Probing the Efficacy of the Professional JOURNALISTS' Associations in Ethiopia within the Journalism Arena; Roles, Challenges, and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the roles, prospects, challenges and responsibilities of today's professional associations in developing, maintaining and sustaining the professionalism that underpins the profession of journalism. To do so and to generate pertinent data, the study employed individual in-depth interview, focus group discussion and quantitative data gathering tool known as questionnaire. Accordingly, in-depth interviews were made with professional journalistic associations' leaders, editors and reporters. To inculcate the views and opinion of members and non-members of professional journalistic associations, questionnaires were dispatched. And finally group discussion with five professional journalists was carried out.

Upon the data collected and analyzed and the relevant literatures consulted the study showed that part of the roles of the professional journalistic associations include the activities and processes that establish boundaries for the profession; stake the territory in which the profession operates; promote the profession, develop the prestige of the occupation through education, safeguard and protect the specialized knowledge of the field and certify its attainment, develop the standards and regulations by which the profession operates, preserve the integrity of the profession; and keep up with innovations, developments and knowledge which are effectively disseminated to members through communications, publications, conferences, seminars and training processes to support them in improving the services they provide.

The outcome of the study also showed that the associations do not have a well thought temporary and constant financial base plan, timely research based guidelines and publications for members, skill and knowledge dissemination schemes, lobbying and promotional plans, and well equipped and accountable leadership and managerial staffs. Hence the residual effect became weakening the association from inside out.

The changing nature of the profession and the evolving relationships between members and the associations is a consequence of the wide-ranging experience over recent years. Although not unique to the profession of journalism, interms of the ever changing technology the media is using. These dynamism have altered the fundamental nature of our profession in terms of how we network, communicate and how we maintain our knowledge and skills. Hence, professional journalistic associations need to go along with the dynamic nature of the profession.

The finding also revealed that there indeed is a Divisive, distrustful, and suspicious relationships between government and private media journalists due to differing political orientation and inclination and professional ideological disparity. And the discrepancy has contributed to weak and fragile professional associations hence, forums for discussion and professional debate should be arranged so that a chance can be created to arrive at a shared view

Statement of the problem

The FDRE constitution and the subsequent press proclamation have given recognition to freedom of forming an association freedom of expression and freedom of the press. (FDRE constitution Article 29)

However, the private/government journalists' dichotomy and other hidden and obvious factors have negatively contributed towards the existence of a strong and viable media association. It is quite obvious that professional association has a paramount significance to the excellence and regulation of a profession. For the effective discharge of the media responsibilities too, media associations have a second to none role. Nevertheless the associations in the media landscape are not playing the expected roles. Birhanu mentioned in his book as "The rivalry situations between EIJA and ENJU seemed to be quite after the ministry of justice suspended EIJA and due to post election crisis in Ethiopia. The polarized and intense conflict existed in the professional associations of journalists has led many journalists to dissociation than to association." (Birhanu, 2009:38).

Apart from other significances, with in the media landscape, professional associations have a massive positive contribution towards planting and developing freedom of expression. By promoting standards, self regulation helps maintain the media's credibility with the public. Media self regulation helps convince the public that the free media are not irresponsible. Simultaneously self- regulation protects the rights of journalists to be independent. And to be judged by for professional mistakes not by those in power but by their colleagues. When it comes to correcting factual errors or violations of personal rights by the press, satisfaction over the judgments

of self- regulatory bodies lessons pressure on the judiciary system to sanction journalists.

A self regulated media can fight more effectively for the promotion of better laws. A better, productive and efficient media laws benefits not only the media industry but the whole nation as a whole. So a well regulated media can contribute for the evasion of repulsive laws and introduction of workable laws. It can do it by;

Convincing the public that the media are conscious of the need for standards.

Naming and shaming corruption in the media

Offering complaints resolution in justified cases.

One of the main constituent so as to realize a statutory self-regulatory body in the media industry is the strength, professional integrity and unification of these various professional associations. Hence this research thoroughly investigates the efficacy, current status, roles, challenges and prospects of the professional media associations.

Objectives of the study

The research has the following general and specific objectives

General objective

The general objective of the research is to unearth the Efficacy of the professional media associations within the Journalism arena.

Specific Objective

To figure out the members' level of comprehension concerning professionalism and professional association

To find out the perplexes and challenges of forming a vibrant media association.

To forward possible prospects in forming a vibrant media association particularly in emerging democracies like ours.

To examine the legal and ethical ground towards the formation and active roles of the media associations.

Research questions

How is the professional perception of the members concerning media association?

What stumbling blocks are there with in the journalists' association?

What are the merits/prospects of a media professional association?

Are the legal and ethical frameworks suitable towards the formation and sustainability of the associations?

2.1. Concept of professionalism

So as to deal with journalism and its core values within the professional journalistic associations, it is imperative to go through the very concept of professionalism. The concept of professionalism is more than the skills and knowledge of a profession; of equal importance are the values and attitudes inherent in its members. Values such as trust, ethics and honesty sit alongside. Hall's five attitudinal elements of professionalism are (Hall, 1968 ;)

(1) Association;

(2) Perceived societal benefits;

 (3) Self-regulation;

(4) Dedication to the profession; and

(5) Autonomy, to provide a framework for professional behavior.

others have seen professions as being interest groups effecting a monopoly in the market (Larson, 1977), groups trying to define and control their own work (Friedson, 1994) and groups at a particular stage . . . trying to wrest control of their own work from external determinations.

