partisanship is influenced by journalists and editors by selecting which articles are printed.

Truth is often elusive and may be influenced by opinion, completeness of information, interpretation, and perception. Journalists frequently maintain close relationships with their former colleagues; thus, the media cannot fairly criticise politicians. Regarding the relationships between journalists and politicians, Osborne (2012, 62) describes how close they are: “They live together, eat together, dine together, go to bed together.” This is scarcely shocking because many of our most famous politicians were previously journalists.

This vital environment explains the otherwise meticulously strange failure of the press to monitor abuse of power (Christians et al. 2009; qtd. in Tandoc Jr. and Peters 2015, 329; Lee 2002, 365; Osborne 2012, 63). Also, Chung (2010) noted in an article in *Mediatoday* that journalists think politicians should not be criticized and monitored because they will all be colleagues in the future. Media fairness is thus damaged. Kim (2011) condemned that the major media have created muddled media markets, and they have decreased credibility themselves by extremely partial reporting.

Journalists must have responsibilities in society. Thomas and Hindman (2012, 584) also stated, “The onus is on the corporation to engage in a self-reflexive process to revise its role in British society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and better articulate the principles of a model of news media rooted not in markets, but in social responsibility.” Their points are well taken, not only in British society but in Korean society as well.

As seen existing studies, there have been many problems in the function of journalism, when journalists change jobs to political circles. Therefore, it will explore journalist’s perception about political recruiting.



## **Political Recruiting and Origin of Journalists' Changing Jobs in Korea**

### ***Political Recruiting***

According to Foucault, power works at a place remote from a nation, centering on persuasion over control, being diffused across a range of organizations linking state, the general society and the public in complex societies (Lunt and Livingstone 2013, 91). Journalists' jobs changing in political circles are called political recruiting; journalists are led into professional roles in the political system to help maintain the power structure (Almond and Coleman 1966, 31). Political recruiting includes not only the change of non-political roles to political roles but also the selection of personnel to play specific political roles (Lester 1964). Almond and Powell (1979, 108-33) categorized political recruiting into recruiting for citizens, recruiting for the elites, for the selection of an individual player, and as an enticement to anticipate roles.

According to Rush and Althoff (1971; qtd. in Im 2008, 22-23), there are various ways of political recruiting, mainly elections, official examinations, and other manners. Therefore, the changing jobs of journalists in political circles are the political recruitment of the elite, which is one of the main issues in current society because this issue relates not only to socializing politics and maintaining political systems but also reflects society and influences entire social systems. Especially, the "who" and "how" of political recruiting are core elements because the "who" and "how" can have significant political effects and directly decide political development (Rush and Althoff 1971; qtd. in Im 2008, 22-23). There are many reasons to recruit journalists into political circles: journalists are easily recognized and have positive images; journalists can effectively play political roles in delivering messages; journalists have maintained broad personal networks in politics, the economy, and the government; and there is a benefit to maintaining a good relationship with the media and journalists (Joo 2011).

Many academics state, journalists insist that they take pride in their professionalism, providing the truth regarding various issues and functioning as watchdogs to monitor governments (Becker et al. 1979; Gardner et al. 2001; Pew Research Center 1999; Reinardy 2011). However, journalists' assurances are limited although more than 90% of journalists report having felt pride in their jobs (Pew Research Center 1999). They are not happy with their jobs, and only a small number are expected to retire as journalists (Becker et al. 2006).

## *Origin of Journalists' Changing Jobs in Korea*

In Korea, journalists' changing jobs to work in government or political circles began with military dictatorships. Military regimes gave positions as members of parliament or government spokespersons to journalists to use the journalists' connections, which was quite efficient for controlling the media. These connections continued after democratisation in 1987 (Lee 2003, 68-69). These connections operate by collusion between those with political power and some journalists. Many media companies and some journalists have maintained their hegemony through political connections (Sa 2009a, 5).

Korean governments have purposely recruited journalists, and many journalists change jobs to seek personal success for playing their roles to gain power. Kang (2009, 782) criticized greedy journalists who circle around politics. This phenomenon is not only today's problem but was also a problem in the past. Members of parliament in Korea were from the media in •1992 (14<sup>th</sup> parliament)-40 (13.4%); in •1996 (15<sup>th</sup> parliament)-33 (11.0%); in •2000 (16<sup>th</sup> parliament)-45 (16.4%); in •2004 (17<sup>th</sup> parliament)-40 (13%); in •2008 (18<sup>th</sup> parliament)-35 (11.8%); and in •2012 (19<sup>th</sup> parliament)-20 (6.7%) (Joo 2011). We call these media politicians "Polinalists," indicating a combination of politician and journalist. This term has a pejorative meaning because the journalists suddenly became politicians.

