

## The Role and Direction of the Media in the Event of a Disaster

-Ferry Sewol Based on media misinformation during the disaster

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### A B S T R A C T

The media is an axis of community formation that conveys the joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure of human life to another human being. In addition, it plays a role in conveying facts in the event of an accident and a disaster, presenting the response and ultimate direction of organizations and institutions after the disaster, and forming public opinion. This study examined the role and direction of the media in the event of a disaster based on media misinformation at the time of the 2014 Ferry Sewol disaster, which caused public outrage. It also examined the social impact of media misinformation and the responsibility and punishment of media companies for misinformation. Currently, the Korean media has the freedom to express and cover the constitution, while it is true that responsibility and regulations for misinformation are not specific. Based on the misinformation at the time of the Ferry Sewol, we examine the role of the media and the problems of misinformation in the event of a disaster, pointing to the reality and problems of the currently enacted media-related laws, and present the internal efforts and directions of the media.

*Key words: media; misinformation in the media; disaster; Ferry Sewol a disaster; the media law*

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### 1. Introduction

Based on the basic function of satisfying the people's right to know, the media plays a role in criticizing and monitoring power institutions and people in power, including the state and local governments.(Park, 2003, 1)

The function of the media for the people's right to know can be seen as a simple and most basic role in conveying facts such as incidents and accidents. The problem is that the evaluation after the report on the fact delivery is different. The difference in evaluation according to media reports is a disproving that there may be problems with the contents of the report. This can soon cause social problems as different contents are delivered in the process of deciding between reporters who write articles and desks that send articles to the world. Such issues, called misinformation and false reports, can be seen as the biggest controversial issues to the media. A case in which some or all of the articles reported by the media are not true is defined as misreporting. The forms of misinformation include errors in objective facts, selection of inappropriate information, unidentified at the scene, serial expansion and re-

production of misinformation, highlighting perspectives and interpretations, and intentional distortion.(Park, 2021, 28)

In particular, the role of the media in the event of an accident is obligated to accurately convey the size, weight, and situation of the event to the reader. However, in the case of the 2014 Ferry Sewol disaster, which is called one of the biggest misinformation incidents recently, several media outlets reported completely untrue reports at the beginning of the accident, deepening readers' distrust.

Ferry Sewol The disaster revealed that our society's sense of safety remained at the bottom as hundreds of students on school trips sadly lost their lives, and the inappropriate and insufficient response to the rescue process alerted the social safety system. One of the main reasons for hurting the people and causing public outrage at the time was misinformation by the media. The incident took place in the middle of a sea of vast seas, making it difficult to cover the scene except for some large media, but the misinformation poured out by broadcasting and newspapers was like 'Lemming (blindly copying others).'

In addition, due to the recent development of the Internet and smartphones, numerous unknown sources of information have been rampant due to

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the emergence of various social network services (SNS), and cases of damage due to unconfirmed information have frequently occurred. In addition, one of the difficult realities facing the media is that SNS has a faster propagation power than the media, leading the media in terms of the speed of information delivery.

Through the analysis of reporting behavior at the time of the Ferry Sewol disaster, we will study the rules of media reporting and the reality and direction of the media in crisis situations such as disasters.

## 2. Ferry Sewol Disaster and Media

### 2.1. Ferry Sewol Disaster Overview

Ferry Sewol disaster is called the most serious of the recent major disasters. The standard for severe disaster punishment implemented this year is a serious civil accident.

On April 15, 2014, a passenger ship Ferry Sewol (Cheonghaejin Shipping) departing from Incheon Coastal Passenger Terminal to Jeju sank in the sea near Byeongpungdo Island in Jindo-gun, Jeollanam-do, a day later, resulting in 304 casualties, including 295 dead and nine missing. At the time of the accident, only 172 of the 476 passengers survived. In particular, 325 second-year students from Danwon High School in Ansan-si, Gyeonggi-do, were on board on a school trip to Jeju Island, and 250 of them died, causing too much damage to young students.(Kang, YonhapNewsTV. 2019.02.12.)

At that time, the prevailing theory is that Ferry Sewol began sinking on the port side at around 8:49 a.m. on April 16 due to a sudden change in the direction of the ship. However, eight years later, no exact cause and damage compensation have been made, and the bereaved families and victims are demanding a thorough investigation of the government.

As for the cause of the accident, the prosecution and police investigation headquarters gave complex reasons such as a lack of resilience due to the expansion of the ship, a cargo overload problem of two to three times the maximum load, a problem of loading more cargo than the ship's balance.

