

3GJ322: Theoretical MA Thesis

Declining Press Freedom in Hong Kong: *Is Citizen Journalism a Viable Alternative?*

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Thesis for the Master's Programme in Global Journalism

at NLA University College,

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May 2017

Abstract

The year 2014 was described as the darkest time for press freedom in Hong Kong in several decades. Since then, the Special Administrative Region has fallen yet another thirteen rankings at the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders. With the reports of growing self-censorship among Hong Kong journalists, and a rise of alternative journalism formats, this thesis seeks to find out whether citizen journalism is a viable alternative to traditional journalism when press freedom is declining.

Twelve qualitative interviews with citizen journalists and traditional journalists were conducted to find out more about the press freedom situation in Hong Kong, what the journalists see as the difference between a traditional journalist and a citizen journalist, and the attitudes towards citizen journalism.

The findings show that the traditional journalists are negative about the future of press freedom in Hong Kong, perceiving a high degree of political and economic pressure. They also describe a situation where colleagues self-censor to meet the expectations from advertisers and media owners. This may lead to less trust among the audiences.

Concerns about declining trust is strong among the journalists. Neither of the informant groups trusts the media to be neutral or that they are not supporting 'Beijing'. At the same time, traditional journalists do not trust citizen journalism to be a sufficient alternative to traditional journalism. One of the concerns described by the traditional journalists is lack of a validity process and lack of neutrality in the reporting done by citizen journalists.

However, citizen journalists in Hong Kong are often organized in one way or another, and four out of five citizen journalists in this thesis explain that they have an editor proofreading their work before publishing. This means that even if the traditional journalists are skeptical to the new group of journalists, they may not be as different as they might think. Typically, the traditional journalists explain that the citizen journalists produce independent news with new angles. By this they mean that while the traditional press can be censored, the Internet, which is the primary publication channel for citizen journalists, is not.

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Acronyms

HKBU	Hong Kong Baptist University
HKJA	Hong Kong Journalists' Association
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
NSD	Norwegian Centre for Research Data
SCMP	<i>South China Morning Post</i>
RQ	Research question

Acknowledgements

Two years of thinking out loud about Hong Kong and the Chinese media have finally brought me to the moment when this thesis is finished. I have not done this alone. Firstly, thank you Dr. Terje Skjerdal for guiding me through our second 'project' together. Thank you for all your advice, inspiration and help to finish this thesis, I am so grateful for all the work you have put down to help me reach my goals.

Thank you very much, Fritt Ord, for giving me a scholarship for doing this research. Thank you, every participant who took the time to meet me during my fieldwork in Hong Kong. Without you, there would be no research. Also, thank you Florin Serban, Dr. Judith Clarke and professor Steve Guo at the Hong Kong Baptist University who gave me useful tips and guidelines to follow during my fieldwork.

I also owe a big thank you to my family, for hours of proofreading, listening to my ideas and for following me to Hong Kong. And last, but not least; thank you, Thor, for always supporting me and pushing me to follow my dreams.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis seeks to understand the point at which 'ordinary citizens' can become journalists, and how they work in conjunction with or alongside traditional media. The project all started because of my personal curiosity of how citizen journalists work and who they are, and to find out if they contribute to a more plural media scene or not.

The place of research was chosen after studying the development of press freedom in Hong Kong. A British colony for 156 years, the HKSAR has struggled to define itself as either a 'Chinese city' or an 'international city' (Chan & Lee, 2007; Ku, 2002). Hong Kong became a test case for the 'one country, two systems' concept after the handover to mainland China in 1997. 20 years later, it is a region which has never obtained full democracy, although its people have a passion for democratic values (Lam & Hsin-chi, 2008). This is also a picture of the Hong Kong journalists, as the research later shows.

By the late 1990s, Hong Kong had a diversified and a dynamic media, including over 50 daily newspapers (Lai, 2007). But after the handover in 1997, the ideological viewpoints in the media have been reduced, and newspapers which used to be critical to the Chinese government, have become more centrist (Lee & Lin, 2006). The trend is not new for the journalists in Hong Kong. Ever since 2002, the tendency of declining press freedom has been visible on international rankings (Freedom House, 2016b; Reporters Without Borders, 2016b). From being ranked as number 18 in 2002, Reporters Without Borders this year (2017a) ranked Hong Kong as number 73 on the list of 180 countries, which is another four rankings down from the previous year.

The local journalist association, Hong Kong Journalists' Association (HKJA), disagrees with the decrease of press freedom seen by Reporters Without Borders. In their recent survey of Hong Kong journalists (2017), a slight increase of press freedom is reported. Chairperson Sham Yee-lan indicates that it might have something to do with the introduction of online media, saying that it has led to more diversity within the industry.

The online media she refers to are rising outside the traditional news organizations in Hong Kong, and the number of microblogs and citizen journalists is higher than ever before (Wei et al., 2014). Many people now turn to the 'new media' for news and information, partly because of the growth of self-censorship among journalists in traditional media outlets (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2014).

The study objective is therefore to explore if citizen journalism is a viable alternative to traditional journalism when press freedom is shrinking and censorship is arguably increasing. The three research questions are:

RQ1: How do traditional and citizen journalists respectively experience the press freedom situation in Hong Kong?

RQ2: What are the differences between traditional journalists and citizen journalists in terms of role perception?

RQ3: What attitude does each of the two groups – citizen journalists and traditional journalists – have of the other group?

1.1 Declining press freedom in Hong Kong

Under article 27 of the Basic Law (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, 2017) the Hong Kong inhabitants are promised freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of publication. The Hong Kong Government on its part is pleased: It claims that the local media are characterized by "a healthy and outward-looking press, radio and television industry that enjoys complete freedom of expression" (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, 2015).

However, the members of the local journalist association do not agree. Their latest report about press freedom in Hong Kong is called "One country, two nightmares", and reflects on how the local media are caught between the capitalist system in Hong Kong and the socialist system in mainland China (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2016).

Lai (2007) argues that the political climate has become 'colder' in the case of the press, and the HKSAR is described as 'partly free' by Freedom House in 2017 (Freedom House, 2017). This was also the case in 2016 (Freedom House, 2016b), but in 2017, Hong Kong lost another two points in the ranking. Where 100 points is regarded as being most free, the region got 61 points, and the report (Freedom House, 2017) is most critical to the political rights of the Hong Kong people. A possible explanation for this is interference of the Chinese government, as they are legally able to interpret the Basic Law, and the chief executive and half of the Legislative Council are indirectly chosen from the 'pro-Beijing-side' (Chan & Lee, 2007; Freedom House, 2017).

The situation of the press is still ranked to be acceptable by the US-based freedom organization (Freedom House, 2016b), as the report points to the fact that several newspapers are available on the market; that the Hong Kong residents have international

radio broadcasts; and that international media can operate freely. Also, the online censorship in China does not apply in Hong Kong (Tsui, 2015).

But even though the civil liberties of the Hong Kong people are regarded as mostly free, the declining press freedom is worrying for both press freedom organizations (Freedom House, 2017; Reporters Without Borders, 2017a) and researchers (Lai, 2007; Tsui, 2015). The press freedom organizations argue that the newspaper owners have close ties to the Chinese government, and that there has been an increase on physical attacks against journalists (Freedom House, 2016b; Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2016).

1.2 High degree of self-censorship

These factors could lead to self-censorship among the journalists, which is highlighted as one of the main reasons for declining press freedom in the HKSAR. Media self-censorship is defined by Lee & Chan (2009, p. 112) as: “nonexternally compelled acts committed by media organizations aiming to avoid offending power holders such as the government, advertisers, and major business corporations”.

A survey conducted by Lee and Chan (2009) in 2007 showed that 58.5 percent of the surveyed Hong Kong journalists believed that self-censorship had become a more serious problem than in 1997. In another study conducted by So and Chan (2007), 3.5 percent of the journalists answered that there was no self-censorship among their colleagues. This is supported by a press index from the HKJA (2015) 8 years later: The 537 journalists who were asked, gave an average rating of self-censorship “7.0” - in commonness. The rating 10 indicates that the practice is very common.

An illustration of how self-censorship may work is the well-known example of the major public television channel in Hong Kong, TVB. The broadcaster captured seven police officers beating an activist, and the first time it was showed on air, the broadcaster said that the officers carried the activist:

“to a dark corner of Tamar Park where he was placed on the ground and punched and kicked by the group. Two officers then left the scene, while the remaining officers continued to kick the activist. The remaining officers eventually escorted the activist away. The whole process lasted nearly four minutes” (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2015, p. 12).

However, shortly after it was broadcasted the words “dark”, “punched and kicked” were removed, and the new version became “Officers carried him to a corner of Tamar Park. The

officers eventually escorted the activist away. The whole process lasted for four minutes” (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2015, p. 12).

But the journalists were not happy with the final version, and over 140 TVB employees signed a letter complaining on the downplaying of the text (Tsui, 2015). The editors’ response was that there was uncertainty about what exactly happened, because the journalists had failed to ask the officers if the beating was intended (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2015).

1.3 Attacks against press freedom

Another reason for declining press freedom in the HKSAR is the increasing number of attacks against journalists. The marketplace of opinions in Hong Kong shrunk on a visible level in January 2014 when the chief editor of *Ming Pao Daily News*, Kevin Lau, was removed from his position (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2014). Lau had been known for giving a critical coverage of government politics, and was replaced by a Malaysian editor (Maheshwari, 2014). Similar acts of replacement happened to an outspoken government critic in commercial radio, Li Wei-ling, as well as to Lam Shan-muk in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*. But just a few days after the removal of Kevin Lau, the former newspaper editor was physically attacked and injured, and some local journalists saw the attack as punishment after an exposé of Chinese leaders’ offshore holdings (Kaiman, 2014).

During the last couple of years there have been reported more attacks against journalists than ever before (Freedom House, 2015). This is seen in the report of HKJA (2015): The annual report shows that journalists covering the 79-day Occupy protests in 2014 (also called The Umbrella Movement) faced harassment and violence, in which over 30 journalists were said to have been injured by the police and protesters.

The brutal attacks against journalists and editors have not been silenced. After the attack on Kevin Lau, more than 13.000 people gathered to protest against the violence (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2014).

Some of the attacks have gained international interest as well as local. In 2015, five booksellers went missing from Hong Kong and had been taken to mainland China. All of them were working in the same store, selling books critical to the mainland and the Communist Party (Freedom House, 2017). Eventually all of them came back, but the missing bookseller case is seen by European Union (European Commission, 2015) as posing a serious challenge to the ‘one country, two systems’ principle. The local journalist association (Hong

Kong Journalists' Association, 2016) claims in their report that this case made fewer booksellers willing to sell books that were critical to the mainland.

However, the attacks are not limited to physical assaults. Cyberattacks against the Hong Kong media have occurred frequently. According to HKJA (2014), there have been several attacks, where the attack against *Apple Daily* has been particularly highlighted. The attack happened right before an unofficial poll for nomination methods for the chief executive election 2017 was supposed to be published, and froze the site in both Hong Kong and Taiwan for 18 hours.

The citizen journalists have also faced attacks. In 2014, over 1.000 social and political videos got deleted from the YouTube of SocREC. Technology professionals claim that the attacks came from the mainland (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2014).

While the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (2016b) claimed in 2016 that the Hong Kong media were still able to write critical stories about both the mainland China and the local government without fear of repercussions, the latest report (Reporters Without Borders, 2017a) signify that the media are finding it more difficult to cover sensitive stories than before.

Despite different incidents, Chan and Lee (2007) argue that China cannot act against values such as freedom of the press and democracy because they want to show the world (especially Taiwan) that the idea of 'one country, two systems' is working.

However, columnist Shirley Yam argues states that self-censorship is no longer limited to Mainland China, but is practiced in Hong Kong as well (Maheshwari, 2014).

1.4 Challenge: trust and credibility

Hand in hand with the high prevalence of self-censorship, the *credibility* in the news media have dropped significantly during the last couple of years, reaching its lowest level since 2006 (University of Hong Kong, 2016). So and Chan (2007) defines media credibility as being measured on how the journalists uphold and keep their professionalism even when they are pressured by marked forces or political institutions. This means that if the media report in an 'objective', truthful way, they gain more credibility from the public. So and Chan (2007) claim that if the media report in line with the opinions of the Hong Kong public, they will have more credibility than if they have a stance towards China.

The traditional media in the HKSAR have a declining readership and a loss of audiences (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2015). According to the annual survey from University of Hong Kong (2016), the Hong Kong inhabitants' satisfaction with press freedom

has never been this low, with 49% believing that the Hong Kong media practice self-censorship. The same observation is supported by the journalists (Chan & Lee, 2008; Lee, 2016; So & Chan, 2007).

In a study conducted by Lee (2016), journalists with at least five years of experience were asked about the changes in journalism in Hong Kong. The results showed that the journalists think they work more hours than before, but they have lesser time to research the stories. About half the group of journalists says that the credibility of journalism has decreased, while 38 percent answers that the freedom to make editorial decisions is diminishing.

There could be several factors involved in the loss of credibility, but So and Chan (2007, pp. 154-156) state that *self-censorship*, *sensational news approach* and *political stance* towards the Chinese government are some of the main factors. It is argued that together with the rise of new media outlets in the region, competition for advertising money has increased, and therefore a more sensational reporting style has developed. This has led to less trust among the readers, and even the journalists in the study (So & Chan, 2007) explains that the ethical standard of the media is fairly low.

The second factor is the political stance towards the Chinese government. By this, the authors point to changes in ownership, and argues that the media owners have a financial interest in China. This again, may lead to self-censorship (Fung, 2007; So & Chan, 2007).

Nevertheless, there have been different methods for maintaining credibility: While *Ming Pao* has been more concerned with upholding the principle of objectivity - *Apple Daily* has been focusing on upholding the criticism towards the Hong Kong government (Lee & Lin, 2006). Anyhow, the growing distrust in the media coincides with the rise of Internet-based media, and the blossoming of new websites, radio stations, video platforms, and social media platforms has been remarkable in the last couple of years (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2016; Leung, 2015).

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Defining press freedom

In this chapter, press freedom, self-censorship, and how citizen journalism is sometimes 'born' out of a situation with declining press freedom is to be discussed. The literature review will also give an overview of the discussions around differences between traditional journalism and citizen journalism, as it is sometimes difficult to separate. But firstly, the thesis will look at different definitions of press freedom.

The concept of press freedom is widely discussed, and there is not necessarily a clear-cut definition of it. As the second word indicates, it is freedom from something; but from what or whom? Siebert et al. (1956) invented one of the most influential models of the press (*Four Theories of the Press*) over 50 years ago. The model have faced criticism from different scholars (among them Hallin & Mancini, 2004; McQuail, 2010), but have also gained interest for its definition of press freedom. Siebert et al. (1956) meant that press freedom was being free from government control. In the later years other definitions have been blossoming, focusing on freedom from economic interests as well (Becker et al., 2007).

