Author(s): Jung, Joo-Young; Villi, Mikko

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NEWSPAPERS AND CROSS-LEVEL COMMUNICATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JAPAN, KOREA, AND FINLAND

In order to examine how the same types of social media are perceived and utilized in different national contexts for journalism and news media, we studied mainstream newspapers in three countries where both newspapers and social media are viable: Japan, Korea, and Finland. Our in-depth interviews with journalists indicate both similarities and differences in the three countries. The most outstanding similarity is that newspapers have not fully incorporated cross-level communications available on social media platforms. Factors related to organizational structures, goals, policies, and procedures served as filters for the incorporation of social media into the news production and distribution system. On the other hand, differences were influenced by socio-economic factors in the three countries. Japan revealed a presence of strong offline networks of journalists and social systems; a strong online intermediary and corporate structure was found in Korea; and thin resources were found to limit online activities in Finland. The present study indicates that mainstream newspapers in the three countries are trying to adjust to a changing media environment and to find a viable way to best utilize newly available opportunities enabled by online platforms.

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Introduction

When new media enter a communication environment, existing media assess potential inflicting impacts. Implications of the Internet on newspapers are complicated: the Internet has a positive potential of increasing reach and overcoming physical limitations in news distribution. On the other hand, the open structure of the Internet makes it difficult for newspapers to find an effective business model to maintain or increase their profits. Recent reports and studies have shown that social media have rapidly become one of the main platforms for news consumption (Gottfried and Shearer 2016). Kümpel and her colleagues (2015) examined past research concerning news sharing in social media and found that in the last ten years, social media have emerged as an important channel for obtaining and sharing news.

While many mainstream social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are used globally, the majority of studies and reports on the use of social media for news have been concentrated in the United States (Kümpel et al., 2015). The ways in which the same social media platforms are used in different social contexts have yet to be sufficiently studied (c.f., Domingo et al. 2008; Nossek, Adoni, and Nimrod 2015; Newman et al. 2016). In order to respond to this gap the current study compares the incorporation of social media by mainstream news organizations in three different socio-cultural and communication contexts. In-depth interviews were conducted in newspaper companies in Japan, Korea and Finland; countries in which newspapers continue to play central roles and, at the same time, social media have become an important communication medium. Despite commonalities, these three countries are distinguished by different characteristics of media ecologies. Based on media system dependency theory (Ball-Rokeach 1985), this comparative study explores different relationships between newspapers and social media developed in distinctive media and social environments. Specifically, this research focuses on how newspapers in different contexts incorporate and utilize cross-level communications available in social media for news publishing and circulation.

Media system dependency theory

Media system dependency theory (Ball-Rokeach 1985) is a communication theory that focuses on dependency relations among individuals, media, and societal-level systems. Rather than focusing on attributes of individuals or media for explaining effects that media have on individuals, media system dependency (MSD) theory focuses on an ecological relationship between different players in society. The power of certain participants in a society is not predetermined but rather influenced by resources implicated in the relationships. When high ambiguity exists in a social environment, the power of the mass media is likely to be stronger than interpersonal networks due to exclusive resources available on mass media. According to the theory, the impact of a new media type should be understood in terms of the existing dependency relations formed between individuals, different types of media, and social systems.

Figure 1 demonstrates a theoretical model of media dependency relations. Individuals' media dependency relations are influenced not only by micro-level individual characteristics, but also by interpersonal network activities at the meso-level and media system activities at the macro-level. Media system activities include organizational structure ("patterned relations of control over resources") and goals, as well as organizational policies and procedures in the news production process (Ball-Rokeach 1998, 18). *Organizational structure and goals* concern the identity of the organization (Stroud et al. 2015; Demers 1996), while *policies and procedures* refer to more tangible logistics and guidelines (Lee 2016; Opgenhaffen and d'Haenens 2015). At the macro-level,

media system activities are influenced by structural dependency relations among the media, political, economic, and other systems (Cornia 2016; Halpern 1994). Finally, the social environment, such as major events, disasters, and social issues, influences both individual and media system dependencies (Hirschburg, Dillman, and Ball-Rokeach 1986; Kim et al. 2004; Loges 1994).