At that time, it was revealed that even during the Ferry Sewol sinking, "Stay stil" was repeated on board, resulting in numerous students being sacrificed. In addition, rescue efforts by the Coast Guard and other rescue teams have not been carried out properly, and they are stigmatized as the worst human resources due to the government's poor overall response to the safety of the people.

After the Ferry Sewol disaster, Korean society has been flooded with calls for countermeasures against social disasters. On November 24, 2017, a

bill containing major contents, including the establishment of the 2nd Special Investigation Committee for the Ferry Sewol disaster, passed the National Assembly. Ferry Sewol The official name, which legislated the prevention and countermeasures of social disasters such as disasters and humidifier dis-infectant disasters, is "the amendment to the special bill for finding the truth of social disasters and building a safe society."(Kim, CBS No Cut News, 2017.11.24.)

### 2.2. Media misinformation at the time of the Ferry Sewol disaster

In the event of a disaster, the media has a mission to report on the disaster situation based on facts. However, the media at the time of the Ferry Sewol disaster did not play a proper role in responding to the disaster crisis by reporting out misinformation from the beginning.

At the time of the Ferry Sewol disaster, MBN reported the news that it was "a rescue of all students at Danwon High School."(MBN, 2014.04.16.) It was plain misinformation. However, misinformation was maximized as newspapers and broadcasters copied MBN's report.

According to the announcement of the investigation results of the Ferry Sewol disaster special investigation team launched in 2019, MBN reported that all students from Danwon High School were rescued around 11:01, MBC around 11:01, and KBS around 11:26 respectively. Rumors were spreading among parents of Danwon High School at around 10:55 at the time, and Danwon High School reported without filtering that all students were rescued at 11 o'clock. This is a case in which each media company copied and reported without confirmation of the facts after MBN first sent out power rescue subtitles without any verification.

Since then, as the scene of the Ferry Sewol disaster has been changed again, MBC reported out correction maps around 11:24 p.m., MBN around 11:27 p.m., and KBS around 11:33 p.m., respectively.

As a result of analyzing evening main news such as KBS News 9, MBC News Desk, and SBS8 News from April 16 to 20, 646 cases were reported, including 245 cases of KBS, 222 cases of MBC, and 179 cases of SBS. However, more than half (53.9%) reported rescue and site damage, and it was insufficient to find out the cause of the sinking, accountability, and the government's disaster management problems.(Lim, 2014, 1)

### 2.3. The problem of media misinformation

Misinformation about the Ferry Sewol disaster caused the media to cause public resentment as well as victims and bereaved families, and the media's credibility dropped sharply. This clearly revealed

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the chronic behavior of the media, which does not confirm the facts, and the miserable reality of being buried in the competition for breaking news.(CCDM, Media today, 2022.04.26.)

The media's competition for breaking news leads to excessive media pressure on each reporter, and articles produced by reporters without properly covering the site will create another series of misinformation.

At the time of the Ferry Sewol disaster, media companies were unable to go to the scene and relied too much on government announcements to produce misinformation. In the event of a disaster, even if it is a regular announcement by the government or the disaster response headquarters, an article should be written after thorough fact-checking.

In the case of the BBC, when the London subway attack occurred in 2005, the news was relatively late compared to other media outlets. This is because it took time to confirm the facts because it was judged that the accuracy of the report was more important than the speed. This BBC effort reminds us that it is the mission of the media to increase the accuracy of articles rather than breaking news competition. (Choi, NoCutNews, 2014.04.24.)

Since the Ferry Sewol disaster, the government has formed a special investigation committee for the Ferry Sewol disaster, and the private sector has formed a committee to deal with the victims, missing persons, and survivors of the accident to find out the truth. Through their activities, the cause of the accident and the punishment of the person responsible are continuously demanded, but the media that reported the misinformation only corrects it, but failed to properly apologize and reflect on it. According to the special investigation team, all those responsible for the broadcasting company who misrepresented the "power rescue" during the Ferry Sewol disaster were cleared of charges.(Jeong, Media today, 2021.01.19.)

### **3. The current state of the Media law**

#### *3.1. The need for social norms to control the Media*

The importance of the role and mission of the media has grown as we look at the behavior of media reports during the Ferry Sewol disaster. In particular, in the event of a disaster, it is necessary to expand the right reporting to the obligations and responsibilities toward the people beyond the basic function of the media.

However, the media clearly delivered misinformation in the event of a major disaster that killed hundreds of people, as in the case of the Ferry Sewol disaster, but the reflection and punishment on it were weak. Therefore, in addition to the ability to

self-purify, it is necessary to check whether related laws, which are a function of checking social norms, are enacted. Laws related to the media include regulations in the Constitution, the Newspaper Act, the Broadcasting Act, and the Media Arbitration Act.

