

## **Unbound Journalism: Interloper Media and the Emergence of Fortune-Telling Journalism**

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This study examines how interloper media are challenging the boundaries of journalism by offering new imaginations of what journalism could be. By conducting a case study of the left-leaning political YouTube channel Rhyu Si-min's AlliLeo, this study shows how it could create intimate emotional ties between its host/guests and audiences by using unique rhetorical strategies that stress authenticity and sincerity. This study also reveals how the YouTube-based journalistic interloper could successfully position itself within the boundaries of Korean journalism by transforming the traditional norm of journalism as *truth-telling* and the ideal role of journalists as *truth-tellers* into *uncertainty-resolving* and *fortune-tellers*, respectively. It then critically evaluates the possible social and political implications and the conceivable consequences of this transition for the future of journalism and for society at large.

*Keywords: interloper media, journalistic practice, YouTube, Korean journalism*

Amid the decline of the quantity and quality of journalism worldwide, especially the standard of watchdog journalism, combined with technical challenges and a widespread distrust toward the role of mainstream journalists, the boundaries of journalism are constantly blurred. In this context, diverse "actors doing journalism but . . . not (yet) considered journalists" (Tandoc, 2019, p. 139) have been considered agents of change in the journalism realm. These segments that Eldridge (2018) has called interlopers range from individuals such as Web analysts, app developers, YouTube creators, bloggers, and citizen journalists to organizations such as WikiLeaks and Breitbart. A consistent theme found in current journalism studies is that a new set of journalistic practices has been created amid the tensions between these emerging journalistic actors and traditional ones.

At issue in this study is how explicit interlopers (Holton & Belair-Gagnon, 2018) are challenging the boundaries of journalism with an aggressive push to construct their authority by offering new imaginations of what journalism could be. To explore this, guided by Bourdieu's (1998, 2005) field theory

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and conceptual and empirical research on the changing boundaries of journalism, we conduct a case study of the left-leaning political YouTube channel Rhyu Si-min's AlliLeo. We identify its production styles, content compositions, and rhetorical strategies that intensify the persuasive power of the show's host, Rhyu Si-min, and his guests. Our analysis will show how Rhyu Si-min's AlliLeo creates intimate emotional ties between its host/guests and audiences by using unique rhetorical strategies that stress authenticity and sincerity. This study also reveals how the YouTube-based journalistic interloper could successfully position itself within the boundaries of Korean journalism by transforming the traditional norm of professional journalism as *truth-telling* and the ideal role of professional journalists as *truth-tellers* into *uncertainty-resolving* and *fortune-tellers*, respectively.

### **The Journalistic Field and Professionalism**

To explore how emerging actors gain authority in the boundaries of journalism, it is useful to conceptualize journalism as a professional field in which a particular group of social actors gather, integrated around a certain traditional core. Since Bourdieu (2005) defined journalism as a venue for cultural production and social power, multiple journalism scholars have explained the process of creating and maintaining the boundaries of journalism through the process of journalists' "professional project," meaning the process of establishing legitimacy for their role of supplying knowledge to society in the form of news (Anderson, 2019).

Journalistic professionalism is not a natural or fixed element, but rather a historical one (Carlson, 2017). Journalistic expertise is a set of values, strategies, and codes that defines a member as a part of the press. It creates a professional culture, providing a means for journalists to think, act, and speak about themselves and their work (Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008). Professional ideals, such as autonomy from the market, independence from the government, and objectivity, serve as sources of regulation for journalists. In this way, journalists internalize a common mindset toward journalism and evaluate good journalists and appropriate articles in a similar way. For example, journalists in the United States, as well as in the Republic of Korea, share similar beliefs about objective reporting. Summarized as "the world is observable from a distance" (Carlson, 2017, p. 42), this belief provides an observation-based coverage technique and a practical system for converting the observation into news. This belief also serves as a basis for why journalism has social value (Eldridge, 2018). Historically, journalism has been seen as the fourth estate, justifying its rights to observe the world from a distance and inform the public of these observations in an objective and neutral manner. Society's acknowledgment and recognition of the roles of journalists, their cultural products, and their narratives give authority to the press (Carlson, 2017).

### **Interlopers and Their Challenges to the Boundaries of Journalism**

Using Bourdieu's field theory as the framework to understand the journalistic field allows us to understand how journalists have used exclusivity to sustain their social roles. It also reveals how and against whom emerging journalistic actors will be competing in the journalistic field. According to Bourdieu (2005), any actor in a professional field, whether at the core or at the periphery, implicitly or explicitly agrees to be "participating in the same game" (p. 36). Emerging journalistic actors thus necessarily participate in the

game within the journalistic field with the already established professional culture, under the influence of rules created and maintained by authoritative actors—namely, traditional journalists (S. C. Lewis, 2012).

In some cases, emerging actors tend to create collaborative or dependent relations with traditional journalists, because they do not threaten the traditional structure of journalism. This type of nontraditional journalism actor—for instance, Web analytics professionals and programmers (Belair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; S. C. Lewis & Usher, 2013)—contributes to professional journalism by making news content better suited to the characteristics of digital media while preserving traditional journalistic values. They are thus generally welcomed by central actors in the journalistic field. In addition, some work within news organizations without the title or role of a journalist. Although emerging journalistic actors of this type, whom Holton and Belair-Gagnon (2018) called intralopers, may cause tension in news organizations centered on journalists, they are not considered an explicit threat to journalistic authority because their expertise generally supplements and complements the work of journalists.