United Nations (1946) is one of the global organizations which works continuously for press freedom, and outlines that to remain free, the press have to be independent, pluralistic and to remain free from political and economic control (Guseva et al., 2008). Other organizations, such as Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders, continuously follow the development of press freedom in the world, publishing a report every year. While Freedom House uses criteria of legal environment, political influence and economic pressures to measure the level of press freedom, Reporters Without Borders uses criteria of attacks and threats against journalists to examine the different countries (Guseva et al., 2008).

In post-colonial societies and new democracies like Hong Kong, Voltmer and Wasserman (2014) point to the importance of making the concept of press freedom fit into the society. This can be done by ascribing the norm a local meaning by looking at other countries (often established democracies). But also, established Western democracies have divergent beliefs about the meaning of press freedom. The researchers (Voltmer & Wasserman, 2014) provides two models of paradigms: *The libertarian paradigm*, which sees press freedom as a part of freedom of expression, and is therefore seen as a human right, and *the responsibility paradigm*, where the press is promised press freedom and independency for the purpose to serve the common good. A second method of ascribing 'press freedom' a local

meaning, can be done by looking at domestic traditions, worldviews and cultural practices to construct the meaning (Voltmer & Wasserman, 2014).

The researchers (Voltmer & Wasserman, 2014) argue that cultural influences have a significant role in the understanding of press freedom. However, so has political history. Especially in post-colonial contexts, the researchers state that the ideas of independence from political interference often is mixed with the struggle for national freedom. Weaver (1977), however, chose to focus on three important elements for the definition of press freedom. The three elements are 1) freedom from government control, 2) freedom from non-governmental control and 3) existence of conditions which make it possible to express different ideas and opinions to a large amount of people (Weaver, 1977).

There seems to be an agreement that the media have to be free from government and economic control regarding the definition of press freedom. Therefore, the definition of Weaver (1977) will be used as the definition of press freedom in this study.

But for a press to be free, LaMay (2011) suggests that there has to be *political conditions* and a *supporting civil society* for the press to gain independence. This is backed up by Merrill (2009), who states that political development often is more important than economic development. An example of this is China, where there is an expanding free market but lacks conditions for press freedom (Merrill, 2009).

Other methods of controlling the private media could be through censorship, licensing journalists, or by creating 'insult laws' (i.e. laws to protect the honor of politicians or public officials) (Parsons et al., 2009). A consequence of overstepping the lines set by the government, could be physical attacks or jail for the journalists. Instead of taking the risk of this to happen, the solution might be to self-censor (Yin, 2009).

In Asia, political systems are diverse, and the connection between media and government varies just as much (Yin, 2009). But even though it has variances, the media are seen to have a common view about the role of the media in nation-building. Here, the role of supporting development and social change is seen as an important role for media in developmental and transitional societies (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). This type of journalism is often called *development journalism*, and emerged in Southeast Asia in the 1960s (Yin, 2009).

A country where this type of journalism is performed, is for example China. Here, the media are seen to be a driving force to secure national development, information and education. If the media do not report in line with these intentions, the government can fire or appoint editors and introduce new media regulations (Yin, 2009). Even in democracies where the media are legally free from government control (for example Japan and South Korea), the media are often described as 'lapdogs' instead of 'watchdogs' because of its

considerations of reporting in line with national interests (Yin, 2009). What is seen to be problematic with the role of nation-building being ascribed to media, is that the journalists might feel a pressure to focus on positive stories, having less opportunities to be critical and independent (Skjerdal, 2011).

2.2 Self-censorship and media control

Self-censorship is commonly regarded as a major threat for journalism around the world, but is not necessarily an easy activity to define. Skjerdal (2010a) explains that the understanding of the concept stretches from being an everyday practice for journalists around the world, to a more narrow definition. An example of a narrower definition could be where media organizations actively downplay or exclude coverage of sensitive topics because of political or economic reasons (Becker & Vlad, 2009; Lee & Lin, 2006; Skjerdal, 2010a).

The definition in this research is more in line with the latter description, as I define self-censorship as media actively holding back information or downplaying coverage because of external pressure.

The reasons for self-censoring are, often seen as coming from a collective, external pressure. Lo et al. (2005) found that concern about *government pressure* seems to be the primary reason for self-censorship, describing concern over *pressure from advertisers* and *cultural expectations* as other reasons. Self-censorship is, however, often difficult to document, as the experience of it is individual – and even journalists within the same media might have different experiences or attitudes towards the subject (Lee, 1998; Skjerdal, 2010a).

Also, political climate in a country is often seen to have an impact on the journalistic practice (Merrill, 2009). This is exemplified in Amin (2002), where it is argued that self-censorship is commonplace in the Arab world because of the political culture. The news media are controlled by the government, and some subjects are not to be covered. The researcher (Amin, 2002) states that in the Arab world, censorship is seen as a form of civic responsibility, and as the state does not publish a list of no-go subjects, the journalists are left to decide what to include or exclude (i.e. censor).

Self-censorship is often seen as common in countries where the government controls the media, like in the previous example (Skjerdal, 2010a). However, the activity is also observed in democracies, like for example Japan, South Korea (Yin, 2009) and Taiwan; which is regarded as the place with most press freedom in Asia (Reporters Without Borders, 2017b).

The practice of self-censoring is also observed in the U.S., where underreporting on topics which is sensitive to advertisements is happening (Germano & Meier, 2013). A reason

for this might be that media organizations owned by business corporations are economically dependent on advertising revenue, meaning that the value of being an independent press coexists with the pressure to make a profit (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006; Lee & Chan, 2009).

A fast growth of media organizations within the Asian media has led to globalization and big international media conglomerates buying media organizations (Yin, 2014). McQuail (2010) problematize this, thinking particularly of the media independence. The researcher argues that even if the media organizations are free from government control, the owners of the media houses have much power over the content.

This is confirmed by the Hong Kong journalists. In a recent country report, 35.3 percent of the journalists indicated that owners of the news organizations had extremely or very influential impact on news content (Lee, 2016). It was also reported by 23 percent of the journalists that that censorship is extremely or very influential on their work.

Although self-censorship is considered to be common in Hong Kong, different studies suggest that local journalists have a high degree of professionalism (Lee & Chan, 2009; So & Chan, 2007). Professionalism is defined by Lee and Chan (2009) as the idea of journalists being independent from political and economic power, and following a set of shared values. Among these values are monitoring the government and being independent from political interests and pressure from advertisers highlighted as the most important values by the journalists (Lee & Lin, 2006). The objectivity ideal is also often highlighted as a component in journalistic professionalism, here defined as the ideal of a detached reporting, keeping personal opinions from the journalists outside of the story (Carpenter, 2008).

Professional values are seen as key to fighting self-censorship, and according to the journalists themselves, professionalism is important for sustaining media credibility (So & Chan, 2007). The combination of high degrees of professionalism with high degrees of self-censorship, however, indicates a gap between the ideals and actual practices (Chan & Lee, 2008).

One way to ascertain the gap is through the definition of media self-censorship. Lee and Chan (2009) point out that professionalism is *individual*, while media self-censorship is not. Self-censorship is seen as an “organizational phenomenon (...) produced by news organizations without the bosses or managers explicitly ordering it and the frontline journalists knowingly practicing it” (Lee & Chan, 2009, p. 114).

The censorship practices in Hong Kong are still regarded as ‘softer’ than those in mainland China. The methods for controlling media in Hong Kong are known as *ownership regulation* and *political and economic pressure* (Lee & Chan, 2009). Many of the owners of media organizations in Hong Kong have close ties to the Chinese government, which can be

described as indirect media control from the mainland (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2014; Maheshwari, 2014). Fung (2007) explains that the businessmen who own the media mainly share the same interests in mainland China, and therefore, the media ownership in Hong Kong is seen to be concentrated even though there are diverse owners.

Many of the journalists themselves claim that ownership is an important factor in controlling the media in Hong Kong. In a recent study, the owners of media houses were regarded by 35.3 percent of the Hong Kong journalists as being extremely or very influential in their work (Lee, 2016). However, the same study finds high standard deviation on this issue, meaning that there is disagreement among the journalists on how much influence the owners have.

Fung (2007) claims that even the most 'professional' journalist would think twice before raising their voice if they know that their new boss has close ties to the authorities. This implies that the journalists try to take a 'neutral' stand regarding politics when reporting on sensitive issues, which is a strategy described by the researcher (Fung, 2007) as representing a pro-China stance rather than a pro-democratic one. An illustration of how reporting has become more pro-China, is how the coverage of the yearly demonstration of the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, have changed after 2002. At that time, several newspapers in Hong Kong got new owners and editors. Fung (2007) points out that before the handover to China, all independent Hong Kong newspapers regarded the Tiananmen Square incident as a democratic movement, and the Beijing students were called heroes. After 2002, things started to change. Fung (2007) explains that all the newspapers - except *Ming Pao* and *Apple Daily* - wrote in a more 'factual' and 'calm' manner about the incident and reported about the happening only as something factual. This is but one example on how the newspapers in Hong Kong have become less provoking to central China after the takeover.

Another method of controlling the media has been through *advertising*. Or, rather by *not* advertising. The method has been called the 'invisible hand reaching from China', where either placing or pulling off advertisements in the newspapers is a trend. Friendly reports are supported with advertisements, while critical coverage is punished by pulling advertisements out (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2014). As the media in Hong Kong face tough economic times, they are therefore caught between the need for advertising money and ideological principles of operating as a free press (Lau & To, 2002).

However, some of the Hong Kong newspapers are still willing to risk the advertising money to sustain a degree of press freedom. An example of this is when advertisements worth several million dollars disappeared from *Ming Pao* for 18 months because the

newspaper had published investigative and negative reports about the development of luxury apartments in the city (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2014; Leung, 2015). The same thing happened to *Apple Daily*, when in 2013, the two international banks HSBC and Standard Chartered, plus the local Bank of East Asia, pulled their advertisements from the newspaper. The banks had been the source of the biggest income of *Apple Daily*, where the income was worth approximately 3.5 million Hong Kong Dollars (about 4.1 million NOK) (Reporters Without Borders, 2016c).

Different scholars have argued that news organizations owned by business corporations practically 'serve' the owners: Among them are Herman and Chomsky (1988), who use the 'propaganda model' to argue that the private media are profit seeking and propagandizing for their owners to get money in return. The result of this is supposedly self-censorship among journalists. However, they point out that these factors are not all-controlling - and do not necessarily lead to homogeneous content.

Fung (2007) argues that there is too little research on the subject to conclude that there is a direct correspondence between self-censorship and ownership, and that self-censorship did not have a direct link to a "direct shutdown of media's critical voice of China" (Fung, 2007, p. 160). He is, however, arguing that the concentration of political ideologies among the owners of the newspapers in Hong Kong diminishes a diverse marketplace of opinions.

2.3 The rise of citizen journalism

Another demonstration of the decreasing press freedom, is the rise of citizen journalists, working mostly voluntarily to contribute to a free press (Wei et al., 2014). However, the trend to include citizens in reporting started almost ten years ago. In 2006, the page called iReport was started by CNN, and the media house wanted people around the world submit photos and text from around the globe (Ali & Fahmy, 2013; Palmer, 2012).

iReport was one of the new media platforms which changed the view of ordinary people to becoming "prod-users" instead of only being users (Bruns, 2008). However, in Hong Kong, the online media platform In-Media takes it a step further. The website relies mainly on ordinary citizens to produce its content voluntarily, and its economy comes from crowdfunding and donations (Multiplejournalism, 2016). Crowdfunding means that the public are funding the media outlets by donating money. According to Yung and Leung (2014), the online platform provides the Hong Kong citizens with different viewpoints from the traditional media.

The elevation of the citizen voice is also seen at a global level. When presenting the 'Person of the Year'¹ in 2006, the choice was different than ever before. The person of the year was – simply – 'You'. The front page read: "Yes, you. You control the information age. Welcome to your world" (TIME, 2006). The choice was accompanied by the coverage of the website *Ohmynews* in South Korea, where news are entirely produced by citizen journalists – and where the motto is "Every citizen is a reporter" (Kang, 2016).

Gillmor (2004) is applauding *Time* for acknowledging ordinary citizens, pointing out that the journalism is becoming more 'controlled' by the grassroots than before, because of the rise of what is called *citizen journalism*. Defining this type of journalism is challenging. However, generally speaking, the concept is framed as a 'bottom-up' phenomenon where the journalism is produced by the former 'users' or audiences (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Bruns, 2008; Lasica, 2003).

The term 'citizen journalist' has been used for a range of positions and activities. To illustrate, it has been used for anything from A citizen journalist can be everything from being 1) a person having a micro-blog (Twitter) or a blog; to 2) a person contributing to a crowdfunded, non-profit investigative journalism website; and 3) a citizen engaged in democratization by doing reporting as an alternative to established media (for example citizens reporting during The Arab Spring). What is common to these activities, however, is that citizen journalists are *ordinary people* who are not *paid for their labor* (Robinson & DeShano, 2011). In-Media in Hong Kong is an example of how citizen journalism can be an organized group of citizens producing news content, and not just random acts from individuals online (Holt & Karlsson, 2015; Multiplejournalism, 2016).

Korson (2015, p. 366) argues that citizen journalism is "any type of journalism engaged in by someone who has not undergone formal training to be a journalist and, in most cases, is not subject to oversight or censorship". This definition excludes a whole group of reporters who currently regard themselves as citizen journalists, namely journalists who have formerly been working as professional journalists, but are now doing citizen journalism through their own blog, webpage and so on (Lindner et al., 2015). An example of this is mentioned by Rojas and Macafee (2013), who explain that formerly traditional journalists in Columbia are now working for new online outlets instead of the traditional ones, because of declining press freedom.

There appears to be agreement among researchers, nevertheless, that citizen journalism is an activity which is established outside traditional news organizations (Goode,

¹ 'Person of the Year' is a nomination which the *Time* magazine has run since 1927 (Kang, 2016).

2009). However, citizen journalism may be built on both norms and conventions of traditional journalism, making it more difficult to draw a sharp line between the two types of journalistic activity (Ali & Fahmy, 2013). Thus, various scholars have suggested other demarcation lines. Goode (2009), for example, suggests that the definition should be restricted to citizens practicing as *content creators*, i.e. the production of news, vis-à-vis the practice of commenting on online posts or linking to other websites etc.

While citizen journalism is mostly associated with the Internet, this is not necessarily the only place where it is possible to do such journalism. Both TV channels and the printed media often use content captured on the citizens' cellphones, for example. However, the Internet has made such sharing of user-generated content much easier (Goode, 2009). This thesis will define citizen journalists as "*people producing news content who are not paid from a traditional news organization and do not have it as their full-time job*".

At the global level, Gillmor (2004, p. 58) points to September 11, 2001 as an historical day for this new form of journalism: "Via e-mails, mailing lists, chat groups, and personal web journals – all non-standard news sources – we received valuable context that the major American couldn't, or wouldn't, provide".