Recently, the Democratic Party of Korea proposed an amendment to the Information and Communication Network Act and the Broadcasting Act, which bans the editing of news on portal sites and establishes a broadcasting management committee to improve governance of public broadcasters. Attention is focusing on whether the final passage of the revision will correct the contradictory balance between portal companies and media companies.

#### *3.2. The media in the constitution*

In Chapter 2 of the Constitution, Article 21 of the Rights and Obligations of the People states that "all citizens have freedom of speech and publication and freedom of assembly and association", "Permission for media and publication, censorship, and permission for assembly and association are not recognized, "Matters necessary to ensure the facility standards of telecommunications and broadcasting and the function of newspapers should be prescribed by law, ". "The media and publication should not infringe on the honor or rights of others, public morality or social ethics." It is stipulated that when the media and publication infringe on the honor or rights of others, the victim may claim compensation for the damage.

#### *3.2. Law on the Promotion of Newspapers, etc*

The law, called the Newspaper Act, aims to contribute to the promotion of freedom of speech and democratic public opinion by guaranteeing freedom of publication, independence and function, enhancing social responsibility, and supporting and fostering the newspaper industry.

Starting with the enactment of the "Act on Registration, etc. of Periodic Publications" in 1987, it was revised to the "Act on the Freedom and Functional Guarantee of Newspapers" in 2005 and then to this day.

It consists of the operation of the newspaper business, the role of the Korea Media Foundation, the media promotion fund, and penalties related to the establishment and operation of media companies.

#### *3.4. Broadcasting law*

The Broadcasting Law was enacted in 1963 to protect the rights of viewers, form democratic public opinion, and improve national culture by guaranteeing freedom and independence of broadcasting and increasing public responsibility. It has been revised several times until today.

In particular, the government of the Republic of Korea, local governments, religious organizations,

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political parties, and those who want to run community radio broadcasting businesses for profit, stipulating its willingness to maintain an independent function of the media.

### *3.5. Media Arbitration and Damage Relief Law*

This law, called the Media Arbitration Act, was enacted in 2005 with the aim of establishing an effective relief system, such as coordinating and arbitrating disputes over honor, rights, and other legal interests violated by media reports or mediation. Relief measures for infringement of personal rights by the media include a claim for damages, a claim for correction, a claim for reporting an objection, a claim for additional candidate, and a claim for prohibition in advance.(Kim·Lee, Korean Journalism Law, 2015, 6) This Law stipulates freedom and independence of the media, social responsibility of the media, the principle of remedy for damage caused by the media, the protection of the personality of the deceased, and the complainant. In particular, it deals with relief, mediation and arbitration, litigation, correction recommendation, and penalties for the establishment and infringement of the Media Arbitration Committee.

However, controversy continues as it focuses on the independence and autonomy of the media rather than the relief of damage caused by the media. In addition, media companies are also in a position that they have been restricted from legitimate reporting activities due to requests for correction and civil lawsuits, saying they have suffered losses from reports that have undergone normal coverage.

Recently, the media arbitration law has been revised to define and regulate fake news concepts, punitive compensation systems, regulate the size of correction maps and original reports, block Internet articles, and suspend bulletin boards.

## **4. The Role and Direction of the Media in the Hyper-Information Age**

### *4.1. The role of the media in the hyper-information age*

Currently, it is an era of hyper-information that the Internet and smartphones have become mainstream. It took 250 years from the first industrial revolution represented by the invention of steam to the second industrial revolution in the previous era. It took 100 years for the third industrial revolution based on information and communication. It then took only 30 years until the 4th Industrial Revolution, a hyper-connected era.(Lee, Crisis management system theory, 2022.03.05.)

The Industrial Revolution is a measure of dominating and maintaining human life. Of course, there are different views in terms of mind and culture, The basic food, clothing, and diet change with the

stage of the revolution, It represents an era. Currently, which is evaluated as a hyper-connected era, it is evolving so fast that it is difficult for people to follow technology. Above all, the development of the Internet and the spread of smartphones are breaking down the geographical and hierarchical boundaries of existing societies.

