In 2014, Taiwan was hit by a major food scandal that damaged the country’s reputation and tarnished the island’s image as a reliable food manufacturing hub in the Greater China area (Jain, 2014). On September 4, 2014, the adulteration of one of Taiwan’s most popular and reliable cooking oil was first reported. Chang Guann, a leading supplier of the cooking oil, was accused of collecting restaurant waste and animal byproducts—known as “gutter oil”—from an illegal factory and mixing it with lard to make its own Chuan Tung brand of cooking oil. According to the report, 645 tons of adulterated cooking oil were distributed to more than 1,200 restaurants, schools, and food processors, and more than 1,300 different food products were tainted by this oil (New York Times, 2014). Subsequently, those products were removed from store shelves. The tainted cooking oil caused a public outcry and many local businesses were economically affected. It is estimated that the gutter oil scandal cost the Taiwan food industry US$165 million and affected 1,256 food-related businesses (Wee et al., 2016). The stock prices of the involved companies experienced a major decline. Many countries ceased to import cooking oil product from Taiwan. For example, Hong Kong asked supermarkets to stop stocking the Taiwanese food products and issuing a recall (Chyan, 2014). Singapore also conducted tests on all food items from Taiwan (Hui, 2014).

In addition to the Chang Guann scandal, it was reported on October 9, 2014 that the lard supplier, Cheng-I, had mixed animal feed oil with cooking oil and then sold it for human consumption (Su, 2014). At the time, it was estimated that Cheng-I dominated 80% of the share of the lard and lard-based oil market in Taiwan. After the public revelations, its parent company Ting Hsin International Group announced the closing of its oil manufacturing business in Taiwan and promised to donate NT$3 billion (US$100 million) to the government or government-designated foundations to help maintain food safety standards (Su, 2014).

This was not the first time a tainted food scandal had erupted in Taiwan. In 2013, the products of several popular food companies were illegally adulterated with less expensive or lower quality cooking oils. For instance, the Taiwanese owner of Chang Chi Foodstuff Factory Co., was sentenced to 12 years in prison for selling olive oil adulterated with cheap cottonseed oil and the banned coloring agent copper...
chlorophyllin. Ironically, neither Chang Chi’s olive oil was pressed from olives, nor their sesame oil from sesame seeds. Instead, the flavors were created with artificial additives, prompting consumers to question whether they were safe for cooking. Whistleblowers in the company helped break the story because of consumers’ concerns.

The public argued that the food manufacturers had not done enough to keep their food supply safe. Furthermore, they expected the government to have been more proactive in establishing and implementing legal safety standards, especially since these factories had already been in business for more than a decade. The widespread food scares showed that authorities did not fulfill their role to protect consumers. The series of food scandals exposed the shortcomings of the food regulations and revealed the need for the government to start focusing on public health, consumer protection, and food safety (Wee et al., 2016). The incidents led to Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou’s public apology and the resignation of the Health Minister, Chiu Wen-ta.

Unavoidably, the series of incidents of tainted cooking oil in 2013–2014 became a center of media focus locally and abroad. Intense news coverage of the tainted cooking oil recall and the health risk messages drove consumers away from the affected product, reduced confidence in the government’s food regulatory agencies and decreased the public’s trust in both the manufacturers and the nation’s cooking oil supply chain. Overall, this had a negative effect on the Taiwanese food industry.

The media often play a role in relaying food safety standards to consumers. Researchers have claimed that “the news media has long been both a primary source of consumer information relating to food safety and a notable contributor to the policy agenda” (Laestadius et al., 2012, p. 751). The tainted cooking oil scandal in Taiwan provides a unique case study of how food safety and health risk messages presented in the news media reflect the complex interplay between legal and health concerns. This study systematically examines, through the scope of the framing theory, how the printed news media framed the tainted cooking oil scandal.

**Literature Review**

**The Concept of Framing**

According to Chong and Druckman (2007), the major premise of the framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives with multiple implications and considerations. Framing is a way of understanding how an issue is characterized in media and affects how the public views the issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Specifically, frames are used to determine what content is relevant to discuss the topic and concern, to define the role of stakeholder, and to outline the values and goals of the content area (Hertog & McLeod, 2001).

Goffman first defined the concept in 1974 and stated that individuals draw on “schemata of interpretation” (p. 21) in order to organize new information and to construct meaning. Framing happens at every stage of the communication process, from sources to receivers. Gitlin (1980) developed Goffman’s idea and offered another definition, highlighting that “frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of few tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (p. 6).

