

# An Investigation of the Practice of Journalism in Ethiopian Television

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## Abstract

The main focus of this study was to investigate the practice of journalism in Ethiopian Television (ETV). The study assessed how journalists in ETV see the discrepancies between journalism and public relations and the impact of public relations on the real practice of journalism. It was the main objective of this study to investigate the factors that affect news and source selection in the media institution. Data was collected using qualitative and quantitative content analysis as well as in-depth interview. A total of 147 news stories ETV broadcast were selected purposely from the first two weeks of three months news stories (December, 2012 up to February, 2013). The findings of the study showed that most of the news was event and development oriented. As a result, very few news stories were critical of the government and most news dealt with success stories. The selected news stories revealed that most of the news stories were presented not from the public interest point of view, but from the government interest view. The study further revealed that ETV's journalists were cognizant of the differences between journalism and public relations. However, due to the lack of journalistic independence in the media, journalists were coerced to select news and sources which served government interest. Journalists were influenced to report the positive sides of government and conceal the wrong doings of government officials. The findings of the study also indicated that ETV's use of public relations professionals as one of their sources of news tainted the real practice of journalism. Overall, the study concluded that the principles of journalism, like; the obligation to the truth and loyalty to citizens were, not portrayed in ETV. Rather the media served as the major rhetorical tool for the government. Therefore, ETV may be advised to look into these and other principles to produce news and to maintain credibility in front of public.

**Keywords:** Journalism, Practice, Public relations and Media

## Introduction

Journalism and public relations (PR) take part in different roles in media organizations. The two professions strive for different purposes. Journalism strives to serve the best interest of the public (mass audience). However, PRs strives to serve the interest of the hired organization and its publics (targeted audience). PRs serves the interest of its publics from the angle of serving the interest of the hired organization. Although public relations and journalism are professions that share many similar attributes and functions, they are very different in practice. For example, journalism is different from PRs in the following way.

Journalism is considered to be service to society. Journalism is the reflection of truth, and is considered to the source of revelation of hidden secrets. It encompasses different analytical and critical spectrums which are incorporated by the journalists in their contributions. The purpose of the sole exercise is neither glamour nor popularity, but rather it is a service, a service which has the sole ambition of revealing truth to the viewers and readers (Danny, 2000:109).

As Danny defines above, journalism is not the work of popularity rather it is a service to society. He states that the work of journalist is to bring the truth to light by looking at things critically. Ironically, John E. Marston, 1963 defines public relations as follows. A public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an organization with the public interest, and executes a program of action (and communication) to earn public understanding and acceptance. As we can infer from the argument above, public relations is a service to an organization. In order to implement the policies and agendas of the organization, a PRs officer assesses the interest of its publics because without them it is difficult to implement the organization's agendas.

Unlike a journalist, a PR officer of a given organization works to establish and maintain reciprocal indulgent between an organization (or individual) and its public.

The two definitions above show the clear differences between journalism and public relations, especially the way they engage in serving the public.

The fundamental difference between journalism and PRs is in who their work serves. The foundation of journalism is the desire to serve the general public and act as a balance and check on society and government. A liberal interpretation of good journalism asserts that the loyalty of journalists is to citizens (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2003). Further to this element of loyalty, journalists should attempt to overcome barriers to understanding, retain 'independence from those they cover', and attempt to see things from all perspectives (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2003). In contrast, a public relations officer is formally dependent up on half-truths. This means that the work of public relations does not totally depend on false case, but they use some grain of

truth. Based on this truth, PR officers try to get recognition by persuading the public in line with the curiosity of their organization (PRs employers). This can play its own role in molding the perception of the public and in understanding the truth. For Falcon, Public Relations could be considered as the professional maintenance of an organization's favorable image. This means journalists and PR officers serve different bodies.

Objectivity is one of the most significant principles of journalism. Journalistic objectivity involves using an impersonal and detached voice to report an issue in a neutral manner. The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance's 'Code of Ethics' states that the primary and principal ethical principle is honesty. Journalists are required to "Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts" (Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance 2012).

According to this view, among the journalist's ethical principles in reporting, honesty is the most crucial one. Journalists are supposed to report and interpret events honestly without taking side. PRs is with their principle, aims to promote their client from an interested, partial perspective. PRs is meant for a targeted audience, while journalism is for mass audience. PRs is all about bringing good image to any company/corporation, where as journalism is all about facts and truths.

Although journalists and public relations practitioners both work with media, these two professional occupations approach their work from different angles; have a diverse set of priorities, as well as dissimilar aspirations. According to Clear & Weidman (1997:1), "The main differences between public relations practitioners and journalists are the manner in which they convey information and their reasons for doing so."

Despite their differences, public relations and journalism are professions that share similar attributes and functions. The two professions depend on one another. While PRs relies on journalists to promote its organization, journalists are also relying on the work of PR officials to produce news. Charron (1994:43) supports this view, "Public relations practitioners and journalists find themselves mutually dependent of one another, a situation which demands cooperation, while their divergent control interests cause distrust and opposition." The main intention of those working in the journalism profession is to provide their readers and audiences with accurate, reliable information they need to function in society. The work products from public relations professionals are intended to persuade the public and are designed to promote and protect an individual or organization's image and products.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Currently, the closing gap between journalism and public relations is making the two professions similar. In fact, journalism and public relations are dissimilar in many ways. Since PRs work is building the positive image of an organization, it is difficult to be impartial. In such a context, if journalists depend on PR officers for their sources, they are hurting journalism in another way. The globalization of media systems and ownership guarantees that the coercion on journalism is experienced internationally. The continually closing gap between the two professions is fast reducing, with studies showing up to 98 per-cents of news articles containing PRs content (Taylor & Francis Group, 2010). In light of this, it is difficult to trust the truth the media portray.

To understand how the PRs can be detrimental to good journalism, it is critical to appreciate the fundamentally disparate functions of the two professions. A journalist's role in society is to provide information that serves the public's best interest (Dueze, 2005). This requires a commitment to the inflexible principle of reporting the most accurate and balanced version of events as possible. On the other hand, public relations utilize persuasive approach to serve the interest of its organization above all. Salter (2005) reasons that the purposeful roles of public relations and journalism conflict. In short, journalism is in the business of reporting, public relations is in the business of selling. The consequence of this conflict is the inevitable decay of quality journalism.

The degree to which journalists rely on public relations for news stories undermines ethical journalism. It eliminates the professional journalist's knack for discerning a newsworthy story. Consequently, the rise of 'sharing' information between PR practitioners and journalists has seen a decline in the journalistic abilities, qualities and capabilities as an informant to the wider public. As Michelle Grattan (1998: 32) puts it, "The rise of spin has had a negative impact on journalism, distorting news processes and encouraging more passive forms of journalism."

As different scholars said above, it is difficult to distinguish journalism from public relations because of the increasing influence of PRs in news production. John Lloyd argues that:

The normal journalistic approach to PRs – i.e. dogs and lampposts – is grossly self serving from the point of view of journalists. It glosses over, ignores or even denies the fact that much of current journalism both broadcast and press is public relations in the sense that stories, ideas, features and interviews are either suggested, or in the extreme actually written by public relations people. Until that becomes open and debated between PR people and journalists, we will continue to have this artificially wide gulf where journalists pose as fearless seekers of truth and PRs are slimy creatures trying to put one over on us. It is not remotely like that (Guardian 10 April 2006:3).

As can be inferred from this argument, currently journalism is becoming public relations because journalist's

sources are PR experts. In accordance, Street states that “journalists are the lapdogs of partial interests, not the watchdogs of the public interest” (2001:146). However, contrary to this view, McNair (2000) argues that editorial staffs are fully capable of evaluating and disregarding material sent to them by the PR industry. From this argument it is possible to infer that journalists are not playing what the profession requires of them. They are becoming the mouth piece of the employers. As a result, most media institutions are becoming PRs organization of government.

