This Reporter is so Ugly, How can She Appear on TV?

Paromita Pain & Victoria Chen

THIS REPORTER IS SO UGLY, HOW CAN SHE APPEAR ON TV?
Negotiating gender online and offline in Taiwanese media

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In Taiwan, 25 professional female journalists were interviewed, to understand how they negotiate gender and professional identities online and offline through the lens of Shoemaker and Reese's media routines and the socialization theory as articulated by Rodgers and Thorson. The findings suggest that while Taiwanese women journalists found that gender in some aspects of reporting is an asset, gendered harassment online and incivility in the digital sphere are important issues with which they have to contend. Comments on stories and professional identities online primarily focused on their looks and physical attributes. They were openly uncivil and abusive. Such incivility affected normal journalistic routines and prevented them from being impartial conveyors of information. Not just online abuse but cultural norms that expect women to be subservient deterred them from promoting stories on personal social media and negatively affected their coverage of controversial issues. In some cases, though gender provided certain advantages, the participants were aware that these gains were limited and ultimately patriarchal in nature. Although the study's primary focus is on Taiwan, the analysis is applicable beyond national boundaries.

Introduction

Taiwan, today, has one of the freest and most competitive media environments in Asia with a highly diversified media system comprising over 2000 newspapers, 5883 magazines, cable television system operators, radio stations and 98 satellite broadcasting program providers (Lo 2012). Surveys of Taiwanese journalists were rare in Taiwan until the 1990s. Small convenience sample-based studies (Cheng 1988) show that reporters in Taiwan were predominantly male (75%) with women constituting only 24.2% of journalists surveyed. But from 1996 onwards, the numbers of women journalists have increased to 42.5%. Lo's (2004) comprehensive national survey of 1642 journalists focused on Taiwanese journalists' basic characteristics, their training, education, working conditions and professional values.

While this survey did not focus on the experiences of women journalists as a separate and unique entity, and certainly did not look at their experiences online, it pointed out certain important aspects of women journalists in Taiwan. It showed that men dominated most media. Only 42% of the participants were a part of the print industry and 39% of television journalists were women. A significant finding also showed that more than 50% of all

the journalists under the age of 34 were female suggesting that most women left journalism in their early 30s.

Since 2004, emerging social media platforms have changed much of what was considered normal routine journalism. In his book *Digitizing the News* (2005), Pablo J. Boczkowski says that journalism today is becoming "increasingly audience centered, part of multiple conversations and micro local." Online comments and the maintenance of public profiles on social media are a step towards creating such "multiple conversations" and are considered important aspects of journalists' routines today (Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton 2012). Our study builds on Lo's (2004) seminal study by specifically considering the impact of social media, concepts of online commenting and ways in which Taiwan's women journalists deal with such changes in routine while negotiating gender, both online and offline. While the ability to maintain digital identities, and open up options to interact with audiences via reader's comments, for example, may come with many advantages, it also raises important questions. For example, how do optimal relationships between journalists and online audiences look like? How does the concept of online trolling and gender socialization affect these relationships?

Women and media, widened in recent years to "gender" and media, has been the topic of continuing the discussion in academic and journalistic circles but Taiwanese women journalists rarely constitute an important part of the ongoing dialogue. Through the lens of Shoemaker and Reese's media routines and the socialization theory by Rodgers and Thorson (2003), this study, using qualitative in-depth interviews with 25 women journalists from print, television and online media in Taiwan, aims to fulfill gaps in our understanding of how female journalists in Taiwan negotiate gender, both online and offline, and adds to studies on Taiwanese women journalists, an area that needs more scholarly attention.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Gendered Notions of Journalism

Journalism has often been understood as a set of practices described as "doing news work" including gathering, presenting and dissemination of news (Zelizer 2004, 42) while the influences on these practices are many (Rao 2009). Gender, perhaps, is among the most important. Rodgers and Thorson (2003) in their seminal work on professional differences between men and women journalists in the US media found certain interesting differences. For example, female reporters stereotyped less and used more diverse sources besides writing more positive stories than their male counterparts. They offered socialization as a theoretical explanation for the variances found (Rodgers and Thorson 2003). The socialization theory akin to the concept of acculturation postulates that in the process of acquiring culture people adopt the dominant patterns of behavior (Rodgers and Thorson 2003). They presented the theory through the gender and job model to further parse their findings.

The gender model posits that the different reporting approaches that male and female journalists have as a result of their socialization since childhood will not just influence the ways stories are sourced, researched and framed but will also explain how each gender will adjust to their newsroom roles and as journalists. The model, says, that different priorities and values that men and women have influence the way they socialize into

the workplace (Dodd-McCue and Wright 1996). Women value nurturing interdependent relationships prioritizing family which is in contrast to the more action-oriented and goal-oriented behavior of men (Kinnier, Katz, and Berry 1991; Cook 1993). Men naturally self-promote (Mulac, Bradac, and Gibbons 2001), while women advocate more democratic and less hierarchical relationships than their male counterparts (Haugen and Brandth 1994).

