

## Chasing ratings hurting coverage of foreign news

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Taiwan's media organizations' failure to provide sufficient high-quality international news could be a result of their lack of vision, as news outlets focus only on trivial and sensational stories to attract high ratings, media insiders said.

"There is demand for serious global news coverage in Taiwan, but the media do not want to make the investment," said Feng Chien-san (翁建山), a journalism professor at National Chengchi University.

Feng's comments echoed a survey conducted by the National Communications Commission last year, which found that 56.9 percent of respondents thought the nation's media outlets carried far too little international news coverage.

Feng said both the quality and quantity of foreign news coverage are poor because Taiwan's media outlets do not put enough time and resources into its production, and the choice of content broadcast is often "bizarre."

Having good-quality international news coverage is expensive, and local media are often too lazy to explore the market and often resort to broadcasting "superficial" news stories to boost ratings, said Lin Yuan-huei (林元輝), head of the university's journalism department.

"When all media providers are like street vendors chasing a small but rapid turnover, no investment will be made in self-improvement," Lin said.

The government has also failed to formulate a media policy that grants the necessary incentives or stipulates that news providers must produce good-quality foreign news coverage, Lin added.

Even some representatives of national media organizations have said the country's substandard media environment should be held responsible for its poor international news production.

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TV stations are “too lazy to make events happening far away from Taiwan relevant and interesting to people’s lives,” said Jane Lee (李靜), an International Community Radio Taipei (ICRT) journalist, who worked at Taiwan Television for 15 years.

Feng Hsiao-lung, news manager of the Broadcasting Corp of China, said TV ratings are used by the media as the only standard when deciding what to broadcast.

“They are very near-sighted,” he said.

This view is shared by Jason Ho (何志強), director of the commission’s Department of Content Affairs, who said the main factor holding TV channels back from showing more international news is TV ratings.

However, Ho also said that Taiwan is a democratic country which enjoys wide media freedom, so the government cannot demand that media outlets show more international news.

However, he added that TV channels that have recently applied for license renewals have nevertheless promised to improve the quantity and quality of their international news coverage.

Others blamed the lack of good international news coverage on the tastes of viewers and readers.

Many Taiwanese are used to reading tabloid-style political newspapers as the country is highly politically divergent, a practice that has affected consumption of foreign news as well, said Julia Lin, a correspondent at Hong Kong’s Phoenix Television.

To adapt to such habits, global news coverage is often aired during off-peak slots or published on less important pages, which only leads to further marginalization, she said.

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“Compared with people in Hong Kong, most Taiwanese are much less demanding of the news content they receive daily,” Lin said.

Michael Yu, deputy director of the news department at the Public Television Service, attributed the situation to Taiwan’s limited international presence, adding that Taiwan’s lack of representation in on the global stage could also be a reason for its media’s indifference to foreign news.

However, Yu said that with the younger generation getting more access to the global community through travel, overseas study and the Internet, demand for foreign news is likely to increase.

Liu Hui-wen (劉慧文), an assistant professor of journalism at National Chengchi University, said the nation’s weak public broadcasting system is another reason for excessive commercial intervention in news production, which results in inadequate foreign news coverage.

A well-operated public broadcasting service should safeguard news quality and provide the public with serious information, she said.

“The public should be better informed about why they need an independent media,” she added.

Taiwan does not put enough emphasis on media education, Liu said, adding that poor media literacy has led to a relatively disadvantaged audience that is less critical of news coverage.

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