Despite the differences that exist between journalism and public relations as discussed so far, in Ethiopia it seems that the practice of journalism and public relations is the same. This being the case, the researcher doubts that there is a clear understanding on the role of journalism in different media organizations found in Ethiopia. Hence, this study wanted to investigate the practice of journalism in Ethiopian Television (ETV).

### Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

How does the media institution (ETV) find out the discrepancies between journalism and public relations?

To what extent ETV practices journalism?

How PRs affects the practice of journalism?

What are the factors that hinder the media practitioners in news and source selection?

### Scope of the Study

This study focused on the practice of journalism in Ethiopian Television (ETV). It didn't include other media institutions found in the country. ETV broadcast news in variety of languages. However, the study focused only on Amharic news believing that it is the working language of the country.

Even though ETV presents news in its morning, noon, and evening programs of a day, this research focused on the evening news program which was transmitted at 8 PM. The main reason for this is that the evening news program is expected as it comes up with fresh and diversified news items.

### Review of Related Literature

Journalism is and has been theorized, researched, and studied worldwide by people coming from a wide variety of disciplines. Different scholars at different places have been researching journalism. In this world, it is not difficult to find colleges or universities that are engaged in teaching programs of journalism. At the same time, the field has its own international and national journals. This implies that journalism as a discipline has international principles which make the practice of journalism common across worldwide.

In decades of journalism studies, scholars have been investigating the dominant sense of what is (and should be) journalism. The following are scholars who have taken part in identifying the concepts, values and elements of journalisms' ideology or the typical traits or values of journalism. They are Golding and Elliott (1979), Merritt (1995), and more recently Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), and describe the traits of journalism as:

**Public service:** journalists provide a public service (as watchdogs or 'newshounds, active collectors and disseminators of information);

**Objectivity:** journalists are impartial, neutral, objective, fair and (thus) credible;

**Autonomy:** journalists must be autonomous, free and independent in their work;

**Immediacy:** journalists have a sense of immediacy, actuality and speed (inherent in the concept of 'news');

**Ethics:** journalists have a sense of ethics, validity and legitimacy.

### The Role of Journalists in Journalism Profession

The Australian Journalists' Association, a division of the industrial union of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), is responsible for the ethical code guiding Australian journalists. In its preamble, the code of ethics describes the professional journalist with public responsibilities.

Journalists describe society to itself. They seek truth. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression, many journalists work for private enterprise, not all these have public responsibilities, MEAA members engaged in journalism commit themselves to honesty, fairness, independence and respect for the rights of others (MEAA,1997:15).

MEAA describes above the special qualities of journalists which distinguishes them from other professionals. Above all, journalists are part of society who are professionals revealing the hidden information and question anybody to bring into illumination what the large societies are not aware. They are the driving force who put into practice the concept of democracy. What is more, journalists are professionals who provide services to society and have public responsibilities. As accountability engenders public trust, it is essential to the fulfillment of journalism's public responsibilities. Journalists have a special obligation to be accountable because

it is they who claim to be one of the main methods of holding to be accountable, on behalf of the public, others wield power' (MEAA, 1997:3). This strengthens that it is the obligation of journalists to be accountable to the public. The services that journalists provide should serve the public. Philosopher Clifford Christians sees individual integrity and dedication to the public good as central to journalism: Justice for the powerless, stands as the centerpiece of a socially responsible press. In this view, the socially responsible journalist must be society's mirror and critic and advocate for its weaker members. The mirror reflects what is before it. The critic reminds society of the standards it has to live up to (Christians, Rotzoll and Fackler 1987).

### **Public Relations Functions**

A definition adopted at the first World Congress of National Public Relations Associations, held in Mexico in 1978 also states the role of PRs officer. It states "Public Relations is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organizational leaders as well as planning and implementing a programme of action that will serve the interest of not only the organization but also that of its publics."

The above definition notifies that PRs serve the interest of both its organization and its publics. This has a correlation with the former definition. It is tough for PR officers to realize their organization's vision without its public. Thus to achieve its objectives the two way communications help the PR practitioners to know the interest of its publics. So, the aim behind serving the interest of the public is first in line with the organizations' interest. PRs officers can not only serve the interest of the public unlike journalists, they do so for serving the interest of their organization because organizations hire PR officer to pull off its agendas.

More than anything, what public relations activities communicate is the values and visions of the organization-for better or worse. These may be socially positive, acceptable values or questionable ones. But whatever the explicit message sent forth, with it goes an implicit message of whether the organization really cares about people, the community, and the future; or instead is self-centered and concerned only with its immediate profits or success-or possibly even anti-social (Ermiyas, 2009)

Generally, scholars raise different ideas about the role of public relations. Though there are different arguments, most of them agree that a public relations is a profession that involves a two way communications to establish mutual understanding between its organizations and public. As discussed so far, PRs to prevail, it should work to serve not only the interest of its organization but also its publics because PRs success and failure depends upon its publics. However, PRs serve the interest of the public with the implied intention of serving its organization interest first. This is why organizations hire PR practitioners.

The relationship between PR practitioners and journalists has been a source of investigation, mainly, in relation to the role of independence in journalism and the increasing pressure on journalists to produce news within short period of time thus growing reliance on PR. Literature confirms the intricacy and gracelessness between PRs practitioners and journalists while trying to explain the divide between the two professions (Brody 1984; Delorme and Fedler 2003 and Sterne 2010)

Wyatt et.al (1996:124) is one of the opinions that although at first the two functions of public relations and journalism share many common interests and values; they now appear to have some conflicting goals leading them to a love-hate relationship. Charron (1994:43) endorses this, "public relations practitioners and journalists find themselves mutually depending of one another, a situation which demands cooperation, while their divergent control interests cause distrust and opposition."

As a journalist, my inclination is to say the similarity stops here. Journalism does indeed see to describe the world as it is, not as someone might wish it to be. It is to be a witness to the world, and tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The profession of public relations is quite different (Jenkins, 2006:45). This argument shows as journalism and PR are reasonably poles apart because both of them strive for different purposes. Journalists look at things to describe them the way they should be not the way someone wants them to be. As discussed ahead, the role of journalists is to present a certain story from different angles in order to provide audiences with the information they need.

However, since the most important characteristics of public relations are to work for the positive image of the organization, they can't unearth any information that may hurt the image of the organization. The organization also hires PR officer not to badly affect its image because the core point of PRs is working for the positive image of the employer. Lee Salter corroborates this argument:

Holistic reality is not good for public relations. A client doesn't employ a public relations agent to tell the truth, regardless of the personal orientation of the agent. Neither does the client pay a public relations firm to represent the interests of their opponents. One to assist the public in weighing up all of the evidence. So, they can make their own judgment on the situation (Salter, 2005:12).

Based on this argument, it is thorny to use PR officer as a source of journalists because PR practitioners might protect or promote their organization by giving or hiding information. That is why journalists should always maintain a serious look to their statement. As Howard Kurtz said, in this overheated environment, the degree to which basic facts can be messaged, manipulated, and is truly troubling. And that raises the fundamental question;



amid the endless noise, whom do you trust? (Quoted in Hargreaves, 2003:186). What journalists are supposed to do is not only covering what happened, but also to show the process of the happened event for their audiences. To do this, journalists should try to see beyond what already happened so that they can uncover the unseen or hidden facts.

As discussed so far, both journalism and public relations serve different stakeholders. The first and most aim of journalism principle is to serve the public interest. On the other hand, though public relations strive to serve the interest of the organization and its publics, its utmost purpose is to serve the interest of the hired organization.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Political Economy of Mass Media**

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky Book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media (1988)*, argue that the media in America serves to promote the agenda of the elite class in American society. In other words, the media only provide one-sided news coverage. They provide a radical critique of the American Mass Media. The Mass Media is owned largely by wealthy individuals, banks, and corporate interests. The media depends upon the state for information and assistance in its day-to-day operations. Thus, free-market forces cause the media to adopt a bias in favor of corporate interests, government interests, and the status quo in general.