During the Myung-Bak Lee (or MB) government, Polinalists' activities were particularly remarkable. Polinalists spearheaded pressure on the media, rendering journalism powerless. Eventually, Jae-Yeol Ko (2009) of SisaIN disclosed "The names of 88 Polinalists under the MB government." Of a total of 297 members of the 18<sup>th</sup> parliament, 35 were from the media. However, Kang (2009, 780) argued that journalists who attempted to be politicians numbered many more than 35. During the presidential campaign of MB in 2007, 41 members of the media worked for MB. After MB became the president, 29 of those 41 campaigners became members of the government or media-related organizations; many people also became personnel of CheongWaDae. Regarding these situations, Kang stated that journalists generally lack media ethics and professionalism, which is the entire problem with the Korean media. Under the current Geun-Hye Park government, similar activities of Polinalists have continued (Han 2013).

Some negative effects of past cases are that some Polinalists played roles

not for political development as media experts, but for regimes or existing power groups to distort truth or exert pressure to deny freedom of the press (Kang 2009, 796). Therefore, media researchers have criticized these Polinalists (ibid. 778-82). Specifically, under the MB government, Polinalists rendered journalism in Korea null by exerting pressure to deny freedom to the press and distorting the truth (Jeon 2012, 117). Additionally, the Internet and SNS have been threatening freedom of expression. On 7 January 2009, the financial blogger, Dae-Sung Park “Minerva” was arrested (and released on 20 April), he wrote negative comments on Korea’s ailing economy policy (Jung 2012, 445; Sa 2009d, 13). Moreover, national organizations have all mobilized for wiretapping, censorship, and control (Jeon 2012, 117). These situations are reflected in assessments of freedom-monitoring organizations from overseas and by the media academics of Korea.

According to two international organizations, Reporters without Borders (RWB) and Freedom House, press freedom-monitoring organizations designated Korea a free country during the Moo-Hyun Roh government (Sa 2009b; 2009c; 2014, 168). In 2006, the RWB (2006) assessed Korea as one of “the Asian continent’s best performers” in press freedom. However, since the Myung-Bak Lee government, freedom of the press has fallen sharply that Korea ranked 69<sup>th</sup> in freedom in 2009 (RWB 2009). Grassroots democracy and freedom of the press in Korea have retrogressed dangerously because of cruel control, and many journalists have been desperately resisting. Consequently, only during the MB government, 455 journalists were fired or punished by their employers (NUMW 2013; Sa 2014, 217); this remains an ongoing issue. Grassroots democracy and freedom of the press have been getting worse. Eventually, conscientious media academics in Korea have proclaimed “for the protection of media fairness,” and they have consistently argued for freedom of the press (J. Lee 2012, 179-80). As stated above, Korean governments have purposely recruited journalists, and these Polinalists have certainly played their roles to gain power (Im 2008, 24). The number of journalists becoming politicians must decrease. Journalists should establish agendas for politics and public welfare.

## Methods

This research is an attempt to reveal and to probe the views that the changing jobs of journalists influences the function of journalism. Also, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014, 9) stated, “Journalism must serve as a monitor of power” and “Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.” Moreover, journalism must be free from any personal benefits (Anderson and De Maeyer 2015; Bas and Grabe 2015, 162; Im 2008, 63; Kang 2008, 36; Mellado and Humanes 2015).

### *Research Questions (RQ)*

RQ 1: Frequency of journalists accepting job offers from power circles

RQ 2: Reasons why journalists would accept job offers

RQ 3: Relations between job acceptances of journalists and media locations

### *Study Survey*

Survey data were collected two times from journalism practitioners who belong to news media such as daily newspapers, broadcasting, news agencies, and internet news media in Korea (see Table 1 and 2). The survey focused on news journalists working in the news section, and it was based on an in-depth structured survey and made up of a mix of closed and open-ended questions. It firstly took about three and half months from 3 October 2006 to 20 January 2007 (hereafter first survey), and secondly took a little less than three months from 17 March to 13 June 2011 (hereafter second survey).

Of the diverse news organizations represented, 38 news organizations from the first survey (see Table 1) were in Seoul (18) and local (20) areas; and 45 media companies from the second survey (see Table 2) were in Seoul (15) and provincial (30) areas. 84 journalists (48 from Seoul and 36 from provincial areas, see Table 1) from the first survey; and 73 respondents (21 from Seoul and 52 from local districts, see Table 2) from the second survey, completed survey questionnaires and returned them to the researcher. However, the ratio of response is not easy to calculate. The number of mail failures appeared

continuously while the reminder emails were sent from the first time to the last time. The total number of journalists who actually received the survey and opened the questionnaires is not known because there were no confirmation emails exchanged between the researcher and the journalists. The survey questionnaires were sent by email to potential contributors (1,597 emails of 62 news companies for the first survey and 1,416 emails of 92 media organizations for the second survey) on an almost weekly basis.