The job model is a contrast to the gender model and argues that socialization is a professional function and that men and women are professionally similar dependent on the similarity of their organizational experiences (Aven, Parker, and McEvoy 1993). Professional experience is of importance here and it shapes the stories done and sources used. It acknowledges the differences in values, attitudes and priorities that men and women may have but emphasizes the importance of organizational size and ratio of male-to-female reporters and editors (demographic composition) as important mediating factors in the way male and female reporters may work (Jones 1983).

Thus, gender notions have been recognized in certain professional values affecting professional identity. Some see masculinity according better with journalism's values —"that men's professional identities are much less fragmented and problematic than those of women in journalism. … Female journalists working in traditional news journalism therefore have a much more fragmented and contradictory professional identity than men" (Van Zoonen 1998, 39, 45).

Research may be inconsistent on how the presence of women and minorities in newsrooms affect news coverage (Correa and Harp 2011) but feminist researchers have regularly argued that in (the still) male-dominated newsrooms, the decisions which journalists make every day about what is newsworthy tend to be based on masculine conceptions of the world and what is important in it (Ross and Carter 2011). Even if gender in the newsroom does not influence news focus, it certainly influences tone and style, because women have different experiences in the world and thus bring a different perspective (Steiner 1998; De Bruin 2000; Melin-Higgins 2004; Ross 2007). And such perspectives are important. For example, Desmond and Danilewicz (2010) in their analysis of newscasts showed that female reporters were more likely to present human interest and health-related stories, while males were more likely to present political stories. Such divides, they explain, are harmful because among younger women it creates a sense that certain types of news are covered only by women and thus negatively limit the expectations and foci of what constitutes professionalism among news professionals, according to their gender. Yet even after more than a decade of such studies, as North (2009) underlines in essence newsrooms remain deeply gendered and that gender is an important element that shapes the daily dilemmas and constraints of journalists' routine activities. This is seen online as well.

Journalistic Routines

Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchy-of-influences model introduces the concept of journalistic routines and the five levels of influence on news content. The five levels include individual, organizational, routines and extra media, and ideological influences. Eliasoph (1988, 315) has described them as the "literary conventions, organizational pressures, and the journalist's own ideologies" that create news. Each of these levels is self-explanatory. The individual or first level, for example, examines how the individual features,

backgrounds, life experiences and role perceptions of media workers influence news content. The routines level focuses on how "those patterned routinized, repeated practices and forms that media workers use to do their jobs" (105) affect how news is constructed. At the organizational level, different news "judgments reflecting prevailing journalistic practices and the specific needs of the audience as perceived by upper management" (Dennis and Merrill 1984, 137) determines information channelizing. In 2013, Shoemaker and Reese updated their model for the digital age by reversing the order from macro to micro and emphasizing the forces beyond the individual's control.

Tuchman (1978) terms journalistic routines a "strategic ritual" and suggests that news workers are considered "professional" to the extent that they adhere to the procedures, the accepted practices of deadlines, and simply getting the work done. Following the procedures provides a useful fallback "professional" defense when challenged by audience members or other critics. Reese, building on Gidden's idea of "structuration," underlines that structures or professional routines can be both constraining and enabling. The way society is structured or social systems and the "the structure of relationships among people and the institutions they create" deeply influence the ways power and dominant ideologies are expressed through the media. They can act to constrain journalists' work. For example, Chen and Pain's (2017) study showed that in today's hyperconnected world journalists engaged with audience comments on stories but also felt this challenged the notion of objectivity.

Today posting stories online, promoting profiles and interacting with audiences online has become normalized as part of journalistic routines (Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton 2012; Chen and Pain 2017). It is important to consider that even in the digital sphere where information creators seem to have less control over the content they have created, professional norms and routines are important with individual and cultural characteristics playing influential roles in shaping journalistic decisions (Shoemaker et al. 2001).

Online Incivility and Women

Online comments on news items, argue Manosevitch and Walker (2009) is an opportunity that media organizations offer their readers to contribute perspectives to content produced by journalists and in the process, creates a "deliberative" space for discussion. Gastil (2008) outlines certain characteristics of this online deliberative space. They include opportunities for dialogue and careful articulation of views in a manner that is mutually comprehensible and respectful towards all participants.

But issues of incivility online mar this and there is no denying that the online space for women is a dangerous one (Chen and Pain 2017). Women are particular recipients of online incivility. As The Guardian technology project that examined 70 million comments left on its site since 2006 showed; of the 10 most abused writers 8 are women. Gendered online backlash today is seen in the eruption of nasty hashtags aimed at attacking women (Cole 2015) and the long history of abuse against women in different platforms (Duggan and Smith 2014; Ging and O'Higgins Norman 2016). Uncivil discourse is a growing concern in American rhetoric, and this trend has expanded globally beyond traditional media to online sources, such as audience comments and social media presence of journalists (Anderson et al. 2014).