Though the focus of Herman and Chomsky's study focuses on the US media- foreign policy relationships, we can apply their theory elsewhere. Their theory is applicable both in domestic issues and other states too (Street, 2001; Herring & Robinson, 2003).

### **Research Methodology**

In order to answer the research questions and accomplish the objectives of the research, both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies (mixed methods design) have been employed. As noted by Zoltan Dornyei, (2007) mixed research method helps to reduce the inherent weaknesses of individual methods, qualitative and quantitative, by compensating them with the strength of the other. These two methods are not antagonistic but are useful when they are used in combination (Newbold 1998:228). While qualitative approaches of content analysis and in-depth interviews have been used to answer the major research questions of the study where as quantitative content analysis has been used to find out the main sources and main speakers in the news production.

### **Method of Data Collection**

Qualitative content analysis can, to some extent, be incorporated within or conducted simultaneously with quantitative content analysis. At first, though the focus of the study is on qualitative content analysis, the study gives the general overview of the text under study by using the quantitative method. This facilitates for the whole understanding of the study. It can be concluded from Hansen et al. (1998), Shoemaker and Reese (1996) and others cited, that a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis offers the best of both worlds and, further, that a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis methodologies is necessary to fully understand the meanings and possible impacts of media content/texts.

As a qualitative approach to data gathering, the researcher employs personal in-depth interviews with journalists and other media practitioners. There are a number of reasons why this tool has been employed for the study. Firstly, it helps the researcher to get the in-depth perspectives of key media practitioners about the practice of journalism in their media. Secondly, to double-check the data gathered through qualitative content analysis. This means to confirm whether their practice goes or not with what they say. Finally, the in-depth interview with key media practitioners is an important instrument to answer some of the research questions mentioned in the study.

### **Sampling Method**

The study employed one of the non-probability samplings called purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used because it "involves administering the instrument to entities that are readily available" (Colton and Covert 2007: 322), it relies on human judgment (Bradley 2007:175). The researcher selects key informants based on their experiences. The main purpose was to get detailed data from key informants of the media practitioners.

As indicated, the main focus of this study has been to find out the extent to which ETV is practicing journalism. Since it is difficult to investigate every media, the study has been forced to choose appropriate sample. For the media content sample, the study focuses on ETV's prime time news at 8:00 PM. The main reason the researcher focuses on news is because news is the big issue that separates journalism from public relations and it's the life of journalism; '...without news journalism would not exist' (Mwaffisi:1994). The researcher prefers prime time news believing most of the news presented in a day is repeated at this time and also the majority of news arrives to newsrooms in the afternoon. Also, this is the time most people come back to their home and watch the news.

The researcher believes that a sample of one or two month's prime time news of whatever issues can serve the

purpose of the study. Accordingly, the study examined the first two weeks of each of the three months: December, 2012, January and February, 2013. This also has its own reasons. Firstly, the researcher believes that ETV's news broadcast at any times can serve the purpose of the study. Secondly, in order to create variety, it is important to see news that was broadcast at different times.

Since the selected media institution broadcast in variety of languages, the study focuses on Amharic program. As Amharic is the working language of the country. ETV has been chosen for the study as it is the biggest media in the country.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection methods of the research were content analysis (both qualitative and quantitative) and in-depth interview. In order to analyze the contents of ETV prime time news coding sheet was developed.

### **Variables and Categories**

As stated earlier, the research has employed both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The coding sheet of the quantitative data was classified into two analytical categories: the news sources and main speakers within the news.

#### **1. Main Speakers within the News**

This has helped the researcher to identify the person quoted as the main information source in a story or to know whose voice was predominantly heard in the news.

Government officials ( at federal)

This refers to any government officials at federal level

Government officials ( at regional)

This refers to the government official at the regional level. These include the nine regions in the country that are recognized by the EDRE constitution.

Political parties

This includes the ruling party as well as other organized political parties.

Community members

This refers to the public or ordinary citizens who do not represent any organizations, but quoted as main sources of the news.

E.Scholars

This represents academicians or scholars who took part in the news by reflecting their views on several issues.

F.Others

This refers to people who are portrayed in the news; but not belongs to one of the above categories.

#### **2. Sources of the News**

This dealt with individual's organizations that were directly quoted as sources of information. These include:

- ETV staff reporters
- Ethiopian News Agency (ENA)
- Regional Government Communication Offices (RGCO)
- News Media Organization.
- Public Relations Practitioners (PRP)

### **Inter-Coder Reliability**

Since the reliability of data is an important aspect of research, the researcher gave the responsibility of coding for two coders who had better understanding of the issue. The researcher, then, checked the inter coder reliability by using Holsti's formula where:

Reliability  $= 2M / (N1 + N2)$

M-represents the number of coding decisions with which the two coders agreed up on, while N1 and N2 are the total number of coding decisions by the first and the second coder respectively (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997). By doing this, the researcher proved that the two coders agreed in their coding decisions.

In addition to qualitative content analysis, the researcher used an in-depth interview, in relation to the qualitative method of data collection. For this purpose, six key informants were interviewed from 12 April to 16, 2013. In order to select these key informants, the researcher used purposive sampling. Accordingly individuals who had experiences in news gathering and editing were selected. The working experiences of these informants ranges from 5 to 23 years in news reporting and editing. To get the necessary data for the study, three reporters, two editors and one editor in chief were interviewed. Among these, two of them have been females and the others have been males. The participants have been selected based on their experiences and gender. All respondents were interviewed in Amharic so as to create conducive environment for them. The results were later translated into English.

### Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

As mentioned earlier, the main objective of the study was to investigate the practice of journalism in ETV. Findings from content analysis (both quantitative and qualitative) and in-depth interviews were presented and discussed concomitantly in this chapter per the objectives of the study.

#### Sources of the News and Speakers within the News

Based on the content analysis of six weeks of ETV prime time news stories, the following major sources and speakers within the news were discussed.

*Table: Sources of the news and speakers within the news*

Speakers within the news	Sources of the news							Percent
	ETV staff reporters	ENA	RGCO	PRs practitioners	News media organizations	Others	Total	
Government officials at federal	63	6	0	5	0	1	75	51
Government officials at regional	13	2	21	2	2	1	41	27.9
Political parties	3	0	1	0	0	0	4	2.72
Community members	8	2	2	0	1	0	13	8.84
Scholars	5	0	2	0	0	0	7	4.76
Others	3	2	0	2	0	0	7	4.76
Total	95	12	26	9	3	2	147	
Percent	64.62	8.16	17.7	6.12	2	1.36		100

The above table can be described in terms of three classifications: Firstly, the sources of the news; secondly, the speakers within the news and thirdly the emphasis that each source of news adopted for each of its speakers. Accordingly, each of them will be discussed below.

The table depicts that ETV uses different sources of news. Firstly, news which is prepared by ETV staff reporters and the others are from ENA, regional government communication offices, PRs practitioners, different news media organizations and other sources.

Out of 147 news items which were broadcast in ETV, 95 (64.62%) of the news was produced by ETV staff reporters. The regional government communication offices covered about 26 (17.7%) and ENA and PRs practitioners were used 12 times (8.16%) and 9 times (6.12%) respectively. Therefore, it is possible to infer the vast majority of the news in ETV is covered by the staff reporters. In addition, it can be deduced that the other sources of ETV's news were government sources.

Secondly, as can be inferred from the above table, government officials at federal level were the main speakers within the news. They appeared in the news 75 times (51%) out of 147 news stories. The regional government officials accounted for about 41 (27.9%) of stories. The community members became speakers within the news about 13 times (8.84%). Scholars and varied political parties covered 7 (4.76%) and 4 (2.72%) of the total news stories respectively. This implies that government officials at both the federal and regional levels were given the highest coverage in ETV. On the contrary, different community members only received 13 (8.84%).