[Figure 1 about here]

The theoretical model of MSD theory serves as an appropriate framework to compare how newspaper companies in different countries perceive and utilize social media by examining the influence of various players in each society. Thus, while the same social media services are used in different countries and their attributes are more or less the same, the ways in which social media are incorporated into society are likely to be influenced by dependency relations in different communication and media environments.

Cross-level story flows on social media

In examining the impact of social media for mainstream newspapers, we argue that one of the crucial characteristics of social media for mainstream newspapers is the blurred boundary between mass and interpersonal communication found in past research (Jung and Moro 2012; Castells 2011). While early theories of media and communication have noted the importance of interpersonal communication in mediating the influence of mass media on individuals (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955), the majority of communication inquiry treated mass communication and interpersonal communication in separate frameworks. Menzel's (1971) significant, yet under-acknowledged article published in Public Opinion Quarterly titled "Quasi-mass communication: A neglected area" opens with:

> Most discussions of communication focus either on mass communication and its effects, or on interpersonal communication. This dichotomy, however, leaves out of account a vast amount of socially vital communication activities that utilize social arrangements and set-ups, but can be characterized neither as mass communication nor as person-to-person communication. We may call such activities "quasi-mass communication." (Menzel 1971, 406).

The quasi-mass communication conceptualized by Menzel (1971) was acknowledged after more than three decades with the advent of social media. While many newspapers launched online sites in the latter half of the 1990s, their online practices for a long time were mainly about performing one-way mass communication, without engaging in participatory processes that included audiences. Within the last decade the development of social media tools and platforms has cultivated new forms of relationships between the producers and consumers of media content. Importantly, unlike older communication media, interpersonal connections and networks are visible on social media and occupy a central part of them (Castells 2011; Shirky 2008).

In an effort to demonstrate the significance of social media in the network society, Jung and Moro (2012) proposed a cross-level story flow model of social media that explicates the ways in which stories from micro, meso, and macro levels flow across these levels and various media (figure 2). The authors argue that one of the crucial features of social media that made them immensely popular in a short period of time is the cross-level story flows enabled by their technical

affordance and socially-shaped usage. In Jung and Moro's model, boundaries of interpersonal, group and mass communications are blurred. Individuals can access social media to interact with friends (micro level), get information and interact at group, community or organizational levels (meso level), and get daily news from mass media (macro level). The amalgam of stories from different levels in people's social media interface allow individuals and organizations to be involved in seeking, consuming, re-distributing and creating contents without being limited to the level in which stories are initially created (Marwick and boyd 2011).

[Figure 2 about here]

What are the implications of the cross-level communications on social media for existing news media? In particular, what are new opportunities and challenges that emerge from the advent of social media? Implications of social media on news media can be discussed at both the production and consumption levels.

On the production level, cross-level communication platforms on social media allow *user-generated content* (UGC) to flow across micro, meso, and macro levels of communication (Figure 2). Examples of UGC involvement in media practices include commenting on news items and other media content or offering content that users have produced themselves, such as photographs and stories. Several studies have examined the ways in which professional journalists utilize UGC (Johnston 2016; Manosevitch and Tenenboim 2016; Nah et al. 2015; Paulussen and D'heer 2013), and other studies noted resistance or caution in using UGC by professional journalists (Bonin 2016; Tong 2015). For example, in their research of Chinese newspapers, Cui and Lin (2015) found that professional values and journalistic authority set limits to utilizing UGC on social media.

On the consumption level, news media increasingly see the significance of social media for distributing news and reaching audiences. *User-distributed content* (UDC) is an increasingly recognized form of audience participation. UDC describes the role of horizontal, intra-audience connections in disseminating media content (Villi & Noguera-Vivo, 2017). Terms and concepts that closely relate to UDC are superdistribution, the forwarding of media through social networks (Anderson, Bell, and Shirky 2013) and social curation, which illustrates the networked distribution of media content by adding qualitative judgment and imbuing content with personal and social significance (Villi 2012). Singer (2014) coined the term user-generated visibility, which is very close to UDC.