Qualitative and quantitative methods were incorporated into the survey questionnaires to strengthen the study; each method complemented the other method's weaknesses. The survey was explained to the journalists by the researcher by "Information for Participants," which was sent to journalists with the survey questionnaires to explain the requirements for conducting the research, including research ethics. The "Information for Participants" was based on guidelines from the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

## *Analysis*

This paper combines an analysis of theories and the changing jobs of journalists with an examination of empirical data regarding Korea. Journalists were asked to give information regarding ten (see Table 1) and nine (see Table 2) categories including job sections, holding positions, types of media, service location, gender, age group, first or subsequent job, service duration, qualifications, and major of highest degree. Most survey respondents gave diverse reasons for their selections (see Table 3): also, in qualitative statements which were classified by the researcher (see Table 4). The qualitative information of respondents was translated by the researcher from Korean into English. The survey focused on news journalists only.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### *Journalists' Responses Regarding Job Offers from Government or Political Circles*

When asked a question about being offered a position in government or

political or economic circles, more than half of the provincial respondents said that if offered such a position, they would think about accepting it (see Table 1 and 2). This included those who chose “yes, consider accepting,” and “yes, absolutely accept.” However, more than half of the Seoul respondents stated they would not accept, which included “not consider accepting” and “absolutely would not consider accepting” (see Table 1 and 2). Of the participants, 4.8% (4 numbers, hereafter n.) from the first survey and 6.9% (5n.) from the second survey reserved their decision.

**Table 1. Frequency of Journalists Accepting Job Offers (2006)**

Categories	Details of categories	TR (%) (100)	Frequency of journalists accepting job offers (%)	
			A (52.4)	NA (41.7)
Sections of news in which they worked	Political	7.1	4.8	2.4
	Social	27.4	17.9	8.3
	Business	20.2	11.9	8.3
	International/North Korean	4.8	1.2	2.4
	Sports/life	1.2	0	1.2
	Culture	3.6	0	2.4
	Sub-editorial	9.5	6	3.6
	Photo journalism	1.2	0	1.2
	General reporting	14.3	7.1	7.1
	Editorial writer	4.8	1.2	1.2
	Managing editors or equivalent	3.6	1.2	2.4
	Others	1.2	0	1.2
	No answer	1.2	1.2	0
Positions held	Managing editors or equivalent	10.7	4.8	4.8
	Editors or equivalent	22.6	13.1	8.3
	Deputy editors or equivalent	29.8	17.9	9.5
	Reporters	35.7	15.5	19
	No answer	1.2	1.2	0
Types of newspapers	Seoul newspapers	32.1	10.7	20.2
	Provincial newspapers	41.7	27.4	11.9
	News agencies	3.6	1.2	2.4
	Business newspapers	15.5	7.1	6
	English newspapers	3.6	3.6	0
	Special newspapers	2.4	1.2	1.2
	Others	1.2	1.2	0
Location of the company where they worked	Seoul newspapers	57.1	23.8	29.8
	Provincial newspapers	42.9	28.6	11.9
Gender	Male	94	50	39.3
	Female	4.8	1.2	2.4
	No answer	1.2	1.2	0
Age group	From 20 to 29 years old	1.2	1.2	0
	From 30 to 39 years old	35.7	16.7	17.9
	From 40 to 49 years old	56	32.1	20.2
	From 50 to 59 years old	4.8	1.2	2.4
	From 60 to 69 years old	1.2	0	1.2
	No answer	1.2	1.2	0
First or subsequent job	First job	64.3	29.8	28.6
	Subsequent job	34.5	21.4	13.1
	No answer	1.2	1.2	0

Categories	Details of categories	TR (%) (100)	Frequency of journalists accepting job offers (%)	
			A (52.4)	NA (41.7)
Length of service	From 0 to 4 years	6	3.6	2.4
	From 5 to 9 years	17.9	8.3	8.3
	From 10 to 14 years	16.7	7.1	8.3
	From 15 to 19 years	44	26.2	15.5
	From 20 to 24 years	10.7	4.8	4.8
	From 25 to 29 years	2.4	1.2	1.2
	More than 30 years	1.2	0	1.2
	No answer	1.2	1.2	0
Qualifications	Diploma 2 years	1.2	0	1.2
	Bachelor 4 years	51.2	27.4	21.4
	Master degrees	41.7	20.2	17.9
	Doctoral degrees	4.8	3.6	1.2
	No answer	1.2	1.2	0
Major of highest degree	Media and Communication	22.6	9.5	9.5
	Economics/Business	19	10.7	7.1
	Sociology/Philosophy/Psychology/History	10.7	4.8	6
	Law	2.4	2.4	0
	Politics/Administration & Planning	23.8	11.9	11.9
	Language & Literature	15.5	10.7	3.6
	Science	1.2	1.2	0
	Others	3.6	0	3.6
	No answer	1.2	1.2	0