Thirdly, the findings of the above table also show that from the majority of news stories that were produced by ETV staff reporters, which is out of 147 news stories, 63 of the pieces derived from the words of government officials found at federal levels. About 13 news stories were from government officials found at regional level. The others like community members and scholars were given scanty coverage by ETV staff reporters. ENA gave coverage for federal government officials about 6 news stories out of 12 news stories from the whole the total number of news which is 147 news stories. The regional government communication office gave the highest coverage, which accounts for about 21 news stories for government officials found at regional level out of the news stories originated from the regional government communication office which accounts 26 news stories from the total news stories, 147 news stories. And they gave little coverage for the others.

The public relations practitioners also gave the highest proportion of coverage for federal government officials which amounts to about five of the nine news stories originating from PRs practitioners.

### **News Selection Process in ETV**

The media do not simply report on something newsworthy. As discussed in chapter two, news is the final product of various processes. Several scholars proposed different criteria for news selection, Golding and Elliot (1979) proposed on three things for news value: the audience, accessibility and fit as discussed in chapter two. Here the researcher looks at news selection based on audience interest in ETV.

### **Qualitative Content Analysis of Selected News Stories**

Qualitative content analysis deals with analysis and interpretations of the themes of the categorized titles, tones, and with the analysis of news coverage. The identification of themes was conducted as Rice and Ezzy (1999:258) says through 'careful reading and re-reading of the data'. It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis.

### **Themes of News Content**

#### **1. Social Issues News**

Most ETV news of this category focuses on success stories. They deal with what the ruling party has done in every sector in the country. As informant 4 of the study said 'ETV focuses on Development Journalism (DJ). However, the concept of DJ is misperceived by government.' According to Hermant Shaw (1990:1035) development news should examine critically, evaluate and interpret the relevance of development plans, projects, problems and issues. It should indicate the disparities between plans and actual accomplishments. Based on this, the practice of DJ in ETV is in contrary with the argument of Shaw outlined above. Most of the news stories of different projects of social services deal with the final results not on the process of the projects.

Some of the news was presented in the following ways.

A project of clean drinking water which benefits more than 100,000 refugees was inaugurated in Dolo Ado Refugee Camp, located in Somali region. It is also reported that the relief delivered by the Ethiopian government to the Somali refugees displaced by the internal troubled caused by insurgents of Alshabab, and it is also creates strong bond between the two countries' people. (February 03, 2013)

Clean drinking water centers developed in more than birr 26 million have started delivery of service in East Wolega Zone as of last year. Hence, more than 200,000 people turned out to be beneficiary of clean drinking water. Like the explanation of the zone's water and minerals office, in the current budget year, various activities also carried out to enhance the coverage of clean drinking water in the zone, in birr 30 million. (February 12, 2013)

The excerpts above reflect coverage of two government-sponsored projects and their inaugural ceremonies. They detail how the projects solved the problem of clean drinking water in certain regions. And yet the report didn't give even the smallest glimpse of the problems project leaders encountered as the work was under way. Background information about the projects; the ups and downs that took place while the projects were in progress was not reported. However, the main intention of the news is to show as the government gave emphasis on society's problem.

Journalists of the media cover only the positive aspects of the development activity that is taking place and leave aside the critical stories related to the projects. Scholars like Salter (2005) argues that what journalists are supposed to do are not only cover what happened, but also to show the progression of the event in question for their audiences.

On similar note, in ETV it is routinely mentioned that as the country is on rapid development stage from sub-Saharan African countries, but not many details are given about the process of the development. Here is one of the news stories that deal with this issue:

The ministry of finance and economy has announced that the execution of the two years growth and transformation plan was 10% in average. The minister also explained that the activities to be executed in the coming three years shall be a two digit growth. The economic growth has shown significant change as of 2003. Hence, in the past nine consecutive years, the country has attained economic growth of 11%, like the deputy minister Dr. Abraham Tekest's explanation. Since the implementation of the 5 years GTP commenced, the execution of the growth plan for the past years has been 10% in average. The growth, the industrial sector 13.6% and the service rendering sector 11.1% as per the explanation of the deputy

minister, the growth domestic product of Ethiopia has reached 7%, which is birr 37 billion. The amount of investment also has shown a rise of 34.6% in 2004 in comparison with 27.9 in 2003. Income per capita of citizens also has shown a rise of 513 US dollar in 2004 in comparison with 338 US dollar in 2003. (February 04, 2013)



The above selected news stories would imply that the country is on sustainable growth; as the growth is achieved in different sectors i.e. in agriculture, industry and service rendering sectors. It simply implies the government continuous effort in all sectors. From the text it is impossible to refer views other than the central idea of the text which worship the government role for the growth of different sectors. The text didn't incorporate views from different bodies only the government official view is reflected in the text. MaCnamara (1999:6) explains that PRs had its birth in the Press Agency Model, which focused on publicity (good or bad) from a very one-sided point of view. Scholars like Hatchen (1998:37) attaches Paramount importance to the diversity of views that are reflected through news. Conversely, most of the news stories of ETV present-ideas from one point of view where government officials dominate the media and news presented in the direction desired by the government. Similarly, the preferred meanings that are structured into news discourse are typically 'those that are functional for elites (Herman and Chomsky; 1988:23).

## 2. Political News

In ETV, political news stories were presented in a manner that embellished the actions of the ruling government. The news stories were presented to exhibit the strength of the ruling party and its contribution in the development activity of the country. It seems that what Herman argues for a 'propaganda model' of journalistic production, to analyze the numerous and important cases where the mass media serve as instruments in campaigns of ideological mobilization (Herman and Chomsky 1988:175). Below is some of the news:

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn explained that Ethiopia is currently established on soiled foundation of peace, as well as the EPRDF government is a government of development, and the people of the country are also peace loving. In the aftermath of the passing away of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, some parties have reflected suggestions that the development activities will come to a halt, a suggestion which failed to take the governing party's and the development governments institutional strengthens, as well as the diligence and peace loving people of Ethiopia into consideration. (December.02, 2012)

Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP) marks its 13<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary in Logia and Avira towns. Regional chiefs and party chairman took note that the public in the state are benefiting from fruits of development happening in the country. The party has taken massive activities in combating, progressing and improving the livelihood of pastoralists. (December 05, 2012)

In ETV, whatever the issue is, in one way or another the news can be related with the development and growth of the country. The following news stories illustrate this:

Ethiopia is elected to host the 2013 Africa and European Union parliaments' combination assembly. The speaker of house of people's representatives, Mr. Aba Dula Gemeda explained that Ethiopia was elected as a host country due to its significant role throughout Africa and other areas. 13 countries in the zone also delivered their support to Ethiopia's election. Like the speaker explained, the election was made in consideration of the current peace and security, as well as the development activity in the country. (January, 03, 2013)

Members of AEDM in Addis Ababa have announced that they strive to ensure and hasten the country's renaissance and to sustain the results of development activities in the country, through good governance. The 32th anniversary of AEDM was celebrated in Addis Ababa under the name of 'Operation Meles for Growth and Green Development'. As per the explanation of the ministry of trade attended the celebration, AEDM has executed a number of activities to ensure the benefit of the people. (December 01, 2012)

Mr. Ali Suleman, commissioner of the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, was elected as the advisory member of board for the anti-corruption commission of African Union. It is announced that the election of Mr. Ali a proof that the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission is carrying out encouraging and producing activities, as well as it is an indicator that Ethiopia has a solid anti-corruption stand. (February 06, 2013)

One can discover the same theme for the texts above though the issues in question are different. The texts worship the development activity that is taking place in the country. The texts illustrate the ideology of ETV, which is pursuing Development Journalism. As one of the informants of the study revealed so far as the notion of development journalism is misinterpreted in the country, the main purpose of ETV is heralding the success of the country in different aspects by hiding critical stories that may hamper the country's image. It is the government that can benefit when the country is portrayed in positive way. Whatever the event is in ETV, what can be raised on the event is obvious because they all relate with the success of the country economically, politically and socially. Government uses events or occasions to bring to light the validity of its work so as to influence others. And the above texts reflect this notion.