Drawing on Goffman (1974), Tuchman (1978) recognized the vital role that framing plays in the media’s news gathering and audiences’ news processing, suggesting that media use frames to construct social reality for audiences and thus give meaning to words and images. Tankard (2001) defined a media frame as “a central idea for news content that supplies context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration” (p. 99). Creating an overarching discipline, Entman (1993) claimed that framing requires that media “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). By selecting and highlighting certain aspects of information, frames make a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

Callaghan and Schnell (2001) found that the media sometimes intervened with issue framing, including establishing its own frames, favoring one side of an issue, or creating their own subtexts. In particular, the media added their own frames into the coverage, in addition to those frames that were influenced by interest groups. Through framing, the media also influence the public’s understanding of an event, including the causes and the solutions to address the issues related to it (Entman, 1993).

The aforementioned definition has established itself as the standard reference which focuses on the “words, images, phrases, and presentation styles” (Druckman, 2001, p. 227). The most compelling studies tend to take the following steps: (1) an issue or event is identified; (2) if the goal is to understand how frames in communication affect public opinion, then the researcher needs to isolate a specific attitude; (3) an initial set of frames for an issue is identified inductively to create a coding scheme; and (4) once an initial set of frames is identified, the next step is to select sources for content analysis (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 106–107). The choice of specific news outlets, such as printed media (i.e., newspapers, magazines), electronic media (i.e., television, radio), and internet sources (i.e., websites, social media), depends on the researcher’s intent, as for example, to capture the general theme in coverage or to compare a specific issue of content across multiple media platforms. Simply put, media frames are how reporters tell a news story, and frames frequently tell the public how to think about an issue. Thus, they do not simply report the true news. Instead, they tell stories that provide frames for understanding the event or issue.

Besides examining media frames, frames exist as a cognitive structure within people’s minds. The way in which the news media frame events, in turn, can influence viewers’
perceptions (Scheufele, 1999). More precisely, news frames have a profound impact on audiences’ understanding of issues and resulting attitudes by emphasizing certain elements of a controversial topic to shape audiences’ opinions and preferences. Thus, framing accentuates certain considerations in a message that can influence individuals to focus on particular considerations (Druckman, 2001, p. 230).

**Food Safety and Media Framing**

Mass media are consistently ranked by the public as a primary source of food safety information (Tiozzo et al., 2020). The news media and influencing policymakers can offer a clear public health service by providing greater awareness of food safety issues and informing the public of direct threats to their health, allowing them to change their purchasing habits. For example, both the German mad cow disease (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, BSE) in 2000 and the UK foot and mouth disease in 2001 led to reformed agendas and major changes in the governments’ agricultural policies as a response to media criticism and public demand (Feindt & Kleinschmit, 2011). Bringing science knowledge in a comprehensible way and highlighting the implications to the public is not an easy task. This responsibility is shared with the scientists and the media. However, only a few news reporters have a science background and only a few scientists have training in communicating with the media in simple and clear language, which creates a barrier when trying to tell food safety stories (Anderson, 2000).

Researchers have used the framing theory to argue that how the media characterizes varying aspects of food incidents can influence the public’s perception of the event. Irlebeck and Akers (2010) point out that a reporter could present a frame of warning that informs the consumers about a health concern and how to avoid it, or the reporter could interview a victim who would present the harmful effects of an incident to the audience. News media framing research has been conducted on how agricultural risk or food safety related issues, such as Salmonella outbreaks (Irlebeck et al., 2011), mad cow disease (Ashlock et al., 2006), Fipronil eggs contamination (Lauran et al., 2019), horsemeat scandal (Ibrahim & Howarth, 2017), milk scandal (Yan, 2020), ice cream recall (Calley et al., 2019), processed foods (Runge, 2018), foot and mouth disease (Cannon & Irani, 2011), antibiotic use in livestock and hormone use in poultry production (Edgar et al., 2017), have been presented to the public.

Irlebeck et al. (2011) established, in their analysis of the television news coverage, three dominant frames in the 2009 Salmonella outbreak in peanut products: informational; anti-Peanut Corporation of America; and anti-FDA. The most commonly used sources were victims of Salmonella, politicians, and current and former FDA officials. However, they found an absence of frames related to agriculture together with almost no agricultural organizations cited as sources. The researchers concluded more food safety information needed to be more effectively communicated with the media.