\*TR: total respondents to the survey A: would accept NA: would not accept

**Table 2. Frequency of Journalists Accepting Job Offers (2011)**

Categories	Details of categories	TR (%) (100)	Frequency of journalists accepting job offers (%)	
			A (54.6%)	NA (40.6%)
Sections of news in which they worked	Political	11	5.5	5.5
	Social	30.1	16.4	9.6
	Business	11	6.9	2.7
	International/North Korean	1.4	0	1.4
	Sports/life	2.7	1.4	1.4
	Culture	4.1	2.7	1.4
	Sub-editorial	11	6.9	4.1
	Photo journalism	1.4	1.4	0
	General reporting	2.7	0	1.4
	Editorial writer	8.2	5.5	2.7
	Others (including Managing editors or equivalent)	15.1	6.9	8.2
	No answer	1.4	0	1.4
Positions held	Managing editors or equivalent	19	11	8.2
	Editors or equivalent	27.4	17.8	8.2
	Deputy editors or equivalent	21.9	11	9.6
	Reporters	30.1	13.7	12.3
	No answer	1.4	0	1.4
Types of media	Newspapers	78.1	45.2	26
	News agencies	2.7	1.4	1.4
	Broadcasting	13.7	4.1	9.6
	Internet	4.1	2.7	1.4
	Others	1.4	0	1.4
Location of the company where they worked	Seoul media	28.8	6.9	19.2
	Provincial media	71.2	46.6	20.6

Categories	Details of categories	TR (%) (100)	Frequency of journalists accepting job offers (%)	
			A (54.6%)	NA (40.6%)
Gender	Male	97.3	52	39.7
	Female	2.7	1.4	0
Age group	From 20 to 29 years old	2.7	0	1.4
	From 30 to 39 years old	28.8	15.1	11
	From 40 to 49 years old	45.2	26	16.4
	From 50 to 59 years old	21.9	11	11
	From 60 to 69 years old	1.4	1.4	0
Length of service	From 0 to 4 years	11	5.5	4.1
	From 5 to 9 years	13.7	5.5	5.5
	From 10 to 14 years	13.7	9.6	4.1
	From 15 to 19 years	24.7	11	11
	From 20 to 24 years	31.5	19.2	12.3
	More than 25 years	5.5	2.7	2.7
Qualifications	Diploma 2 years	2.7	0	2.7
	Bachelor 4 years	60.3	28.8	26
	Master degrees	27.4	17.8	8.2
	Doctoral degrees	8.2	5.5	2.7
	No answer	1.4	1.4	0
Major of highest degree	Media and Communication	23.3	11	11
	Economics/Business	9.6	6.9	2.7
	Sociology/Philosophy/Psychology/	9.6	5.5	2.7
	History	4.1	1.4	2.7
	Law	17.8	11	6.9
	Politics/Administration & Planning	15.1	5.5	6.9
	Language & Literature	6.9	6.9	0
	Science	12.3	4.1	6.9
	Others	1.4	1.4	0
	No answer			

\*TR: total respondents to the survey A: would accept NA: would not accept

### Journalists who “would accept” or “would not accept” job offers

Participants were asked to provide information on the news divisions in which they worked and additional information. Interesting differences in percentage ratios were observed. First, regarding position, from the first survey, a higher percentage of deputy editors selected that they “would accept” job offers. However, as there were a much higher percentage of reporters who responded to the survey, this indicates that the deputy editors were more strongly inclined to accept job offers than were the reporters. Also, from the second survey, regarding “would not accept” job offers, a similar percentage of editors and deputy editors selected that they would not accept. However, a much higher percentage of editors responded to the survey, indicating that editors were more strongly inclined to accept job offers than were deputy editors. Perhaps, the journalists who have been promoted have a less secure future as journalists because of the instability of their job.

Next, concerning media locations, from the first survey, a higher numbers of journalists who worked at Seoul media responded to the survey. However,



a higher percentage of provincial journalists selected that they would accept job offers than Seoul journalists. This response indicates a stronger inclination of provincial journalists towards accepting job offers. Also, from the second survey, although more than twice as many provincial journalists responded to the survey, a similar percentage of Seoul and provincial journalists selected that they would not accept job offers. Most likely, the poorer environments of provincial journalists create more interest in accepting a new position than do the environments of Seoul journalists.