From the viewpoint of media organizations, UDC is a process by which the mass media converge with online social networks through the intentional use of social media services and other platforms in an effort to expand the distribution of media content (Villi, Matikainen, & Khaldarova, 2016). This allows media organizations to reach new audiences and keep their existing audience connected, even if not on their own site (Himelboim and McCreery 2012). On the other hand, UDC demands a transformation in the gatekeeping role of journalists and news organizations in the degree to which they have controlled news distribution (Bro and Wallberg 2014; Dahmen and Morrison 2016). Sharing of news stories by users in social media has become an important driver of traffic, as well as means of promotion for media (Hermida et al. 2012). For instance, according to a cross-national study covering 26 countries (Newman 2016), already half of media consumers say they use social media as a source of news each week and for around one in ten it is their main source of news.

Research questions

Based on MSD theory, the cross-level story flow model, and past studies, this study compares ways in which mainstream newspapers in different socio-cultural contexts adopt and utilize social media in their news production and distribution processes. In order to examine the influence of media system dependency relations on news production and distribution, mainstream news companies are compared in three countries: Japan, Korea, and Finland. The study is guided by the following research questions.

RQ1. How do *media system activities* of mainstream newspapers in Japan, Korea, and Finland influence their perception and utilization of UGC and UDC in their production and distribution processes?

> RQ1a. How do *organizational structure and goals* of mainstream newspapers in Japan, Korea, and Finland influence their perception and utilization of UGC and UDC in their production and distribution processes?

> RQ1b. How do *organizational policies and procedures* of mainstream newspapers in Japan, Korea, and Finland influence their perception and utilization of UGC and UDC in their production and distribution processes?

RQ2: How do different *media system dependency relations* in Japan, Korea, and Finland influence the ways in which mainstream newspapers utilize social media for news production and distribution?

Selection of three countries: Japan, Korea, and Finland

Japan, Korea, and Finland are examined for the following two reasons. First, newspaper industries in the three countries are among the most vibrant in the world. According to International Federation of Audit Bureau of Circulations (2012), Finland ranks the second highest in the EU and third highest in the world in newspaper circulations per capita. Japan's top three national newspapers are ranked the highest in the world in terms of print circulation. Korea's circulation rate per capita is within the top 10 in the world, and three major newspapers are ranked within the top 20 in terms of print circulation (Park 2014).

Second, the three countries boast high diffusion and use of the Internet, mobile phones and social media services. The Internet penetration rate in Finland, Japan and Korea are 92.38%, 90.58% and 84.33%, respectively (International Telecommunications Union 2014). Social media services such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are ranked within the top ten in terms of web traffic in each country (Alexa 2017). The three countries make interesting cases due to their current media contexts in which both newspaper markets and social media diffusion are vibrant. Examining the ways in which mainstream newspapers in these three different countries perceive and utilize social media will provide an understanding and foresight on the relationship between newspapers and new platforms of information flow.

Research methods

Data were gathered in Japan, Korea and Finland in 2013-2014 based on a purposive sampling method. The dataset from Japan is comprised of 10 interviewees from six newspapers, the data from Finland consist of four interviewees from four newspapers and the Korean data consist of

four interviewees from four newspapers.[1] The data is not representative of the whole newspaper industry in the three countries, although the selection of major mainstream newspapers in every country provides good grounds for an accurate empirical contribution. The target interviewees were senior-level journalists and executives in charge of overseeing media strategies in the respective newspapers. In Japan, in-depth interviews were carried out in six major newspapers: *Yomiuri Shimbun, Asahi Shimbun, Sankei Shimbun, Mainichi Shimbun, Nikkei and Chunichi Shimbun.* The interviews, lasting approximately one and a half hours each, were conducted in English, either by all parties involved speaking English or with the aid of an interpreter. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

In Korea, top four leading newspapers in terms of newspaper subscription rate were chosen (Park 2014): *Chosun Ilbo, JoongAng Ilbo, Dong-A Ilbo,* and *Maeil Business Newspaper*. All interviews were conducted in Korean, transcribed in Korean, and translated to English. In Finland, the four studied news media were major newspapers, including the leading newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, and three important regional newspapers *Kaleva, Etelä-Suomen Sanomat and Turun Sanomat*. The interviews were carried out in Finnish, then transcribed and translated to English.