Other places where this 'grassroots journalism' have been important is in the Arab uprisings in 2011, (also called the Arab Spring), where some even talked about a 'Facebook revolution' (Harlow, 2013; Smith, 2011). The uprisings started after December 17, 2010, when the young vegetable merchant Mohammad Bouazizi took the first step in a fight for democracy in Tunisia by stepping up in front of a municipal building and setting himself on fire (Howard et al., 2011). The demonstration was quickly spread in social media by Facebook users and the television network Al Jazeera, putting a face on oppression (Khondker, 2011). In 2010, Reporters Without Borders (2010) ranked Tunisia 164 out of 178 countries on their press freedom ranking. In 2017, the country was ranked 97 out of 180 countries (Reporters Without Borders, 2017a). The role of the social media during Arab Spring is widely discussed. Researchers agree that the new form for journalism was a foremost tool for organizing a social revolution, but that it also worked as a tool for spreading the news to international audiences (Ali & Fahmy, 2013; Bruns et al., 2013).

However, reports from elsewhere show that there are not only sunshine stories regarding citizen journalism. Sienkiewicz (2014) problematizes the credibility of citizen journalism pointing to a movie that was 'smuggled out' from the Syrian Civil War in 2013. The video clip was captured by a Syrian citizen journalist, showing seven soldiers on the ground with men pointing guns at them. *New York Times*, who decided to use the video in a report about the extremist group Al Qaeda, informed that it was recorded in 2013. The first

impression of this story is that it demonstrates how citizen journalism can be an act of democratizing, showing what is happening in Syria to the rest of the world. On a second look, it turns out that the use of the clip is entirely misleading. The reporter has got it all wrong; the video is a year older and the executioner is not a member of the extremist group (Sienkiewicz, 2014).

This illustrates that attitudes towards citizen journalism are split: While Gillmor (2004) argues that it is the birth of a more democratic way of reporting news, critics point to problems with ethical and professional standards surrounding the alternative form of journalism, and also question if it is as democratizing as it seems (Carr et al., 2014; Mythen, 2010). Meadows (2013), for example, maintain that in many countries, the opportunity to do citizen journalism is limited because there is only a small group who have the opportunity and access to produce news. But even though the social media did not cause the upheavals in North Africa alone, it functioned as a point of connection for otherwise disconnected groups – especially the unemployed and youth (Hamza, 2014; Lee et al., 2015).

2.4 The umbrella movement and citizen journalism in Hong Kong

Hong Kong had its own social media demonstration, the ‘Umbrella Movement’, in 2014. The name of the demonstration stems from when the police fired tear gas into the crowds, and the protesters defended themselves with umbrellas (Ortmann, 2015). The protesters showed their opinions online with different digital activities such as posting videos of the demonstration on YouTube, changing their Facebook profile pictures and to write about it on Twitter (Lee & Chan, 2016). Tsui (2015) argues that the social media were important for gathering the protesters and for being a communication channel for the international public. In one case, a video showing the protests in Hong Kong went viral and quickly received over one million views (Tsui, 2015). In an interview with Guardian (2014), a citizen journalist says: “It is a new trend in Hong Kong. If there is an accident – don’t call 999, use the phone to take a photo or a movie”.

After the Umbrella Movement, the new online outlet Hong Kong Free Press (2016) was launched because of the decline of press freedom in Hong Kong. Founded by independent journalists, the newspaper states that a gap between the English and Chinese press was detected under the Umbrella Movement. The new online outlet has chosen to report in English, aiming to provide the citizens of Hong Kong with comments, analysis and investigative journalism. The online outlet is also use citizen journalists and bloggers in their reporting.

Not surprisingly, the HKJA (2015) is rather skeptical to alternative ways of reporting through the online and social media, arguing that they represent a significant challenge to the traditional media and its declining readership. At the same time, traditional media channels also employ the new technology. The journalists frequently go online looking for news, using Twitter and other social media channels to report breaking news. Most of the media houses also want the citizens to send images, videos and first-hand information from news events (Franklin, 2014; Palmer, 2012).

That said, it is important to recognize how much the people of Hong Kong use social media, compared with other Asian societies. Hong Kong has a high penetration of mobile phone and broadband subscribers, where the percent of subscribers are 233,4% and 86% respectively, because the people of Hong Kong often have more than one subscription on average (Office of the Communications Authority, 2016). One of the most frequently visited webpages is Facebook, which has a penetration rate of 71,2% in Hong Kong (Internet World Stats, 2016), being among the highest penetration rates in the world (Chen et al., 2016).

Even though the sample in the study conducted by market researchers in TNS is relatively small (1,068 respondents), 91 percent answered that the social media they visited most frequently, was Facebook (Lam, 2014). 44 percent said that Facebook was the place they would use to catch up with the latest news, reading news from both citizen and traditional journalists.

Journalism students in Hong Kong investigated people who watch videos online, and they may be more critical minded than 'feared'. The respondents in the study, which was students in Hong Kong, rated television as having most credibility, followed by radio, newspapers and the Internet as the sources with the least credibility (Chu et al., 2016).

2.5 Professional journalism versus citizen journalism

The boundaries between 'traditional journalism' and 'citizen journalism' are more blurred than one might think. The issue eventually boils down to the question of what journalism is. As Hong Kong journalists have a strong sense of professionalism (Lee & Chan, 2009; So & Chan, 2007), one way to describe traditional journalism is to look at the ethical codes of the Hong Kong media. In their official code of professional ethics, three principles are highlighted: The principles of seeking truth, objectivity and fairness (Hong Kong Press Council, 2014).

The typical journalist in Hong Kong is young (30 years) and well educated, with fairly short time of professional experience (7,5 years) and is unlikely to belong to journalist

association. The journalist can either be male or female, as the percentage is 44% female journalists, versus 56% male (Worlds of Journalism, 2016a, 2016b). The demographics of Hong Kong journalists have remained fairly stable. In 2006, the picture of the typical Hong Kong journalist was male or female, well educated, and around 30 years old, with an average professional experience of 7 years (So & Chan, 2007). When it comes to citizen journalists, however, there is unfortunately, little research about demographics and profiles. One of the reasons could be the problem of deciding who the citizen journalists are. Also, they can be harder to find if they are not organized.

However, a commonly shared view of the difference between the citizen journalist and the traditional journalist is the split of *amateurs* versus *professionals* (Carr et al., 2014; Örnebring, 2013), where the citizen journalists are regarded as amateurs with few or no professional rules to follow. At the same time, there has always been a discussion of whether journalism should be regarded as a profession or not, even for journalists who work fulltime in established media houses. In a way, everyone *can* be a journalist, because licensing journalists and calling it a profession could be undemocratic (Örnebring, 2013). On the contrary, many journalists regard themselves as being professionals and seek belonging to a professional community (Weaver & Willnat, 2012).

A study conducted in six European countries found that journalists regarded the main difference between traditional and citizen journalism as a difference of being part of an organization (traditional journalism) versus being an individual reporter (citizen journalism) (Örnebring, 2013). From a Chinese perspective, Wang and Mark (2013) have focused on different production methods when describing differences between old and new journalism practices. While traditional journalism is considered to include fact-checking and going through an editorial process, citizen journalism has a more 'relaxed' production process where personal commentaries and emotions are allowed. Thus, there might not be the big difference in production methods: In-Media in Hong Kong do have editors going through the different articles, even though few are deleted (Multiplejournalism, 2016).

However, In-Media does not expose an ethical codex online (Multiplejournalism, 2016). Looking at the professional values of the traditional journalists, one of the main values is the ideal of *objectivity*; which has for a long time been promoted especially in Western journalism (Blaagaard, 2013a). The objectivity ideal can be seen as being impartial or providing balanced reporting – where the goal is to “represent the world as it is” (Blaagaard, 2013a, p. 188). The idea of objectivity in journalism gained ground in the US in the early 1930s, where being an objective reporter meant that you were detached, focusing only on facts, and excluding the journalists' personal opinions (Carpenter, 2008; Ward, 2014).

The ideal of objectivity is still seen as important for the credibility of the press (Chung & Nah, 2013). Nonetheless, the objectivity ideal is not what it used to be, according to Ward (2014): Journalists and academics alike have come to agree that journalism are interpretations in one way or another. On this basis, Ward (2014) has suggested a concept of the *objective stance*, implying that that journalists have a critical distance to the story and report on different views and arguments, while aiming to approach the truth.

Even if it is widely discussed globally, the objectivity ideal is included in the code of ethics for Hong Kong journalists as an essential professional ideal (Hong Kong Press Council, 2014). Thus, the ideal is criticized by scholars for being an excuse for not being critical to the government, but referring to 'hard facts' instead (Lee & Lin, 2006).

In the case of not being a 'silent observer', citizen journalists are typically described as being more personally involved in the stories, ending up as quite the opposite of objective – namely subjective and contextual (Ali & Fahmy, 2013; Blaagaard, 2013a; Carpenter, 2008). A new trend in HKSAR is that several new online platforms are crowdfunded and run by voluntary citizens. One of these platforms is In-Media, which promote an opposite view to the traditional media when it comes to the objectivity ideal. In-Media has a vision to bring social change, and anyone can register to write articles for the website (Yung & Leung, 2014).

However, the objectivity ideal is seen as difficult to achieve for traditional journalists as well. Goode (2009, p. 1291) argue that the journalistic work cannot be "divorced from processes of meaning-making, interpretation and re-articulation". By this, he denotes that there are choices which are made before the story reaches the public, forming the way it is presented. Increased subjectivity can be seen in for example crisis reporting, where a 'human' method of reporting is becoming more accepted, often displaying emotions by the reporters (Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2013). At the same time, it has been suggested that different journalistic cultures threat the objectivity ideal differently. While the objectivity ideal is often referred to as a Western ideal, the role of supporting development and social change is found in developmental and transitional societies (Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

With the rise of the 'new media', researchers have suggested that journalism is becoming more *democratized* – since anyone can become a publisher (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Bruns, 2008; Gillmor, 2004). This transition is described by Gillmor (2004) as representing a move from treating journalism as a lecture, to becoming a conversation between the former consumer and the producer.

Ward (2014) takes it a step further, suggesting *layered journalism* as the future for media organizations. The concept implies that different forms of journalism share the same platform and that both traditional and citizen journalists are gathered in the same

newsroom. Ward argues that media organizations have reached the early stadium of layered journalism, using interactive websites and employing bloggers.

In this regard, Hong Kong online media may be viewed as having taken a step towards layered journalism. Amidst traditional media houses and citizen journalism hubs like In-Media, we find the newly started CitizenNews and Hong Kong Free Press. These online media platforms rely on both citizen journalists and traditional journalists in the production of news, and are crowdfunded by the public (Hong Kong Free Press, 2016; Mak, 2017).

The mentioned organizations may not fully represent 'grassroots journalism' or citizen journalism, as they are platforms with full-time employees. Neither can they be recognized as traditional media, as they only publish online and use citizen reporters. They are, however, built upon norms and functions of traditional journalism, and can be seen as a hybridization of professional skills and civic opportunities (Deuze & Bardoel, 2001; Goode, 2009).

Despite that, Hong Kong Free Press has had difficulty as being accepted as a media house by the local government since its startup, as they have been denied access to press conferences and the Government Information System (Hong Kong Free Press, 2015). Although the media organization is a registered non-profit company, it is not recognized as a media channel by law, because they are missing printed edition. However, this may change in 2017, as the newly elected chief executive Carrie Lam has promised to include online media to government press events in her term (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2017).

These platforms are two of many organized online sites set up to catch up with the news scene in Hong Kong. While traditional journalism is struggling to maintain its credibility, readers seek information from other platforms (Wei et al., 2014). These platforms are often recognized as being independent from traditional media and official owners, and several platforms are funded by the crowd instead of through advertisements or through the official society. This condition prompts the question which is the main issue of this study: Do the new channels serve as a viable alternative to traditional journalism?

Chapter 3: Research methodology

The study uses qualitative interviews as the primary research method, as this was regarded as the most suitable method to answer the research questions. Each of the three research questions (1.0) queries about the journalists' perceptions of their work situation, thus approaching the journalists personally and qualitatively appears to be an appropriate method. The first research question seeks to understand how the journalists in Hong Kong experience the press freedom situation, while the second and third questions try to grasp the personal relationship between the two groups of informants.

3.1 Reasons for choosing a qualitative approach

Qualitative research is explained by Kvale (2008) as focusing on different social phenomena from the 'inside'. This method is used for understanding social life (Brinkmann, 2013; Dowling et al., 2016), and to "explore any deeper significance ascribed by subjects to the topic under examination" (Lach, 2014, p. 89). Because this thesis seeks to *understand* how journalists experience citizen journalism in a region where press freedom is under pressure, qualitative research appears suitable.

However, qualitative interviews may not be the only possible methods to approach the research objective. An alternative could for example be to do a content analysis of citizen journalism in Hong Kong to understand how it is practiced. Unfortunately, the field research in Hong Kong was limited to approximately two weeks, and it was seen as too ambitious to do a content analysis as well as interviews. A second problem that presents itself is that since I do not speak Chinese, content analysis would be limited to English text alone. The language issue is also an argument for the qualitative research methods: I could approach the journalists since they all spoke English, even if some of their news production is in Chinese.

3.2 Sample size

As qualitative research tries to study phenomena in their natural settings, I travelled to Hong Kong for two weeks. Rather than collecting data from a large sample, I chose a relatively small sample of 12 journalists.

The issue of an appropriate sample size in qualitative research is widely discussed (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Trotter Ii, 2012), and the sample size can be fairly small because of the desired depth of the study and the type of information one seeks. As the information could give detailed input about a phenomenon, there is a point where more samples do not necessarily lead to more information (Mason, 2010; Ritchie et al., 2014). This is sometimes referred to as the point of saturation. During my 'fieldwork' in Hong Kong, I realized that by my 12th interview, I got less new information related to my research questions. This is an indication that the research was saturated and that I had enough informants (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Although it is tempting to generalize some of the findings, it is difficult because of the small number of informants. However, some of the details given by informants kept being repeated by others. An example of this was when the informants were asked to describe the press freedom situation in Hong Kong. The answers varied from 'OK' to 'very bad', but everyone agreed that it could be worse – and several mentioned that *"It is not as bad as Turkey"*.

While the idea was to get the same number of informants from both 'camps' (citizen journalists and traditional journalists), it was difficult to achieve because of the lack of access to citizen journalists. However, because the detailed data from the interviews need to be analyzed, the total size needed to be kept relatively small (Ritchie et al., 2014), and the total number of informants landed at 12 people; 5 citizen journalists and 7 traditional journalists. It was also important that the sample size was not too small, as the different informants may have diverse opinions, and the sample should be large enough to reflect different perceptions (Mason, 2010).

3.3 Sampling and definitions

Because the aim of the study was to understand what specific groups of people (professional journalists and citizen journalists) think about specific subjects, a purposive sampling method was used. This means that the people interviewed had to fulfill certain criteria before they were interviewed; they were chosen with a purpose (Devers & Frankel, 2000; Jensen, 2012).