### **Frequency of journalists accepting job offers from power circles**

Regarding journalists' moving to political jobs, based on major media companies in Seoul, Im (2008, 58-59) observed that some journalists had positive views of the freedom of job-selection; however, most journalists had negative responses, therefore, journalists would not accept a job offer. However, findings from this research (see Table 1 and 2) based on the national media in Korea arrived at different results; more than half of the provincial respondents said they would accept job offers. This reflected that the poorer environments of provincial journalists create more interest in accepting a new position than do the environments of Seoul journalists (to be discussed later).

Regarding changing to political circles, there were differences in journalists' opinions in Im's research and in the surveys conducted for this paper. Im's study focused only on the journalists of major Seoul media companies; however, the journalist surveys conducted for this study were based on national media journalists in Korea. This gap indicates that Korea has not developed evenly and that there are differences in media environments in Seoul and provincial areas. Probably, provincial areas are poor environments that are reflected in the media industry.

Moreover, regarding the changing jobs of to political jobs, according to Im (2008, 59) journalists express different views if they represent the conservative media or the progressive media. The journalists of the progressive media believe strongly that "changing jobs of journalists to political circles decreases media reliability." Impressively, progressive journalists also think that "each media company must establish a code of media ethics." Journalists do much more than merely deliver information; they also outline and construct the news and in doing so, form a communal awareness of subjects and occurrences (Schneider 2012, 71). The function of journalism is essential to

the development of a healthy democratic society; thus, journalists' roles are quite significant.

### *Why the Journalists “Would Accept” Job Offers or “Would Not”*

The journalists gave various reasons for accepting job offers or not accepting them or choosing not to answer if offered a position in government or political-economic circles (see Table 3 and 4).

**Table 3. The Reasons Why the Journalists “would Accept Job Offers” (2006)**

Categories	The journalists' comments
Job security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The future is not assured in the media industry because the retiring age is low” (No.16).</li> <li>• “Media industry has no future in Korea” (No.58).</li> <li>• “Job security was provided in a PR-related corporation, a public corporation, government and municipal offices and others” (No.18).</li> <li>• “The prospects in the media are discouraging” (No.14).</li> <li>• “Job stability at current provincial media is very weak” (No.37).</li> <li>• “As a journalist it is a really short working life (early retirement)” (No.61).</li> <li>• “Journalists' life is not stable” (No.11).</li> <li>• “I will accept a government job, which is a stable and popular job in Korea because stable wages and retiring age are guaranteed” (No.63).</li> <li>• “Uncertain future”</li> <li>• “Unstable job as a journalist”</li> <li>• “Unstable market structure”</li> </ul>
Economic security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Attraction of journalism is getting weak because of the low wages at the provincial newspaper” (No.33).</li> <li>• “Current wages and welfare systems are too low therefore my living is threatened” (No.69).</li> <li>• “Wages at current provincial media is very low” (No.37).</li> <li>• “Company pays low wages” (No.61).</li> <li>• “A journalist has no remuneration based on their work” (No.11).</li> <li>• “Loss of journalist's self-respect related to poor economic conditions in journalist's living” (No.8).</li> <li>• “Low wages”</li> <li>• “Poor living standards”</li> <li>• “Poor work condition”</li> <li>• “Poor wages”</li> </ul>
New experience or future career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “For the other dreams: it is possible to get a better job utilizing my experience as a journalist” (No.36).</li> <li>• “Individual ideal could be realized in better conditions and a better environment” (No.60).</li> <li>• “If there are good given conditions and environments and also the future is bright, I will change my job for self-development” (No.30).</li> <li>• “I will accept a job offer in order to pursue new opportunities” (No.49).</li> <li>• “I have chosen the media in order to participate strongly in decision-making in society therefore, a change to government or political circles is another way to participate strongly in decision-making in society” (No.70).</li> <li>• “For a new challenge”</li> <li>• “For variety of experiences”</li> <li>• “Career development”</li> </ul>
Other reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I am not one hundred percent satisfied with my job as a journalist” (No.40).</li> <li>• “Unsatisfied job as a journalist”</li> <li>• “Lack of ability as a journalist”</li> </ul>

**Table 4. Reasons for Journalists' Selections regarding Job Offers (2011)**

"Would accept"	"Would not accept"	"Other" (reserve)
New experience or future career	Fit job, and job satisfaction	Currently [journalists] satisfy but worry after 10 years
Economic security	The breach of media ethics	To decide depends on any works or situations
Job security	Already reject	"I do not know"
Other reasons	Other reasons	Other reasons

Sources: Qualitative comments of respondents categorized by the researcher

### Why the journalists "would accept" job offers

Journalists gave various reasons for accepting job offers; however, the qualitative answers can be placed into mainly three categories: new experience or future career, economic reasons, and job security.