Media Context in Taiwan

Since the 1980s, progress towards democratization in Taiwan has led to the highly controlled media regime operating under the Kuomintang government to gradually loosen and become more independent (Chen 1998). During the political transition, while the market mechanisms gained new importance, the major TV stations remain susceptible to the influence of the KMT (Kuomintang of China), the military, the government and the DPP (Democratic Progress Party) (Lee 1993; Wang and Lo 2000). Hung (2013) has shown that even with media reforms in 2006 and 2011, politicians tend to maintain institutional dependence on the media in order to further their own agendas. There is high polarization between a pro-China and anti-China stance, which has occurred as a result of the many Chinese who fled to Taiwan to escape the communist regime in China in 1949 (Wang and Lo 2005; Lo 2012). The major dailies are also linked to the political parties ideologically, if not organizationally (Lo, Chan, and Pan 2005).

Newspaper readership has in contrast declined sharply from 61.9% in 1993 to 38.5% in 2008 (Chang and Liao 2009). The gaps have been filled by rises in television and radio audiences. Competition for audience growth and retention has led to heavy competition with great emphasis placed on sensational, and soft news with blurring lines between news and entertainment to boost circulation (Baum 2003).

The Professional Sphere

Journalists in Taiwan, including foreign correspondents, rarely face physical violence and they are able to cover news freely. Yet journalists in Taiwan claim the least amount of professional freedom (Willnat, Weaver, and Choi 2013) and gender makes a difference, especially in the news beats assigned (Zhao 1987). Media owners exercise considerable influence over the editorial content of their outlets. For example, in October 2011, Global Views Survey Research Center (GVSRC)—owned by the Commonwealth Publisher Group, a Taipei-based commercial news outlet known for its in-depth business reporting— announced that it would no longer conduct polls on elections or political issues. Commercial considerations and a "change of market environment" prompted this decision.

Zhao (1987) showed that when the martial law was enforced in the country, women were assigned education, health, entertainment and women's news to cover while appropriate beats for men were sports and politics. Progress towards democratization in Taiwan has affected the media since the 1980s and market pressures and the presence of an increasingly legitimate political opposition have forced the regime to liberalize its control (Chen 1998). After the lifting of the ban in 1987, Wu (1987) found that though women journalists claimed high degrees of satisfaction with their careers and professional identities, they still faced gender-based obstacles. 65% of participants in the study (Wu 1987) comprising 68 women journalists indicated that they did not have the same venues for promotion and advancement in their careers as men. 71% stated that they had to work harder than men to succeed and obtain the same opportunities as men. Only 20% of the participants indicated that they would work as journalists until retirement. Liang (1991) also showed that women journalists in the post ban media were less satisfied with their supervisors in the workplace and salary prospects. Lo's (2004) survey showed 39% of television journalists were women. This is important as television-reporting jobs, particularly, are considered more feminine jobs since women are considered to use their appearances to draw in

audiences. Yet they are viewed as ill-equipped to carry the equipment associated with television and photojournalism work (Sun 2007; Wang 2015).

Critical theorists blame gender inequality in the media on power relations and the way they are embedded in the political and social order (Diamond and Quinby 1988). As Taiwan maintains a strong emphasis on Chinese culture, the Confucian philosophy ("code of conduct" by which to live by) has been perpetuated as the quasi-official ideology of Taiwan's society up to the present day (Tsai 2006). This philosophy assigns rigid roles to men and women and they are expected to adhere to this. Thus, while the Taiwanese government has declared women to be equal socially and by law with full rights to access education and become economically independent; social transformation involving women has not been easily accepted (Berik, van der Meulen Rodgers, and Zammit 2009).

Women in Taiwan are expected to play a passive, submissive and subservient role (Tsai 2006) and are consigned to a lower status when compared to men. In the professional sphere, especially within the context of journalism, its effects find little attention. This is evident even in the blogosphere. For example, a cross-cultural analysis of social media has indicated that Wretch, one of the popular blog spaces in Taiwan, exhibited high inclinations of masculine culture, emphasizing traditionally institutionalized gender division labor like house-work for females and professional occupations for males (Chang and Tseng 2009). Salary discrepancies between male and female journalists with males earning about $1767 compared to the $ 1667 females make. Males also have about two years more experience than females on an average (Lo 2004; Chang and Tseng 2009).

In such a scenario, Lo (2004, 81) showed that the most important predictor of job satisfaction among Taiwanese journalists was "reporting accurately or objectively" and avoiding stories with unverified content. The second was the journalists' rating of their news organization. Radio journalists reported a high level of perceived autonomy while television reported the least (Lo 2004). Lo's study (2004) underlined that while male journalists dominated newsrooms; women were a growing force, but they were more likely than men to leave journalism as a profession. Lo (2004) warned that Taiwanese newsrooms would continue to be male dominated unless more women could be recruited and retained. Yet age and gender were not significant predictors of job satisfaction (Lo 2004).