However, including citizen journalists in the study implied methodological challenges. As the line between being a traditional journalist and a citizen journalists is blurred, this represents a challenge in choosing informants (Holt & Karlsson, 2015). Some citizen journalists may formerly have been worked as a professional/ traditional journalist,

and vice versa. Additionally, it was difficult to get a sampling that matched the demography of citizen journalists. As they are not organized, and little research is so far conducted on the population, there is little data on who and how many they are. This also makes it difficult to generalize the research findings.

The methodological challenges were introduced early in the project. In the beginning of the research, I tried to define a traditional journalist in Hong Kong as someone having a degree within journalism. Already then, the criterion was argued to be seen as 'too limiting' – but in 2006 (So & Chan, 2007) more than half of the journalists working in news organizations in Hong Kong actually had either a bachelor or a masters' degree within journalism. However, the informants from the traditional media houses in this thesis had bachelor and master degrees from studies other than journalism. And vice versa; one of the citizen journalists had a master's degree within journalism.

3.4 First group of informants: Traditional journalists

The thesis uses the term *traditional journalists* instead of *professional journalists* about the persons working in an established news organization. The reason for this is that the term 'professional' may not necessarily be clearly defined to established news organizations alone. In the end, the traditional journalists selected for the thesis were defined as:

- Working as a full-time journalist for a newspaper belonging to a larger organization or an online publication in Hong Kong
- Reporting on current affairs, especially political issues

I have chosen to focus on newspaper journalists, as there are several newspapers to choose from, but not that many TV or radio channels. The only licensed TV channels are the public service broadcaster called Radio TV Hong Kong (RTHK), Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) and Hong Kong Television Entertainment (HKTVE), while the list of licensed terrestrial radio stations includes RTHK, Commercial Radio Hong Kong and Metro Radio Hong Kong (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2016).

The second criterion is that the journalist should report on political issues. This is because political journalists are most likely to hold information about self-censorship and press freedom. However, this criterion was also for the selection of the citizen journalists as well. This means that a *stratified purposive sampling* method was used. The method is explained by Ritchie et al. (2014, p. 114) as: "A hybrid approach in which the aim is to select

groups that display variation on a particular phenomenon but each of which is fairly homogeneous, so that subgroups can be compared”.

After the criteria for the traditional journalists were decided, I started to contact different journalists by sending them an email or contacting them on Facebook. My experience was firstly that the traditional journalists were difficult to get in touch with. Since many of the journalists did not have a personal email address online, I had to contact the editor or the media owners, who often did not respond. Therefore, my plans about getting two journalists from the biggest newspapers in Hong Kong (*SCMP*, *Apple Daily* and *Ming Pao*), was not going so well.

However, as I had sent hundreds of emails and contacted different persons via

Table 1: Overview of the informants from the traditional media houses in Hong Kong.

Table 1			
Informants: Traditional journalists			
Number of journalists	Media house	Daily or weekly newspaper	Circulation numbers 2016
2	<i>South China Morning Post (SCMP)</i>	<i>Daily</i>	105.000
1	<i>Hong Kong Free Press</i>	<i>Daily (online)</i>	
1	<i>Apple Daily</i>	<i>Daily (online)</i>	130.000
1	<i>Quartz Daily</i>	<i>Daily (online)</i>	250.000 <i>(World wide)</i>
1	<i>Ming Pao</i>	<i>Daily</i>	-
1	<i>Freelance journalist</i>	-	-
N= 7			

Facebook, the network of informants grew. In the end, I ended up with 7 traditional journalists for my research: 1 informant from Hong Kong Free Press, 2 informants from *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, 1 informant from *Ming Pao*, 1 informant from *Apple Daily*, 1 informant from *Quartz Daily* and one freelance journalist (see *Table 1*).

Circulation numbers are difficult to verify in Hong Kong, as they are seldom examined (Yin, 2009). However, Hong Kong Audit Bureau of Circulations Ltd (2017) have the figures for *SCMP* and *Apple Daily* (see *Table 1*).

Two of the informants come from Chinese newspapers (*Apple Daily* and *Ming Pao*).

This means that the three remaining media houses report

in English, which makes the sampling a bit different from the reality of the newspaper demographics in Hong Kong. In 2017, Hong Kong had 16 newspapers which reported in Chinese, 8 in English, 2 in both languages (Online Newspapers, 2017).

However, the demographics of the interviewed traditional journalists are close to the research of Hong Kong journalists conducted by Lee (2016). His report explains that a Hong Kong journalist is young, university-educated with an average age of 30.01 years (N=471). The average age of the informants in the current research is 33.7 (median= 32.5).

The educational level among the informants is high. While three of the informants have a master's degree, the rest of the informants have a bachelor's degree. Three of the informants specifically have a degree within journalism. According to the research of Lee (2016), nine out of ten journalists had university education (88,9%). In the current study, it was seven out of seven.

Further, a short introduction to the different newspapers could be helpful.

- *South China Morning Post (SCMP)* is one of the largest newspapers in Hong Kong in terms of circulation, and is published in English. *The Post*, as they call it, does not specifically describe their political stance.
- Hong Kong Free Press is crowdfunded by the people, and was started in 2015 because of the pressure on press freedom (Hong Kong Free Press, 2016). The online publication is not officially regarded as a media channel, according to the local government (because they do not publish a newspaper). However, this thesis sees it as a professional organization because of its full-time employees. The online publication describes itself as pro-democracy.
- *Apple Daily News* is known for being an outspoken pro-democracy paper in Hong Kong. The newspaper is among the biggest newspapers in terms of readership, but has recently suffered a loss of advertising revenue because of their outspokenness (Reporters Without Borders, 2016c). The newspaper is published in Chinese.
- Quartz Daily is an American digital media house, which produces news mainly for tablets and mobile phones (Quartz, 2016). The media house has international reach, but in this thesis, the Hong Kong reporter was interviewed. From the beginning, I did not plan to include this media house in the research – but after being advised about the experienced journalist from Hong Kong who belonged to the media house, I chose to include her in the research.
- *Ming Pao* is among the newspaper rated with the highest credibility (Together with *SCMP* and *Hong Kong Economic Times*), and is published in Chinese. The newspaper

does not openly describe a political affiliation.

In addition to the in-depth interviews with these seven reporters from organized media houses, I included an interview with a freelance reporter, who is here counted as a traditional journalist, because she has it as a full-time job. I also interviewed two persons from the Department of Journalism at Hong Kong Baptist University, professor Steve Zhongshi Guo and PhD candidate Florin Serban. They gave me a lot of valuable background information before I was going to meet the other informants, and are regarded as key informants in the research.

3.5 Second group of informants: Citizen journalists

The thesis has earlier (2.3) defined citizen journalists as being “*persons producing news content, who are not paid from a mainstream news organization and do not have it as a full-time job*”. This definition coincides with the criteria of selection of citizen journalists for the study, as the citizen journalist in this research is seen to be:

- Active in producing news content, through his/ her own blog, website or YouTube-channel
- Do not have journalism as his/ her full-time occupation
- Reporting on current affairs, especially political issues

Even though these criteria try to separate the two groups of journalists, it is still possible that the same person could belong to both groups at different points of time (i.e. there might be a person who had been engaged in citizen journalism before entering a job as a traditional journalist, or vice versa). None of the traditional journalists had formerly been engaged as citizen journalists, but two of the informants in the citizen journalism group have strong ties to traditional journalism. They have chosen to do citizen journalism instead of working in a traditional media organization because of the perceived lack of press freedom in Hong Kong.

One of the informants in this group has many years of experience within the Hong Kong media, and could as such be regarded as a traditional journalist. However, in 2016, she quit her job, and together with seven other former professional journalists she has started a Chinese online outlet (CitizenNews), which is also going to be a hub for both citizen and traditional journalists. The journalist plans to work here as a journalist and an editor, and even if she does not fully match the criteria a citizen journalist, she is placed under the category because of her change of journalistic activity.

A short description of the citizen journalism sites could be helpful.

Table 2: Overview of the informants from the citizen journalism community in Hong Kong. * The last informant has started a citizen journalism hub, but have past experience as a traditional journalist.

Table 2		
Informants: Citizen journalists		
Number of journalists	Citizen journalism page	URL
1	<i>SocREC</i>	<i>http://www.socrec.org</i>
1	<i>MyRadio</i>	<i>https://myradio.hk/podcast/</i>
1	<i>Passion Times</i>	<i>http://www.passiontimes.hk/4.0/category/6/</i>
1	<i>Resistance Live Media</i>	<i>https://www.facebook.com/resistancelive2014/</i>
1	<i>CitizenNews</i>	<i>https://www.hkcnews.com</i>
N= 5		

- SocREC is an independent online media outlet run and organized by volunteers. The citizen journalists produce news content for their own website, for YouTube and for their Facebook page. One of their most popular videos is from the 'Umbrella Revolution' (cf. 2.4), and has been watched over 1.4 million times.
- MyRadio also have their own website and Facebook page, but mostly produces most news content for their YouTube channel. The video which has the most views, has been watched 190.000 times.

- Passion Times was formerly run by citizens from the political organization Civic Passion, which was a group of pro-democracy activists (Kang-chung, 2017). However, from now on (2017) the online news site will be run by citizen journalists as an independent organization.
- Resistance Live Media is a group of activists running a YouTube channel. One of their most popular videos has been watched 83.000 times.
- CitizenNews is the new online media, launched by former traditional journalists in 2017. The new online channel promotes public participation combined with traditional journalists working full-time.

What is common for MyRadio, Passion Times and Resistance Live Media is that they have a clear political stance what the call 'pro-democracy'. The informants from SocREC and CitizenNews, on the other hand, explain that they try to be neutral in their reporting.

3.6 Using the interview as a method

A frequently used method in media studies is the interview (Jensen, 2012). The method is

often used to understand what people think about a concept, and Bower (1973, p. vi) explains why: “*The best way to find out what people think about something is to ask them*”.

I have used individual *semi-structured interviews* as the main method of research. In semi-structured interviews the researcher uses a questionnaire about different topics that is meant to be covered, but is also open for follow-up questions if the informant says something of particular interest (Kvale, 2008). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) refer to the in-depth interview as a method to understand social and personal matters shared by a particular group. Because the aim of this thesis is to understand personal perceptions and experiences among journalists, I chose to do semi-structured in-depth interviews. Instead of interviewing different groups of people, the personal interview was chosen. This was because I needed to ask the journalists about sensitive topics like self-censorship, and they might feel uncomfortable talking about it in front of other colleagues.

One of the limitations in personal interviews is the danger of the journalists interviewed wanting to impress the researcher, but this could also happen even if the answered are given anonymously in a questionnaire (Skjerdal, 2010b). As informants do not always say what they think, it is important to recognize that the information may not represent their perceived reality (Jensen, 2012), which must be taken into consideration when making the data analysis.

3.6.1 Thematic analysis

The data analysis in this thesis is done through thematic analysis. This involves organizing the collected data under different themes or categories before comparing them. The idea is that this will lead to more information about the different themes, and uncover both agreements and disagreements among the respondents (Jensen, 2012).

3.6.2 The interview process

The fieldwork period lasted for two weeks in Hong Kong, from late November to early December 2016. As I briefly mentioned earlier, the traditional journalists were difficult to get in touch with in the beginning of the project. But after I got some interviews scheduled, I started asking the journalists if they had suggestions about other journalists I could talk to. Together with recommendations from professors at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), the snowball-effect gave me enough persons who were willing to be interviewed.

After the appointments were scheduled with the informants, we met in their local environment, which in this case was different cafeterias they liked or suggested to meet in. A

reason for not meeting them in their office was that I did not want the journalists to feel that they could not tell me things while their colleagues were around. In the cafeterias, they would just blend in over a cup of coffee or tea, which the informants told me they were happy to do (especially the citizen journalists).

None of the informants knew anything more about the research topic than the fact that I was looking at how journalism works in Hong Kong. The reason for not giving more information about it, was that I did not want the journalists to do prior search for ethical codes, for example. Also, I wanted spontaneous and honest reactions in the interviews, particularly towards the other group of journalists.

After introducing the research, I asked the informants if they were OK being recorded on tape, and as they were all familiar with using a recorder in their work, none of them said no to this. I also informed the journalists that I was going to use the recorded interviews for my transcription only and that they could back out of the project at any time they wanted. Permission to record personal data of the informants were given by NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) before the fieldwork started.

To record the interviews, I used my mobile phone. This was a strategy to make the informants 'forget' about the recorder and talk freely about the subjects. My personal experience with this is that they almost did not show signs of thinking about the mobile phone, as many of them were used to have a phone laying on a table in front of them. What sometimes seemed to be distracting for the informants, was me taking notes. Therefore, I only wrote down short notes and focused more on listening actively and asking follow-up questions when the informants said something new or interesting.

Everyone was asked every question in the semi-structured interview guide (*Appendix 1*) which mostly had open-ended questions. They are mostly open-ended because I hoped they would generate a free-flowing conversation - which they did (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

The interview guide starts with formalities such as name, age and education to make the informants relax and talk about themselves. I then introduced questions about the new media, asking the journalists "*What do you think about the statement 'with the new media, everyone can be a journalist'?*". The answers to this question often gave me indications of the attitudes towards citizen journalism, without having to ask them directly. To this end, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) mention that the first question should be open-ended and should reflect the nature of the research. This is supposed to be a non-threatening question making the informants start to reflect, and was proved to be a good start.

Even if mostly the same questions were asked to both groups, the questions for RQ3

(attitudes toward the other group of journalists) were split. One question that was added to the group of traditional journalists was the question of whether traditional journalists felt that citizen journalists pose a challenge or not. It made less sense asking the question to citizen journalists, as they are the 'new group' of journalists.

As I regarded the questions about the press freedom situation and self-censorship as more sensitive than questions about attitudes towards the other group of journalists, I moved RQ1 to the last part of the interview. As I found it interesting asking the journalists about their own political stance, these questions were the last ones in the interview guide. This was because I was afraid the informant would have either backed out or raising a 'guard' if I asked them about it in the beginning of the interview session.

The interviews varied in both length and focus. As some of journalists used a lot of time reflecting over some of the questions, the interviews varied from taking 45 minutes to over two hours. There was only one occasion where the interview lasted for over two hours, which was an interview with a citizen journalist. Most of the interviews lasted around one hour, and my experience was that when the clock had passed one hour, the informant became more tired and less focused. The focus in the interviews varied from being centered on my interview guide to concentration more on follow-up questions and especially questions about self-censorship. Also, as the research progressed, I felt that the questions gave less new information and I was approaching a point of saturation.

As soon as I returned to my home country Norway, I started the process of transcribing the interviews. I wrote down each of the words from the interview, except from every pause or 'ums and ahs', as these were not relevant for the thesis. After transcribing, the answers were divided under different topics and research questions to make a proper framework for comparison.