In other cases, emerging actors explicitly challenge traditional norms and practices of journalism by participating in the production and distribution of news or newslike content. These *explicit interlopers* (Holton & Belair-Gagnon, 2018) are wrestling to figure out what it means to be a journalist, what journalistic roles they have to or want to play, and how they can position themselves within the boundaries of journalism. Explicit interlopers often identify themselves as a means of correction for the mainstream news media, and they use this role rhetorically to find their place in the journalistic field. For example, several right-leaning alternative media outlets in Western societies argue that the mainstream media are unfair toward certain political perspectives, individuals, and groups (Nygaard, 2020). These interlopers attempt to define themselves as actors who correct this politically lopsided media market. Another example is the case of political influencers or micro-celebrities on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram (R. Lewis, 2020). These social media influencers have created a loose network among themselves, criticizing traditional journalists for only dealing with issues that fit into the so-called social justice perspective—for instance, feminism and LGBTQ activism—hence arguing that they are more credible news sources (R. Lewis, 2020). These explicit interlopers have recently boasted the significance of micro-celebrity cultural elements—such as relatability, authenticity, and individuality—to establish trust among young news users, contrasting themselves with characteristics of traditional journalists, including as distance, inauthenticity, and formality (R. Lewis, 2020). In this case, they tend to use suggestive language and silence dissenting voices, claiming that this is more truthful than legacy media, whose journalists pretend to be nice and polite to maintain audiences.

The performance of journalistic acts by interlopers, plus their definitional control over what journalism is, could expand the boundaries of journalism by bringing new norms, practices, technologies, and individuals into the core of the journalistic field. For example, unlike journalists who have achieved journalistic authority by distancing themselves from the target of observation and by enhancing the collective authority of the journalistic community over individual journalists (Carlson, 2017), bloggers in the early 2000s claimed that they had the right to modify the reality created by the media by inserting themselves and their observations and experiences into the process of news production (Robinson, 2009). Today, around 20 years later, blogs are commonly seen on news sites, and the “activist spirit” that once energized citizen journalists on the blogosphere has disappeared (Carlson, 2019, p. 3). Professional

journalists have also normalized the norms and practices of participatory culture, such as transparency (Singer, 2005), and utilized it rhetorically to assert their journalistic authority. For example, *Caliphate*, a podcast published by *The New York Times*, makes itself seem more authentic by exposing momentary failures of journalists in their coverage process to the listeners, while consolidating the host's persona as a professional journalist by showing qualities such as courage, empathy, and judgment (Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau, 2021).

### **YouTube and the Challenge to Korean Journalism**

Digital news consumption is continually growing in most countries (Newman, Fletcher, Schulz, Andl, & Nielsen, 2020), and YouTube is at the center of this trend. South Korea, in particular, is a country with high YouTube usage for news consumption. According to the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2020), the proportion of Koreans who use YouTube as a source of news has been continually increasing and notably high. In 2020, while the average rate of the use of YouTube for news in 40 countries surveyed by the institute was 27%, the rate in Korea was 45%—a 7% increase from 2019. Further, in most countries surveyed by Reuters Institute in 2019 (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019), the ratio of the use of YouTube for news decreased with age; however, Koreans tend to use YouTube for news regardless of age.

This trend has established YouTube as a crucial space where various media actors—from mainstream news organizations to digital native news media to individual creators—compete to attract news users (Keum & Park, 2020). According to Nielsen Korea (as cited in Jung, 2019a), in April 2019, 306 news channels on YouTube in Korea had more than 10,000 subscribers; of these, 150 were operated by individual creators and 62 were operated by digital native news media companies. A total of 56 channels were run by traditional media companies, and 38 channels were run by social media influencers or traditional celebrities. Among the news videos that these 306 channels produced, the top 0.1% by views accounted for 20.7% of the total views; interestingly, those channels operated by social media influencers, especially political and ideological influencers, were the most successful in terms of views.

Because YouTube serves as a platform that allows anyone to supply news videos regardless of whether they adhere to journalistic standards, there has been tension between traditional and emerging journalistic practices. According to the survey conducted by Nielsen Korea in 2019 (as cited in Jung, 2019a), what Korean news users most expect from news videos on YouTube is "fun, frolic, and frivolity" (para. 15), not credibility or information. On YouTube, the more news videos break from the norm of objectivity, the more views they get (Peer & Ksiazek, 2011). Given this tendency, both professional journalists and untrained, nontraditional journalistic creators are, at least in part, likely to bypass traditional journalistic standards, possibly ushering in emerging practices on how to produce news videos on YouTube.