When we look at some news stories which deal with the constitution of the country, it is possible to discover its interior as of the subsequent demeanor.

The announcement is made that various opposition forces have entered in the city of Addis Ababa pursuant to the peace call made by the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to various insurgents and territories groups. An opposition/insurgent group namely AL-ATHAD has accepted the call of the Ethiopian government to peace and development, and commenced taking part in the development activities exerted in Somali region. The AL-ATHAD insurgent group has also accepted the peace process carried under Kenya's negotiator role, which was commenced by the great Ethiopian leader, the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The anti constitution forces are not acceptable any more in Ogaden. They have a very limited support in the region. The Somali region, which is benefited from the system of the Federalism, has started to administer its affairs like other regions, hence, the anti peace forces has joined the mainstream.

(December, 02, 2012)

The above news story seems to suggest that the FDRE government is the peace loving and development-centered government and shows as the system of federalism is the fruitful system of governance. This builds good name for the ruling party. In line with the above context, the following sound bite by the Deputy Spoken Person of the House of People's Representatives followed by the news story broadcast on December 07, 2012 corroborate what has been said above.

The people of the country are becoming beneficiary in economic and political aspects due to the ratification of our constitution after steadfast process and its implementation has played a significant role for the overall positive direction of the country and the economic growth, which is astonishing to the whole world. Due to each nation and nationality was emancipated by the constitution, and each ethnic group has equivalent right and freedom, they carry out their education in schools in their own language, as well as in court of laws. Thus, the constitution is a source of pride and beneficiary to the people.

The head of Harreri region administration explained that the constitution is fundamental and base for the journey of the renaissance of the country. Like the explanation of the head of the region, Ethiopia has managed to attain successive economic growth as of the time it has started following the constitutional system. In the future, as per his explanation, it is important to ensure the renaissance of Ethiopia through policies and strategies designed by the great leader Mr. Meles Zenawi. (February 11, 2013)

As can be deduced, every government officials rejoices in the ratification of the FDRE constitution. They all celebrate as the implementation of the current constitution in the country, apparently, have paved a way for national renaissance of the country and have given equal rights to all people of Ethiopia. Within the sampled news stories, the way most news stories were presented especially with regard to the constitution is to capture the attitude of the audiences; the researcher couldn't find any story that damages government's image and most of them were presented from the angle of the opportunity that the constitution created for people of the country. So, the political theme revealed that most news stories of this category were centered on presenting government in most positive way.

### **News coverage**

The foundation of journalism is the desire to serve the general public interest and to act as a check and balance on society and government. As communication policy scholar Robert Horwith (2005) has written, "The public interest in broadcasting was translated to mean the presentation of diverse viewpoints-a general balance of programming-and equitable treatment of political candidates". If we take a look at some selected news stories, the majority of the reporting in question deals with government interest news because it is framed in the way that lauds the actions of the government. Here is one of the selected news stories.

The Ministry of Agriculture announced that the model farmers in all areas have increased their produce through using fertilizers such as Urea, Dap and Potassium on their farm. (February, 12, 2013)

As can be inferred from the above excerpt, the model farmers increased their produce due to the government support paid to agriculture sector. The aim of the bulletin is to show the government role in increasing the production output of farmers. So, this builds the government's good image in front of the audiences.

The Silte Zone trade and industry department explained that it has rendering training for more than 400 small and micro finance enterprises. It is also delivering various enhancement trainings. It is believed that the training could tackle the problem of joblessness in the region as well as to strengthen the enterprises. (January 14, 2013)

Southern Gondar farmers who sow in the method of line sowing explained that they have achieved the produce of more than 40 quintal per hectare. They explained that the technology

has helped them to increase their produce in double fold. (February 07, 2013)  
These extracts aptly demonstrate the role of government in decreasing the problem of joblessness and increasing the output of farmers by equipping them with modern technology. So, the extracts are more beneficial for government rather than for the public's. They build a good name for government. Moloney (2000:65) argues that PRs is often used to support the government interest at the expense of other interests. The excerpts given above also reveal the interest of the government because it has a little to do or to serve the interest of the public. With regard to this problem, the researcher asked the informants 'to which issue (public/government) do ETV's media professionals give priority in their coverage? The informants responded as follows:

**Informant 4:** Exceptional coverage is given for government related issues. There is a rationale for this, Most of the time we collect 'Tikoma' (lead) from different sources. The *Tikoma(lead)* is based on government plans. There is an extraordinary case in which we collect news based on our own plans because we are not permitted to do so. This hinders us to leave the public's interest; news stories which deal with different problems of society will not be discovered. This doesn't mean that ETV doesn't give treatment on public related issues, but it is given less focus when we weigh against the government.

This argument substantiates the themes discussed within the extracts above. The main reason why most of ETV's news stories resemble public relations work is that reporters depend on events that the government prepares. This means that ETV is serving the governments' interest at the expense of the public. Journalists have the responsibility to serve the public's best interest. It is rare to see stories critical of the events. The majority of the reporting at ETV focuses on copying the speeches of government officials without critically analyzing them. Thus, it is difficult to see in ETV when journalists produce news based on their professional judgment and creativity. This displays the manner in which media cover the speeches of government officials in order to manipulate public attention. Bernays (1955) provided a seminal view of public relations, defining it as "the attempt, by information, persuasion and adjustment, to engineer public support for an activity". The journalist is considered to be the independent source of information, and it is believed that the information provided by the journalist is free of any manipulation, exaggeration, and nepotism. The following news story shows how reporters at ETV transcribe the speech of government officials without critical analysis.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn has announced that most of vast projects in the country are executed in line with the set forth plan. As per the explanation of the prime ministers, Ethiopia is in the right trajectory of growth. The country's economy is also expected to show a rise of more than 11% in the current budget year, like the prime minister explanation. He is also explained that it is obvious that as the country is known in agricultural sector, our produce of agriculture is increasing from time to time. Farmers training centers were established and various efforts were made to enable the farmers. With regard to the industrial sector, various industrial zones were established. (January 01, 2013)

The above text serves as evidence that ETV's reporters focus their full attention on the speeches of government officials. Viewers are hard-pressed to see a sentence critically analyzing the problems of the country. All of the coverage deals with what government is doing and has done to improve the country. ETV's reporters focus on government speech and the achievement of Ethiopia's ruling party. It is thus rare to see diversified coverage in ETV's news programming because most of the news stories depend up on the government's agenda. In line with this view, the researcher asked whether ETV's coverage reflects attention to the public interest.

**Informant 3:** Substantiates what is said above in the following manner:

In ETV it is not the public that can be seen; it is the government officials that speak and seen on media most frequently. To me, I don't think that ETV is giving a chance for the public to transmit their voices in the way it should be. It is the government plan that the station is reflecting. This means, to me, a kind of propaganda. *Justify why ETV reflects government plans/interests at the expense of the other.* The informant said: we are under pressure of our bosses; so we don't have the power to use the journalistic independence.

From the above excerpt, it is again apparent that reporters from ETV focus on the speech and actions of government officials because of the institutional pressure weighed upon them. There is a 'systematic and highly political dichotomization in news coverage that is based on service ability to important domestic power interests' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988:35).

Similarly, most news coverage of ETV aligns with the interests of the government. Danny (2000), proffers that the job of journalism is to provide service for the larger publics by uncovering truth that otherwise hidden. From here it can be deduced that journalists are a vital source of information for society. The service to the public involves revealing necessary information of which average citizens may not be aware.

