

Media comparison: egypt and hong kong



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Questions 3

Select any specific aspect(s) of mass media in one of the following four countries – Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea –, and compare it/them with another country of your choice. Discuss the similarities and/or differences between the two countries. Specific aspect(s) can be: media system, media history, media control/ regulation, media content, media policy, new media etc.

Introduction

The media plays an important role in informing the population about the current activities within and outside the country. The media also points out the evils of the current government. This is the reason why most government tries to restrict all forms of media such as print and press. In order to fully appreciate the significance of the role of the media in a nation, a case study of Egypt and Hong Kong have been selected for analysis. Two aspects of the media have been selected, the media control/regulation and the media history of these two nations. These two countries have been selected because they both have similar and different aspects in relation to their media. These two nations have also experienced unprecedented changes in the past decade and hence forming a fundamental basis for analysis on the past and current challenges affecting the media.

Similarities between Egypt and Hong Kong media

Egypt and Hong Kong have experienced a number of similarities regarding their media histories. They have both experienced pervasive government regulation. Egyptian media has been controlled by government agencies with majority of the media house being state owned. On the other hand, after the 1997 handover, Hong Kong media has experienced increasing control by the Chinese government which took over from the British colonial power. Majority of the Hong Kong media senior personnel have been absorbed by the Communist government. With the unfolding of these events, in 2011, Hong Kong Press Freedom Index dropped significantly to 54th place from 34th (Weisenhaus, D 2014, p. 273). This was a significant drop and a demonstration of the unfolding events regarding media control in Hong Kong under the watchful eye of the Communist government. As such, both Egypt and Hong Kong have experienced a considerable media control from various governmental agencies (Hackler 2006, p. 331).

Both Egypt and Hong Kong have laws that protect the freedom of press, in Egypt, Article 48 of the constitution states that the freedom of press, publication and information is protected. The law further states that any censorship of the newspaper is also prohibited; this includes suspending and warning of newspapers by the administration. This law only permits limited censorship of any material being disseminated in the media in times of crisis that has a direct effect on the country's security. Similarly, in Hong Kong, the Basic Law, Article 27 protects the freedom of publication and press in the country (Chan & So 2002, p. 324). There are other provisions under Article 39 which further protect the media (Chan & So 2002, p. 324). Both of these

countries thus have provisions that protect the freedom of the media despite the challenges experienced in both cases.

According to Sakr (2013, p. 45) Egyptian journalism has been struggling to gain freedom from the executive control. In the wake of 2005 multi-candidate elections, emboldened journalists were inspired to go beyond the norm and report massive corruption, and other evils of the government. Major changes in the media structure materialized in 2011 as journalists found loopholes in the internet to circumvent government initiatives of restricting the media. Evading proxies and other internet restrictions were used to gain access to social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Journalists used this informal online space to challenge misinformation from the mainstream media about the declining popularity of dictatorial leadership under the former president Hosni Mubarak. This media control struggle continued after the Mubarak and Morsi regime to the current regime under President Sisi. The government under these three presidents has always struggled to control the media in order to advance their interests and hide the shortcomings of their leadership. Similarly, in Hong Kong, during the British administration, the media was given freedom but there were restrictions especially regarding the British administration. The government encouraged criticism of the communist nations including China but restricted dissemination of information criticizing the British government. After the handover of control in 1997, the Chinese government has further tightened the grip on public media control by absorbing major players in the industry and firing those who reject their ideals. This is clearly evidenced by the sacking and murder of Kevin Lau, a renowned journalist early this year. The

struggle to free the media from restrictive government control is bound to continue in these two nations.

Differences between Egypt and Hong Kong media

The media histories of these two nations are different in many ways. These differences are mainly because of the governments that have been in control over time. Hong Kong was under British control for 150 years until 1997. Over this period, Hong Kong enjoyed press freedom as there was no censorship as compared to the mainland China. Citizens were allowed to criticize Chinese regimes. As a result, Hong Kong became the home to major Asian media such as Asian Wall Street Journal, and Epoch Times, and the anti-communist group. On the contrary, Egypt media has been heavily controlled by the state in all sectors including news agencies, broadcast and print media. In fact, the leading Egyptian news houses such as Al-Akhbar(The News), Dar Al-Tahrir (The Liberation House) and Al-Ahram (The Pyramids) are all controlled and owned by the government. The Shura Council manages appointments of editors and other key decision making people in the media (Kouddous 2011). According to Kouddous (2011) 84 % of the population in Egypt depends on the public media such as the TV as the main source of information. The internet is however increasing in popularity as the main source of information to the population; this was particularly evident during its recent revolution that led to the ousting of the Mubarak regime.

The other major difference between Hong Kong and Egypt is the fact that Hong Kong has not experienced any major media struggle as it was recently experienced in Egypt. Despite the fears experienced after 1997 when China

resumed control of Hong Kong, the fears against free press did not materialize. Hong Kong media protection is deeply rooted in the constitution; Article 27 of Hong Kong basic law as well as Article 16 of the Bill of Rights. On the contrary, Egypt has experienced an intense struggle for a free media especially under the Mubarak regime. According to Kouddous (2011) during the uprising, most bloggers and journalist were arrested, harassed and executed by the regime for reporting contentious issues in the media.

Despite the long historical state control of the public media in Egypt, the trend has taken another turn especially after the ousting of the Mubarak regime. The dominantly state owned satellite TV before 2011 are now being owned by individuals who are not pro-government. According to Iskander (2012, p. 123) privately owned newspapers has increased since 2011. Majority of the Egyptian population is now online; about 29. 8 million by 2012 (Sakr 2013, p. 47). Notably, during the 2011 uprising, the social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter were used to organize massive riots that saw the end of the Mubarak regime. This is a positive indicator to the trend in the control of the media in Egypt. Alternative media such as online social media which is hard to control is continually forcing the government and other regulatory bodies to relax their grip on the media. Conversely, the less regulated media in Hong Kong is facing threats from the government. Recently, on the 26th February 2014, Kevin Lau, a renowned journalist known for his firm reporting against the Chinese government was murdered by an assailant suspected to be a government agent (Weisenhaus, D 2014, p. 277). Massive demonstrations were witnessed as a result of Lau's brutal murder.

Conclusion

As critically discussed, there are a number of similarities and differences between the histories and regulations of Egypt and Hong Kong media. Egypt has been under government control for decades despite the provisions allowing for free press. Similarly, Hong Kong freedom of press has been restricted by the Chinese administration, despite the freedom experienced under the British colony, some restriction against publications that dented the British government existed. With the current Chinese regime, Hong Kong's media has suffered a major blow that has seen it drop in ranks according to the Press Freedom Index. Both nations have experienced violence and incarcerations of renowned journalist. The recent murder of Kevin Lau in Hong Kong is an example of this unfolding. In Egypt, all the three regimes, the Mubarak, Morsi and Sisi have imprisoned and incarcerated journalist who report information which gouges the image of the current regime. On the other hand, Egypt has had a long history of press restriction until 2005-2011 which marked the start of a free press through alternative information dissemination such as the internet. Conversely, Hong Kong has enjoyed a significant press freedom over the past 145 years under the British colony. This has seen Hong Kong provide a safe home for major international media such as the Asian Wall Street Journal. This foundation has however been shaken by the Chinese regime which took over from the British control in 1997. As such, these countries have experienced both similar and different media challenges.

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