The problem is that the analysis and use of overflowing information are not properly refined. Existing representative communication methods were heard through the media and recognized based on them,

Various social networking services (SNS) are currently producing faster and more information than the media. At this time, the spread of unverified information, also called "fake news," can pose a great threat to people's lives.(Jo, 2022, 1) Moreover, some individuals who use SNS to spread unrefined information are causing another confusion. Data overload and fake information make the truth about a particular issue disappear and expose a lot of fake news to the public. The purpose is to make an issue unstable and unable to contemplate and recognize it on its own. Fundamentally, it is also necessary to discuss social design that guarantees data citizenship against fake and exhaustion.(Kim, 2021, 17)

As a result, the role of the media is becoming increasingly important. The ability and qualifications of journalists to lead the media are required, There is an urgent need for a heavy responsibility to check and report facts on the spot. The misreporting at the time of the Ferry Sewol disaster can be seen as an example of the need for proper media roles and responsibilities.

It is also necessary to improve the chronic problems of media management, such as breaking news competition and management difficulties.

### *4.2. Controversy over the revision of the Media Arbitration Act and its ultimate direction*

Controversy has continued so far over the media law, which was proposed by the ruling Democratic Party of Korea last year. The revision contains the nature of legal regulations on the media by specifying punitive liability for media misinformation or false information reports.

Accordingly, the media is strongly opposed to compulsory regulations similar to general economic crimes in that they are punitive damages. The ruling and opposition parties, which are in charge of revising the bill, are constantly rekindling the controversy by reversing their stance in line with changes in the leadership political situation.(Jo, 2021, 12)

Accordingly, the legal community and civil society have emphasized the need for compensation and

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punishment regulations for victims of misinformation, bias, and false reports by the media. In addition, the need for two measures to strengthen the media's autonomous regulation and prepare legal regulatory devices based on basic freedom and responsibilities of the media is steadily being discussed.

The reason for the existence of the media lies in the function of checking and monitoring facts and social structure. In addition, all reports produced by the media should be accompanied by an extremely refined sense of ethics, along with autonomy based on independent editorial rights established by the Constitution. To this end, the validity of strengthening the media's autonomous regulations and preparing legal grounds is gaining traction.

#### *4.3. The 2009 Lee Myung bak Administration's Media Law Controversy*

There are many problems with the governance structure of the media in that the media is abusing misinformation on the back of breaking news. In particular, the Lee Myung Bak government's revision in 2009 so-called "media law" became controversial when it legislated to expand media ownership interests of companies such as chaebol.

As a management body, the media is a distinctly different form from ordinary companies. However, it may be similar to the management structure of a general company because media companies also have to rely on profits such as advertisements to pay their employees such as reporters.

The problem is that if large companies play the role of the owner in criticizing, monitoring, and forming positive public opinion, which is the purpose of the media's existence, they are more likely to commit corporate biased errors. If they rely on competition-oriented reports, they will produce more misinformation than straight articles, and as their dependence on advertising increases, the media's net function will eventually disappear and they will have no choice but to stay in a simple company.

The media law in 2009 created a comprehensive programming channel for large companies due to the expansion of the ownership stake of chaebol, and created a lot of skepticism about the purpose of the media existence.(Son, Maeil Economic Daily, 2009.07.15.)

However, media groups are trying to maintain a strong presence that pure function should come first from birth. The evidence is constantly trying to produce articles that provide sharp analysis and alternatives to real-life problems. On top of that, in order to maintain the economic feasibility of media companies, it is necessary to break away from the excessive dependence on government officials of

large companies and institutions and establish a voluntary economic structure through the formation of readers and advisory committees.

#### *4.4. Media coverage in case of disaster*

The misinformation at the time of the Ferry Sewol disaster raised the need for social awareness of the media as well as its own awakening for change. However, it is definitely meaningful that JTBC dealt with articles on Paengmok Port every day during the seven months of the Ferry Sewol disaster.(Seo, JTBC, 2018.04.16.) In the event of a disaster, the media must report based on facts, and above all, concentrated coverage and reporting by the media seems to be important. In addition, after the accident, the diagnosis of problems and measures to prevent recurrence should be analyzed, evaluated, and reported.

In addition, it is necessary to have a sense of duty to brief the media on the exact facts at the control tower of the state or local governments responding to the disaster for reporting the media's reporting of the facts. Through this, it is believed that it can play an important role in conveying the right to know the facts to the people and setting the direction of future measures.

The Ferry Sewol disaster started with media misinformation at the time of the disaster, The absence of a social crisis management system that has not been properly identified in eight years, Extreme hatred, including the frame of "traffic accident" put on in the process of trying to reveal the truth centered on the bereaved family, can be seen to have affected the entire process after the disaster.(CCDM, Media today, 2020.05.27.)

Currently, KBS is designated as a disaster management broadcaster in Korea. However, in the event of a national crisis, all media should work together to deliver the people's right to know and respond to disasters.