### **Defining AlliLeo: An Explicit Interloper**

Among Korean YouTube channels producing journalistic content, Rhyu Si-min's AlliLeo (hereafter, AlliLeo) may be one of the frontrunners in terms of its popularity among news audiences and impact on the Korean journalistic field. This study considers AlliLeo an explicit interloper—"non-traditional journalism

actors who may not necessarily be welcomed or defined as journalists and work on the periphery of the profession while directly contributing content or products to the creation and distribution of news” (Holton & Belair-Gagnon, 2018, p. 73)—challenging the legitimacy of mainstream media.

Since launching in January 2019, AlliLeo has been seen, particularly by right-leaning media, as a “biased” talk show defending the current Moon Jae-in government rather than a news show (cf. Kim, 2019). The producer of the program, Yoo Jiyeon, strongly denied this in an interview:

We are conducting thorough fact-checking in the program production process. . . . If journalism is to gather facts, take a standpoint, and comment on current topics, we are doing journalism. . . . But I don't want to just say that we are a part of established journalism. Now, journalism must be redefined. A new form of journalism is coming. (Jung, 2019b, para. 12)

The channel’s host, Rhyu Si-min, also publicly calls himself a “YouTube journalist” (Keum & Park, 2020, para. 1), although he has never been trained as a journalist. While the channel has gained huge popularity, with 1.13 million YouTube subscribers at the time of analysis, ranking 13th among News & Politics YouTube channels in Korea, he seemingly has earned public trust as a journalist. In a 2019 survey of Korean news users conducted by the weekly news magazine *Sisa In*, Rhyu Si-min was ranked second in the Most Trusted Journalists category (Jang, 2019).

Given that trust in the news in Korea has been consistently the lowest level in the world (Newman et al., 2020), this rapid rise of Rhyu Si-min as a trusted journalist seems to have implications for the changing boundaries of Korean journalism. In what way does AlliLeo challenge the boundaries of Korean journalism? How could AlliLeo establish trust and authority as a journalistic actor, despite such explicitly revealed partiality? What are the characteristics of the show’s production styles and content compositions compared with traditional standards? Through which presentation and rhetorical strategies does AlliLeo deliver the news? How could these strategies intensify the persuasive power of the show’s host and its guests?

### Methods

We conducted a qualitative textual analysis (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008), particularly concerning how the explicit interloper AlliLeo is different from mainstream news media in terms of its production styles and content compositions. We selected 15 programs, including 11 programs that have more than 1 million views, two programs with Rhyu himself as a guest, and two programs that focus on the topic of the reformation of Korean journalism, given its high relevance to our research topic. For preparing analysis, the researchers thoroughly rewatched 15 programs and respectively wrote the initial reflection memos during the screening time. When writing the initial reflection memos, we used Peer and Ksiazek’s (2011) “production elements,” including shooting, editing, and sound style, and “content elements,” including tone, decorum, fairness, agenda, sourcing, and professional language as “heuristic” referents. Even though Peer and Ksiazek (2011) originally constructed these elements as quantitative variables for a strict measurement, we used them as qualitative codes only for an explorative guide for our initial analysis. During our analysis,

the following elements emerged: frank and casual tone, simple and accessible language usage, provisioning clear and easy logics for explaining complicated policy issues, and using succinct analogies. Besides these characteristics, we could also find its unique rhetorical strategies intensifying the persuasive power of the show's host and its guests, such as stressing "authenticity" and "sincerity" and employing "possession." These strategies can be identified as "certain genres or recurrent patterns of interests, goals and shared assumptions that become embedded in persuasive texts" (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 41). To examine what kinds of responses are provoked by these identified rhetorical strategies, additionally, we collected the 10 most "popular" comments from each program's YouTube page, so a total of 150 audience comments were thematically analyzed and cross-matched with identified rhetorical strategies.

### **Setting AlliLeo: Casual Broadcasting Style for Top-Notch Experts**

The main host of AlliLeo, Rhyu Si-min, is a renowned former South Korean politician who served as the 44th Minister of Health and Welfare and as a member of the National Assembly during the Rho Moo-hyun government. Rhyu also has a long career as a best-selling author and a broadcaster of current affairs and political commentaries.

Rhyu is currently serving as chairman of the board of the Rho Moo-hyun Foundation, and AlliLeo started its broadcasting as the official YouTube channel of the foundation in January 2019 (Jung, 2019b). AlliLeo currently holds 1.13 million subscribers, and its main audiences tend to be strong supporters and proponents of the current ruling party, the Democratic Party of Korea, and lean toward relatively progressive and liberal political orientations and propensities. AlliLeo consists of two program segments: the main recorded broadcast, *AlliLeo*, and the livestreamed broadcast, *AlliLeo Live*. Every week, one of each program segment is updated on YouTube, and the duration of the broadcast is generally 60–90 minutes. Both programs typically share a format in which a certain guest(s) is interviewed by Rhyu, and sometimes Rhyu himself becomes a guest and expresses his own opinions about a particular political issue or governmental policy.

The visual configuration of AlliLeo reflects a natural setting for a radio studio. In other words, the broadcast is conducted in a much more casual way than the mainstream broadcasting stations' news broadcasts. However, it is not a program produced by novices or amateurs—it has its own production team consisting of 10 professional crews who handle planning, production, scriptwriting, editing, and shooting.