### Why the journalists "would not accept" job offers

Conversely, the reasons for journalists' not accepting job offers are diverse. Qualitative responses include the following: many journalists are generally satisfied, journalists feel strong pride and a sense of duty, journalists have felt the breach in media ethics, and some journalists have already rejected job offers.

### Why the journalists chose not to answer this question

Some respondents chose not to answer this question. Journalists said, "Currently I am satisfied but worry about what will happen after 10 years," "To decide depends on specific work or situations," and "I do not know."

### The main reasons journalists' leave their jobs

Although journalists have sworn to inform the public of the truth professionally and responsibly and act as watchdogs over power groups, journalists have consistently left the media. According to Weaver (2005, 53), some scholars argue that salary, job security, and the chance to advance are less professional aspects of this occupation than editorial policies, the ability to develop a specialty, autonomy, and helping people. However, Weaver stated that there are "wide disagreements among journalists from different countries on which aspects of the job are very important." Weaver et al. (2007) argued that job stress and overwork are the main reasons journalists' leave their jobs. Another reason is poor working conditions. Reinardy (2011, 34) also stressed

that economic issues coupled with deadline pressure, competition, and the stress of overwork create complex problems in traditional journalism. These reasons are also confirmed in Korea.

In Korea, there are various reasons why journalists leave their jobs. According to Im (2008, 59), major reasons to leave journalism jobs are “realization of political belief” (33.8%), “opaque future of the media” (32.7%), “connecting consideration of journalist’s professionalism” (16.9%), and “other reasons” (15%). Journalists were evenly divided between positive answers (49.7%) and negative reasons (47.7%). Also, in the surveys of journalists conducted for this paper, reasons for accepting job offers were diverse, and qualitative answers were categorized into mainly three areas: “new experience or future career,” “economic reasons,” and “job security” (see Table 3 and 4).

### **New experience or future career**

One major reason for journalists’ accepting job offers was new experience or a future career. More Korean journalists are changing jobs than in the past (Ahn 2009, 212). Journalists’ having personal greed and seeking political success circle around politics. Chung (2010) criticized this behavior, calling such journalists “Polinalists,” which has a negative connotation in Korea, Polinalists are depicted not as practitioners of proper journalism, but only as seekers of political success. Some Korean journalists are becoming quite difficult to distinguish from information collectors for their employers. Many journalists are no different from other salaried employees of other organizations (Lee 2007, 121). As confirmed from the journalists’ survey for this study, many respondents want to change jobs to power circles for new experience or a future career.

It is important to distinguish between journalists who change jobs because of poor working conditions and journalists who are seeking personal success. Some journalists in small or provincial media outlets are forced to change jobs because some of those companies cannot even pay staff salaries on time; therefore, journalists in these companies have difficulty providing for basics in life. I had a similar experience working for small specialist newspapers. However, many journalists change jobs to seek personal success. Also, Hart (2007) commented in an article in *Ohmynews* that many American journalists choose jobs for personal success rather than to inform citizens of the truth. This is clearly observed in Korea (see Table 3 and 4).

In Korea, many journalists change easily to other jobs, especially for political power, or choose journalism as the basis for personal success. A previous colleague said, “I became a journalist for my future job, because journalists can easily access important and valuable information and government organizations.” This view is consistent with current media practices, and one of the major reasons journalists gave for accepting job offers in this study was “new experience or future career.”

### **Economic reasons**

Another important reason why journalists would accept job offers is economic issues. Kang (2004, 340) examined that if a media company pays well, journalists are more inclined to serve management than serve the people. This attitude indicates what journalists currently think is more important. However, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014), journalism’s first loyalty is to citizens. Moreover, a former journalist and professor, Young-Hui Rhee, in an interview with the *KyunghyangShinmoon* (Oh 2008), stressed three important concepts that journalists should keep in mind: journalists should be professional, honest, and live a non-extravagant life. Rhee stated that if journalists are always striving to be rich, they can misuse their power.

Nowadays, Rhee’s dictum is more significant than ever because with globalization and the expansion of capitalism, journalists can easily be led into materialism and authoritarianism. Capitalism and political power are becoming more focused and predispositions are being reformed by individuals (K. Lee 2012, 487). However, many people are “sick and tired” of life under capitalism and perceive capitalism as an “evil” system that converts everything to money and profits (Park 2013, 17). Journalism must reinforce the recovery of a society that is consistently bleak.

Lee (2003, 75) argued that journalists must maintain high ethical standards and professionalism. Journalists should reject the power that comes from politics, economics, and law. However, economic issues are complex problems that involve deadlines, pressure, competition, and the stress of overwork in traditional journalism. Also, Alterman (2006) and Reinardy (2011, 34) stressed that attempts in newsrooms and information centers are required to improve these problems; the influential power of the economy is no longer overlooked in journalism. Globally many media and Korean media outlets face economic problems, particularly provincial and small media outlets

that have economically weak bases. The survey of journalists conducted for this study confirmed this situation: one of the major reasons journalists gave for accepting job offers was an “economic reason.”