A semi-structured model was used for all interviews. While the same set of questions were presented to all interviewees, the researchers wanted the interviewees to continue their thoughts along new lines as well, and asked them to elaborate on certain themes that seemed interesting and to express reflective and critical views. The accumulation of the empirical data and its analysis were systematic. The study proceeded with a considerable amount of textual data, moving from analysis and coding of parts of the dataset (single interviews) to developing a general understanding of the practices and views expressed by the interviewees. By applying a thematic analysis, we distinguished the following themes from the interview material: online vs. print, social media, UDC, UGC, uncertainty, innovation, development and change. These themes were largely based on the interview framework. However, we were also open to themes that arose from the analysis of the interview material or that originated from the interviewees.

In order to assure the full anonymity of the interviewees (as requested by the interviewees themselves), names or positions of the newspaper staff are not revealed, nor are newspapers specified when referring to the data. The newspapers are indicated with the letters A to N.

Results

The Influence of Media System Activities on the Perception and Utilization of UGC and UDC (RQ1)

Organizational Structure and Goals (RQ1a)

With regard to the organizational structure and goals that influence the ways in which newspapers perceive and utilize UGC and UDC in social media, three main themes arose from the interviews: *ownership structure and motivation for innovation; professionalism and the agenda-setting role; and political orientations*.

Ownership structure and motivation for innovation. Interviewees mentioned that ownership structure of newspaper companies influence journalists' motivations for actively presenting new ideas for change and for taking responsibilities in changing certain aspects of news production and distribution. In Korea, many newspapers, including the four newspapers examined in the present study, are part of parent companies that cross-own other media, such as cable television channels,

magazines and other businesses. Parent companies have a strong voice in deciding how to allocate resources for newspapers, and often times, journalists do not have decision-making power. As one interviewee in Korea mentioned, journalists tend not to have a strong sense of responsibility for the newspaper in which they are working due to ownership structure and hierarchical power relations. In such a corporate structure, it is less likely for journalists to propose new ways of gathering and distributing news content. Similarly, many mainstream newspapers in Japan are owned by parent companies; they are economically stable but tend to have a bureaucratic company structure. Several interviewees in Japan have mentioned that the conservative bureaucratic system of the mainstream media companies make it difficult and slow to implement changes within news production and distribution. As an interviewee in newspaper A stated:

> *For instance, the bureaucracy here in Japan, it's very stiff, so that it's really hard to change. And it's the same with the media as well. The structure is unchangeable. If the readers change, then they [media] will change, but you know, they [media] can't change themselves. (newspaper A)*

Professionalism and the agenda-setting role. In all three countries, interviewees mentioned that professionalism continues to be one of the main goals of their respective newspapers and journalists. Interviewees in Korea and Finland indicated their views that what the audience expects from mainstream newspapers is not an active incorporation of UGC, but their traditional role as professional agenda-setters. Interestingly, several Korean interviewees suggested the prevalence of UGC to be a factor that makes professional journalism more valued rather than less. The interviewed journalists mentioned that due to an indigestible amount of information available, consumers are seeking news produced by professionals rather than by amateur citizens. As one interviewee commented:

> *People are still more interested in the agenda-setting function of newspapers. Citizens do not necessarily want to hear citizen journalism but rather want professional journalism. All in all, credibility and citizen journalism is at odds. (newspaper J)*

Interviewees from Finnish newspapers mentioned that they continue to support the traditional position of the audience as consumers, especially when the readers represent older age cohorts who are not necessarily interested in connecting newspapers and social media together. UGC and audience participation in general might seem to be a way of "just following the opinions of some marginal group." One interviewee (newspaper N) went further to say that print newspapers and the traditional mass-communication model would experience a "renaissance" as people tire of social media. This renaissance would effectively mean a more unidirectional environment in which journalists create content and audiences consume it.