Because AlliLeo is essentially a political and current affairs broadcast, it mainly deals with public affairs topics and recent political issues. Moreover, the program is hosted by Rhyu, a former influential politician of the current ruling party, so it broadcasts with a firm progovernment agenda. In particular, unlike the usual news programs that deal with a variety of current issues, each week, AlliLeo spotlights only one or two of the hottest issues, seen through a progovernment lens. AlliLeo's primary programs tend to focus on key policy issues pursued by the government through interviews with current ministers, senior presidential secretaries for civil affairs, presidential aides, presidential office spokespersons, and ruling party politicians. Because these guests are mainly in charge of the given policy, they have an opportunity to clarify detailed information about the specific policy from the progovernment and the ruling party's points of view. In addition, whenever a politically sensitive and urgent conflictual issue has arisen, the broadcast has

consisted of interviews with guests representing the ruling party or the government's position on those issues. The AlliLeo-covered topics include foreign affairs issues, such as the 2019 North Korea–United States Hanoi Summit; political issues, such as the establishment of the new anticorruption unit to investigate high-ranking public officials; and economic issues, such as increasing the minimum wage.

Despite its casual broadcasting style, it is obvious that this broadcast is not made by ordinary people. The program's main host, guests, and even producers should all be recognized as top-notch experts in their fields. That is, AlliLeo is not made by digital native YouTubers who want to be influencers, but produced by experts who already have a strong influence. Notably, the guest is a prominent person who generally has the power and ability to access important, extended, and advanced information about the major political issues and governmental policies covered by the show, so the guests interviewed become the main knowledge sources of the program, significantly increasing the program's quality and credibility.

Moreover, because Rhyu, the guests, and even the audiences share progovernmental or current ruling party positions, AlliLeo *straightforwardly* and *explicitly* talks about a given issue or policy from the government's and the current ruling party's perspectives. In other words, it is a format in which only one-sided opinions are considered. Rhyu himself also recognizes that the show has unique characteristics and limits as a journalistic medium because of its noncompliance with impartiality; he even proudly admits that AlliLeo is an outright biased broadcast for the supporters and proponents of the current government and the ruling party. When confronted with the question of how he thinks about the political partiality of his show, Rhyu stated in a televised debate,

We as human beings can't leave the logic of partisanship. What is necessary is to rationally develop the logic of partisanship. I think there will be no problem if we [in bipolar positions] compromise with each other when we need to do so. It's not the human world living without partisanship. (MBC 100분토론 [MBC 100-Minute Debate], 2019, 32:10)

Based on this position, the logic underlying AlliLeo's justification of the program's bias is that there are no such media to talk about a given issue from the current ruling party's viewpoint. In other words, for them, the Korean media landscape is completely skewed toward right-wing and conservative political forces, so for them, it becomes all about balancing the story by tilting to their point of view. Because the entire Korean media system is overly right wing and conservative-oriented, it will be balancing as a whole for Rhyu and his guests to be comparably partial to the other side. This somewhat naïve version of a *free marketplace of ideas* is how they justify their partiality.

### **The Rhetoric of Sincerity: "I'll Tell You Everything Sincerely Here."**

AlliLeo's guests, for the most part, are renowned government officials and political celebrities. These broadcasts, however, differ from existing ones in that these experts are presented in a casual atmosphere, unlike conventional, stereotypical political and current affairs broadcasts. For example, ministers, mayors, current ruling party politicians, and senior presidential secretaries of civil affairs often make jokes and use swear words that are not suitable for mainstream broadcasting language. To create this comfortable atmosphere, Rhyu himself plays a key role in responding to guests, and because he knows most

of the guests personally, he naturally guides them to tell their personal stories and creates a comfortable and casual atmosphere by clapping from time to time. Importantly, this casual informal atmosphere serves to increase the *sincerity* and *veracity* of the guest's story. In other words, unlike the formalized, strictly organized format of mainstream broadcasts, in which the guest tends to save face in many cases, the audiences trust that the guests are not trying to make up or carefully tailor their stories in this relaxed and casual atmosphere. For example, when guests are confronted with sensitive questions about given issues, they often say, "Can I be honest?," "Can I say that much?," or "Can I say this here?" After this prefatory remark, guests often speak from their hearts about the given topic, and this rhetoric of "I'll tell you everything sincerely" allows the audiences to conclude that the broadcast does not filter or gatekeep its on-air comments. In contrast, in the mainstream media, it is relatively difficult and rare for these types of experts to talk about themselves comfortably because of time constraints, questioning, checking of sources, and verification processes. The AlliLeo broadcasts offer an alternative to mainstream broadcasts, providing a setting in which audiences can hear guests comfortably talk about their innermost thoughts and share backstories so that their interviews are perceived as more reliable and trustworthy than ordinary mainstream broadcasts.

In addition to this frank atmosphere, the show's other noticeable rhetorical feature lies in its *easy* and *simple* way of explaining the given complex political and policy issues. In fact, the various policy and political issues that AlliLeo deals with are often complicated and difficult to understand, or sometimes a lot of background knowledge is needed to understand them well. For instance, issues such as the establishment of the Senior Civil Servant Corruption Investigations Unit, the adjustment of the prosecution and police's investigative rights, and media reform issues are not easily penetrable; it is not conceivable that the general public will fully grasp depth of these topics through the standard delivery of two- or three-minute news bites. Moreover, these issues are often controversial and polarized, depending on one's political and ideological position. AlliLeo is characterized by having the most famous experts and actual policy makers on the issues explaining complex ideas through using simple, accessible language that ordinary citizens can understand without much time and effort. This rhetoric, prioritizing comprehension and accessibility, is the main reason that it has earned huge popularity.