Another study investigated how the print news media covered the 2010 Iowa egg recall and its causes, as well as how consumers reacted to the Salmonella outbreak and recall (Laestadius et al., 2012). The content analysis revealed that the egg recall was framed both as a failure of government oversight, as well as poor production practices by the farmers in question. The results also suggested most coverage failed to fully contextualize food safety concerns and to convey the relationship of the Salmonella outbreak to the current system of agriculture.

Using the 2008 Irish dioxin contamination of the pork incident as an example (Brún et al., 2016), the study indicated that the dioxin incident not only was portrayed as impacting the Irish agribusiness industry, but also assigned blame and responsibility as well. Irish newspapers most frequently described the crisis in terms of its impact on the industry, whereas the UK newspapers focused more on the crisis as a risk to health. Researchers concluded that these dominant media messages and message framings have implications for public understanding of the issue in each country and for potential consequences regarding the perception of the adequacy of existing food policy and regulatory oversight (p. 1235).

One study, which investigated the 2000/2001 mad cow disease in German newspapers, found a high level of press coverage leading to a policy turnabout (Feindt & Kleinschmit, 2011). The study further pointed out that politicians were blamed more for the problem than businesses or agriculture. However, politicians were also overwhelmingly framed as the problem solvers, far more than science, agriculture, business, and consumers. They concluded that food crises create an opportunity for legitimizing policy change and that the portrayal of an issue can have significant implications for future food policy.

News framing research on Taiwanese food safety incidents is very limited. By learning how food incidents are presented (or framed) in the media, consumers are better able to understand the accuracy and reliability of the information. This news framing study then helps risk communicators assess what additional information is necessary for supporting or correcting that coverage. To address this issue, this study conducts a content analysis to examine how the tainted cooking oil incident was described in the print media, with a focus on the primary frames and their tone of presentation.

The news discourse shapes reality by relying on external sources for obtaining important information and facts. Thus, this study also investigates the sources used by the Taiwanese media and examines how they could have served as “external sources of influence” of the media frames (e.g., political actors, authorities, and interest groups), as described by Scheufele (1999). In addition to examining framing theory, the authors assess the print media’s use of tone in its coverage and the description of government officials throughout
this food incident. The tone media use to disseminate news informs the audience of not only the news, but also provides a specific perspective of the news (Lore et al., 2013). Tone is one more aspect of media framing which influences audiences to think a certain way about a particular issue. This study analyzes the print news’ coverage of government officials to determine whether the tone was positive, neutral, or negative.

Based on the above theoretical discussion and literature review, the following four research questions have been proposed for analyzing the frames used in print news coverage of the Taiwanese cooking oil scandal in 2013 to 2014:

RQ1: What was the frequency of news coverage of the tainted cooking oil incident?
RQ2: What were the main sources of information used in the articles?
RQ3: What tone was used in news description of governmental response to the incident?
RQ4: What were the dominant frames in news coverage of the tainted cooking oil incident?

Method

Data Collection

This study proceeded from a content analysis of the frames used in the Taiwanese newspaper articles. According to Kiousis (2001), printed newspapers have the highest credibility, followed by online news and television news, respectively. Hence, in this study, the newspapers, United Daily News and the China Times, were chosen for sampling, based on high readership levels, quality reporting, readership demographics, and data accessibility. Since these two national newspapers likely reflected the primary frames used in mainstream national coverage, we assumed they helped shape the overall frames conveyed to the public on this food scandal.

The coverage time frame selected for this study was between October 16, 2013 and October 4, 2014, based on the chronological development of the story. The analysis, during this 12-month period, began from the first day of reporting of the Chang Chi’s food scandal until after the resignation of the Minister of Health and Welfare, Chiu Wen-ta, when news coverage dropped significantly.

Articles were collected from the United Daily News and the China Times news database, because of their accessibility, by searching for the term “Chang Chi Foodstuff Factory” and “tainted cooking oil” in the headline and body of the newspaper articles. Articles that contained the search terms but did not focus on this incident were excluded. The articles were cross referenced and duplicates eliminated. This search identified a total of 237 United Daily News stories and 164 China Times stories. News stories, columns, letters to the editor, and editorials were included in the resulting sample. A total of 401 articles were exported into text files, printed, and read by two researchers.