Political orientations. Another organizational goal that influences the utilization of UGC and UDC is the political orientation of newspaper companies. In Korea and Japan, mainstream newspapers tend to take conservative or liberal political views. For example, in Japan, *Yomiuri Shimbun* is identified as a more conservative newspaper than *Asahi Shimbun*. In Korea, *Chosun Ilbo* is considered the most conservative newspaper, followed by *Donga Ilbo* and *JoongAng Ilbo*. Interviewees mentioned that maintaining the "political color" is important for the identity of a news organization, which makes it difficult for the newspapers to adopt diverse views from UGCs. As one interviewee in Korea mentioned:

Each newspaper has its own color and it is difficult to absorb diverse opinions that go beyond the news media's color. Newspapers have to maintain their credibility with their color and tradition. Therefore, negotiating diverse citizen opinions with the newspaper's position is difficult. (newspaper J)

Organizational Policies and Procedures (RQ1b)

With regard to organizational policies and procedures that influence the perceptions and utilization of UGCs and UDCs on social media, four themes arose from the interviews: *protectionism; distrust toward UGC and UDC; allocation of resources; and prioritization of print newspaper subscribers.*

Protectionism. Most of the newspapers in the three countries indicated certain levels of protectionism of their content against UGC and UDC. In Japan, interviewees expressed concerns toward the prevalence of social media. There was not much consideration of a synergy between mainstream media and social media; rather social media were considered as competitors alongside other newspaper companies, or even as bigger competitors than other legacy media outlets. The social media situation is described as the "wild west," with yet a uniformed attitude toward it.

Fear. For instance, the newspaper companies feel fear against Facebook... Until now, we compete with each media, each newspaper... But recently the situation has changed... We have to think of a strategy against.. Facebook, Google and Yahoo. (newspaper D)

With regard to UDC, newspapers tend to have ambivalent views about distributing their content on social media. The interviewees from Japanese newspapers were careful about circulating their content on social media. This might have to do with the fact, as already noted, that social media companies are considered to be their competitors, commonly described as "others," or "them."

As for social media, our company thinks that we shouldn't easily distribute our articles through such kind of other media, [which are] not our media... So it is very unacceptable to distribute our headlines or articles through them. Because the articles are our fortune and property, that kind of property must be distributed only through our media. (newspaper G)

On the other hand, there is an acknowledgement that UDC has important potential for promoting the newspaper and its content. Social media may be "the most effective instrument and tool to disseminate certain information, and the mission of newspapers is to disseminate information. If we don't approach this service [social media], the newspaper's future is not good" (newspaper B).

Distrust toward UGC and UDC. Interviewees in all three countries expressed distrust and skeptical views toward UGC and UDC. Interviewees mentioned that newspapers tend to utilize social media as a "news gathering tool" and consider UGC as "raw material" which should be re-written by professional journalists. An interviewee in Japan mentioned that UGC materials such as photographs are useful, but newspaper companies have practical objections because of the uncertain originality and copyrights of the contents.

Newspapers are very reluctant to take part in the social media... Because, it usually includes errors and erroneous information, which is completely different from information policy in the established newspapers...Because of this reason we [newspapers] are not very enthusiastic about taking part in the social media. (newspaper C)

With regard to UDC, several newspapers mentioned that news stories distributed on social media are often not the type of news that journalists think are important. They stated that news content distributed on social media tend to be light in content thus able to appeal to a wide audience (see Zeller et al. 2014, 222–223). As one interviewee in Korea mentioned, "Sensational and light news are distributed. So, even if we write serious/higher quality news, they are not widely distributed." Other interviewees mentioned that social media networks could be suitable for distributing specialized content targeted to a specific audience, such as news related to hobbies, sports, and business matters.