Typical narrative strategy of how AlliLeo actually simplifies and makes accessible complex issues looks like this: In the middle of a guest talk about the ruling party's or government's position on an issue, the host, Rhyu, asks the guest about the opposition's opinion, and then the guest refutes it step by step using simple and easy logics. Next, when summarizing the whole debate, Rhyu tends to use simple analogies so that the logic of this rebuttal can be well understood and remembered by the audiences. For example, in a broadcast in which the former Justice Minister Cho Kuk appeared to explain why the establishment of the Senior Civil Servant Corruption Investigations Unit is necessary, Rhyu asks questions like this: "Among those who oppose the establishment of the Senior Civil Servant Corruption Investigations Unit, do they argue that there are already similar governmental systems such as a special prosecution team and a permanent special prosecution system?" (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019a, 11:40). Then, after Cho refutes these opinions one by one, Rhyu summarizes them by using succinct analogies, such as, "The idea of a special prosecution team is like a house that's too small" and "The idea of the permanent special prosecution system is like a house with only a house site but no house" (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019a, 14:20). In fact, introducing dissenting opinions, encouraging guests to respond to them, and then summarizing them



by using simple analogies can be understood as a kind of logic offered to the audiences to counter or contradict their opponents when they encounter these questions from oppositional camps. Eventually, it can function as a type of coaching that informs viewers about strategies to argue; we can expect that supporters of each camp will fight according to the political logics of a particular issue they have learned about via their respective YouTube political channels, such as left-wing AlliLeo and right-wing Shinsu News. In other words, it appears that by using the discursive logic learned through these shows, citizens can be engaged in a kind of *proxy warfare* based on the logic already developed by each camp's politicians and policy makers, rather than constructing their own opinions on a given issue.

### **The Rhetoric of Authenticity: Making Emotional Attachment**

AlliLeo seems to be broadcasting casually and comfortably, but it is possible to locate a precisely woven narrative structure. The main narrative flows by focusing on the guest(s) explaining the given controversial issue or policy in detail for an hour or so, with Rhyu sometimes asking questions about the necessity and importance of the policy, and presenting contrary, opposing opinions so the guest can refute them. The content refuted by the guest is easily remembered through the use of analogy. After this explanation, usually toward the end of the broadcast, Rhyu often asks the guest personal questions that reinforce the guest's *authenticity* for the audience, delving into the guest's personal motivation or purpose behind his or her strong support of, and specific position on, a given policy. When Rhyu explores the personal motivation, it is usually connected to the guest's life trajectory. In other words, these questions give the guest a chance to talk about how he or she is authentically involved with the given policy or issues through not only his or her public life, but also his or her personal life. In many cases, the guests reveal what they are giving up or sacrificing or even how they are suffering in the process of promoting and pursuing the given policy or issue.

For example, when the former Senior Secretary for Civil Affairs, Cho Kuk, was interviewed about the establishment of the Senior Civil Servant Corruption Investigations Unit, Rhyu asked Cho, "Did you become Senior Secretary for Civil Affairs [after taking a temporal leave from your Seoul National University law professor job] to do this?" (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019a, 65:30). Then, Cho responded that he has lived his life both as a criminal law scholar and as a social activist and viewed this as a sort of long-cherished task for him. Also, when Byun Sang-Wook, a renowned journalist, spoke on the media reform issue and talked about the long-established collusive ties between journalists and their beats in Korea, he said that he had never traveled abroad or received overseas training with the support of beats [a chronic collusive convention involving journalists and their beats] and that he had never been a beat reporter under his own justice principle. Then he revealed that he could have survived as a respected journalist, but instead he had a very clean media career without involvement with any of those corrupt journalistic practices and conventions (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019b). Similarly, when another journalist, Choi Kyung-young, was a guest on the show, Rhyu asked, "Is it okay for you to criticize the current Korean media even though you are a part of journalism?" (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019c, 68:45). The question connoted that he might have received pressure or criticism not only from the company that he worked for, but also from his peer journalist groups because his strong criticism of current Korean media could make them feel that he was attacking his own peers. In response to this question, Choi Kyung-young described his personal hardship

when he was unfairly dismissed from Korean Broadcasting System under the previous conservative government because of his strong criticism of journalism practices. He then added,

My wife is actually very worried, but I think I have to do my best because every journalist must have his or her own calling as a journalist . . . and at least I want to support that calling as best I can. But it is hard . . . [so please give me some support]. (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019c, 68:55)