Data Analysis

The major elements coded in this study included topic, tone, and frames. A coding protocol was created to analyze the data set and locate the dominant messages of each article. The unit of analysis for the study was each individual article which was assigned an identification number. Two researchers read each newspaper article to identify the initial codes. The category system was based on the research questions previously formulated. A corresponding codebook was devised for explicitly defining the coders to be included or excluded in the respective categories. The coding scheme focused on the following topics in the news coverage: cause of the tainted cooking oil; health effects of the tainted cooking oil; government responses to the tainted cooking oil; and links between tainted cooking oil and other food safety issues in Taiwan. Researchers examined each story, using a researcher-created coding book. The codebook was based on the research questions presented above. Categories included date of publication, types of sources, overall tone (positive, negative, or neutral), and prominent frames. For the purpose of this analysis, each category was coded only once, even if there were multiple elements in the article that could have been ascribed the same code in one story.

In conjunction with the analytic coding, two additional rounds of coding by the two researchers were undertaken in advance to compare reliability over the span of the project and to assess agreements. Each researcher took a sample of the same 30 newspaper articles in the first round and 10 additional articles in the second round and coded them—working together to check and validate each other’s coding. Intercoder reliability was between 86% and 97% of the articles, matching the standards suggested by Holsti (1969). Through discussion and explanation of methodology, the researchers eventually came to a mutual and consistent agreement on all findings.

The researchers coded both manifest content explicitly stated in the article and the implicitly latent content of the texts. In this case, the manifest content was defined as identifying information about the articles, such as the author, date of publication, title of the newspaper article, tone of voice, and source of information. The latent content was defined as frames, themes, and discourse which emerged from the coding process and was analyzed by both researchers.

Results

News Coverage Over Time

The first research question focused on the frequencies of news coverage of the food incident. The majority of news
coverage relevant to the impact of tainted cooking oil was observed during the initial stages of the scandal in October 2013, indicating that the newsworthiness of the tainted cooking oil event ebbed over time, as shown in Figure 1 (articles over time by month). Coverage dropped off steadily in January 2014. A small spike in coverage occurred in July 2014, likely in response to public anger at the lighter punishment for manufacturers. Another peak climbed in September 2014 when there were reports on remedying flaws in legislation and urging food safety regulation after the incident’s one-year anniversary. Relatively few tainted cooking oil events were published after the resignation of the Minister of Health and Welfare in October 2014.

The United Daily News and The China Times both broke the story on October 17, 2013, but, in total, The United Daily News published 237 articles and the China Times, 164 articles on the scandal. Figure 2 illustrates each paper’s proportion of coverage in each month. For both of these newspapers, the numbers of news per day dramatically dropped in February 2014.

Sources of Information

The second question was related to the sources of information used by the news media. Limited sources can reduce the credibility of viewpoints available to readers. While reporters are responsible for the frame selection, there are external sources outside the newsroom that help shape news coverage as well (Maddison & Watts, 2012). For public health issues, source plays a significant role in informing the public and communicating risk. Over 92.8% of the analyzed articles relied on external sources to create their stories. Across all seven external source categories, as shown in Table 1, the most frequently cited sources in articles of both newspapers were basically the same and included: government sources (67%); cooking oil industry sources (8.2%); and consumer sources (5.7%).

Previous work on sourcing routines in news production has suggested that journalists rely primarily on government officials and agencies’ sources because they play a major role in food policy arenas and offer a steady stream of newsworthy information (Maddison & Watts, 2012). This current study also illustrates that news coverage of food safety issues from these two newspapers was dominated by government sources (e.g., the United Daily, 65.8%, and the China Times, 68.9%). The government sources were mainly from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, Taiwan Food and Drug Administration, and the local government Health Bureau.

The China Times, as compared with the United Daily, relied more on consumer sources (7.3%) and cooking oil industry sources (9.1%) than on government sources. In contrast, the United Daily directly quoted member of parliament sources (5.5%) and expert sources (5.1%), meaning that the two newspapers differed somewhat in their editorial policy on this event.

Media’s Use of Tone

The third question asked whether the overall tone of the newspapers offered a positive, neutral, or negative description of the government response to the food incident. Analysis of the media’s use of tone towards the government allowed for a more in-depth exploration of framing. Analysis of the data indicated that a neutral tone towards the government was employed most often in the newspapers (80.8%), followed by a negative tone (14.7%) and a positive tone (4.5%), as illustrated in Table 2.