### **Tone of the News**

McCombs (2000) argued that the content of mass media messages including the tone of the messages influence the pictures of the world in our minds. The news coverage of ETV lacks critical reporting. Though there are hardly negative stories in the media's news coverage, they deal with how the government is playing its own role

to alleviate the problems or how the government solved the problem. Besides, the news stories are presented as the problems occurred due to other bodies not due to the negligence of the government. The news stories excerpted below justify this claim:

The Gedo Bako Nekemt road construction project's delay has created serious and negative influences on their day to day activity, as per the explanation of the dwellers of the area and road users. The Ethiopian roads authority also explained that the problem is created by the contractor, which is in charge of the construction of the road. According to the explanation of the authority, possible effort will be made to finalize the construction of the road. (January, 09, 2013)

As can be seen from the extracted text above, though it deals with the problem residents of the area are facing, the blame is placed on an entity other than the government. The passage displays how ETV provides very scant coverage for potentially critical stories. It is the way it not negatively affects the government.

From the sampled news stories, almost all of the news deals with positive actions of the government. The news celebrates and appreciates the progress and development in the country in different sectors. What the researcher observed in the news coverage of ETV is that the network

prefers to cover the problems of society, whether they involve scarce access to clean drinking water or transportation-related issues, after the problem is solved by government. There is no evidence of the network detailing the complaints of society before the project had been started.

The following news story further illustrates this problem:

The administration of Hosana town has announced that different investors with capital of birr 1.5 billion have contributed significant role to the town's growth. The dwellers of the town also explained that as the project of clean drinking water commenced its service, the problem of drinking water is tackled. According to their explanation, they used to get clean drinking water once in 3 days. Nonetheless, the project carried out in birr 120 million has sorted out the problem of drinking water. The lack of drinking water also discouraged the investors to invest in the town previously. As the explanation of the Hosana municipality, the completion of the project will sort out the problems once and for all. The current investment activity also will be improved. (December, 09, 2012)

It is possible to understand from the above news story that the government solved the problem that the area residents encountered. Maybe it hasn't been given any coverage about this problem before the problem overcame. From this excerpt, it is easy to conclude that ETV as a media network follows and reports on governmental progress rather than revealing the problems Ethiopians face. Such kind of coverage is not in the interest of the society. The public does not benefit if reports of such issues are filed after the problem is solved. This type of coverage benefits the government in molding the attitudes of society members by displaying positive actions of the government in media. The mass media are instruments of power that mobilize support for the special interests dominating state and private activity (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: Xi). PR academics similarly claim (Bernays and Goldman and others) that PR has served as a type of manipulative communication in the vast majority of its practice.

One can thus conclude that ETV is providing coverage for the stories of most positive tone which vaguely resemble development journalism in their content. This refers to the absence of critical reporting, which may have affected the attitudes of people to government in ETV. This is a means to control and shape the public's attitude for the purpose of building good name. The researcher questioned the informants of the study on how they cover critical stories in their news reporting. Their comments are displayed below:

**Informant 1:** in the first place, to do a critical reporting you need to have journalistic independence. And when follows you need to select news and source of the news by yourself. However, in ETV both news and its sources are selected by our bosses who are parts of the government. The source we contact is also parts of the government. So, there is no way in ETV to do critical reporting. Sometimes when you bring critical news, they can edit it the way they want it.

**Informant 2:** though it is rare, we cover critical reporting, but neither in-depth nor the way the name of government officials are negatively raised.

The arguments offered by the informants reflect the issues plaguing the stories discussed so far. In ETV though, sometimes critical reporting is given coverage, but they are not the way the government name is mentioned negatively. This shows as the media is working or giving coverage for news story which doesn't affect any government officials. This means ETV is serving the interest of the government rather than focusing on the problem of the society. It is clear to infer also that there are external pressures on journalists not to engage on investigative reporting.

Generally, the findings reveal that ETV gives more coverage from the government interest's news stories. As a result most portraits of ETV are deal with positive tone which is concerned with success and development stories. In contrary, the investigative responsibility of media is disregarded in ETV.



### **The Differences between Journalism and Public Relations**

It is possible to say that all of the key informants of the study clearly defined the discrepancies between journalism and public relations as defined and discussed under chapter two. The researcher was unable to find any disagreement or differing opinions among the respondents of the study in differentiating the two professions in the clearest way. The following response of only one informant is taken as a representative or sample of the others informants of the researcher's study.

**Informant 5:** Public relations focus on only the success of the organization. By any means you cannot get negative information from PRs. Even if you raised by yourself he/she will tell you the means they have used to solve the problems. They show you the capacity they have in solving problems. So, they are there in the organization to make you believe the positive aspect of their organization.

On the other hand, purpose of journalism is informing the public to reveal information that is important, however it is done hidden from public. Unlike PRs, journalism doesn't take side in order to support one group and reject the others and to act as watchdog over the government and to serve the interest of the public.

As can be seen above, the informants of the study can tell apart the professions in the same way the scholars of media define it. 'As a journalist, my inclination is to say the similarity stops here. Journalism does indeed attempt to describe the world as it is, not as people wish it to be. It is to be a witness to the world, and tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth whereas the profession of PRs is quite different (Jenkins, 2006:45). Hypothetically, the media practitioners can understand the differences between journalism and PRs. However, when it is seen in a matter-of-fact sense, it is difficult to say that media practitioners plant demarcation on the differences between the two professions. This happens as a result of the pressures on reporters.

As discussed so far in this study, journalists in Ethiopia are servants of the government. They do not have the power to opt for their own news and source of the news. They depend up on the government officials and PRs sources. At the same time the informants told the researcher as it is not easy to verify information of the PRs or other government officials.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that though ETV's media practitioners display the discrepancies between the two professions, they do not have the power to crosscheck information of the public relations officials because PRs are part of the government. That is why in ETV, a majority of the news resembles the testimony of PRs because stories are presented in a manner that serves the interests of the government. Not only the information that they get from PRs but also the news stories produced by the media's reporter reflects the positive actions of the government in most cases due to the fact that journalists are under the control of their bosses. The PM's 'The Five Filters' provide a basis for the general argument that the news which is deemed 'fit to print' will overwhelmingly be that which is politically and ideologically advantageous to the interests of power (Chomsky:1989).

The researcher asked why ETV reporters cover news in a manner that builds the government reputation and neglects a majority of critical stories, despite being aware of the differences between journalism and public relations. Almost all of the informants provided the same response. They said they are under dearth of journalistic independence and yet every one of their activities is managed by government-assigned bosses. One informant (informant 5), declared that 'it is the fear of the journalists themselves who neglect to cover critical stories not the government. Most importantly the experienced culture of work has shaped the journalists.'

To conclude, ETV's manner of practicing journalism resembles PRs functions in building the good image of the ruling party not due to the lack of knowledge from the media practitioner's side, but rather due to the working culture the media has established and the overarching pressure from the government.

### **Factors Affecting Journalists News and Source Selection**

As mentioned already, news and sources are two major factors in journalism. The researcher believes that in order to properly analyze the practice of journalism at ETV, it is crucial to see the news and source selection of ETV. At the same time the study on factors that affect the selection process is important too.

Weaver (1998) argues that reporters work can only thrive and flourish in a society that protects its media from censorship and in a company that saves its journalists from the marketers. A majority of the informants have pointed out that they have different challenges on selection of their own news and sources based on journalistic principles. The extract below illustrates this:

**Informant 1:** There are lots of challenges we face. We can't run a story which we believe serve the interests of the public. We are framed according to the plan of government. Since the government plan is focus on development story, we are doing the same. We don't have the power to deal with critical story. Our boss gives us direction on what kinds of story should we focus or not. Even there are times when our editors cut out the core point of the news when we bring newsworthy issues to the newsroom. Most of the time, this happens due to the lack of adequate knowledge from our editors. Most of our editors are people who are not from journalism background and their working experience is below



acceptable. They are given the position as a result of political affiliation. They cut the most important part of the news by assuming that it may ruin the image of the government which is not concerned with. So, the structure of the works like reporters, editors and editor in chief is given in our media institution not based on your journalism knowledge. This highly affected the news selection process inside ETV.