As they listen to these interviews, the audiences feel that guests are not simply performing their roles as public agents, but rather that they see themselves as a kind of *prophet* or *martyr*, with an authentic calling to address a certain given policy or issue. This rhetoric of authenticity allows them to reveal how they have followed their own unique life trajectory to follow through on this policy or issue; that revelation touches a different level of the audience members' minds from the previous rhetoric of talking easily and truthfully simply to increase credibility. By hearing personal motivations and life stories, the audiences might accept the issue not just because of convincing logic but through being mediated by the *personality* of the guest. Issues and policies have no emotions, no sincerity, and, more important, no authenticity; humans possess those things. Because of this process of what we called the *personification of the issue* for the audience members, the mere issue of the establishment of Senior Civil Servant Corruption Investigations Unit becomes a special issue driven by their respected, beloved, authentic Cho; as a result, people experience a strong attachment not only to the issues, but also to the guests. In other words, these personal questions give the hard and boring issue a genuine humanized form, and that transforms the issue into a private, more personal matter for them. Rhyu, as the show's host, plays a kind of *shaman* in that humanizing of the issue by inviting expression of the guest's deep internal motivation and personal pain in connection with the given issue or policy, as a psychological consultant might.

It is the comments that best reveal that people have actually formed personal and emotional relationships with these guests through this rhetorical strategy. Most of the best comments are filled with such emotions as respect (to the guest), thank you (for the guest), cheering (the guest), feeling relieved (because there is a person like the guest in our society), and feeling sorry (because we did not know the guest's hardship and sincerity). Interestingly, the audiences respond with sorrow to those who, with sincerity and authenticity, sacrifice themselves and continue to carry out this public service despite all the difficulties and obstacles; audiences want to send them respect, gratitude, support, and a feeling of regret that they had not recognized their situation before now. For this reason, the audiences feel that they want to protect and sustain the guests more, and they feel so grateful for the guests confronting huge challenges, such as the powerful mainstream media and prosecution; they feel sorry that guests are performing their jobs for the public, namely for *us*, at their own expense.

### **The Rhetoric of Possession and Fortune-Telling Journalism**

Another notable audience reaction that we can observe among the popular comments was that only through watching the show could they get a keen *insight* or some kinds of *master vision* that they could never get from the mainstream media. Audiences feel that they can finally look into an issue *properly* and *rightly*. The audiences tend to say that *from the great interpretations and insights* suggested

by Rhyu and his guests, they have been enabled to correctly understand and grasp particular issues or current affairs. Moreover, many people revealed that they feel *relieved* by adopting the views presented on the show. They felt that they could understand what is at stake and who is the real target and enemy interrupting the progress of the policy or issue; they could then come together against the oppositional party and conservative media because they now recognize that is in their own interests to do so. In other words, for the show's audiences, some kinds of *collective relief* or *resolving uncertainty* are markedly expressed in their impressions of the show.

One of the notable rhetorical techniques igniting this reaction is the *rhetoric of possession* [*bingui*], a type of *psychoanalysis* through which Rhyu or his guests analyze a particular actor's psychological state or reason for certain public actions in the context of a particular political issue, as if Rhyu or his guest is possessed by the person and trying to read the actor's mind. Therefore, when Rhyu or a guest attempts to perform this, each becomes like a *fortune-teller* who reads the deeper mind and inner thoughts of that person regarding the given issue or policy. This rhetoric of possession becomes one of the most popular parts of the show, and hashtags, such as *#BinguiGenius\_Rhyu Si-Min*, as well as numerous *bingui* memes, have been created and circulated online. For example, in one show, Kim Eo-jun, a renowned pro-current ruling party journalist, appeared as a guest. Kim Eo-jun and Rhyu performed a kind of psychoanalysis of the current prosecutor general Yoon Seok-yeol, who led investigations against the former Justice Minister Cho Kuk, who was involved in various scandals. Yoon's decision was severely condemned by the current ruling Democratic Party and its supporters because they assumed that Cho was under an unfair and unjust investigation as a retaliation, given that Cho, as a former justice minister, tried to promote and pursue the overhaul of the national prosecutor's office by establishing the Senior Civil Servant Corruption Investigations Unit. At the same time, the question remains unanswered as to why Yoon Seok-yeol, thought to have a progovernment stance from the ruling party supporters, is investigating Cho Kuk so harshly.

In Kim's possession of Yoon Seol-yeol, Kim explained the situation in terms of Yoon's *faulty loyalty* to the current president, Moon Jae-in. Kim argued that Yoon personally shared with other prosecutors that he instructed the investigation of Cho based on his sincere loyalty to the president. Based on this keyword of Yoon's loyalty, Kim started his possession on the topic of why Yoon did that, pointing out that Yoon was satisfying "his desire for recognition" as a kind of basic need shared by all human beings. Korea's prosecutors have a rigid hierarchical order system, called *gisumunhwa*, which is based on the year of joining the prosecution. While one year's seniority can make a huge difference in the senior-junior relationship of the prosecution, Yoon entered the prosecution nine years later than his peers. Many of his seniors were, therefore, younger than him, and most of his juniors were much younger than him, almost as young as his youngest brother. Therefore, Kim explained that Yoon's desire for recognition would not have been satisfied by receiving praise from his superiors, who were younger than him, in the prosecutors' organization. Kim then claimed that Yoon probably would have been "psychologically recognized playing the role of the big brother who hits the stomach and protects the bottom" (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019d, 38:51). In other words, according to Kim's possession, Yoon has a "mentality of big brother," and his mindset is like a "lone wolf" in the junglelike prosecution offices (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019d, 39:14). Kim added that, for this lonely Yoon, the current president Moon Jae-in could be perceived as a "father figure," someone on whom he can rely for the first time (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019d, 39:50). Kim said, "Yoon's heart feels that 'I will play my part to make that person [Moon Jae-in] do well,' and this is why he said, 'I am doing this