3.7 Methodological challenges

In addition to the methodological concern about deciding who is a citizen journalist and who is a traditional journalist, there were some other concerns to think through, such as where to meet, and how to establish trust. I will discuss how I dealt with these in the following.

3.7.1 Who is a citizen journalist?

As already mentioned, my goal was to have the same number of informants from both 'camps', i.e. traditional and citizen journalists. I already briefly addressed the methodological concern about deciding who is a citizen journalist and who is seen as a traditional journalist

(cf. 3.5). However, as I embarked in the fieldwork, the distinction appeared to be not all that easy. After I had contacted two journalists contributing to Hong Kong Free Press (each of them also had their own blog), I took for granted that they were citizen journalists. However, when we met up, I soon realized that the first informant also worked at a media house (Quartz Daily), and the other one was a freelance journalist.

Because I had defined a traditional journalist to be a person having a journalism job as a full-time job, the respondents fell under the first category instead of citizen journalists. However, it was interesting to get another point of view, and I got some interesting responses from a freelance reporter who did not work in a set environment. She was included in the category of traditional journalists, as she has it as a full-time job.

3.7.2 Interview setting

A challenge of meeting informants in cafeterias was that some of the cafeterias were a bit noisy. Especially the first cafeteria I met someone in, was too noisy, which made it difficult to transcribe exactly what the informant said. However, as I sent over the text to the informant afterwards, there was only some words which needed to be edited, and it ended up being an informative interview. Before scheduling the next interviews, I was more precise in saying that we needed to meet at a place which was not too noisy. However, there were occurrences of some language difficulties, where the informant tried to explain by using Google Translate. Fortunately, we figured out the meaning after a while, and little seems to have been lost in translation.

3.7.3 Trust

Although there are some challenges when using anonymity in research, the informants in this study would not speak out about sensitive issues like self-censorship and how the press freedom situation is affecting the media houses - without being promised anonymity from the researcher. During the interview, they revealed information that could jeopardize their position in the newspaper, and the informants made sure their identity was for me only.

On one occasion, the journalist gave me some information 'off the record', before the recorder was turned on. This was information about previous work and self-censorship, and was very interesting for the research project. We discussed how this information could be anonymized, so the journalist would not be recognized in the final report. After this, the informant agreed that the information could be used in the research project.

3.7.4 Personal stance

Personal attachment to the research topic or participants could pose a challenge in research. Prior to this research, I did not have any relations to the research objects. However, ethical challenges can be raised around the use of Facebook. Some of the informants added me as a friend after our interview, and I decided that it was OK to accept it. I did this, firstly, because I have so many friends on Facebook which I do not consider as close friends, and secondly, because it was useful to contact the informants through Facebook.

As it is impossible for a researcher *not* to communicate (Jensen, 2012), it is difficult to say that I did not have an impact on the informants. However, as I have chosen to ask open-ended questions, the impact will hopefully be reduced. The follow-up questions were only used to make the informant tell me more about the subject, or to simply to provide more specific information.

This research was partly sponsored by the Norwegian free speech organization Fritt Ord. The organization has however no influence on the research process itself, as it does not ask to intervene or see the results before the study is completed.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

The findings and discussion will be organized according to the subjects of the interview guide (*Appendix 1*). Firstly, the experience of press freedom in Hong Kong will be analyzed and discussed (RQ1), then the thesis will look at what the informants recognize as the difference between citizen journalists and traditional journalists in terms of role perceptions (RQ2), before discussing what attitudes the two groups of journalists have of the other group (RQ3). First, however, a brief overview of the informants interviewed.

4.1 Demography

As earlier mentioned, the typical Hong Kong journalist is a young, well-educated man or woman, who is not very well paid (So & Chan, 2007). This is similar to the latest report of Lee (2016), which finds the average age to be 30.1 years old. In this thesis, the mean age of all the informants is 33.7 (median 32.5 years).

The educational level among the informants is high. While four of the informants

Table 3: Demography of the citizen journalists in the research. ‘Other’ means that the person has a degree in another area than journalism.

Table 3	
Informants: Citizen journalists	
Gender	Education
Male	Bachelor’s degree, other
Male	Bachelor’s degree, other
Male	Bachelor’s degree, other
Female	Master’s degree, journalism
Female	Bachelor’s degree, journalism
N= 5 (40% women)	80% have a bachelor’s degree

have a master’s degree, the rest of the informants have a bachelor degree. Five of the informants have a degree within journalism. According to the research of Lee (2016), nine out of ten traditional journalists in Hong Kong had university education (88.9%), but in this research, everyone has a university degree.

It is easier to look at the differences when the categories are split in citizen journalists and traditional journalists (*Tables 3 and 4*).

Firstly, we look at the group of informants among citizen

journalists (see *Table 3*). The mean age of the informants is 37.2 years, and the median age is 34 (N=5). This is slightly higher than in the group of traditional journalists, as shown later.

What is interesting is that everyone has a university degree, and both the interviewed female journalists have a degree within journalism. These informants work with journalism only part time, without being paid, except from the female informant (58 years). She has recently started a citizen journalism hub called CitizenNews, and works full-time with this online site. As a former traditional journalist, she is recognized to be part of a ‘transitional group’, and does not really fit either of the categories.

Overall, 2 of the 5 interviewed citizen journalists are women. So and Chan (2007) explain that a typical Hong Kong journalist is neither male nor female, because the genders are equally split. Therefore, the informants do not fully represent the actual gender proportion of local journalists. However, it is important to recognize that the thesis does not

Table 4: Demography of the traditional journalists in the research. ‘Other’ means that the person has a degree in another area than journalism.

Table 4	
Informants: Traditional journalists	
Gender	Education
Male	Bachelor’s degree, other
Male	Bachelor’s degree, journalism
Male	Master’s degree, journalism
Male	Master’s degree, journalism
Female	Bachelor’s degree, other
Female	Bachelor’s degree, other
Female	Master’s degree, other
N= 7 (42.8% women)	57% have a bachelor’s degree

try to mirror the demographic reality, but rather tries to go in depth of journalistic identity. Also, the research done by So and Chan (2007) reflects how *traditional journalists* are split; there is little research on who is a citizen journalist, and there are few available references in this area.

To sum up, the citizen journalists consulted in the thesis are mostly men, with an average age of 37.2 years. They all have at least a bachelor’s degree, and one of the informants among the citizen journalists has a master’s degree in journalism.

The traditional journalist informants have a mean age of 31.14 years (median age is 31 years). The general profile of traditional journalists in Hong Kong has remained stable, with an average age slightly over 30 (So & Chan, 2007). The journalists in this

thesis are also well-educated (see *Table 4*), insofar as all of them have a university degree. Three of the informants (N=7) have a degree within journalism, of whom two have a master's degree.

The years of experience vary from 3 to 11 years. The average length of experience is 7 years (median = 8 years). It is not a surprise that the journalists do not have many years of experience as they are fairly young. However, this has been a situation for long, as Chan et al. (2012) in 1996 found that 70 percent of the journalists had fewer than ten years of experience in the field. A decade later, 59.4 percent had fewer than ten years experience.

This indicates that many of the Hong Kong journalists change their job after being a journalist for some years. Chan et al. (2012) suggest that one of the reasons for this may be the low salary. This is also mentioned in the current study. However, there might be other reasons as well: One of the journalists from *SCMP* explains that many journalists quit after a couple of years because of the difficulty of standing up against their editors. The journalist from *Apple Daily* explains that reporters usually stay in their job for around 2-3 years. This is argued to happen because the salary is low, and so is the status of being a journalist.

4.2 RQ1: Experiences of the press freedom situation

The first question about the experience of press freedom in Hong Kong includes how the informants define press freedom themselves. In response, they mostly refer to *being free to publish what they want to*. However, three themes are repeated, illustrated by the following three quotes:

"It is the freedom that allows journalists to report news in any angle they believe is in public interest."

"Press freedom is to report things freely and without control from politicians or other financial considerations. It means to report on different views from different people."

"Journalists can research and present stories and issues without having the fear of negative consequences."

(Hong Kong journalists, personal interviews, November/ December 2016)

It is interesting to compare the three components from the research of Weaver (1977) with the answers from journalists in Hong Kong almost 40 years later. Writing from an American perspective, the three elements Weaver (1977) described to be the most important for press freedom were 1) freedom from government control, 2) freedom from non-governmental

control, and 3) existence of conditions which make it possible to express different ideas and opinions to a large amount of people.

The informants expressed that freedom from government control is one of the most important aspects describing press freedom. But where the traditional journalists also focused on the freedom from financial considerations and access to information, the citizen journalists were more focused on the right to say what they want without facing any pressure. This is to be expected, as the latter group does not have to think about commercial interests. On the other hand, it is difficult to separate the two groups' definitions of press freedom, as the informants focused on the same overall themes: *Freedom from government and financial control and the right to publish anything without being afraid of the consequences he or she might get.*

As discussed earlier in the thesis, Lee and Chan (2009) argue that Hong Kong journalists have maintained a high degree of professionalism. However, the ideals are not always practiced, because sometimes it is simply not possible (So & Chan, 2007).

Even if the informants were not asked many questions about professional ideals, it is interesting to look at how they define press freedom, and how they describe the situation for journalists in Hong Kong. After the journalists had given their definition of press freedom, they were asked if they felt the descriptions were expressed within the Hong Kong media. The following three answers are revealing, as they come from traditional journalists in some of the biggest newspapers in Hong Kong: *SCMP*, *Apple Daily* and *Ming Pao*.

"In a way. However, it is very difficult to get information, and our government is not transparent at all."

(Journalist, *SCMP*, personal interview, November 28, 2016)

"No. I think most of the news organizations in Hong Kong are influenced by Beijing or under financial pressure. Most of the news organizations have management which have interests in mainland China, and if there are some angles or voices the mainland do not like, they will be excluded from the newspaper."

(Journalist, *Apple Daily*, personal interview, December 2, 2016)

"No, of course it is not expressed in Hong Kong. It is getting more and more difficult to report on what you want. This is because it is so much censorship in every news outlet in Hong Kong. An example of this is if you report anything critical about the property tycoons in Hong Kong: You write it 'nicer', unless you want them to remove advertisements from the newspaper."

(Journalist, *Ming Pao*, personal interview, December 2, 2016)

The main problems considering press freedom are explained by the informants to be a) difficulty of getting information and b) self-censorship among journalists.

Hong Kong does not have an information law which gives the right to official documents and information (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, 2017). This is criticized by Freedom House (2016b), which gave the HKSAR a legal score of 13/30 in its 2016 report. Accordingly, the journalists from *Apple Daily* and Hong Kong Free Press explain that it might be difficult to get information sometimes, although it is not impossible.

The informants argue that the main reasons for self-censorship are political pressure from the government, influences from the owners of the media organization, and economic pressure from advertisers. This is also reported by the local journalist association (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2016) and several researchers (Fung, 2007; Lau & To, 2002; Maheshwari, 2014). As the journalist from *Ming Pao* states, journalists sometimes downplay stories which are sensitive to the advertisers of the newspaper. This is also found in the U.S. by Germano and Meier (2013).

However, the traditional journalists in the study describe a situation where fewer people than before respect them, pointing to an increase of physical attacks against journalists and editors. A journalist from one of the biggest newspapers in Hong Kong explains how censorship is sometimes performed. He works with investigative journalism, and explains that the journalists never know which story can get them into trouble. However, they keep 'digging' and continue to publish stories:

"Some people are paid to punch and hit journalists to stop them from writing a story. You will not die. But they will threaten you."

(Traditional journalist (age 28), personal interview, November/ December 2016)

The media are seen by Lau and To (2002) to be caught in an ideological trap: As they face difficult economic times, they are caught between the need for advertising revenue and the ideological commitment of upholding the independent press.

As earlier explained, some of the informants got a question the others did not get. The question was "Have any of your co-workers experienced self-censorship?", and was asked to four of the traditional journalists. Three of the informants confirmed that self-censorship has been practiced by some of their co-workers. One of the *SCMP* journalists describes how censorship was organized in the former newspaper she worked in.

“They had a ‘black list’ in the news organization. This list contained people who were not supposed to be mentioned in their articles, and the reporters were used to it. They know what and who they cannot write about.”

(Journalist, SCMP, personal interview, November 28, 2016)

The journalists agree with Lee and Chan (2009) with the description of self-censorship as an organizational phenomenon. Nevertheless, the journalist from *Apple Daily* thinks self-censorship is nearly non-existent in his own news organization, but argues that it is a serious problem in other media outlets. Despite that, he points out that the journalists in SCMP write critical stories when their editors are not there to supervise the editorial process. If this is the case, it is difficult to argue that self-censorship is always a ‘trained’, organizational phenomenon. Instead, it seems that self-censorship tends to happen mostly when the editors are there, which makes it more of an individual choice.

Lee and Chan (2009) argue that self-censorship is often performed without the editors or bosses explicitly ordering it. However, there are examples of the opposite in this study. The journalist from *Ming Pao* describes a situation from his own working place:

“Yes, of course they have experienced self-censorship. One of my former colleagues told me that she was instructed by the chief editors not to get reactions from certain political commentators”.

(Journalist, *Ming Pao*, personal interview December 2, 2016)

This is an example of passive self-censorship, as proposed by Skjerdal (2008). Where active self-censorship is seen as actively holding back information already gathered, passive self-censorship is described as a choice not to report on an issue or getting interviews from different informants.

Thus, self-censorship is a global threat against press freedom, and is not only found in Hong Kong (Lee & Lin, 2006). Explained by Germano and Meier (2013), sensitive topics for advertisements can be underreported because of fear of losing money. This is confirmed by the informant from *Ming Pao*. In 2014 the newspaper lost advertisements worth several million HK dollars for 18 months, because they had published investigative and negative reports about the development of luxury apartments (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2014; Leung, 2015). Now, the informant explains that the journalists write ‘nicer’ because of the fear of losing advertisements.

Self-censorship is also argued to happen because of *ownership* of the media organizations. This is explained by referring to the business interests their owners have in mainland China. Fung (2007) argues that there is too little research to conclude that there is a

correlation between ownership and self-censorship. This is partly described by the traditional journalists as well: While they explain that they are affected by their owners, they also say that the owners do not have direct influence on the editorial decisions. This might have something to do with self-censorship as often being individually experienced (Skjerdal, 2010a).

As the traditional press in Hong Kong has reached the lowest level of credibility in ten years, new media have blossomed during the last couple of years (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2015; University of Hong Kong, 2016). And citizen journalism is, in most cases, not a subject of censorship, according to Korson (2015). This is because their independence of both owners and advertisers, which is described as the main challenge for the traditional media in Hong Kong (Fung, 2007; Lau & To, 2002; Maheshwari, 2014). The citizen journalists in the thesis express what they see as a paradox in the media of Hong Kong:

“The traditional media can easily assess information, but sometimes they cannot say what they want to say. This is partly because large companies will not place advertisements in critical media. We, the citizen journalists, can always say what we want to say, but we do not have the resources to assess all the information.”