As can be inferred from the excerpt above, the big challenge for news selection is the lack of journalistic knowledge displayed by some media professionals. Those who are placed at different positions in the media are selected according to their political affiliation, not for their knowledge of journalism. This means that those high up in media management give editors enough power only to serve the interest of the ruling party. In general, a lack of enough journalistic knowledge is hampering the profession; the government's role in appointing people of its interest at different positions is affecting the quality of journalism. As a result, most of the news stories were shaped to serve the government's interest.

Almost all of the key informants of the study proved as it is so challenging to cover any critical stories on the government in ETV. The researcher asked the respondents to reason out their responses and said the following:

**Informant 1:** I do have about 23 years of work experience in ETV. All the way through these years, there is hardly any story which negatively disclose about the reputation of government or its official's. I remember the report of my coworker about a certain government organization. He challenged the government officials of the organization and made the report accordingly. Another government official called to our media and then ordered a reprisal to be taken on the reporter. ETV made another report to do a piece on the reporter by labeling him as "*yegili tikim abarari*" which means as the one who runs for self-benefit. Those who are on management position in ETV also took their own punishment up on the reporter. This shows as there is no right to cover news which may negatively hurts one of the government officials. If one of them is mentioned, it is taken as if all of them are damaged equally. So we keep our self refrained from doing the same activity.

The above extract revealed that journalists practice of self-censorship due to the pressures from government in selecting news story. This means that in order to survive within the profession of journalism, the journalists should work for the good name of the government. According to Solomon (2005:11), journalists practicing self-censorship often favor government authorities over other groups with different views in a number of ways.

Depending on the findings, it can be concluded that there are a lot of pressures affecting journalists' news and source selection in ETV. The journalists are not doing critical stories or investigative journalism. They act as the mouthpiece of the government. News can be selected and distributed only if it talks about the positive actions of the government. Even journalists are neglecting to verify information because the source selection is done by the media and journalists lack independence.

### **The Impacts of Public Relations on Journalism**

Public relations has a stronger influence on the profession of journalism nowadays. Many studies in the past link the rise of PRs in relation to the government elite need to manage the public at times of difficult social transition (for instance, Tulloch 1993; Ewen 1996). It seems that the current activities of ETV fit well with this interpretation according to the interview with informant 1. The informant was asked to identify his or her criteria for selecting news. In response, the informant said, 'we are servants of government. We act as a mouth of a government; we follow what government says and we select news based on government plans and contact sources that are part of the government like government PRs'.

This statement shows journalists are a critical component of government because their news and source selection process is based on the interest of the government. To serve the government interest, journalists use PRs officers of different organizations as their source since PRs are part of the government. Media scholars like Dennis L. Wilcox (2005:304) avows that PRs and journalists operate under a longstanding love-hate relationship as a result of the different roles the two professions play, despite the similarities in their content. However, the situation in ETV seems as this situation is in conflict with international trend. Asked to explain ETV's media practitioner's relations with different public relations officers, almost all of the respondents bring forth similar explanation.

**Informant 1:** We do have smooth relationship with PRs officers of all organizations. In ETV we have the phone number of all PR officers. We contact them when we want them. We take information about that organization and use it for our report.

**Informant 4:** We do have a good relationship with PRs practitioners. However, the majority of news is produced by ETV reporters. PRs officers send huge amount of information to our media and we use them by adjusting it the way the information fits for broadcast news.

According to the arguments displayed above, ETV's reporters maintain good relationships with PRs officials. Most informants agreed that the main reason for the smooth relationship is due to the absence of investigative work in the news making process of the media and suggested as their work is to put the government in most positive light. The informants also weren't afraid to accept the idea that their relationship with PRs is unprofessional. It is discussed in chapter two that the two professions serve different purposes. A journalist's

role in society is to provide information that serves the public interest (Dueze, 2005) whereas PR officials serve the interest of both their organization and its publics. However, they engage in serving the interest of their publics from the angle of their organization's interest. This means that PRs cannot serve the interest of the public like journalism because PR officers are hired to serve first the interest of their organization. So, it is possible to infer from the arguments of the two informants above that ETV uses PRs officials as one of their main sources of information. This has its own impacts on the practice of journalism. The researcher asked all respondents whether the use of PRs officials' information has an impact on the practice of journalism or not. All of the respondents agreed that the use of PRs as sources of information has negative impacts on journalism. In response, the informant claim "PRs has a big impact on journalism. So, when we use PRs as a source, the story we produce inclines to positive tone only because PRs doesn't focus on the deficiencies of their organization. The loyalty of journalism is to the public, but PRs officers are loyal to the organization he/she is serving above all. So, using PRs as a source means threatening the purpose of journalism." (Informant 6)

As can be seen from the argument above, the two professions are different. So, using PRs as a source means making the two professions similar and threatening journalistic integrity. According to the informant, the loyalty of journalism is to citizens, which is one of the principles of journalism. So, using PRs as a source means disturbing this principle. Another informant describes the impacts of PRs on journalism in the following way.

**Informant 2:** PRs hinders us from working investigative journalism. As a working culture, ETV reports the good only. For instance, if the Ministry of Health invests hospital in Oromia region, what normally reported is that the ministry has increased its health coverage from this percent to this percent and this shows the focus that the government gives to health sector. However, investigative questions like did the hospital consume all budgets appropriately? Is it finalized within the planned time with its all standard qualities? These and other questions will remain uncovered. Such kind of coverage is PRs works which hides the critical story. So, use of PRs as a source negatively affects the purpose of journalism. To me, ETV is working without touching the core points of news.

One of the most important qualities that separate journalism from PRs is that journalists engage in investigative works. They do not see things from only one angle. PR offices present ideas in one way - the positive way. It is obvious that when a reporter talks to PR officers, he/she is merely obtaining only one perspective. So, the argument above shows that the use of PRs negatively affects journalism. It teaches viewers not to see things from multiple perspectives, rather to absorb news from one angle. That is the most positive angle which lauds the activities of government. However, journalism's foremost principle is, as stated by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), to serve as an independent monitor of power, not only to speak and report the positive sides of the government. Journalistic loyalty, the authors claim, is to the citizens.

Most of the key informants agreed as they are using PRs as their source knowing its negative side on journalism. The researcher asked the informants to justify this.

**Informant 3:** PRs is one of the news sources of ETV. Our boss orders us where to go. We don't have power to select our own news source. We want to balance the information we get from PRs, but we fear the punishments that follow because the PRs are part of the government. So, what is experienced is to report what the media and the PRs official desire.

The argument above shows the reason why journalistic work resembles the PRs jobs. Journalists have the responsibility of balancing and verifying stories they receive from PRs sources. But they cannot do so due to the pressure exerted on them by their bosses, or the culture of work the media have experienced. This pressure obliges journalists to dispatch information provided by PRs of government officers said which is simply promoting development activities. This also played its own role in hurting the profession of journalism. So, based on the argument above, PRs is recognized news source of ETV. This indicates as the media itself is using a source which affects journalism in order to serve the interests of the few in power. According to Chomsky (1989:153), the general predictions concerning patterns of media behavior is that what enters into the mainstream will support the needs of established power. ETV's use of PRs as formal established news sources shows the media is designed to voice the needs of the government so that the government name will not be tarnished. This damages the credibility of media which should strive to serve the public interest.