Taiwan has been ranked as one of the most wired nations in Asia. The Internet World Statistics report has said that of 2016, Taiwan has about 20,601,364 internet users and 18,000,000 Facebook users. Survey results identified that 77.61% of the female users surfed the internet, compared to 77.27% of male users do (Taiwan Network Information Center 2013); that is, the gender differences in internet use have equalized. Yet male journalists interact more with audiences online than female journalists (Wang 2004).

In this light, this study explores four research questions:

RQ1: How and to what extent do women journalists face gendered harassment online and offline?

RQ2: How and to what extent does online gendered harassment influence their journalistic routines?

RQ3: How and to what extent does gender influence the way women work and function as journalists in Taiwan?

RQ4: What solutions do the journalists have for dealing with gendered harassment?

Method

This study, focusing on how Taiwanese women negotiate gender online and offline in their work as journalists, used in-depth qualitative interviews with 25 female Taiwanese reporters recruited via a snowball sample. This included reporters from online news media, TV, news magazine and print media and different beats such as politics, finance and business, entertainment reporters, crime reporters, sport and technology. We posted requests for participation on different social media pages and handles of individual journalists as well as media organizations. One of the authors, having worked extensively as a journalist in Taiwan, reached out to her professional network.

Semi-structured interviews (Lindlof and Taylor 2010) using a pre-determined set of open questions were conducted from April 2016 to July 2016 by Skype and recorded. Each interview, conducted in Mandarin and translated into English, averaged 60 minutes. We used the constant comparative approach to find recurring themes and patterns in the interviews (Tandoc and Peters 2015). Each interview was then read and reread to check for emerging themes and categories. Both manifest and latent meaning in the words of our participants were examined to gain meaning and a better understanding of the strategies they suggested for dealing with the question of gender on the job, both online and offline (Kvale and Brinkman 2009). Our participants remain unidentified as mentioned in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application.

The professional experience of our participants ranged from 9 months to 13 years. They were encouraged to elaborate on their professional experiences paying special attention to the role of gender and its influence. To answer RQ1 that focused on how and to what extent do women journalists face gendered harassment online and offline, participants were asked about their experiences posting stories online, creating and maintaining online identities and their experiences with the kind of comments readers posted and the interactions, if any, they had. They were also asked about how they selected sources and topics of the stories they covered as well as how professional contacts and sources responded to them.

For analyzing RQ2 and RQ3 which looked at how and to what extent, did online gendered harassment influence their journalistic routines, participants were asked about the different behaviors they encountered online and offline, if incivility online influenced the way they did stories, found sources and presented facts. Participants were also asked if they engaged with comments and commentators online. They were also asked about solutions they had to make the online space, a more safe and engaging space for women journalists, to answer RQ4 which asked respondents for their views on dealing with such harassment.

Findings

Four key themes emerged from the interviews. These include: (1) Gender is key; (2) Face is everything; (3) Promoting stories online and (4) Strategies of coping with incivility in online comments. The participants said that gender did make some positive differences when it came to work as a journalist, particularly on the ground. In the online sphere, gender was certainly a key differentiator in the kind of behavior and comments their appearance and stories elicited. Cultural norms and the way journalists were socialized

played an important role in certain ways their sources responded to them and often actively prevented them from promoting their stories online.

Gender Is Key

A majority of the participants interviewed reported that female reporters have some clear advantages when gathering news. Male subjects preferred to chat with female reporters so that female reporters are more likely to obtain exclusive information than their male counterparts, especially when female reporters emphasized their feminine features (e.g. soft voice, large eyes) to interact with male interviewees. For example, in television, female reporters are preferred over male reporters to do crime news because police officers like to chat with female reporters rather than men. As the participant interviews often reiterated, the younger and prettier the reporter was, the better information she could gather from the police. The police often take a very protective attitude towards female reporters.

As one participant said,

> Policemen use police vehicles to drive women reporters home after late night press conferences. Senior judges are kinder to young female reporters. For example, senior judges tolerate mistakes female reporters make, often kindly correcting them like teaching a student. (Personal interview, 2016)

Similarly, in the area of sports, baseball players preferred to chat with young female reporters. Reticent baseball players often speak up when interviewed by young and pretty female reporters.

In the news gathering environment, it would almost seem that men clearly did not dominate. Instead, there seem to be certain reversals of power whereby women stood to gain benefits. A majority of our respondents, overwhelmingly, felt that "female reporters were tough and independent."

As one respondent said:

> Female reporters can work as well as men. For example, if we need to drink with our sources, we can drink as much as our male counterparts. (A 32-year-old newspaper reporter)

But this came with a caveat. As one respondent pointed out, baseball players preferred to talk about "deep" subjects to male reporters, especially if the male reporter also played baseball. But with female reporters "lighter" topics like sartorial choices were discussed with much more ease rather than game strategy (Personal interview, 2016).