(Journalist, *Passion Times*, personal interview, November 25, 2016)

One might think that the citizen journalists were more negative to the press freedom situation than the other informant group, considering that the new media often blossom because of the lack of credibility in the traditional media (Korson, 2015). However, the two informant groups mostly agree with each other on this issue. In their description of the press freedom situation, the citizen journalists express a worsened situation since 1997. According to international rankings, press freedom in Hong Kong has slowly diminished since 2005 (Freedom House, 2016b; Reporters Without Borders, 2016b), and there is no sign of it getting better in the latest report from Freedom House (2017). In fact, the report shows that HKSAR fell another two points in 2017.

On the other hand, the informants agree that there is press freedom to some extent. This is explained by the possibility to use the Internet and social media, which is an observation supported by Freedom House (2017). But the citizen journalists worry that it will not last for a long time: “The government has blocked our Facebook-page before. Our page will probably be blocked in a couple of months”, an informant explains. Cyberattacks have affected both traditional media houses and citizen journalists before. In 2014, over 1.000

videos were deleted from the YouTube channel of SocREC (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2014).

4.2.1 Sustaining press freedom

The journalists keep fighting for press freedom in Hong Kong. The question “How do you and your colleagues work to sustain press freedom?” engaged the informants to talk about their daily work. While half of the informants explained that they were passively fighting for press freedom, the other half felt that they had to fight actively. Among the latter group was the journalist from *Ming Pao*. The informant explains that within the news organization, they fight for publishing the story they want to publish. Outside the organization, they try to force the government to release documents.

When the informants talk about other media organizations, they often describe a situation which is worse than in their own working place. The traditional journalists explain that they feel they can write about anything they want, and that their articles are rarely altered by the editors. This is interesting, as they also describe a situation where the pressure from the editors and advertisements is heavy. The latter portrayal is supported by the informants of Lee (2016), where 52.4% explain that editorial supervisors and higher editors are seen as extremely or very influential. If the press freedom situation had been worse, the journalists may not have felt that they could write about everything. It is also possible that the informants would not admit in the interview that they are affected by the editors.

But what about those journalists who do not have an editor? One of the differences between being a citizen journalist and a traditional journalist is who decides what to publish. Where 6 out of 7 traditional journalists answer that it is the editor who decides, all the citizen journalists (N=5) and one of the traditional journalists agree that it is their personal choice what to publish. Thus, the traditional journalist from *Ming Pao* explains that sometimes, it is neither: “*In other media, it is different: If they receive a phone call from ‘Beijing’, they will change the angle. That is quite common*”, he says.

Anyhow, the traditional journalists argue that they cannot do more to fight for press freedom than they already do. They explain that they must keep publishing stories and stand up against their editors, even though it might be difficult.

4.2.2 The future of journalism in Hong Kong

The journalists interviewed for this study are not very optimistic about the future of press freedom in Hong Kong. When asked to describe the future, phrases like ‘not optimistic’,

'uncertain', 'hopeless' and 'bad' are repeated by all the informants. The traditional journalists from *Ming Pao* and *Apple Daily* express their skepticism to the future as such:

"I think it is quite uncertain. I do not think many reporters dare to challenge the decision of an editor. You have to listen to your boss, unless you want to get fired."

(Journalist, *Apple Daily*, personal interview, December 2, 2016)

"Hopeless. I think Beijing is getting more and more interference in Hong Kong, and we cannot avoid them. They will try to control how the media are reporting, and we cannot stop it. We all feel powerless."

(Journalist, *Ming Pao*, personal interview, December 2, 2016)

Even if they see big challenges in the daily routine, the journalists are, unsurprisingly, positive to the fact that the Internet is not censored². A lot of Hong Kong people read their news online, and in a small study conducted by Lam (2014), 44 percent of the Hong Kong people answered that they use Facebook to catch up with the latest news from citizen and traditional journalism. The traditional journalists in this study point out that more people will read news online in the future, if the press freedom is still intact.

"I do not think that Facebook is a healthy way to read news, but most people in Hong Kong do it. If anything happens to Facebook, it will be a disaster. Anyway, I do not see a bright future for journalism in Hong Kong."

(Citizen journalist, MyRadio, personal interview, November 23, 2016)

It is intriguing to look closer at this paradox: When the inhabitants of Hong Kong get their news from Facebook, the method of reading news is criticized by citizen journalists. This is quite interesting, as they mainly post their reports on their Facebook-page. But while the traditional journalists are cheering because the Internet is not censored, one of the citizen journalists tells about a new censorship-tool for Facebook. The informant explains that Facebook has developed the tool to try to get into the Chinese market.

The tool will make it possible to hide posts in specific geographic areas and control which posts should be visible in the user's feeds. If this tool is going to be used in Hong Kong, it becomes more difficult to argue for the level of press freedom they have today. However, the tool may not be realized, according to employees in Facebook (Isaac, 2016).

Regarding the question about the future of journalism in Hong Kong, the citizen journalists are slightly more negative than the traditional ones. The citizen journalists predict

² Mainland China heavily censors Internet content, and was according to Freedom House (2016a) the world's worst abuser of internet freedom in 2016. The censorship system is commonly referred to as China's 'Great Firewall'.

that in the future, one will not be allowed to say anything bad about the government. The experienced journalist who started CitizenNews, describes the situation as bad.

“The majority of the media already moves towards Beijing, and they will not criticize the government. The political pressure experienced by the journalists is very bad. We have passed the point of no return”, she explains.

(Journalist, CitizenNews, personal interview, November 28, 2016)

When traditional journalism is struggling to uphold its credibility, readers seek information from other platforms (Wei et al., 2014). But is citizen journalism an alternative? In a study of American journalists, Carr et al. (2014) found that people do not necessarily separate professional and citizen reports. However, perceptions differ from person to person; informants who tended to be more skeptical to the mainstream media, also thought citizen journalism had more credibility. Despite that, the research of Chu et al. (2016) shows that students in Hong Kong still trust the traditional media more than the new media.

4.2.3 Crowdfunding

There are different methods of gaining independence for traditional journalists. Several of the interviewed traditional journalists are optimistic about the future of crowdfunded journalism, where the organization has no revenue from advertisements and no official ‘owners’. As the traditional journalists argue that advertisers and media owners are the main reasons for self-censorship, they are positive to a crowdfunded business model like the Hong Kong Free Press and CitizenNews for the future.

Different methods crowdfunding are seen in Hong Kong. While Hong Kong Free Press (2017) mainly depends on donations, other methods including pitching stories and seeking money to cover the cost of reporting. Jian and Shin (2015) argue that crowdfunding is a reliable business model for media, explaining that it might remove the pressure from advertisers. Besides, it stresses that what to read is the choice of the public, rather than an editorial decision.

These arguments show that crowdfunding could be an alternative for the media organizations in Hong Kong, since traditional journalists claim that advertisements and editors are the main problems. However, it is also meaningful to ask whether the public always have the best judgement on which stories to choose. Jian and Shin (2015) found that most of the donors of crowdfunded journalism tend to be young and well-educated. As they point out – crowdfunded journalism should represent all the social groups in a community to be a genuine alternative to mainstream journalism. This is because the donors have the

power to decide which story is going to be researched. However, this is only a problem in the model where each story is pitched to the public before the journalists get the money to do the research.

Crowdfunded citizen media may also incur some difficulties. Because the media organization mainly relies on income from the public, the journalists depend on the stories the public wants to read about (Jian & Shin, 2015). On the other hand have the media always been dependent on writing about what interests the public.

That said, Hong Kong Free Press (2017) has also opened up for advertisements, which means that they have a business model based on both donations and advertisements. The difference from media with subscribers and advertisements is that Hong Kong Free Press is a non-profit organization. The organization is a hybrid of the model of crowdfunding and being dependent on advertisements. This makes it difficult to see the full independence they claim to have, especially if the definition of press freedom includes being independent from financial considerations (as the informants explained under 4.2). On the other hand, this goal might be nearly impossible, as the media organizations always will be dependent on a sustainable income.

Another side of being independent is the goal of having credibility among the readers. While one of the *SCMP* journalists argue that the crowdfunded organizations should make themselves politically impartial to gain credibility, others disagree. The citizen journalists in this research explain that they do not trust the traditional media because they think the media have a 'hidden agenda' by having a political stance and not being open about it. Thus, in 2014, *Apple Daily* - which is an outspoken pro-democracy paper, was ranked 17 of 22 newspapers in Hong Kong concerning credibility (South China Morning Post, 2014). However, their political stance may not be the main reason for this ranking, as they have adopted a more sensational style of journalism (So & Chan, 2007).

So and Chan (2007) explain that the interaction between being objective versus being in line with the political stance of the Hong Kong people, decides if the media will gain credibility. In Hong Kong, the pro-Beijing newspapers are perceived to have less credibility than newspapers which are more liberal (So & Chan, 2007).

4.2.4 Political stance

It is interesting to look at the different political viewpoints among journalists and media houses. When the traditional journalists are asked about the political stance of their working

place, there is a lot of ‘finger pointing’ to the other newspapers as being pro-Beijing, while their own working place is described as neutral.

An example of finger pointing within the Hong Kong media, occurs when *SCMP* is accused by all the informants (except from their own journalists) as leaning towards Beijing in their reporting. However, one of the journalists from *SCMP* explains that the *editors* have a pro-Beijing stance, but she does not see a political stance in the editorial decisions. This is similar to *Ming Pao*, where the journalist thinks editors are pro-Beijing, though he claims that his own reporting is the opposite:

“I think every paper has their own political stance. But *Ming Pao* is quite interesting: The stance of our editors is often different from the stories we run. Very often the editors are considered to be pro-Beijing and are mild in criticizing the government, but the stories we run are still very critical against the government.”

(Journalist, *Ming Pao*, personal interview, December 2, 2016)

The informant from Hong Kong Free Press explains that more and more people see ‘*The Post*’ (*SCMP*) as being more pro-Beijing and more conservative in their reporting than before. He defends the journalists, explaining that they try to report balanced and natural, but that the editors have more power. This is also seen in the latest report from Lee (2016), where 38 percent of the informants explain that the journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions has decreased.

The veteran journalist in CitizenNews explains that ‘her’ new online platform site was started because of this polarization and ‘finger pointing’ among the media in Hong Kong. Secondly, she wants citizen journalists and traditional journalists to unite. However, Lee and Lin (2006) argue that the trend of a polarized media is not new. They claim that newspapers in Hong Kong have always been classified by their political stance.

In the traditional media, the informants from Hong Kong Free Press, Quartz and *Apple Daily* explain that their working place has a political stance towards ‘pro-democracy’, while the informants from *SCMP* and *Ming Pao* maintain that the editors have a pro-Beijing stance, but they claim that it is not seen in their reporting. It may not come as a surprise that most of the informants from the citizen journalism side think their working place have a pro-democracy stance. Yet, the informants from SocRec and CitizenNews describe their working place as being neutral. This is interesting, as researchers often describe citizen journalists as being subjective and contextual (Ali & Fahmy, 2013; Blaagaard, 2013a; Carpenter, 2008).

As argued by different scholars (Lee, 2016; Lee & Chan, 2009; So & Chan, 2007), Hong Kong journalists have a high degree of professionalism. So is also the degree of self-

censorship. This means that even though the journalists strive to report neutrally, they may feel the pressure to report 'nicer', like the informant from *Ming Pao* who informed that journalists from his newspaper might do such reporting.

4.2.5 Objective reporting

When it comes to their own political stance, the journalists from both informant groups agree: Eleven out of twelve informants claim that their political stance is pro-democracy, including one of the citizen journalists who is an active member of the political party Civic Passion. The last informant (a citizen journalist) explains that he is neutral.

It might not come as a surprise that journalists have a political stance towards pro-democracy. The journalists were asked if their political stance made it difficult to report objectively, or if this is even a goal. About half of the informants explain that having a personal political view does not make it difficult to report objectively, because they claim to include the voices from both sides in every story.

Carpenter (2008) agrees with this, arguing that traditional journalists are not likely to include their own opinions in their writings. In her research of citizen journalism websites and traditional media, Carpenter found that 42.0% of citizen journalism articles included personal opinions, while only 11.2% of the traditional media reports did. However, two of the informants in the citizen journalist group argue explicitly for objective reporting. This may show that factual and objective reporting has support among citizen journalists in Hong Kong.

The remaining informants (about half) explain that reporting objectively is not a goal they strive to achieve. While the traditional journalist from Quartz explains that the ideal of being objective is only an American idea, the informant from Hong Kong Free Press sees the ideal like this:

“Right now, everyone in Hong Kong knows that it is not possible to report objectively. You still select who to interview and what you use. But you have to have opinions from both sides.”

(Journalist, Hong Kong Free Press, personal interview, November 25, 2016)

This statement underlines that the definitions of objective reporting are different. While the informant argues that it is impossible to uphold the ideal, he still maintains parts of the ideal by including voices from both sides of the story. The citizen journalist from Passion Times agrees with this view. He does not think it is possible to report fully objectively, but argues that they try to remain neutral, which involves interviewing persons with diverse opinions.

As earlier mentioned, the objectivity ideal is widely discussed in the global journalism literature. However, as many journalists have accepted that the ideal cannot be reached, it has become more of a 'performance ideal' (Blaagaard, 2013a; Carpenter, 2008). This is where the concept of *objective stance* is suitable, as the concept includes having a critical distance to the story, to report on different views and arguments, and to present the truth (Ward, 2014).

Even if it is widely discussed, the objectivity ideal is implemented in the code of ethics in Hong Kong as one of the most important ideals for the journalists (Hong Kong Press Council, 2014). The question then arises: Does it make a difference being educated within journalism when it comes to the stance towards the ideal of objective reporting? About 4 out of 6 informants who were *positive* to the ideal had a degree within journalism. On the other side, 5 out of 7 informants who said that the ideal was *not important* or not a goal for journalism, had a university degree from another subject area than journalism.

It is difficult to conclude that professionally educated journalists in Hong Kong are more positive to the objective ideal than those who are not educated in the craft. Yet, in this small sample, it is possible to observe a small tendency. On the other hand, only five of twelve informants have a degree within journalism, the other seven have not.

4.3 RQ2: Differences between the two groups of journalists

Under the second research question, the informant groups were asked to describe the differences between citizen journalists and traditional journalists. The discussion here will be split between professional and practical differences. The first question the journalists had to reflect over, was: "*What do you think about the statement 'with the new media, everyone can be a journalist?'*".

4.3.1 Professional differences

One might think that all the traditional journalists were going to be skeptical to the idea of everyone being qualified to be a journalist. However, the two informant groups are quite similar, - both of them are split. Some of the informants agree with the statement to some extent, others agree totally, and the third group completely reject it. And there is no clear pattern as to who belongs to which group. However, one of the journalists from *SCMP* sums up what seems to be the argument for most of the traditional journalists:

“I have a little bit reservation. I feel journalists still have a role to play to cross-check facts. So many times, people just take a picture and post it online, and it turns out to be a completely different story.”