One of the negative effects of PRs is on presenting views from different angles because PRs main job is to build the good image of the hired organization not on the critical stories about the organization. During this time, PR officials focus on presenting ideas from one angle. So, using PRs as a source means taking the one side of the story. The following informant illustrates this:

**Informant 6:** as I told you on the discrepancies, the two professions have both different purposes. When we use PRs professionals as a source of news, we can shape journalism as PRs. Since PRs is for the hired organization, it covers no negative news about that organization. It focuses only on the positive story the way it serves government interest. In contrast, journalism purpose is to serve the public. So, using PRs as a source means serving the interest of others instead of public. This can negatively affects media credibility.

As cited in, Dan Berkowitz, 1997, Ralph Barney noted: a first reason for journalists to exist is the gathering and distributing of information, most particularly information that others are taking pains to keep from being distributed. It is that type of information that would prove most valuable to society. In contrary, ETV's experience regarding this argument is void. What the public's to hear is not only the positive side; they also want the media to present the background information of something that is what media professionals call it the public interest.

Generally, as Salter (2005) says the increasing influence of PRs on the press has a negative impact on the dissemination of impartial information. Moreover, the role of media to entertain different viewpoints in order to maintain fairness and balance would remain in question when journalists use PRs officers as their sources. ETV's experience is obvious as discussed earlier; majority of the news was one-sided because PRs is one of their sources. At the same time, journalists who use PRs as their source do not have the power to crosscheck due to the government pressure on the media practitioners since PRs is recognized source of the news by government. This impairs the ultimate objective of journalism which is the search for truth and to serve the public at large. So, it is possible to conclude that ETV's use of PRs posted at different levels of government offices is aimed at giving a voice to the government officials and to serve their interest. This directly brings forth the destruction of quality journalism as a whole.

## **Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Summary of Findings**

As indicated above, the aim of the study was to investigate the practice of journalism in ETV. To this end, understanding the source of the news and speakers in news stories reveal something about the station's practice of journalism. The findings showed that the government sources were the main sources of news in ETV. The result of the study indicated that out of 147 news stories broadcast in ETV, 64.62% of the news was produced by ETV staff reporters. The regional government communication offices covered about 17.7% and ENA and PRs practitioners accounted for 8.16% and 6.12% respectively.

Similarly, the government officials both at federal and regional levels were the main speakers in each news stories. Government officials at federal level covered 51% out of 147 news stories. The regional government officials accounted for about 27.9% of stories, where as the community members covered about 8.84% only. The community members were given less attention.

The finding of the study also revealed that journalists have been under continuous pressures from the government in news and source selection. The bosses, not the journalists, selected both news and its sources. The bosses were appointed by the government based on their political affiliation, not on merits. The finding also showed the lack of professional independence in ETV. Lack of professional independence has forced ETV to focus on stories that portrayed the government positively.

In ETV, the major criteria of news selection were based on the value of the news in building the image of the government. The news that lauds the government actions was given coverage no matter what the source is. In contrary, the station neglected any news and its sources if they coupled with negatively affecting the government's actions/name.

The findings of the study also indicated that the media professionals were aware of the differences between journalism and public relations. However, due to pressures often from their bosses, they were unable to practice journalism. Journalists of the media acted as the mouthpiece of the government. Journalists were responsible to gather and report the good sides of the government and they evaded any critical stories. And this has been taken by journalists as working culture in the station. As a result, journalists were engaged in self-censorship. Hence, the journalists were engaged in putting and developing government positively and voided critical stories in their news content.

The majority of ETV's news content, whether it was social or political news, was presented within the aim of lauding the government actions in front of the public. The news was presented in the way it served the government. The themes that emerged from the data mostly centered on quoting government as development government and celebrating its actions.

In the case of news coverage, ETV gave priority for government issues. This means that ETV served the interest of the government at the expense of the public. Most of the news was presented from the government point of view. Journalists directly quoted government officials posted at different levels and presented it in the media. It was too rare that news of public interest was given coverage. The voices of ordinary people were also absent in ETV.

It was also found out that almost all of the tone of ETV news about government was positive. It was rare to find news stories that were critical of the government. Even if the news was critical, it was showed from the angle of the government's effort made to solve the problem.

Finally, the results suggested that the use of PR officers as one of the main sources of news has a negative impact on the journalistic practices. Based on the findings, it can be argued that ETV journalists were aware of

the negative impact of PRs on journalism. Regardless of this awareness, PR officers have been used as one of the station's main news source. It was also revealed that ETV's journalists used PRs because it was recognized by the media as one part of government. The findings also showed that media practitioners have worked in ETV knowing the differences between journalism and public relations and PRs impact on journalism, but due to pressure by the government, they worked by portraying the government positively.

### **Conclusion**

As indicated above, the study aimed at investigating journalism practice in ETV. In doing so, the study employed both qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The quantitative content analysis was used to examine the main sources and speakers of news in ETV. This paved a way to study the station's journalism practice qualitatively. In-depth interview also used to substantiate the data and to achieve the other objectives of the study. The research data asserted that the practice of journalism was not done in ETV in line with Journalism Principles, especially with journalism principles adopted by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2001). As argued by these scholars, journalism first obligation is to the truth. ETV journalism practice showed that sources of the news were government officials. In the way to the truth, diversified views in certain news story is crucial. However, ETV didn't use diversified sources in news production. Even though Kovach and Rosenstiel and other scholars raise as journalism's loyalty is to citizens, ETV gave priority service to government interest news story. As Campbell (2004) argues news media which is controlled by government (the ruling party) has great chance to be manipulated by government officials and restricts the practice of journalism to public interest. ETV operated under government control and consequently served government interest. ETV dominantly used government sources and gave coverage for the voices of the government officials. This finding concurs with Gans (2003) point. He contends that top-down coverage reflects the perspective of those who are powerful. Therefore, issues which are of priority to citizens interests were not covered in ETV.

With regard to the contents of ETV news, media's power to act as an independent monitor of power was not observed. Critical reporting on government which reveals the wrong doing of the government was neglected in ETV. Rather it was used to manipulate and shape public attitude. Herman and Chomsky (2002) state, through the structure of ownership, and power and pressures on news organizations, business and government elites are able to ensure that certain views prevail and news become a means for the ruling to control ideas in society to produce its pre-eminence. This notion was reflected in the finding of the study. The media professionals were acting as the mouth piece of the government to make laudable the voice of government officials. The media acted to shape the public attitudes by presenting the views of the government elites. Moreover, the contents of ETV news reflected that development news was given above all a special attention over other issues. The news was presented in the way it brings forth government in most positive light.

As a principle, journalism must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise. This was not reflected in ETV's news content because it was the voice of the government that was being heard in the media. Schudson (2003) emphasizes that media's reliance on government officials doesn't guarantee to provide favorable news for the audience. The role of journalists in serving as a bridge between government and the public was not seen in ETV because the journalists gave for the government voices by favoring government officials and their actions. This undermines the public's right to criticize the government's wrong doing.

The discipline of verification is the most important principle of journalism. For verification to take place, journalists are supposed to contact different sources. This develops the diversity of views in a certain news story. However, because ETV's news source was government sources and the speakers of the news were also government officials, it was impossible to verify their information as confirmed by the informants of the study. Collecting information from diversified sources enables the media to serve the majority of the public (Byrd, 1992).

Generally, it is possible to conclude that the practice of journalism in ETV appears to contravene the principles of journalism. The news stories were presented in building the positive deeds of the government and void of critical stories about the government.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made to effectively practice journalism in Ethiopian Television.

The media needs to incorporate diversified views in the news because ETV dominantly used government sources and reflected the voices of government officials.

Because journalists of ETV were aware of the differences between journalism and public relations, the media needs to encourage journalists to practice journalism based on its principles. The government should ensure professional independence in ETV.

The media needs to practice investigative journalism rather than simply portraying different government officials positively. Exposing wrong doings needs to be practiced so that elected officials would learn from it.



Principles of journalism like journalism's obligation to the truth, its loyalty to citizens and the importance of verification are the cornerstone of journalism. Therefore, ETV may be advised to look into these and other principles to produce news and to maintain credibility in front of public.

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