Comparing the different news sections, news stories towards the government were the most positive in tone (83.6%); both editorial and letters to the editor were more negative in tone towards the government (61.5% and 60%, respectively). An analysis of tone concluded that there was no difference in coverage of tone between the United Daily and the China Times.

An analysis of the newspapers’ use of negative tone indicated that administrative inefficiency was most criticized (13.2%), followed by lack of regulation (1%), and lack of information (0.5%). Although media coverage of the government response was considered slow, the media’s tone was 80.8% more neutral than negative (14.7%). It was possibly because the cooking oil manufacturer was the culprit causing the food scare instead of government itself.

Distribution of Story Topic

An analysis of the 401 news articles indicated a predisposition to cover stories relating to the government’s legal action (60.8%), with stories about food safety (18.2%) and whistleblowers (9.7%), as the second and third most noticeable topics (Table 3). Both newspapers widely reported that the government took legal action (United Daily News, 59.5%; China Times, 62.8%) against the cooking oil manufacturers due to the break of the scandal and public criticism. Following the event, the United Daily News (20.3%) reported more
Table 1. Sources of Information.

| External                        | United Daily News (%) | China Times (%) | Total (%) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Government official             | 65.8                  | 68.9           | 67.0      |
| Experts                         | 5.1                   | 3.0            | 4.2       |
| Consumers                       | 4.6                   | 7.3            | 5.7       |
| Member of parliament            | 5.5                   | 3.0            | 4.5       |
| Cooking oil industry            | 7.6                   | 9.1            | 8.2       |
| Tainted cooking oil manufacturer| 3.4                   | 0.0            | 2.0       |
| Internal                        | 8.0                   | 8.5            | 8.2       |

Table 2. Tone.

| Tone                            | United Daily News (%) | China Times (%) | Total (%) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Positive                        | 5.9                   | 2.4            | 4.5       |
| Neutral                         | 79.3                  | 82.9           | 80.8      |
| Negative                        | 14.8                  | 14.6           | 14.7      |
| Administrative inefficiency     | 13.9                  | 12.2           | 13.2      |
| Lack of regulation              | 0.4                   | 1.8            | 1.0       |
| Lack of information             | 0.4                   | 0.6            | 0.5       |

Table 3. Distribution of News Topic.

| Topic                          | United Daily News (%) | China Times (%) | Total (%) |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Health                         | 1.7                   | 3.0            | 2.2       |
| Food safety                    | 20.3                  | 15.2           | 18.2      |
| Economy                        | 2.1                   | 2.4            | 2.2       |
| Consumer response              | 5.1                   | 4.9            | 5.0       |
| Government communication       | 2.1                   | 1.2            | 1.7       |
| Government legal action        | 59.5                  | 62.8           | 60.8      |
| Whistleblowers                 | 9.3                   | 10.4           | 9.7       |
articles than the China Times (15.2%) on the importance of food safety issues. This tainted cooking oil scandal was exposed because employees blew the whistle on company violating food safety law. It is also important to note that both newspapers (e.g., United Daily News, 9.3% and China Times, 10.4%) reported whistleblowers as a way of examining the practices of journalistic accountability.

This study found varying amounts of coverage of news topics. The news articles had the most coverage on government legal action (61.9%). Letters to the Editor focused on food safety issues (80%), as shown in Table 4. Editorial reviews covered food safety (46.2%) and government legal action (46.2%) at the same level, which were equally important for their readership.

### Major Frames

The fourth question examined the dominant frames in news coverage. Echoing other researchers’ point of view about framing research, it is common to “provide numbers and percentages of news stories that fit a certain story type. It is also important to examine how shifts in public opinion and policy may be indicative of and influenced by the ongoing discourse that news outlets use” (Iannarino et al., 2015). Thus, this study used a content analysis which assisted in determining the dominant portrayal of the issue. The data analysis followed a sequence of reading, interpreting, categorizing, and identifying frames. Analysis of the coverage resulted in three dominant frames that characterized Taiwanese printed news discourse of the incident: (1) attribution of responsibility; (2) weak food safety system; and (3) efficiency of dissemination of information. In the following paragraphs, we describe the three core themes by citing specific examples from the printed news coverage.