(Journalist, SCMP, personal interview, November 28, 2016)

The traditional journalists who are skeptical to the statement of everyone being a journalist, typically explain the skepticism by referring to a situation where pictures or information posted online have gone wrong. Therefore, the informants express that they use a lot of time to verify information and pictures which come from citizen journalists. This is also found in the research of Örnebring (2013).

On the other hand, the traditional journalists explain that many of their former readers increasingly read or watch material produced by citizen journalists. This trend is confirmed by the Hong Kong Journalists' Association (2014), which sees the loss of credibility in traditional media as a reason. It would be intriguing to look at why the public trust citizen journalism, while traditional journalists are skeptic about its accuracy. Thus, this might be an idea for a new thesis.

Going back to the statement of everyone being a journalist (see 4.3) the journalist from *Apple Daily* highlights that he firstly has to define what a journalist is, before it is possible to give an answer. The informant explains that if a person is simply reporting what is happening, it cannot be called journalism. However, if the person is reporting on different angles and explaining different consequences, it is. What is interesting is that most of the citizen journalists use the same argument as this journalist. The citizen journalist from MyRadio explains the difference like this:

“Professional journalists tell the people what is happening, why is it happening and what the results are. Everyone can be a *citizen journalist* if they are at the right place and the right time. But it requires a lot of skills being a journalist.”

(Journalist, MyRadio, personal interview, November 23, 2016)

Is it then only the method of reporting which decides who is a ‘professional’ journalist? The traditional journalist informant from *Ming Pao* argues that the difference is found in *ethics* of the different informant groups as well. He explains that the traditional journalists have a code of ethics the citizen journalists do not have, and ethics are also included in the Lee and Chan (2009) definition of professionalism.

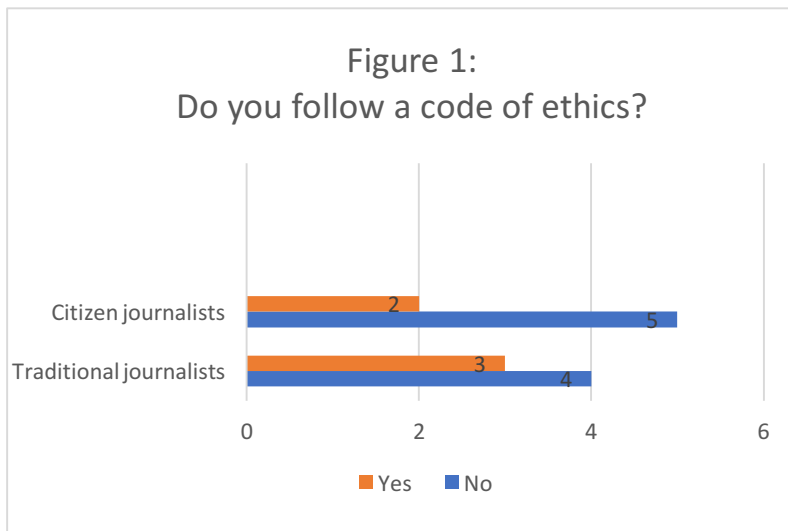


Figure 1: Overview of how many journalists from each category stating to follow a shared set of ethics.

However, when it comes to ethics, the informants in this study do not agree about the importance of an official code of ethics. While two of five citizen journalists say they follow a code of ethics, three of seven traditional journalists explain that they follow a code (see Figure 1). This means that more than half of the informants from traditional media outlets claim that they

do not follow a code. Even so, the informants have clear opinions of what their ethics are, and what they should be like. The informant from Hong Kong Free Press explains why he thinks there is no need for an official code of ethics:

“I do not even think the Hong Kong Association has a code of ethics. It is not like a very big set of ethics that you have, you learn them by working as a journalist. ‘No false information, try to have open sources.’ A lot of journalists in Hong Kong do not have a journalism degree: They learn the ethics through working.”

(Journalist, Hong Kong Free Press, personal interview, November 25, 2016)

The result is quite different from the research of Lee (2016), which found that nearly nine in ten journalists agreed that they should stick to the codes of professional ethics. But even though half of the traditional journalists in the current study do not see the importance of a written code of ethics, they do follow a set of ‘non-written’ ethics. What they rate as the most important ethical principles, are to be *accurate, do not rely on anonymous sources, no false information and being trustworthy*. The citizen journalists argue that the most important principles are to tell the truth and to not report fake news. This is also found to be the most important values for journalists across the globe, in a comparative study of 18 countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

Nine out of twelve informants are members of a journalists’ association. The informants who are not members are two citizen journalists and a freelance journalist. What is interesting, is that while the Hong Kong Press Council (2014) has an official code of ethics,

the informants refer to the same set of ethics - though without actually knowing that they are written down somewhere.

Is there a difference between the journalists who have professional education and those who have a different education in the question about code of ethics? Two out of the three traditional journalists who say they follow a code of ethics have journalism education, while one of two citizen journalists have journalism education. It is difficult to generalize these results, but the indication is that having a professional education does not necessarily imply that the journalist adhere to professional ethics, and vice versa.

Going back to the earlier mentioned statement of everyone being a journalist, the study finds that there are a couple of informants who agree to this as well. Among them is the most experienced informant, the woman who have started CitizenNews. She is among others who have exchanged to an independent online news site. In Columbia, similar trends are registered. Because of difficult times for press freedom, traditional journalists are now working for new online outlets instead of the traditional media houses (Rojas & Macafee, 2013).

“With the new technology, if you are in a certain spot and take a very newsworthy picture, at that moment – you are a journalist. You can report what you see, what you saw. That is journalism.”

(Journalist, CitizenNews, personal interview, November 28, 2016)

Even though it seems like most of the traditional journalists want to separate the role of being a journalist from that of being a citizen journalist, they all agree that citizen journalism is valuable both for them and for the public in general. Most of the traditional journalists use a sentence similar to this one to explain how valuable citizen journalists are: “*We cannot be everywhere all the time*”.

4.3.2 Practical differences

When trying to figure out the main differences between a traditional and a citizen journalist in Hong Kong, the informants are firstly asked to describe traditional journalism. They all agree that there must be an *institution* involved. They underline that traditional journalists within each organization work together, follow the same ethics and have the same ‘goals’. These traits are also found in European countries by Örnebring (2013), who highlights that the main focus is the *collectiveness* of traditional journalism.

The traditional journalists in this study all agree that the most important things to do as a journalist are monitoring the government and telling the truth. They also mention the

need to get information and to inform the public. Even though only three of seven traditional journalists explain that they follow a code of ethics, they all refer to central ethics from the official code of the Hong Kong Press Council (2014).

Some of the informants also mention that the traditional journalism is supposed to be trustworthy, but that they do not think the press in Hong Kong is successful in this area. Even the traditional journalists mention this:

“Professional journalists work for a news outlet with a long history and credibility. The traditional press try to be trustworthy, but they are not necessarily nowadays.”

(Journalist, *Ming Pao*, personal interview, December 2, 2016)

However, it is not the *journalists* the informants do not trust; it is the editors. The informant from Hong Kong Free Press explains that most of the media are reasonable, even though they have a political view. This is because he regards most of the journalists as pro-democratic, even though their editors are not.

There is also a lot of discussion among the informants about the political standpoint of the different newspapers. Several of the citizen journalists define six newspapers as being pro-government (among them is *SCMP*), while *Ming Pao* is the only newspaper described as being neutral, and the only newspaper recognized as pro-democracy is *Apple Daily*. What is interesting is that while the citizen journalists define *Ming Pao* as being neutral, Reporters Without Borders (2016c) argue that censorship has become a routine at the newspaper. However, the informant from the particular newspaper argues the same way as one of the informants from *SCMP*: It is the editors who are pro-Beijing, not the reporting.

Hong Kong Journalists' Association (2015) asked 537 journalists to evaluate the level of self-censorship on a scale from 1 to 10. Where value 1 represents no self-censorship, and 10 a high amount of self-censorship, the journalists gave an average score of 7. On the other side of the table, we find the journalists who are accused of writing for a newspaper who self-censor and has a political stance towards Beijing. These journalists have a high degree of professionalism, and see it as an issue that they are not trusted among the public. Among them are the journalists in *SCMP*, where one of the informants explain that the editors are pro-Beijing, but she does not think it affects the routines in the newsroom.

“People have a perception that The South China Morning Post is pro-Beijing, and it is very frustrating. It is also quite sad. I don't like finger pointing, but people are trusting the social media instead.”

(Journalist, *SCMP*, personal interview, November 28, 2016)

It is therefore interesting that no other than *SCMP* was ranked to be the newspaper with the most credibility in Hong Kong three years ago (South China Morning Post, 2014). However, one year after the ranking, the Chinese business man Jack Ma bought the newspaper, and to *New York Times* he then explained that a motivation for buying the newspaper was to improve the image of China (Barboza, 2015).

In terms of editorial intervention, all the traditional journalists explain that they have people proofreading their work before publishing. These people are mostly the editors of the newspapers. However, the informants all agree that if anything is amended, it is mainly language and grammar, seldom the angle of the news story.

When the informants are asked to describe *citizen journalism*, most of the traditional journalists mention that the concept includes random people taking pictures and posting it online. Thus, while studies often focus on *individuality* (Örnebring, 2013), all the citizen journalists in the current study are organized in one way or another. They see their most important job as informing the readers and to tell the truth. One of them also argue for the importance of fast reporting, which none of the traditional journalists regards as particularly important.

However, the informant from Hong Kong Free Press does not give citizen journalism much credibility. He argues that there is no concept of citizen journalism in Hong Kong, and he shares this view with the key informants in the study, namely professor Steve Zhongshi Guo and PhD candidate Florin Serban.

“You rarely talk with people who think they are citizen journalists: They just think they are active on social media. They do not have to follow rules or anything”, the informant from Hong Kong Free Press explains.

(Journalist, Hong Kong Free Press, personal interview, November 25, 2016)

The citizen journalists interviewed in the research do not agree with the three informants arguing that there is no concept called citizen journalism in Hong Kong. They see themselves as citizen journalists, describing the concept as being free from political and commercial pressure, while they also see it as a reaction to the loss of credibility and trust among the traditional media.

Most of the citizen journalists explain that they have people proofreading before publishing, which means they have some ‘rules’ after all. This again, indicates that citizen journalism has somewhat professionalized its process.

Blaagaard (2013b) argues that most citizen journalism is situational and contextual. This means that citizen journalists are ‘allowed’ to be subjective, and to use their personal

experience in their reporting (Blaagaard, 2013a; Carpenter, 2008). This does not necessarily have to be negative. For example, the objectivity ideal is criticized for being an excuse for not being critical to the government, but referring to 'hard facts' instead (Lee & Lin, 2006). Therefore, subjective journalism may also contribute to press freedom.

This view is supported by most of the traditional journalists. The informant from *Ming Pao* explains that the citizen journalists may not have to go through a verification process, and that they may also include their political view in their reporting. He highlights that most of the traditional media in Hong Kong are now considered to be pro-Beijing, and that one of the differences between different reporting formats is that citizen journalists are open about their political view, while the newspapers are not.

The citizen journalist from MyRadio maintains that he would trust the traditional media if they only were more open about their political stance. It comes as no surprise that he supports a more subjective reporting style: "I do not say we want to change the world, we simply want to change Hong Kong", he explains.

Researchers like Gillmor (2004) praise a more democratic way of news reporting. Also, informants from *Apple Daily* and *SCMP* are positive to citizen journalism.

"I see journalism in Hong Kong as a cooperation. It happens quite often that people see something and upload it on Facebook – and then the traditional media write about it. We do not have the resources to station everyone everywhere, so citizen journalists help us a lot."

(Journalist, *SCMP*, personal interview, November 28, 2016)

On the other side, there are traditional journalists who are more skeptic to the citizen journalists. Among them is The Hong Kong Journalists Association (2015), which argues that citizen journalism is a significant challenge to the traditional media and its declining readership. Carr et al. (2014, p. 453) point to problems of ethical and professional standards which tend to surround alternative forms of journalism, arguing "more information does not necessarily increase the quality of information".

The freelance journalist in this study agrees with the statement. She defines citizen journalism as such: "Random people writing things, exposing things that are not particularly spectacular or important." The informant from *Apple Daily*, however, underlines that citizen journalism are independent news, and that it serves as a supplement to the traditional media. He argues that because the media have different considerations, citizen journalism can be more 'free'.

However, the information shared by citizen journalists may not necessarily be new.

Even though most of the traditional journalists explain that they must read reports from citizen journalists because there could be valuable news in them, sometimes the reports coming from citizen journalists actually stem from stories in the traditional news media. Hong Kong Journalists' Association (2014, p. 22) therefore argues that citizen journalism “cannot *totally* make up for declining press freedom”. What the local journalist association explains, is that if the news coming from citizen journalists relies on traditional media houses, they may also reproduce material which have been subject to self-censorship.

4.3.3 Summarizing the differences

To sum up the differences between the two groups of journalists: The attitudes are split both in global research and in Hong Kong (e.g. Blaagaard, 2013a; Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Örnebring, 2013). Not surprisingly, the opinions about the differences between citizen journalism and traditional journalism in this research are also split.

However, the findings in this study indicates that the informants think there is a clear division between *organization* (traditional journalism) and *individuals* (citizen journalism). This is also mentioned by the European journalists surveyed by Örnebring (2013).

Thus, most of the traditional journalists are positive to citizen journalism. Although they are skeptical to fake news, they argue that citizen journalism is a genuine contribution for the society. This is partly because of the freedom the citizen journalists have, as they are seldom being censored by editors (c.f. Korson, 2015).

However, both traditional and citizen journalists distance the latter group from the professionals. Some of the traditional journalists highlight the difference of ethics, especially the ideal of being objective and subjective. Here, one of the informants from *SCMP* describes the difference as the ‘burden’ of being neutral for traditional journalists, versus the citizen journalists which he thinks have the opportunity to be subjective. However, he does not think it is healthy with a polarized media scene with lots of opinions, and therefore he hopes that citizen journalism will become more neutral and balanced.

This is also seen in a study of Dutch journalists by Pantti and Bakker (2009). The study reveals that traditional journalists distance themselves from citizen journalists by referring to their judgement of what is relevant or accurate (i.e. editorial judgement); the difference of having ethical codes versus not having any codes; and the different verification processes.

On the contrary, the findings in the current research show that the informant groups are not that different when it comes to the view of ethics and objectivity. Even if citizen

journalists are seen to be freer to express their subjectivity, two citizen journalists explain that they strive to present the truth and to let the facts speak. The rest of the citizen journalists explain that they actively strive to make Hong Kong better (by being subjective). However, all the traditional journalists claim that they always strive to be neutral and balanced in their reporting, which underscores that balanced reporting is a stronger trend in traditional journalism than citizen journalism.

