

Public 'losing say' in the media

NATTAYA CHETCHOTIROS

»People have little power over what the mainstream media broadcasts or publishes in an era when the social media dominates the audience's attention, a media forum was told.

The media's power rests not in the people's hands, but those of investors. Social media giants also call the shots,said Prawit Leesatapornwongsa, a National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission member.

He was speaking at a forum on media power at Thammasat University on Friday. Dr Prawit said "platform" media, a reference to social media platforms, is quickly gaining status as the medium of choice. Meanwhile, the government's media policy appears to lack direction.

He said authorities still try to control coverage of sensitive news.

If the media is to be people-driven, the public needs more access to information and show that they are selective about the news they consume, Dr Prawit said.

Professional media practitioners are an essential factor in making the media serve people, with proper fact-checks a prerequisite to ensure the news is fair and neutral. Such fact-checks are seldom performed on social media.

He added the structure of media outlets must be redesigned to lessen their excessive dependency on financiers, especially the "opaque" ones.

Thiptrai Salawong, of the Thailand Development Research Institute, said that in assessing where power behind the media is concentrated, financiers ranked first, the government second and media practitioners third.

Accessing state-sector information was difficult, which adds to the cost of news production, he said. In some cases the state may have raised its "firewall" on purpose, to keep the media out.

"If the media can obtain insight into state information with greater ease, their work will be easier, production costs lower and the media business on the whole will be more profitable," Mr Thiptrai said.

Pichai Chuensuksawadi, *Bangkok Post* former editor-in-chief and former executive of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, said he believed media power lies in the hands of the media outlets and the people.

However, digital media platforms are a game changer where instant exchanges of information and public opinion takes place.

He said Facebook should be held accountable for its contents, given its dual capacity as a platform and publisher.