#### Attribution of responsibility

Iyengar (1991) suggested that the type of media framing influences how the public attributes responsibility. In fact, research suggests that an important function of the framing process is to identify systematic faults and ascribe blame to those who are responsible (DeVries, 2004). Throughout the incident, the assignment of blame and responsibility was frequently discussed, proving to be a dominant theme throughout the articles. Newspaper coverage placed blame largely on the manufacturer, Chang Chi Foodstuff Factory, which unethically produced the cooking oil. Food safety incidents not only harm the consumer’s health, they also represent threats to brands and affect the consumer’s buying intentions toward the faulty brands (Barbarossa et al., 2016). When consumers perceive that manufacturers are blameworthy and culpable, they are less likely to purchase their product in the future (Wee et al., 2016). Accordingly, consumer groups filed a class-action lawsuit against tainted oil manufacturer and demanded compensation for the consumers.

Secretary-General Lu Ying-wei, the Consumer Protection Association of Taiwan, supports consumers who were affected by the Chang Chi Foodstuff Factory’s tainted cooking oil, filed a class action lawsuit on their behalf. He further pointed out that “Chang Chi Foodstuff do not have a problem-solving mindset. We are going to protect consumer rights and interests” (Chang, 2013).

Consequently, it led consumers to rethink their attitude and behavior in food consumption and to question the government’s competence and transparency in dealing with this food safety issue. Since the government did not appear in control of events, trust in the government was likely at an all-time low. According to Feindt and Kleinschmit (2011), since the food safety system was backed by the government’s regulatory oversight, the assignment of responsibility was necessarily placed in the political field as well. In this study, the news articles highlighted the public’s attribution of responsibility to governmental officials. Premier Jiang Yi-huah and related government departments were questioned by the public numerous times over the tainted food and other food safety concerns that had plagued Taiwan. In response to the criticism, the Premier, as a representative of the government, offered his apology to the public for the food incidents which had demonstrated the failure of the government to ensure food safety. The Minister of Health and Welfare, Chiu Wen-ta, resigned to shoulder political responsibility for the incompetent handling of food safety and the tainted oil scandal.

Furthermore, the coverage of solutions typically focused on the government’s role in preventing future food incidents. The central government demanded that the local officials ensure food products containing the adulterated cooking oil

### Table 4. News Topics.

| Topic               | News Articles (%) | Editorial (%) | Letter to the Editor (%) |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Health              | 2.3               | 0.0           | 0.0                      |
| Food safety         | 16.4              | 46.2          | 80.0                     |
| Economy             | 2.3               | 0.0           | 0.0                      |
| Consumer response   | 5.0               | 7.7           | 0.0                      |
| Government communication | 1.8         | 0.0           | 0.0                      |
| Government legal action | 61.9         | 46.2          | 20.0                     |
| Whistleblowers      | 10.2              | 0.0           | 0.0                      |
be removed from store shelves and promised to impose harsh penalties for food safety violations. More specifically, heavy fines and strict inspections were among the solutions added to ensure food safety.

**Weak food safety system.** The news media blamed the lack of regulation on negligent government management. The most worrying aspects of these tainted oil scandals were that these food manufacturers had earned Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) certifications. For example, Chang Chi received 17 GMP certifications and Chang Guann obtained 12 GMP certifications for its edible oil products. The Chang Chi food scandal was covered up long before it was exposed. Vice Minister of Economic Affairs, Woody Duh, said that the company had manipulated its product manufacturing records and provided the government with “misinformation about its manufacturing processes” to obtain the certificates (Mo & Shih, 2013, p. 3). Consumers were advised to look for the GMP certifications which were an assurance of food safety. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case now. Consumers can check GMP labels for what they buy in stores, but when eating out in restaurants or at food stands in the night market, there is no way to be sure of the quality of the ingredients. In particular, the year-round, popular “night market” is one of Taiwan’s unique cultures where people enjoy the fun of strolling, shopping, and most importantly, eating. However, these markets are usually located in densely populated areas where both fresh and cooked food is sold in crowded spaces under warm temperatures over long hours. These circumstances increase the risk of unsanitary conditions. In fact, the rising trend of foodborne illnesses in Taiwan may have been caused by street vendors’ lack of hygienic practices and food safety knowledge (Sun et al., 2011).