Difficulty of allocating resources. The coordination cost and a lack of qualified contributors make it difficult for newspapers to actively incorporate UGC. According to interviewees in Japan and Korea, even top newspapers are struggling to improve their business model, and executives are hesitant to allocate new resources for managing social media, particularly when the visible effects of social media on generating news traffic have not been proven. As one interviewee in Korea noted, "Larger newspaper organizations cannot flexibly respond to rapidly changing needs of consumers partially due to the shortage of resources" (newspaper H). Overall, newspapers acknowledge the potential of social media to influence news flow, but it has not been realized due to existing news flow structure and lack of resources. In Finland, interviewees mentioned that even larger newspaper companies do not always have the resources for hiring dedicated professionals who would help in promoting content and acting in the social media arena. Social media practices are mostly dependent on the activity of individual staff members rather than on a systematized division.

Several newspapers also mentioned that they have tried to work with citizen journalists to produce news, but this took too much effort to coordinate while not bringing much benefit to the company. Interviewees also mentioned that when they set up a system for citizens to contribute content to newspapers, few actually participated. As one interviewee in Korea mentioned, "Users are invited to upload news to our website. But contributions from the audience via social media are still very small…and the quality is not so good" (newspaper H).

Prioritization of print newspaper subscribers. The final factor in organizational policies and procedures is the prioritization of print newspaper subscribers. Many interviewees mentioned that they are in an ambivalent position between offline and online readers. While newspapers acknowledge that the proportion of online readers will increase, the current revenue largely comes from advertising and subscription revenues in print newspapers. An interviewee from a Finnish newspaper (newspaper N) mentioned that the company does not want to maximize the number of online visitors because it may "take away" print readers, i.e. subscribers. The newspaper aims to find a "suitable number" of online readers who do not cannibalize print sales too much, but at the same time offer sufficient support for sales of online advertisements. In Finland and Japan in particular, the strategy in almost all of the studied newspapers is in fact quite ambivalent, indecisive, and still based greatly on print-first thinking.

One of the ways to protect subscribers of print newspapers in Japan is the paywall. Many newspapers in Japan offer a "freemium model" where the premium product is available only to

print subscribers. Digital editions are regarded as an additional customer service for those subscribing to the printed paper. Past studies have examined factors that influence the maintenance and operation of the paywall (Myllylahti 2017; Fletcher and Nielsen 2016) and noted both advantages and disadvantages of the paywall for generating profit (Pickard and Williams 2014).

The Influence of Newspaper Companies' Media System Dependency Relations on Their Utilization of Social Media (RQ2)

The second research question concerns the influence of the dependency relations among newspaper companies, other types of media, and social systems on the ways in which they perceive and utilize opportunities enabled by social media. Dominant structural dependencies mentioned by the interviewees in each country are described below by contextualizing interview results with social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics in each country.

Japan: Political Dependency and Offline Intermediaries

At the macro-level, Japanese mainstream media are strongly tied to the *kisha club* (reporter's club) system. Mainstream media that are part of the *kisha club* have privilege in accessing social systems, including the government, companies and other large organizations. The *kisha club* is criticized for serving as a "lap dog" of the government or companies due to their close relationships (Freeman 2000). As an interviewee (newspaper B) describes, "the contradictions between the closeness of the [kisha club] membership and the openness of the social network" make it difficult for newspapers to actively incorporate user-generated content into their production system.

At the meso-level, Japanese newspapers have a close relationship with the exclusive sales and distribution system called *senbaiten*. Ninety-five percent of mainstream Japanese newspapers distribute print newspapers to the customers via the local *senbaiten* shops (Villi and Hayashi 2015). The delivery system has a foundational role in Japan's newspaper market, and the *senbaiten* have played a pivotal role in boosting the circulation of newspapers in Japan. Our interviewees mentioned that as knowledge and skills on sales and marketing largely belong to the realm of the *senbaiten*, newspapers want to protect dealers' business and keep them happy. Going digital would mean risking the relationship with them, as the business of the *senbaiten* is dependent on the distribution of print newspapers.