What is common for the two groups of journalists in Hong Kong is the ethical value of telling the truth. This is also seen in global journalism ethics which describes it as central to the profession (Hanitzsch et al., 2013). In his study of ethical codes in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and Muslim Asia, Hafez (2002) found international agreement about the importance of truth. However, he also found the importance of reporting objectively. In this question, the Hong Kong journalists are more split, even though they also have it written down in their official code of ethics (Hong Kong Press Council, 2014)

Some of the informants also refer to citizen journalism as being beyond fact-checking and without any 'rules'. While all the traditional journalists explain that their editors proofread their work before publishing, four of the five citizen journalists say the same. This might be different if the citizen journalists had operated as *individuals* and not as organized enterprises like in this research. However, it may also show that citizen journalism is more professionalized than the average journalist thinks.

An example of this is that citizen journalism is often being referred to as 'amateur reporting' (Carr et al., 2014; Korson, 2015; Örnebring, 2013). In this study, two of the persons engaged in citizen journalism in Hong Kong are educated within journalism, and have experience from the field. However, they have chosen to work with citizen journalism instead of traditional journalism. The woman who started CitizenNews does not want to work in traditional media anymore, because she thinks the media polarization in Hong Kong damages press freedom.

Finally, one point of difference is that while traditional journalists are paid for their labor, citizen journalists have it as a second job, often without getting paid. This is a shared view among the informants. This was also a criterion for choosing the citizen journalist informants in the thesis.

As highlighted earlier, the sampling of informants in this research is fairly small, which makes it difficult to generalize the differences and similarities to a larger number of journalists. Yet, compared with other literature, it is possible to see both differences and similarities with other findings. The next research question will look further into the attitudes between the two groups of journalists.

4.4 RQ3: Attitudes towards the other group

To find out the attitudes towards the 'other' informant group, a series of questions were asked to the different groups (see *Appendix 1*). One question, however, was only asked to the traditional journalists, namely whether they feel citizen journalism challenges them in some way.

4.4.1 Views of the traditional journalists

Four of the seven journalists admit that they see citizen journalism as a challenge. The informant from *Apple Daily* explain this by pointing to the freedom the citizen journalists have, as they do not have to take the same precautions as the traditional journalists.

“The readers will hesitate to trust the traditional media because they will not write about something the citizen journalists will do. But the citizen journalists only report from one side of the story; which is nothing positive about the government.”

(Journalist, *SCMP*, personal interview, November 30, 2016)

Do the traditional media lose credibility and trust because they have a goal to report in a balanced manner? As one of the main ideas behind the objectivity ideal is to receive credibility (Chung & Nah, 2013), it is interesting to note that the traditional journalists in Hong Kong feel that they are losing credibility instead of gaining it. Another factor for receiving credibility is when the media report in line with the opinions of the Hong Kong public, which can be compared with the view of the informant from *Apple Daily* (So & Chan, 2007).

But not only do the traditional journalists see citizen journalists as a challenge because of their credibility - another factor is the speed of reporting. The informant from *Ming Pao* thinks the pressure on traditional journalists would be less if the information would not have to be published as fast as today. He thinks citizen journalists exacerbate this pressure, as they often do live-reporting and post instant comments about incidents.

In the latest country report of Hong Kong journalists, Lee (2016) found that 81 and 73 percent of the respondents believe social media and user-generated content have influenced journalism, respectively. The respondents also explain that they have less time to do research than before, which supports the view of the journalist from *Ming Pao*. However, this is a global trend, and is not only visible in Hong Kong (Bakker, 2012).

On the contrary, the traditional journalists feel that they have to follow the news content produced by citizen journalists, and all the traditional journalists explain they continuously read or watch news which is produced by citizens. Even so, they are cautious about using and referring to the citizen news reports.

The journalist from Quartz is one of them, referring to the problem of 'fake news'. This means, according to the traditional journalists, that they use a lot of time verifying videos and news coming from social media and citizen journalists. But they still often use citizen journalism as a reference.

"We need to watch different organizations. They will have different angles and sources, and we will often follow up their stories. Some of the citizen journalists are maybe lawyers, and they will tell the latest development on Facebook, for example."

(Journalist, *Apple Daily*, personal interview, December 2, 2016)

The traditional journalists explain they fight for press freedom every day by doing their daily job. Some of the informants think it is a rather passive fight, whereas others think it is a daily struggle. Among them is the informant from *Ming Pao*, who see it as a daily fight both inside and outside of the news organization. Inside, he describes it as a fight every time the journalists pitch a story to the editors, outside, it is a fight to get information from the government.

However, the informant from Hong Kong Free Press explains that Hong Kong still is 'partly free', as described by press freedom organizations as well (Freedom House, 2017; Reporters Without Borders, 2016a). This means, according to the journalist, that they are allowed to ask questions to organizations and politicians, and that it is not a big problem to get information.

That said, the traditional journalists say they do not have the time to cover everything and to be everywhere, which means that citizen journalists fill some of the gap and thereby contribute to upholding press freedom. This is possible because citizens are not obliged to make the same considerations as the media organizations do, like being objective and thinking about financial and political pressure. Because of that, the traditional journalists agree that the 'new group' of journalists has a contribution to make in the fight for press freedom. The informant from *Ming Pao* point to their role as opinion leaders on the Internet, deciding what the netizens and social media users shall talk about.

One of the reporters from *SCMP* thinks the two groups of journalists can supplement each other. She explains this by pointing to a possible cooperation: While the traditional

journalists collect reactions from both sides of a story, the citizen journalists can help spreading it to the mass audience.

“I do not want to see the parts against each other. I do not want the traditional media criticizing them for being amateurs. At the same time, I do not want citizen journalists criticizing traditional media for being old, conservative, pro-Beijing and not important.”

(Journalist, SCMP, personal interview, November 28, 2016)

4.4.2 Views of the citizen journalists

Even though some of the citizen journalists state that the media are conservative and pro-Beijing, all of them watch news which is produced by traditional journalists. However, four out of five explain that they do not necessarily trust the media. “*Nowadays, I do not really need to read newspapers. I find everything on Facebook*”, the informant from Resistance Live says.

While another informant from MyRadio argues that the traditional press is not contributing to press freedom at all, the rest of the citizen journalists disagree. They argue that the frontline reporters are fighting for it, but that the senior reporters and editors are not. But even if *Ming Pao* and *Apple Daily* are the only newspapers seen as actively fighting for press freedom among the citizen journalists, they still think the rest of the traditional media are important.

“Citizen journalism do not have enough resources. We can only supplement traditional journalism. They are trying to report on the issue, we are trying to adjust what they are doing.”

(Journalist, Passion Times, personal interview, November 25, 2016)

Anyhow, the informants from the ‘new media’ think they contribute to press freedom because of their opportunity to present different views. They see themselves as a supplement to the traditional media houses, trying to let the society speak. This is in line with the opinion of Yung and Leung (2014).

What the different informant groups have in common is that they socialize a lot with other journalists. Eleven informants say that they are often hanging out with colleagues. And the ‘colleagues’ do not have to belong to the same informant group. About half of the informants from traditional journalism disclose that they have friends among citizen journalists, while the other group all have friends working as traditional journalist. This means that only two of twelve journalists do not have any friends from the other group of informants.

4.4.3 Summary of the attitudes

To sum up, the findings from RQ3 show that all the traditional journalists continuously follow the reports from citizen journalists. They are, however, a bit skeptical to referring to them and using them as their main source, as they are uncertain of the verification. The citizen journalists do not trust the traditional media either, but explain that they still read and watch news produced by them.

It is interesting that while the traditional journalists are skeptic about the verification process and objectivity of the citizen journalists, they do not mention independence as a problem. This is different from the study of Paulussen and Ugille (2008), where the independence of the citizen journalists are questioned by the interviewed journalists.

On the contrary, the informants are skeptical to the independence of the traditional media, pointing to political attitudes towards Beijing and self-censorship. None of the informants complains about the independence of media organizations which claim to be pro-democracy (e.g. Hong Kong Free Press, *Apple Daily*). Again, it is intriguing to compare this with the method of gaining credibility through reporting in line with the opinions of the public (So & Chan, 2007). However, it is difficult to demonstrate whether the pro-democracy public gives citizen journalism and pro-democracy newspapers more credibility than others.

Both informant groups see each other as fighting for press freedom. The groups also agree that citizen journalism is a supplement to the traditional media, sometimes covering items the other group does not necessarily cover. And even if the citizen journalists are skeptical to the editors of the traditional press, they clearly express that traditional journalists are *trying* to fight for press freedom - but that their hands are tied.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

What the thesis have sought to discuss, is whether citizen journalism is a viable alternative to the traditional press in Hong Kong when press freedom is under threat. The issue could have been researched by using other methods. However, the thesis focused on the personal opinions and experiences of citizen journalists versus traditional journalists in Hong Kong, based on three research questions: RQ1: How do traditional and citizen journalists respectively experience the press freedom situation in Hong Kong? RQ2: What are the differences between traditional journalists and citizen journalists in terms of role perception? RQ3: What attitude does each of the two groups – citizen journalists and traditional journalists – have of the other group?

5.1 Is citizen journalism an alternative?

This findings of the study indicate that citizen journalism can be highly valuable in a society where press freedom is in decline. This conclusion is based on the suggestions by the traditional journalists themselves. Declining press freedom in Hong Kong is evident in international rankings (Freedom House, 2017; Reporters Without Borders, 2017a), and the pressure felt by the journalists seems to be high. They portray a situation where they are caught in an ideological trap between being dependent on advertising revenue and their ideological commitment to an independent press (as described by Lau & To, 2002). As predictions for the future of press freedom, descriptions like ‘uncertain’, ‘hopeless’ and ‘bad’ are given.

The research findings also indicate that there is a trust issue both ways for the informant groups. Neither of the groups completely trust the traditional media, nor do they trust citizen journalism to be a sufficient replacement. The main reason highlighted by the informants for not trusting the traditional media in Hong Kong is the high degree of self-censorship among journalists, and there seems to be a discussion among the journalists of which media house is self-censoring the most. But even though some informants are skeptical to citizen journalism, both informant groups highlight the importance of citizen journalism as a supplement to the traditional media in a time of pressure on press freedom.

As a ‘hybrid’ of traditional journalism and citizen journalism, the informant groups seem to be optimistic about alternative methods of financing the news media, to make them more independent. As several new media houses in Hong Kong have been established by

crowdfunding, this is a method worth recognizing. The local journalist association shares this view, arguing that it is possible for crowdfunded media to survive in Hong Kong, because the public supposedly wants more independent news (Hong Kong Journalists' Association, 2016). On the contrary, it is a persisting question whether it is possible to be fully independent, as the media always will depend on revenue.

CitizenNews is crowdfunded, and is also one of the new media platforms having implemented a type of 'layered journalism'. The concept denotes that traditional and citizen journalists are gathered in the same organization in a collaboration (Ward, 2014). Because of the more blurred lines between citizen journalism and traditional journalism, Domingo et al. (2008) argue that there is need for a new definition of professionalism.

The two informant groups explain the main differences between citizen journalists and traditional journalists to be a) the individual journalist versus an organized group of people, b) difference in ethics, and c) different methods of fact-checking. The findings, however, indicate that citizen journalists in Hong Kong are often organized in a group, they are committed to follow certain ethical codes, and they have a method of fact-checking.

However, the traditional journalists are still skeptical to the methods of verification of news by citizen journalists, and seldom use their reports as the main source. On the contrary, they admit that they have to follow citizen journalists to catch up with their reports, and they also highlight that citizen journalism is valuable for press freedom. Even though the citizen journalists are skeptical towards the traditional media, they explain that they know that the journalists try to fight for press freedom, but that their hands are tied.

How is the future of journalism in Hong Kong? To fight for press freedom, one must firstly have the autonomy to do it. A compelling way of gaining autonomy is to grab what appears to be the main problems hindrance, by its roots. As the main hindrance is seen to be pressure from owners and advertisers, a non-profit crowdfunded media organization is an intriguing method of achieving more autonomy.

On the contrary, it might be difficult for the established media organizations to fight for more independence this way. Therefore, a collaboration with the people having independence, hence the citizen journalists, is necessary for the future of quality journalism in Hong Kong. Even if the citizen journalists cannot *replace* traditional journalism in the HKSAR, it is certainly a valuable alternative when press freedom is decreasing. As expressed by one of the informants from SCMP: "Even if the newspapers are censored, the Internet is luckily not".

5.2 Further research

Further research of citizen journalism should focus on the production method of news, like the research of Wang and Mark (2013). Secondly, it should study the media content produced by citizen journalists versus traditional journalists in areas where press freedom is under pressure. This way, it would be possible to get more knowledge about the potential of citizen journalism in these areas.

Chapter 6: References

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7.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

- Name
- Age
- Education
- Where do you work?
- Do you work as a journalist as a full-time job?
- How many years of experience do you have within this field/ your working place?

RQ1: How do traditional and citizen journalists respectively experience the press freedom situation in Hong Kong?

- 1) How do you define “press freedom”?
- 2) Do you feel that these qualities/ descriptions are expressed within the Hong Kong media? - Yes (How?) - No (Why not?)
- 3) How would you describe the press freedom situation in Hong Kong?
- 4) How do you and your colleagues work to sustain press freedom?
- 5) Who are deciding what to publish?
- 6) Is your work often changed after you have written it?
- 7) What topics do you usually write about?
- 8) Do you feel that you can write about anything you want?
- 9) How do you describe the future of journalism in Hong Kong?
- 10) Have any of your coworkers experienced self-censorship?
(Only asked four traditional journalists)

Personal:

- 1) Do you think your working place has a clear political stance?)
- 2) Can you tell me about your political stance?
- 3) Does this make it difficult to report ‘objective’?

RQ2: What are the differences between traditional journalists and citizen journalists in terms of role perception?

- 1) What do you think about the statement “with the new media, everyone can be a journalist”?
- 2) How do you describe traditional journalism?
- 3) How do you describe citizen journalism?
- 4) What do you describe as your most important job as a journalist? (inform, entertain?)
- 5) Do you have a code of ethics? What do you describe as the most important ethics?
- 6) How do you select what to write about? (selection criteria?)
- 7) Are there any people proofreading your work or checking your sources before publishing?
- 8) What do you think are the main differences between citizen journalism and traditional journalism?

RQ3: What attitude does each of the two groups - citizen journalists and traditional journalists - have of the other group?

Traditional journalists:

- 9) Do you read or watch/ or use/ news which is produced by citizen journalists?
- 10) Do you feel that the citizen journalists challenge you? If yes, in what way?
- 11) How do you feel that traditional journalists are contributing to press freedom?
- 12) How do you feel that citizen journalists are contributing to press freedom?

Citizen journalists:

- 13) Do you read or watch news produced by traditional journalists?
- 14) How do you feel that traditional journalists are contributing to press freedom?
- 15) How do you feel that citizen journalists are contributing to press freedom?

Both:

- 1) Do you often socialize with other journalists?
- 2) Are you part of a journalist association?
- 3) Do you have any friends who work as a traditional journalist/ or citizen journalist?