Making food inspection a top priority was a major frame presented in the news media. In Taiwan, there are various food safety control mechanisms for monitoring the food safety system. For example, the government implemented a so-called food safety red-yellow-green light mechanism to alert the public about food safety. The green light indicates that the food is safe for consumption; the yellow light, be aware; and the red light, suspend all consumption. This alerting mechanism tries to communicate food-related risk information and eliminate the public’s worries about food safety. In addition, the government also set up a toll-free hotline for the public to report their concerns about food safety issues. Once this mechanism is started, the government asks experts to assess the food-related risks and to provide a green, yellow or red light for the food in question within 6 to 8 hours after the case is reported.

In response to public concern, Premier Jiang acknowledged that the government’s food regulation had loopholes through which food manufacturers had been able to evade inspection and that the government needed to address both the loopholes and the problem. Thus, to remedy the situation, the Executive Yuan (the executive branch of the Taiwanese government, headed by the premier) announced eight new measures for addressing food safety issues, which included setting up a tip-off hotline; increasing the maximum penalties for unscrupulous food manufacturers; increasing the rewards for those alerting the authorities; improving regulation of oil products and the management of recycled waste oil; enforcing the existing three-layer quality control system; tracking the sources and manufacturing processes for all food items; and revamping the GMP for the food industry (Lee & Hsieh, 2014). By amending laws and regulations, the amendments included heavier sentences, increased fines, and whistleblower rewards in cases of food safety violations. Furthermore, a three-level approach to food safety assurance, including self-discipline among businesses, certification by Ministry of Health and Welfare, and government inspections established by the Act Governing Food Safety and Sanitation, ensures that government officials are better able to inspect the credibility of food tests and guarantees the standard of Taiwan’s food safety regulatory framework.

**Inefficiency of information dissemination.** Food scares provide a constant stream of newsworthy information and attract audience attention since people relate more closely to food risks, especially about food safety, additives, and processing procedures, than to other risks. When these concerns and needs are addressed in a consistent, frequent, and trustworthy way, the consumers will be able to trust governmental oversight of food safety.

In the case described above, the Chang Chi Factory had the primary responsibility of providing the necessary information about the affected product and where it had been distributed. They certainly had the resources to monitor the quality of their products, but failed. Furthermore, Chang Chi neither maintained open communication with the media, nor held press conferences or answered all calls from consumers. Chang Chi’s actions and response decreased its commitment to consumers and the media as primary stakeholders. Chang Chi appeared unwilling to share information with the public and remained inaccessible throughout the scandal and investigation. Their unwillingness to communicate indicated they had something to hide.

By the same token, the role of government is to ensure the safety of the food supply by overseeing the daily operation of food companies. This responsibility includes a variety of activities such as inspections, establishing policies, enforcing regulations, identifying food safety problems, and carrying out foodborne disease surveillance for early detection and warning. The health authorities claimed that the cottonseed oil products from Chang Chi had been tested and were free of gossypol. The public, however, began questioning whether, after refinement, gossypol might cause male infertility. Not all consumers were able to understand the language in risk warnings of infertility. Therefore, the government should have clarified the difference between cottonseed oil and gossypol and whether adulterated oils are...
harmful. Since there was misinformation over the edibility of cottonseed oil from the manufacturers, customers were even more anxious and concerned. This would suggest that specific warnings, with descriptive statements about the health hazard, should have been placed on the containers.

Coordination and communication were insufficient among government agencies in dealing with food safety. In this concern, on October 22, 2014, the government set up a new office under the Cabinet which functioned as a cross-agency platform for food safety management and served as an interdepartmental communication framework. President Ma placed a high emphasis on this problem:

The public has been questioning the effectiveness of the food safety office. Crisis handling and prevention had been divided between many departments, but the integration procedure fell short of expectations; the office will be in charge of frequent communication and collaboration between different departments in order to receive information efficiently, so, of course, this will work. (Wei, 2014)

In light of a learning experience, this case illustrates that the government should work before a crisis to develop strong partnerships with stakeholders. This suggests cultivating relationships with organizations, such as media outlets or primary stakeholders, which can disseminate information to the public during an incident to help reduce the uncertainty of the situation.

Discussion

Consumers rely on their trust in food producers and the government to ensure that the foods they consume are safe without potential health risks. The tainted cooking oil scandal dominated Taiwanese media coverage for months and drew the public’s attention at nearly unprecedented levels. When the press covers a food safety issue, it can make the consumers more aware of the impact on the affected products. This study provides concrete information on framing, sources, and tone of the Taiwanese government’s response to the food incident which had a national impact. Overall, the findings of this study provide both theoretical and practical implications.