The area of politics also showed similar trends. Senior male politicians preferred to release information to senior male reporters rather than senior female reporters. Senior male politicians, generally, thought male reporters are more reliable and capable of handling certain types of news rather than female reporters but female politicians generally did not have such biases (Personal interview, 2016).

In certain beats, female reporters are a majority and that gave them a distinct advantage. For example, in entertainment news, and in radio, female reporters, generally, outnumber males. In general, the ratio is 7:3 (7 female reporters out of 10). In entertainment news, most media organizations have one male reporter among six women. As the participants reported, male reporters often felt pressurized because men reporting are often

considered "effeminate" (33-year-old television reporter). Sexuality also made a difference. Among the small number of male reporters, a majority are often also gay, report participants. Male reporters are perceived to have privileges if certain interviewees only choose to speak to them.

A majority of our respondents reported that Taiwanese reporters place great value on appearance, and some can take advantage of "being female" to get closer to male sources to gain more information. This "female exclusive advantage," as participants referred to it, reflected a deeply patriarchal society where women "please men with their appearance and sweet voice" (Personal interview, 2016).

Face Is Everything

Online respondents pointed out two general types of common negative comments related to female reporters. One generally focuses on sex. Several respondents mentioned the most common negative comments they came across is "slut." Ironically, the pronunciation of "slut" in mandarin is as same as the pronunciation of "reporter" in mandarin. Female reporters are more likely than male reporters to receive indecent and salacious comments related to sex and sexuality. One respondent (32-year-old television anchorwoman) said, "One comment said 'why don't you be a'" pornography actress? Rude netizens to a male reporter would say, "Why don't you go to hell."

Second, most negative comments were related to appearance. Use of words like "fat" and "ugly" were common. Female reporters are more likely to be criticized because of their appearances than male reporters. A 28-year-old television reporter said her colleague's stands-up was uploaded online and she was criticized that she was too fat, too ugly, and has a big face. Taiwanese consider small faces beautiful. Similarly, other respondents said that comments like "This reporter is so ugly, how can she appear on TV?" (Comment made to a 33-year-old television reporter) were common.

Even if a female reporter makes a mistake or is perceived to have made a mistake, her appearance is still mocked. Our respondents emphasized that because women are expected to be dignified and graceful, a mistake, however minor, breaks the "graceful and dignified image" and this is something viewers are relentlessly contemptuous about. One respondent (A 32-year-old television anchorwoman) shared the severe backlash she had faced when the Japanese actor, Kimura Takuya, was displeased on air, as he felt the TV anchorwoman did not use the right language when interviewing him. The anchorwoman was openly and severely mocked in newspapers and other print media because a mistake by a pretty anchorperson has entertainment value, not just for the public but other journalists as well. "I was mocked not only because I am a female but because people like to watch a graceful and beautiful anchorwoman make an embarrassing mistake." Some other commonly encountered negative comments for women reporters, as our respondents said, include: "lazy," "not doing fact-checking," "idiot," "lacking common sense," and a common one: "If you didn't study hard when you were little, you will be a reporter when you grow up."

Viewers focus on female reporters' appearances more than their abilities. One respondent (a 33-year-old television reporter, a 30-year-old television reporter) emphasized:

> Female TV reporters are just to be gazed at. Viewers care about appearances of female TV reporters more than their professional ability. (Personal interview, 2016)

Female TV reporters are commonly criticized because they are not pretty enough. But as respondents said, female TV reporters in general are very slim and good-looking because they are selected based on appearance as well.

Overall, reporters said that they got few responses when they shared serious or important news on their public social media profiles but got lot of likes and comments when they posted pictures showing happy faces and smiles. As one 32-year-old television anchorwoman said:

> Most my followers on Facebook are male. They don't really care about the news I share. They follow me because they want to see beautiful girls. They care a lot about my make-up, the length of my skirts and my clothes. The goal of my Facebook Page is to attract attention; therefore, I post what viewers like to see. (Personal interview, 2016)

Political Ideology and Discrimination

Our respondents felt that both online and offline "discrimination based on political ideology discrimination" was a major issue. Both male and female reporters were shamed for political ideology, but the women participants reported higher levels of vitriol in the comments aimed at them. Especially online, reporters got a lot of uncivil comments related to political ideology.

As a respondent (25-year-old newspaper reporter) said:

> Most comments I get are about political ideology. Readers having the same ideology leave very positive comments whereas readers having different ideology left very negative comments. (Personal Interview, 2016)

A 32-year-old newspaper reporter from pro-China media got comments from against-China netizens saying, "You are so close to China that you are licking the asshole of Communist Party of China." A reporter (32-year-old online magazine editor) from against-China media got comments like "biased," "are you manipulating public opinion?" Interviewees with a pro-China bent will not speak to certain news organizations because of different ideologies.