Macro- and meso-level media and social relationships shape the ways in which social media are incorporated into the production and distribution of newspaper content. The well-established and closed network of the *kisha club* is likely to find discrepancies with the diversified flow of information and news on social media. Concerns and mistrust toward social media voiced by Japanese interviewees can partly be an expression of the logic and expectations of the hitherto controlled and selective information flow via the *kisha club*. Online publishing is likely to be at odds with the established print distribution connections with *senbaiten*. However, there are some recent indications that Japanese newspapers are developing online pay platforms and apps (Sawa 2016), and thus gradually breaking away from the fundamental and exclusive print-first strategy.

Korea: The Dominance of an Online Intermediary

The most prominent structural dependency relations for Korean newspapers is their relations to *Naver*, the largest and most dominant online portal site in Korea. All interviewees in Korea

emphasized the dominance of Naver in Korea's news circulation and consumption. Naver operates "News Stand" in which news is offered in a virtual newspaper format and each newspaper is presented independently. According to a survey by Digital Media Convergence (2013), 87.2% of news readers in Korea use portal sites, and 81.9% of those who read news on portal sites mainly obtain news from Naver. Similarly, a Gallup poll indicated that 86% of the respondents read news via portal sites and only 9% read news by accessing newspapers' websites directly (Gallup Korea 2013). In the midst of the rapid dissemination of broadband connections in Korea, newspaper companies lost momentum to set up business models for gaining profit online. In such situations, Naver offered newspapers a contract to grant it the right to provide news content on their website with a significant fee paid to the newspapers.

Naver serves as a meso-level intermediary between newspapers and individuals. Due to the dominance of Naver, social media have not significantly changed the already established triangular relationships among consumers, Naver, and newspaper companies. Interviewees indicated that the relationship between newspapers and Naver is "bittersweet;" Naver drives major traffic for newspapers but, on the other hand, newspapers lose independence in connecting to the readers. Newspaper J stated that it is difficult to discontinue their relationship with Naver even if they know that dependency on Naver is not healthy for newspaper companies in the long run.

The Korean case serves as predecessor for increasing interdependencies between news media and social media platforms, such as *Facebook Instant Articles* and *Apple News.* These increased interdependencies implicate the involved risk of losing direct contact with the audience and diminishing awareness of the media brand. Japan experiences a somewhat similar situation, as *Yahoo* acts as the main source of online news for a large portion of the population (Newman et al. 2016). Accordingly, in Korea and Japan, Facebook and Twitter are much less popular for accessing news than in Europe or North America (in Korea 24% use Facebook for news, in Japan 16%, while the overall average in 26 countries is 44 %) (Newman et al. 2016). Additionally, Facebook is increasingly overtaken in popularity as a news source by the domestic instant messaging services *Kakao Talk* (Korea) and *LINE* (Japan) (Jin and Yoon 2016).

When the interviewees were asked to share their thoughts on the future of the newspaper industry, many of them said that newspapers would become more specialized and targeted. As an interviewee in Korea mentioned, news will become "unbundled" and specialized news will be provided to specific audience who are likely to engage more actively in the production and distribution of content compared to the general news. Interviewees mentioned business weekly magazines operated by newspaper companies in Korea to be cases where the audience is actively involved in content generation and distribution. These media utilize their online interactive networks in order to build a community among the readers (Malmelin and Villi 2015), seek audience participation in creating and distributing content, and at times organize offline events to reinforce the network (Villi and Jung 2015).

Finland: Risk Avoidance Due To Limited Resources

In Finland, attitudes in newspapers towards engaging in social media are somewhat more open than in Korea and especially Japan. For Finnish newspapers the ambiguity of social media does not relate to protectionism, but rather to a lack of satisfactory procedures and clear strategy regarding the role of newspapers in social media. Also, compared to the other two, Finland has a very small media market. Thus, even larger newspaper companies do not always hold ample resources to have dedicated jobs for promoting content and acting in social media. They often

prefer to use their resources to preserve and maintain their print business rather than aiming to be proactive in the digital realm. Therefore, social media practices are mostly dependent on the micro-level activity of individual staff members and not on channeling resources to maintaining an active social media presence. In addition to being a small market, the relative rarity of competing online media content in Finnish language has protected newspapers, which may have influenced them to be slow to change and fully embrace the digital era (Newman et al. 2016). Traditional business models have secured their economy relatively well (Lehtisaari and Grönlund 2014).