investigation as a loyal servant to Moon” (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019d, 40:19). Kim went on to picture Yoon as a kind of figurative “son who worries about his father’s [Moon’s] future and finally realizes that Moon has a bad son—Cho Kuk, who, as a corrupted high-ranking cabinet official, could ruin Moon’s administration” (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019d, 41:37). Kim then argued that Yoon is now trying to solve this problem through the prosecution, which is “cutting Cho Kuk’s head” (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019d, 41:54). In other words, Kim figuratively argues that Yoon was now expressing his own version of faulty loyalty to Moon through the prosecution.

The host Rhyu then amplifies on the issue by comparing it to the Korean tale of Shimchong. Rhyu said, “As Shimchong fell into the sea of Indang to open his father’s blinded eyes in the tale of Shimchong, Yoon Seok-yeol is making Cho become a forced Shimchong” (Roh Moo Hyun Foundation, 2019d, 50:34). In other words, prosecution’s unfair and unjust investigation practices emerged in the process of entangling and forcibly investigating Cho, making people think of him like poor Shimchong, and it has ultimately driven people to acknowledge the need for prosecution reform and provided the impetus to pass the Fast-Track bill for the reformation of prosecution. Rhyu said that Yoon Seok-yeol may meet his psychological needs in this process, but he has inflicted a great deal of damage on the prosecution organization, which is now starting to resemble the tragic structure of the Greek classics.

Importantly, we cannot know if Yoon actually executed a series of actions and instructions related to Cho’s investigation by following his faulty loyalty to the current president, as Kim described in his possession, nor is it clear whether the prosecution has a clear intention to turn Cho into a forced Shimchong. Neither Yoon Seok-yeol’s inner mind nor the prosecution’s inside thoughts are within the realms of empirical observation. Further, because such a topic covered by the show is contentious and involves conflictual issues, *truth* in an absolute sense is often difficult to ascertain. In other words, from other perspectives, Cho is just a high-ranking government official involved in various scandals, and Yoon’s job as a prosecutor is to investigate this corruption case thoroughly; even Rhyu and Kim openly said, “This is just my interpretation to the limit. Interpretations can be right or wrong.”

### **Creating the Illusion of Certainty by the Confusion of Causes and Reasons**

It cannot be verified whether or not the rhetoric of possession does actually convey facts. Nonetheless, at least it can function to resolve the audiences’ uncertainty by “the confusion of causes and reasons” (Heaton, 2000, p. 55). Whereas causes can be established by inductive reasoning, which involves using specific *proposals* and *facts* to make general conclusions, reasons are established differently in that they are “justification for action” (Heaton, 2000, p. 53). The practice of possession performed by Rhyu and his guests cannot determine whether A was actually triggered by B. However, because of its performativity, the audiences’ uncertainty regarding A can be resolved by having a perception that B causes A. In other words, by confusing causes and reasons, the audiences can at least feel comfortable.

By accommodating this illusion of certainty, audiences tend to think that they are the ones who rightly and pensively view the hidden essence of current issues; they feel that they have acquired a sense of certainty about things being in order. Furthermore, the rhetoric of possession reveals and confirms to its audiences the possessed public figures’ personal intentions and private reasons for their particular public

actions, although it is highly difficult to determine whether they actually pursued those public actions based on those reasons suggested by AlliLeo.

Regarding the audiences' possible psychological uncertainties, through such questions as "Why does Yoon Seok-yeol drive my favorite Cho's investigation so seriously?," "In what direction will it go?," or "What will happen to my favorite Cho whom I support?" the audiences can get insight or a master vision that resolves their uncertainty and allows them to know what they should do for the future. In his practice of possession, the guest Kim Eo-jun defined Yoon as a kind of immoral son wielding a sword of power, based on his *false loyalty*, to protect the president. The audiences therefore feel that they need to save Cho Kuk from this wrongful prosecutorial persecution and unjust power. This is well represented by the slogan "Protecting Cho Kuk/Reforming Prosecution," as shown in the various popular comments to the show. Furthermore, the audiences' perception that they are seeing inside of the possessed public figure also allows them to treat her or him not as a public figure, but as a bad individual whom they might personally know. The possessed person thereby tends to be a target of hatred rather than an object of public criticism; this can be seen in their excessive use of hateful words, such as *Yoon-Jjajang* and *Yoon-Chunjang*, to attack Yoon Seok-yeol.<sup>1</sup>

### **Is Korean Journalism on the Fault Line or the Merging Line?**

Through a qualitative textual analysis of AlliLeo, our analysis showed how this explicit interloper establishes credibility and authority in the journalistic field of Korea. By the performance of what we call fortune-telling journalism, which stresses sincerity, authenticity, and insight, the show creates an illusion that its audiences understand complicated issues better than they actually do. Given that the show's host, Rhyu, was ranked as the second most credible journalist in Korea (Jang, 2019), his show's presentation and rhetorical strategies that differentiate him from traditional journalists carry implications for the changing boundaries of journalism.