Online Abuse and Journalistic Routines

Respondents were asked if incivility in comment streams influenced the way they work (for example when newsgathering, the questions they ask, details they include in stories). Overall, respondents said that they did not change the way they work because they are confident of their professional abilities. A majority of the respondents said, as professional news workers, "unprofessional commenters" (Personal interview, 2016) did not influence them. One respondent (a 33-year-old television reporter) said:

> As long as my work is professional, I don't change the way I work. I respect their freedom of speech, but these nasty comments do not influence my professionalism. (Personal Interview, 2016)

However, in certain situations, online comments especially, uncivil comments did influence the way women journalists covered certain stories. It definitely affected the way they

covered controversial issues. Controversial issues always bring forth fiercely negative gendered comments. In order to avoid these comments, respondents said they (1) often avoid covering controversial issues; (2) they too great care to ensure balance in news stories; (3) avoided anonymous sources in the coverage; (4) cited as many sources as possible to ensure balance and not get sued; (5) names are often not mentioned if the source him or herself is controversial and (6) very careful about the words used; did their best to use neutral words.

Online media intentionally seeks to cover controversial issues because they drive traffic to the site and rates for online advertising are dependent on this. Traditional media such as print and television said respondents did not care too much about online audience interactions or comments. This was also because they were not dependent on online advertising. For online media, reiterated participants, fierce and nasty comments ensured greater traffic. Reporters, as participants said, were thus encouraged to cover such topics, in a way that would drive traffic to sites. Reporters are encouraged to intentionally include some content that might stimulate uncivil comments to attract traffic. A respondent (26-year-old online media reporter) said, "We criticize the government on purpose because we know this can attract lots of nasty comments." But with women reporters, gender and appearance added to the kind of uncivil comments they got. Our respondents said they often used these factors to draw traffic to their news sites.

One online entertainment reporter (25-year-old online media reporter) deliberately wrote celebrity gossip news that angered fans. This lead to her being bullied online. Fans left nasty comments on her Facebook wall. Her inbox was paralyzed because of the influx of nasty messages from fans. The story and her news site got a record number of hits. But as the participant reported, the incident was not a pleasant one. Since then on, she writes news that pleases celebrities and fans alike.

One respondent (28-year-old television reporters) changed her beat from doing daily news to feature news because of negative online comments.

> Daily news reporters have limited time to produce news, so I did some news which perhaps could have been better reported on. My news which got most shared is the worst new stories I ever wrote. This news still got negative online comments three years after I wrote it. These online comments hurt my reputation too much, so I quit doing daily news. Now I am doing feature news. (Personal Interview, 2016)

Some comments help improve their coverage. One respondent spoke about an incident where readers criticized the way she had covered people who had lost their loved ones in an accident.

Though the comments are really nasty, they pointed out the mistakes we need to correct. These comments helped me be more sympathetic to victims, and it improved my newsgathering skills (Personal interview, 2016).

Another respondent said, "Some comments corrected the jargon that I misused (Personal interview, 2016)." In some cases, respondents found some new angles to cover news from the nasty comments left online. One participant said:

> When we get comments, no matter how nasty (usually they are nasty) implying that the story is biased we look into them and try and address the concerns readers are raising. (Personal interview, 2016)

Strategies of Coping with Incivility in Online Comments

Respondents mentioned that they relied on certain strategies to cope with uncivil online comments. The most common was not engaging with the comments. They choose to ignore and not respond to certain uncivil comments. A common refrain was that those who left negative comments are anonymous, emotional and irrational so replying to such comments stimulate more uncivil comments. As one participant (28-year-old television reporter) said, "I would rather spend time on doing better news stories rather than replying these comments." Another respondent pointed out that rude netizens are anonymous, emotional, irrational, irresponsible, and they do not really understand the news they comment on. Mostly they just want to stimulate nasty arguments online.

But online comments from sources were deemed important. Female reporters, as participants emphasized, are very careful about maintaining cordial relationships with sources. So, if sources post comments indicating unhappiness or displeasure with a story, reporters are quick to explain to explain themselves. As one participant (32-year-old newspaper reporter) said, Comments from interviewees and maintaining good relationships with them are way more important for my career and my job than anonymous online comments. I don't really care about my reputation among the public, but I do care for my reputation in my field (Personal interview, 2016).

Sometimes as the participants said, they did jump into conversations. Online media reporters intentionally talk back to drive traffic back to their sites.

We just want to piss netizens off because the more they are angry, the more traffic we get. (Personal interview, 2016)

Sometimes, as participants said, it was important to stop those from leaving negative comments especially those constantly harassing journalists and those comments harmed reporters' reputations. Threatening to sue them was one option. A respondent said, "I will sue them if they harm my reputation." One respondent (30-year-old television reporter) who threatened to sue actually got an apology.