Our interview results demonstrate that in Finland social media are acknowledged as an important platform but the actual adoption of UGC and utilization of UDC are often limited. A similar trend has been reported in other European countries (Nossek, Adoni, and Nimrod 2015). Culturally, in the Finnish society, reading newspapers has been regarded to be a characteristic of active, participative citizens (Hankala 2011). This macro-level context and the strong history of newspaper subscriptions are an important circumstance that supports Finnish newspaper publishing and at the same time may be holding Finnish publications back from radically moving to the quasi-mass communication (Menzel 1971) in the online media environment, despite the country's advanced technological infrastructure and usage. However, the young generations are not strongly tied to the link between newspaper subscription and social citizenship (Hankala 2011). This is then likely to push news consumption to social media in the future.

Conclusion

Many social media have a global reach. Technological interfaces of the social media platforms are largely identical in different countries. The present study was initiated to explore how the same types of social media are perceived and utilized in different national contexts for journalism and news media. In order to fulfill the goal, mainstream newspapers were examined in three countries, Japan, Korea, and Finland, where both newspapers and social media are viable. This study reveals both similarities and differences in the three countries. The most outstanding similarity is that newspapers have not fully incorporated social media into their production and distribution system. Although social media platforms facilitate communications across mass and interpersonal levels (Jung and Moro 2012), the technological affordance has not directly transferred to actual utility. This study reveals that issues involved in organizational structure and goals, such as ownership structure, professionalism, and political orientations, as well as issues in organizational policies and procedures, such as protectionism, distrust toward UGC and UDC, lack of resources, and prioritization of print newspaper subscribers intervened in the ways in which news companies perceive and utilize social media.

Beyond issues within media companies, the study analyzed social, economic, and political factors in three countries that influenced different perceptions and utilization of social media by mainstream news companies. Different dependency relations (Ball-Rokeach 1985) included strong offline networks of journalists and social systems, and those between newspapers and distribution and sales companies (Japan); presence of a strong online intermediary and corporate structure (Korea); and limited resources and cultural factors that support print newspaper consumption (Finland).

The present study indicates that mainstream newspapers in the three countries are trying to adjust to the changing media environment but are striving to find a viable way to best utilize newly available opportunities on the new media platforms. One of the important implications of the study is that the wide diffusion of ICTs and social media in the society does not guarantee a smooth and

active incorporation of social media into news production and circulation processes. While social media such as Facebook occupy top ranks in Internet usage in the three countries (Alexa 2017), factors within news organizations and ecological relationships in different social contexts shape the incorporation of social media. The study also reveals that countries with similar levels of social media diffusion can have fairly different pictures when it comes to news production and consumption involving social media. The ways in which newspaper companies in Japan, Korea, and Finland incorporate social media are different from those of the United States, for example (Pew Research Center 2015). Thus, future studies should continue to examine the relationship between news media and social media in different socio-cultural contexts.

     The limitations of this study should be mentioned. The countries and newspapers were selected by purposive sampling based on the viability of the newspaper industry and social media (countries), and the circulation rate (newspapers). The study result should be generalized with caution. While interviewees were instructed to answer questions by representing the position of the newspapers, their answers may not fully represent that of their newspapers. Although logistically challenging, future research should strive to include a larger number of interviewees from each newspaper outlet in order to improve the external validity of the study. Finally, a long-term study of this kind would be valuable in observing and reporting the change in the ways in which newspapers and other mainstream media respond to the changing communication environment.

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[1] Six newspapers were included in Japan in comparison to four in Korea and Finland respectively due to the overall higher newspaper circulation rate in Japan. Our intention was to include "mainstream media" in each country and Japan had a larger number of newspapers that met our criteria given its larger market size.

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