#### *4.5. The need for social systems and media to participate in overcoming disasters*

The Ferry Sewol disaster has been eight years. Until now, the government, bereaved families, and civil society have made efforts to find out the cause and come up with specific measures, but they have not achieved much. The important point is the absence of a social system and safety consciousness that vaguely dismisses it as a past event, along with sarcastic remarks such as "Is it Ferry Sewol again" after eight years. When the former president Moon Jae In said in April, "We need to reveal the truth of Ferry Sewol" to mark the 8th anniversary of Ferry Sewol, conservative commentators poured out criticism, saying, "What have you done for eight years?"(Sky Daily editorial, 2022.04.19.)

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In addition, the political circles were extremely divided into teams, representing only the lines and interests of the party, and failed to find out the truth. Contrary to the domestic situation, the "Hillsbury disaster," called the British version of the Ferry Sewol disaster, was crushed to death in 30 minutes at Liverpool Football Stadium on April 15, 1989. The truth was almost buried when the wrong investigation results were announced in the beginning, but the cause of the accident was identified in 22 years due to persistent efforts by the bereaved families and civil society. The British persevered for 22 years and devoted themselves to finding the truth of the great disaster on the football field. (Kwon, Weekly Chosun, 2021.05.09.)

As in the case of the UK, the entire nation, including the state, government, and institutions, should try to find the truth about the unexpected social disaster. The media should also be constantly interested in reporting on various phenomena that take place after the accident, as well as accurate reporting at the time of the accident.

The response to a disaster requires all members of society to work together. It is a matter of how they try and reach a conclusion, but they should never only weigh the passage of time or approach it with political logic.

## 5. Conclusions

This study examined the problems of the media and the direction of the media, which caused public outrage by reporting misinformation during the Ferry Sewol disaster. The media serves as an independent reporting function in democratic countries, and aims to guard against bias in power and satisfy the people's right to know. But in a capitalist society, the media also faces economic problems. No wonder, it is pointed out that the structural characteristics of the Korean media industry are capital monopoly and production concentration. (Kim, 1989, 21) As a result, they are buried in the competition for reporting, and in the end, they are making a serious error of copying and delivering the contents of other companies without confirming the facts.

In particular, the need to convey accurate facts in the event of a major national disaster represented by the Ferry Sewol disaster has been raised once again. In the wake of the Ferry Sewol disaster, the government expressed a sense of national crisis to the extent that it established a new national security center. (Kim, news1, 2017.04.05.) As a member of society, the media must also fulfill its responsibilities and duties and play its role in managing social crises. Moreover, the Special Investigation Committee on Social Disaster recently ended its investigation activities for the first time in three and a half years, failing to properly identify the cause. (Kim, Yonhap

News Agency, 2022.06.09.) It also failed to provide a direction to move forward. This makes the problem of misinformation of the Ferry Sewol disaster even more painful. (Lee, Hankyoreh, 2022.06.15.)

The misrepresentation of the media and the resulting sanctions have various correlations with freedom of expression. Various studies have been conducted on this issue. The Constitutional Court makes it clear that freedom of speech and publication traditionally does not only mean free expression of ideas and opinions and freedom to spread them, but is an indispensable element in a democratic system and an indispensable basic right for the existence and development of modern liberal democracy. (Jeong, 2020, 28)

The laws related to the media also continue to change. Last year, the media arbitration law, which includes strengthening punishment and regulations, is being discussed at the National Assembly. Accordingly, it is required to prepare a regulatory device for false or false reports in a regulatory measure for independent reporting by the media, as well as to prepare intensive measures for proper reporting by the media itself. There are also concerns that independent media activities guaranteed by the Constitution are trapped in regulatory laws. However, misbehavior of the media, which makes false reports due to excessive competition for breaking news and financial difficulties, must be corrected, and various social agreements must be reached for this purpose.

If the net function of the media is to monitor the world, a system to refine the media is also needed. Currently, the development of the Internet provides a channel for the media and seems like a media outlet, but it is encouraging excessive competition for breaking news, which encourages impatience and differentiation, resulting in another error. As a result, it seems necessary to prepare a social consultative body, such as midnight inside the media and the formation of a mediation committee involving all walks of life. In the eight years of the Ferry Sewol disaster, how much has the media's practice of misrepresenting the competition for breaking news, such as receiving government announcements such as "power rescue" and "the largest rescue operation on earth" improved? (Editing Committee of the Korean Journalists Association, 04, 12, 2022) Media companies themselves should always ask back and fulfill their roles and obligations.

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