Promoting Stories Online

Using social media to build personal reputations or maintain relationships with readers is uncommon in Taiwan unless the reporter is a celebrity. As our respondents reiterated they did not care much about their public personas online nor were they personally invested in it. As a respondent (25-year-old newspaper reporter) said, "I am tired to build my personal reputation online." Another respondent (26-year-old online media reporter) said, "I am not interested, and I don't want to spend time on it." Building personal reputations online is considered unnecessary. As a respondent (28-year-old television reporter) said:

> As a print reporter, there is no need for me to build my brand. Building brand is something that television anchorwomen should do. But they build their brands with their pretty pictures not their news. (Personal interview, 2016)

Creating and maintaining cordial relations with sources was more important and not engaging with audiences on social media.

Social media, especially, Facebook is personal, and reporters here want privacy. They share their news with their close friends and maintain strict boundaries between personal and professional lives. Respondents carefully selected items even when sharing news with

friends. As one respondent said, "I only share news that is meaningful to me, such as my first editorial or opinion pieces." Self-promotion is considered bragging, which is inappropriate in Taiwanese culture.

As a respondent (30-year-old newspaper reporter) said:

> I feel shy to share my news. I don't want to be considered a showboat. I share my news only when I need traffic. Then I share my news and beg my Facebook friends for clicks. (Personal interview 2016)

Discussion

Through in-depth qualitative interviews, 25 Taiwanese women journalists explained how they negotiated gender on the professional front in Taiwan, both online and offline, its effects on normal journalistic routines and the solutions they had for dealing with gendered incivility. The situation in Taiwanese media, as the interview themes revealed, is a complex product of social cultural, traditional journalistic norms and a fiercely competitive media environment that is desperately using different means available to grab declining audience attention. The situation is fraught, and gender adds its own intricate issues. Throughout, our participant's responses emphasized certain tensions between their perceptions of autonomy as journalists, the advantages afforded by gender and how incivility related to gender online altered their professional routines.

At the outset, it is important to understand the character of Taiwanese media. It may have one of the freest media in Asia, but it is also one of the most competitive. Men dominate in most media (Lo 2004) and women are behind with numbers rising to 42.5% in 2004 (Lo 2004). This study building on Lo's comprehensive look at 1642 journalists' basic characteristics, training, working conditions and professional values through gendered lens, focused on women journalists as a separate and unique entity. Since 2004, the online space has fundamentally changed journalist and audience engagement and this study is among the few studies that look at how Taiwanese women journalists navigate online comments and social media profiles as they engage with audiences. In the process this analysis also highlights how while much may have changed for female journalists (females now dominate radio and entertainment journalism) since the lifting of the ban, gender, still remains a complicated and contentious issue.

Journalism in Taiwan has always been deeply gendered. Gender before martial law was enforced in the country-determined beats assigned (Zhao 1987). Even after its easement, Wu (1987) showed that women journalists indicated that they did not have the same venues for promotion and advancement in their careers as men. Yet as Wu also found that in spite of such gender-based obstacles, women journalists claimed high degrees of satisfaction with their careers and professional identities. This was an important aspect that our participants underlined as well.

Respondents highlighted that gender was not always a disadvantage and as part of their professional identities could often be advantageous. Yet they were also aware that this advantage was a double-edged sword and not always empowering. Male sources may in some cases prefer to chat with female reporters so that female reporters could obtain exclusive information over male counterparts, but this happened especially when female reporters emphasized their feminine features (e.g. soft voice, innocent eyes). While reporting on legal issues, judges are kinder to mistakes made by women journalists. Reticent sportsmen

also prefer to speak to women but when it came to "deep" subjects' male sources preferred other male sources. In political reporting, senior male politicians preferred male reporters because they were thought of as more reliable. Just as Zhao's (1987) study had shown politics and sports are a male domain and sources consider male journalists within these areas more able to cover serious issues. Thus, although Taiwanese reporters did not quite look at gender as a key element of discrimination, it certainly is not an equalizer. None of our respondents mentioned that male journalists had to play up appearances to get a story or source to respond.

Our respondents showed great awareness of these double standards but did not waver from their belief that "female reporters were tough and independent." They claimed that in some beats as for example, like entertainment, women journalists were in the majority, so men felt the pressure to measure up to their standards instead of the other way around. But as our participants reported, the Taiwanese emphasis on appearance reflected a patriarchal society where women must "please men with their appearance and sweet voice." Thus, socialization plays a role in the way women journalists operate. The job model that contends that socialization is a professional function where similar professional experiences of men and women shape their professional attributes (Aven, Parker, and McEvoy 1993) seems to be dominated by the gender model of socialization as articulated by Rodgers and Thorson (2003). Thus, as the gender model posited the different reporting approaches that male and female journalists have as a result of their cultural socialization will have deep and abiding influences in the ways they operate and adjust to newsrooms professionally. In the news gathering environment, there seems to be certain reversals of power whereby women stood to gain benefits but there was no denying the patriarchal nature of these advantages. Gender is an advantage as long as men are pleased.