### **Job security**

The other important reason for journalists’ accepting job offers is job security. Korean journalists think that job security is the most important aspect of a working environment (Ahn 2009, 47). However, since the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) intervention in the Asian economic crisis in 1997, job security has been threatened generally (Lee 2002, 361). Economic environments directly and indirectly influence the media industry, and the neo-liberal globalization of information and media culture has spread broadly (Sa 2009b; H. Lee 2012, 408-09). However, neo-liberal globalization engenders gradual economic gaps between the rich and the poor. Neo-liberalism was adopted in Korea in the 1990s and has “virtually nullified” certain functions of the public sector (Im 2002, 177). Also, the rhetoric of neo-liberalism has been used to justify abuse by big business (Im 2001, 220). In the media industry, according to Im (2002, 177) areas such as the editorial right have become virtually nullified because of the change from the “public service” model to the “market liberal” model. Under the “market liberal” model, large businesses have dominated most sectors. Im observed the problems neo-liberalism raises for sectors of society committed to public service.

Since the IMF crisis in 1997, large businesses have more powerfully influenced Korean society and the media (Sa 2009a, 5-7; 2009b). Many media companies, particularly privately owned media, seek private benefits rather than serving the public. Some Korean media capitalists have exacerbated differences and conflicts and not only have let powerful people dominate the socially weaker but also have forced the weaker people to allow themselves to be dominated (Kim 2005, 162). Moreover, many media companies have closed, rendering it difficult for journalists to move to other media companies (Park 2006, 175). Although journalists think job security is most important, the working conditions at many Korean media companies are poor. Numerous journalists maintain their media jobs while worrying about an uncertain future (Kang 2009, 781). This can be seen in the surveys conducted for this paper; many journalists said that they would seek other jobs for better “stability.” The journalists who have been promoted have a less secure future as journalists

because of the instability of their job.

### ***Relations between Job Acceptances of Journalists and Media Locations***

#### **Comparison of accepting job offers of Seoul and provincial journalists**

Clear distinctions exist between Seoul and provincial journalists' accepting job offers. Seoul journalists were less willing to accept job offers. Regarding Seoul journalists, 23.8% (20n.) of the first survey participants (57.1%, 48n.) and only 6.9% (5n.) of the second respondents (28.8%, 21n.) indicated that they would accept job offers (see Table 1 and 2): 29.8% (25n.) of the first survey participants (57.%, 48n.) and more than half (19.2%, 14n.) of the second respondents (28.8%, 21n.) indicated that they would not accept job offers. However, provincial journalists were more strongly inclined towards accepting job offers than Seoul journalists. Concerning provincial journalists, 28.6% (24n.) of the first survey respondents (42.9%, 36n.) and of the second survey participants (71.2%, 53n.), 46.6% (35n.) selected that they would accept job offers (see Table 1 and 2): only 11.9% (10n.) of the first survey participants (42.9%, 36n.) and 20.6% (15n.) of the second respondents (71.2%, 53n.) indicated that they would not accept job offers.

#### **Large gaps in accepting job offers between Seoul and provincial journalists**

According to LaMay (2007, 24), the "imbalance of media in urban and rural areas" is one of the limiting factors of freedom of the press. This situation is evident in Korea. Large differences exist between journalists' accepting jobs in Seoul and in provincial media. The imbalance between Seoul and provincial areas is a serious national problem, and the media industry is no exception. In media environments, provincial media companies are in serious situations because they have limited opportunities to produce revenue (Lee 2002, 361). Consequently, many provincial media have more limitations on wages, expenses for gathering news and publishing. The provincial media have difficulty attracting capable journalists because they cannot afford them. To increase the difficulties, many provincial citizens prefer subscribing to major media rather than to provincial media (Kang 2009, 795).

In Korea, major general dailies based in Seoul have nationally dominated

most areas. This dominance further affects the provincial media's circulation and therefore aggravates the provincial media's economic circumstances. Provincial media markets except Busan and Daegu have extremely weak bases (Im 2002, 96). In 1997, at the beginning of stagnation in the newspaper industry, most provincial newspapers were seeing deficits. These problems have existed for a long time, although the IMF crisis in 1997 made these problems worse. Since the IMF crisis, the greatest damage to the media has been to the provincial media because of the weak economy. This is a good example of the rhetoric of the term "globalisation." According to Hart (2008), under globalisation, the lives of weaker economic groups are more difficult. Hart stresses that global economic systems have economically and negatively influenced weaker groups.

