

The Effects of the Media's Coverage of Criminal Events and Trials on Prosecutors' and Judges' Perceptions, Litigations, and Rulings

*Dennis Weng-Jeng Peng and Hsien-Wen Hsiao**

Abstract

With the rapid growth and development of the media in recent years, the proportion of criminal activities covered in the daily news has greatly increased. Reporting the news has become less objective and more theatrical. When the media covers criminal activities, they tend to challenge the principles pertaining to the code of criminal procedure. For example, in regards to the principles related to the confidentiality of an investigation, criminal cases are reported by the media, and even discussed by the public, before the defendant is given a fair trial. What influences may these kinds of circumstances have over the prosecutor, the judge, and the public?

In the past, research in Taiwan regarding these topics was about content analysis of the criminal news, and focused on their form and content. This project focuses on the relationship between the criminal news and the observer. To better understand the impact of the criminal news, prosecutors and judges were selected as the unit of observation as well as the unit of analysis.

The findings show that: (1) Demographic variables have significant

* Dennis Weng-Jeng Peng is an associate professor, Graduate Institute of Journalism, National Taiwan University; and Hsien-Wen Hsiao graduated from Graduate

impact on prosecutors' and judges' TV-viewing habits and Internet usage. (2) Elder prosecutors and judges trust the media more; the more they view the news online, the less trust they have in the media. (3) Both prosecutors and judges perceive that the media's coverage of criminal activities has significant effects on the general public and moderate effects on other prosecutors and judges, but has little effect on themselves. (4) The more the prosecutors and judges trust the coverage of political scandals, the more they believe that the writing style of the coverage will impact them. (5) Compared to judges, prosecutors trust general crime news more, perceive greater media effects on themselves, perceive that characterizations, such as "malicious suspects" or "poor victims", have more effects on their colleagues and have less effects on the general public.

Keywords: coverage of criminal events, news reporting, freedom of press, fair trial, third-person perception, media influence, media credibility, audience research, prosecutor, judge.