In the online sphere, the negative aspects of gender are more prominent. Negative comments related to appearance and words such as "fat" and "ugly" were common. Appearances mattered more for female reporters than male reporters. Faces mattered more than ability especially for television reporters. Lo's (2004) survey showed 39% of television journalists were women. Television-reporting jobs, particularly, are considered more feminine jobs since women are considered to use their appearances to draw in audiences. Yet they were considered ill-suited to carry the equipment associated with the job (Lu 2003; Sun 2007; Wang and Yen 2015). These contradictions are also found in the concept of appearance. Women were shamed publicly and severely if they made a mistake and happened to fit or not fit conventional notions of beauty. In the arena of political reporting, pro-China or anti-China stances made a difference and both male and female reporters are shamed for political ideology, but the women participants reported higher levels of cruelty and abuse in the comments aimed at them. There is thus a deep dichotomy between the actual experiences of our sample and their perceptions of their professions. Just as Wu (1987) showed in spite of clear gender-based obstacles journalists reported a high degree of professional satisfaction, our participants saw themselves as strong and tough professions in spite of having to cater to established social norms.

This incivility online did not lead women journalists to change the way they worked because they reposed confidence in their abilities and would not let non-professionals decide how they would work. But this stance is challenged when they cover issues that might be controversial. The respondents agreed that controversial issues garnered the most number of negative comments, so they are extra careful to avoid criticisms on such stories. They are careful to ensure balance and often do not quote-controversial

sources for fear of backlash. Participants may "respect their freedom of speech but these nasty comments do not influence my professionalism" but as reporters they are careful not to incite outrage. Uncivil backlash led women reporters to avoid covering controversial issues. As one participant said, she quit her beat because as a hard news reporter as the online backlash got unbearable after a while.

Taiwanese journalists cared about the incivility and their reputations. They would not hesitate to sue nasty naysayers who harmed their reputations but overall, they were more concerned about how they were perceived by sources rather audiences. Nasty as these online comments may be, our participants were very open to learning from them. As our respondents said, they learnt to correct jargon use, be more sensitive and often even if the comments are nasty, try and see the point being made by readers. There seems to be a clear difference between reporters' use of online discussion depending on whether they work for online or traditional print media with those working for online media suggesting that they sometimes try to provoke online discussion with controversial stories. The participants did at times try to use reactions online to their advantage though they knew audience reactions were often gendered and biased.

Yet media organization often use this gendered outrage online to draw traffic to their sites. Competition for audience growth and retention have led to heavy emphasis on sensational, and soft news with blurring lines between news and entertainment to boost circulation (Ma 2003). So, reporters are often encouraged to engage with negative commentators and they do so to ensure more audiences. The government is often criticized as that garners attention. Women journalists have learnt to use such tactics to advantage. For example, one journalist whose inbox was paralyzed because of her negative coverage of a celebrity may have now changed to covering only positive news but as she says, both her sources and audiences are happy. They flock to her stories and she gets the audience she needs. Gastil (2008) outlined the online space as a one characterized by deliberation and opportunities for respectful dialogue. But in Taiwan, media organizations have learned to manipulate this to draw audiences and have in a sense marred its inclusive nature.

It is when we examine notions and effects of gender online that we see its influences on journalistic routines in a different light. As Shoemaker and Reese (2013, 64) have emphasized "the structure of relationships among people and the institutions they create" (Shoemaker and Reese 2013, 64) work in ways that allow power and dominant ideologies to be expressed through the media and constrain journalists' work. Thus, when participants mention that they avoid engaging with negative commentators online often as a strategy to cope with online incivility, they contradict the demands of their organizations to use such engagements to draw in audiences. While reporters may be encouraged to engage uncivil commentators, they are not encouraged to promote their stories online or on social media. Our participants claimed reluctance to do so, citing fatigue as a factor and wanting to keep social media private. This may be indicative of the passive roles assigned to women in Taiwanese culture (Tsai 2006) evident in the blogosphere where traditionally institutionalized gender division labor like house-work for females and professional occupations for males (Chang and Tseng 2009) have been emphasized. As Shoemaker et al. (2001) said it is important also understand that while professional norms and routines are important, individual and cultural characteristics are also influential in shaping journalistic decisions. Thus individual and organizational norms work in tandem in the Taiwanese

media scenario to influence journalistic routines complicated by gendered notions and socialization.

The study is limited by its sample size, but the themes analyzed in accordance with existing literature indicate that female journalists working in news journalism have a much more "fragmented and contradictory professional identity than men" (Van Zoonen 1998: 39, 45). As North (2009) has underlined in essence Taiwanese newsrooms remain deeply gendered and that gender is an important element that shapes dilemmas and constraints of journalists' routine activities though in Taiwan, mostly online rather than offline. As Lo (2004) had emphasized for Taiwanese rooms to become more democratic, trained and experienced women must be retained. We can only hope newsrooms are listening.

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