Discussions regarding the media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must include globalisation. Capitalism and globalisation are major factors threatening freedom of the press in democratic societies (Sa 2009b). Globalisation based on the economy can engender financial priorities not only in the economic sector but also in public areas. Power groups support intellectuals with research funds and make those intellectuals into specialists to protect themselves (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 23). Another result of this phenomenon is that the intellectuals maintain silence about corruption of power. Big business controls the media through advertising and ensures that the media environment is favorable to them by supporting the journalists of major media outlets (Sa 2009a, 7). An important task currently is for the media academy to rediscover this reality and criticize current situations utilizing the imaginative power of the humanities (Park 2013, 29).

The centralized system focused in Seoul has exacerbated the poor situations of provincial areas in most sectors. Weak economic conditions have forced some journalists to take on advertising business and other work (Park 2003). Some journalists in the provincial media cannot properly fulfil their roles. The journalists surveyed for this paper corroborated this problem; there are large gaps in the rates of accepting job offers between journalists in Seoul and in the provincial media. As seen previous section (Comparison of accepting job offers of Seoul and provincial journalists), Seoul journalists have less inclination to accept job offers. Conversely, provincial journalists were more strongly inclined to accepting job offers than Seoul journalists. The stronger inclination of provincial journalists towards accepting job offers reflect



the poorer situation of journalists at provincial media such as lower wages and poorer welfare systems. Also, job security at current provincial media is very weak for surviving organizations in an increasingly competitive media environment. Furthermore, weak conditions have forced some journalists to take on other work. These probably could lead to more interest in accepting job offers than Seoul journalists.

As explored above, there are big differences in accepting job offers between Seoul and provincial journalists. The education of media ethics can help journalists overcome the gap between theory and practice in a high-pressure environment. Also, journalism practitioners believe that education such as media ethics, values, and legal problems is more important than breaking news or the technical side of journalism (Weaver et al. 2007, 49). However, in Korea, media ethics is not seriously considered in media-related majors at universities or in media companies. Media-related majors at many universities do not provide media ethics as a core component of the curriculum (Kim 2004, 23; 81). This situation was reconfirmed by the survey of journalists conducted for this study, participants with a university degree in media/communications represented the largest group. However, although half of that group would accept job offers, of the half who would not, only a small number responded that changing jobs to power circles without a time gap is a breach of media ethics.

## Conclusion

This paper examined the changing jobs of journalists and the function of journalism: journalists' responses regarding job offers from power circles, reasons why journalists "would accept" job offers, and relations between journalists' accepting jobs and media locations. Journalists are increasingly wishing to change jobs. Reasons for accepting job offers were mainly "new experience or future career," "economic reasons," and "job security." There are clear distinctions in accepting job offers between Seoul and provincial journalists. Provincial journalists are much more strongly inclined to accept job offers than Seoul journalists.

The function of journalism is essential to the development of a healthy democratic society. Furthermore, in international and national changes in current

social environments, the roles of journalism and journalists are very significant. When journalists change jobs to political circles, they influence the function of journalism negatively in the areas of media ethics, reliability, and impartiality. Journalism's future will be decided by journalists themselves as they work within a network of institutional, financial, and intellectual controls. Therefore, before journalists change jobs to enter circles of power, journalists should consider seriously. Also, Korean society strongly needs ethical development, and media-related majors in universities must improve the teaching of media ethics. Journalist interns need compulsory education of media ethics.

The Korean state urgently requires policies to minimize the gaps between Seoul and provincial areas. As confirmed in this study, there are clear distinctions between journalists in Seoul accepting job offers and provincial journalists. This result is caused by imbalanced development in Seoul and provincial areas. The imbalance has negatively influenced the media, shown by provincial journalists' more readily accepting job offers than Seoul journalists. Weak conditions produce a poor media environment, and this vicious circle is repeated. This problem affects all of society, including the media industry. Therefore, cooperation is necessary to develop journalism evenly. Furthermore, the system of time gaps must be legalized, if a journalist wants to move into government or political circles, also a strong punishment by the law must be followed if the journalist breaches the law. Journalists must improve their professionalism and recognize their responsibility to society.

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the changing jobs of journalists and the function of journalism. An examination of pertinent theories and an assessment of practical data in South Korea led to three suppositions: first, more than half of the provincial respondents said that they would think about accepting job offers if they were offered positions in power circles but more than half of the Seoul respondents stated they would not accept; second, major reasons for accepting such job offers are “new experience or future career,” “economic issues,” and “job security”; and finally, there are notable differences in accepting job offers between journalists working in Seoul and provincial media companies.

**Keywords:** changing job, journalism, political participation, professionalism, South Korea