In regard to the theoretical implication, the emphasis on attribution of responsibility, weak food safety system, and inefficiency of information dissemination were the dominant concerns in the coverage of the newspapers. Drawing on framing theory, Entman (1993) reminds us that dominant media messages are likely congruent with audience understandings and beliefs about the issue. It suggests that the public may hold particular views regarding who was responsible for the tainted cooking oil incident. In emphasizing the issue as a fault of the cooking oil manufacturers, the media highlighted the views of angry consumers and the vulnerable cooking oil supply chain. This fostered further distrust in cooking oil products identified as related to the unsafe food product. Consumers turned to other sources and began purchasing alternative products. Subsequently, the affected products, and even non-adulterated products, were boycotted because consumers lost food safety confidence. In addition to direct public health consequences, food safety incidents can have a significant economic impact on the Taiwan food industry.

The media emphasized a lack of regulatory oversight. It urged the government to call for legislation and further action to increase the monitoring of safety inspections of the food production process. Brün et al. (2016) indicated that the food crises can “become politicized, developing into power struggles between various stakeholders and interest groups, as they compete to define the problem and search for culprits to blame and hold responsible” (p. 1240). Although the tainted cooking oil was investigated and revealed to be caused by unethical manufacturers, there was a focus on the alleged failure of government and regulatory oversight. In this study, the media used significantly increased attributions of responsibility to the government. News media generally use governmental officials as news sources because they tend to be trusted and creditable. Thus, reporters are more likely to focus on the government when they report on attribution of responsibility (Kim et al., 2019). In this vein, knowledge gained from this study is essential for brand managers operating in the food related industry because it sheds light on the consumers’ attribution of responsibility to the manufacturers and their lack of accountability and response to the food incident.

Furthermore, the study indicated the government should clearly and quickly clarify the food safety policy and introduce or enhance practices that restores the public trust. For instance, the government should create a food traceability system. If the authorities consider a food product to be adulterated and unsafe to consume, then the food may need to be recalled from the market. Most importantly, the recall notices must be accurately stated so consumers stay informed.

In regard to the practical implications, this study described the themes in the news coverage that may have shaped public response. For example, the Taiwanese newspapers’ framing of the tainted cooking oil scandal led Taiwanese or other country’s audience to view the Taiwanese government negatively and to regard Taiwanese food with suspicion. More broadly, this negative framing not only reflect anxieties about Taiwan’s food but also contributed to fears of the manufacturing process. At the same time, such coverage serves to keep Taiwanese government more accountable for the decisions they make regarding food safety regulations and policies for consumer protection.

Conclusion

The tainted cooking oil incident served as a wake-up call for consumers, bringing attention to the need for more stringent regulations of food safety to prevent future food incidents.
Foodborne illness in Taiwan is increasing in prevalence (Sun, 2011). This food scandal exposed a lack of vertical linkages from the central government down to the local governments. Results implied the importance of government communication coordination among its departments and stakeholders to avoid public confusion. Consumers cannot understand potential risks and make well-informed decisions without effective risk communication. The government must take a leadership role, implement an effective food safety mechanism and establish a consistent evaluation system. A well-regulated and well-functioning inspection system is needed as well as changes to the laws governing food processing and manufacturing. Food safety should be a shared responsibility and all levels of government, central and local, have distinct but interconnecting roles in maintaining Taiwan’s food safety system.

Limitation and Future Research

This study has certain limitations, primarily related to the sample of only print media, thus, excluding television and radio news coverage, as well as messages through internet sources. However, since the primary focus of this study was to examine the extent to which the tainted cooking oil incident was framed as a food safety and public health-related event in the discourse of Taiwan, newspapers with a national readership were well suited for this investigation.

The current findings might be a contribution to a future study of how and whether this tainted cooking oil scandal was framed differently in television news coverage or internet sources. A longitudinal study would further examine how this tainted cooking oil incident was framed over time and in relation to key events such as legal investigation and prosecution. Future research also could extend to other food crises, such as 2017 Fipronil eggs contamination, to assess how they were presented, the acute effects on humans, and risks to public health. In conclusion, it would be helpful for manufacturers, policy makers, and risk communicators to conduct an analysis on how Taiwan’s government agencies have handled both crisis and risk communication in a variety of emergency situations.

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