AlliLeo uses a narrative strategy that emphasizes sincerity and authenticity. AlliLeo forms emotional ties with viewers by bringing out his inner thoughts and those of his guests, such as elite journalists and politicians. As the show's host, Rhyu actively utilizes his intimate relations with the guests. The mood during the conversations is casual and light. They exchange jokes and use mild expletives as they converse. Such use of language is hard to find among traditional journalists who seek to maintain cultural authority by following traditional norms, such as formality and politeness. Thanks to these strategies, Rhyu and his guests' authority as elites is balanced out by their more human aspects—being frank, easygoing, and truthful—making the host Rhyu look like a more reliable journalist.

Carefully imposing one's originality and genuineness in news production and distribution to build trust—namely, authenticity labor (R. Lewis, 2020; Maares, Banjac, & Hanusch, 2021)—is a typical tactic that emerging actors have been using recently to position themselves in the journalistic field. As more and more audiences have started to use authenticity as a currency to test content producers' credibility (Hayes,

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<sup>1</sup> These words denigrate Yoon by comparing him to the food he likes. *Jjajang* and *Chunjang* are racist metaphors used by Koreans to disparage Chinese.

Singer, & Ceppos, 2007), media interlopers such as social media influencers are using authenticity labor in more explicit, diverse, and generalized ways (Maares et al., 2021). Just as Rhyu publicly talks about his political views and tries to differentiate himself from mainstream journalists who pretend to be neutral despite their hidden political intentions, explicit interlopers want to build authenticity by trying to differentiate themselves from traditional journalists in terms of transparency (Maddox & Creech, 2020). However, even traditional media organizations are now trying to improve their transparency by encouraging their journalists to disclose personal information and their content production processes (Molyneux, Holton, & Lewis, 2018), as well as by involving users in the production process (Shin, 2015), and are using it strategically to consolidate their influence (Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau, 2021). The emerging actors' authenticity labor is thus likely to demand an increasingly significant amount of time and energy to establish credibility in the journalistic field; this can be seen in examples such as displaying a passion for their work and constructing an "always-on" persona (cf. Duffy & Hund, 2015).

Whereas traditional journalists have informed the public by excluding their own personality as much as possible (Carlson, 2017), AlliLeo informs the public through a process of *not meeting a person but actually becoming him/her*, namely, through the practice of possession. By causing confusion between causes and reasons, the rhetoric of possession creates an illusion that the audiences clearly understand the political elites' minds and the nature of the complicated issues. This illusion of certainty cannot be obtained by the users with their own judgment, but it can be implanted by Rhyu and his guests. In other words, AlliLeo allows the audiences to understand the dynamics of society based on Rhyu's own experiences, political motives, and even fantasies, and this in turn strengthens Rhyu's journalistic authority—namely, the right of journalistic actors to "mediate society to society" (Carlson, 2017, p. 92), in the journalistic field of Korea.

Nonetheless, the process in which Rhyu has gained authority differs from the process in which traditional journalists have historically built and maintained theirs. The rhetoric of possession can be used only if AlliLeo is free from the traditional journalistic norms and values, especially the norm of objectivity. In this regard, Rhyu himself proclaims that he is a partisan news host and thus will not follow those values and norms; therefore, the audience does not judge the show based on those norms and values. Like a fortune-teller does not take responsibility for a prophecy being wrong, Rhyu and his guests do not have to be responsible for the accuracy of what they publish as much as traditional journalists do. Moreover, fortune-tellers are not always wrong. Just as a fortune-teller's reputation is enhanced once she or he is correct, Rhyu can establish authority when things seem to be going according to his and his guests' prophecy.

In addition to the rhetorical strategies that we have found, explicit interlopers like AlliLeo pushing in from the periphery to the center of the journalistic field may be attributed to Korea's mainstream media—which has historically colluded with political power—and the resulting overall deterioration in confidence in the press (Newman et al., 2020). Because the degree of political polarization in Korean society is increasingly high, more and more Koreans tend to regard the news media as a political tool. In recent years in particular, more and more Koreans have looked for the cause of political successes and failures in mainstream journalists who seem to be politically inconsistent (Shin, Kim, & Joo, 2021). This situation may have been advantageous for AlliLeo's host Rhyu, showing his political stance explicitly and building up a persona as a political elite to establish authority using his authenticity.

In conclusion, interlopers such as AlliLeo could blur the boundaries of journalism by bringing in norms and practices that had been outside the realm of journalism. At the same time, they often distort the boundaries by gaining authority in novel ways, as AlliLeo does by pursuing the practice of fortune-telling. Further research should ask the following questions about the ever-changing boundaries of journalism: Is fortune-telling journalism a one-time or temporary phenomenon, or a sign that the boundaries of journalism are changing drastically? How will journalistic authority change as journalists attempt to normalize emerging values such as authenticity? What should the members of the journalistic community do for those citizens who believe the resolution of uncertainty is the main role of journalism?

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