In general, in sociological term professions are thought to have four characteristics   (Dingwall, 1997):

1) Primary orientations to the community rather than self interest

2) A high degree of generalized and systematic knowledge

3) A high degree of self-regulation through codes of standards absorbed through work socialization and associations operated by the professionals themselves

4) A system of rewards which are symbols of work achievement so that professionals usually have a high degree of freedom and high income levels.

A more comprehensive characteristic for the legitimacy of occupations as professions are essentially drawn from pre-eminent examples of 'true' profession by identifying the key criteria that need to be satisfied for professional standing to be bestowed. The five characteristics generally considered essential are (Schultz, 1998:127):

1) Unique knowledge;

2) Control over entry to the occupation;

3) A commitment to public service;

4) Operating autonomy; and

5) Codified and enforced ethical standards.

2.2. Professional identity

Professional identity can be viewed in a way how persons see themselves as a professional within their profession influences, how they view their work and how they behave as they do their job (Hall, 1968). A person's professional identity is one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences (Ibarra, 1999). It is well documented in the sociological studies by Evetts (1995) that professional identity construction begins during the educational process and is consolidated through occupational and professional socialization.

Professional associations play a key role in professional identity construction and maintenance through their involvement in the formal education processes and continuing professional development (CPD), as well as in the ways they facilitate professional socialization by connecting with their members and enabling members to connect with one another. Occupational socialization occurs both within and external to the workplace as professionals socialize with organizational and industry colleagues rather outside their own profession. Studies that have attempted to measure professionalism have found that although both types of socialization influence professional identity, professional socialization influences attitudes and values, while occupational socialization influences workplace engagement and motivation (Butter & Hermanns, 2011).

2.3. History and Current Developments of Professionalism:

Julia Evett explains the historical development of professionalism in such a way that Professionalism has a historical background in that it showed conceptual development in its timely evolvement. When considering the history of the concept of professionalism, three phases can be identified: an early phase which defined professionalism as an occupational or normative value; a second negative phase of critique when professionalism was regarded as ideological and promoted in the interests of professional practitioners themselves; a third phase which combines both the ideological critique and the normative value interpretations of professionalism.

2.3.1 Professionalism as a Normative Value: Early Phase:

In early British sociological analysis, the key concept was 'professionalism' and the emphasis was on the importance of professionalism for the stability and civility of social systems (Marshall 1950). Tawney perceived professionalism as a force capable of subjecting rampant

Individualism to the needs of the community (Tawney 1921). Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933)

saw professionalism as a force for stability and freedom against the threat of encroaching industrial and governmental bureaucracies. Marshall (1950) emphasized altruism or the 'service' orientation of professionalism and how professionalism might form a bulwark against threats to stable democratic processes.

In these interpretations professionalism was regarded as an important and highly desirable occupational value and professional relations were characterized as collegial, co-operative and mutually supportive. Similarly, relations of trust characterized practitioner/client and practitioner/management interactions since competencies were assumed to be guaranteed by education, training and sometimes by licensing.

2.3.2 Critical Phase: Professionalism as Ideology

There is a second more pessimistic interpretation of professionalism, however, which grew out of the more critical literature on professions, which was prominent in Anglo-American analyses, in the 1970s and 1980s. During this period professionalism came to be dismissed as a successful ideology (Johnson,1972),Professionalization was intended to promote professional practitioners' own occupational self interests in terms of their salary, status and power as well as the monopoly protection of an occupational jurisdiction (Abbott 1988). This was seen to be a process largely initiated and controlled by the practitioners themselves and mainly in their own interests although it could also be argued to be in the public interest (Saks 1995).

More recently Davies (1996) has urged researchers to abandon claims to professionalism and instead to recognize the links between such claims and a specific historical and cultural construction of masculinity which fits uneasily with newer and more feminized professions. During the 1970s and 1980s, when sociological analysis of professions was dominated by various forms of professionalism as ideology theorizing, one concept that became prominent was the 'professional project'. The concept was developed by Larson (1977) and included a detailed and scholarly historical account of the processes and developments whereby a distinct occupational group sought a monopoly in the market for its service, and status and upward mobility (collective as well as individual) in the social order.

2.3.3 Third Phase: Professionalism as a Discourse

Julia Evett explained the third development involved the analysis of professionalism as a discourse of occupational change and control – this time in work organizations where the discourse is increasingly applied and utilized by managers. This third interpretation is a combination of the previous two and includes both occupational value and ideological elements. Fournier (1999) considered the appeal to 'professionalism' as a disciplinary mechanism in new occupational contexts. She suggested how the use of the discourse of professionalism, in a large privatized Service Company of managerial labor, worked to inculcate 'appropriate'

work identities, conducts and practices. She considered this to be 'a disciplinary logic which inscribes "autonomous" professional practice within a network of accountability and governs professional conduct at a distance' (1999: 280).

METHODOLOGYOF THE STUDY
3.2. Data Gathering Techniques and Sources
3.2.2. In-depth interview
Since the research predominantly employs qualitative research approach, in – depth interview has been among the main data gathering instrument.

Accordingly, the researcher used semi-structured questions to interview the key informants. The informants were chosen based on their belongingness to professional journalistic associations, presidents and secretary general are an examples, and professional orientation, journalists working in media houses.

3.2.3. Questionnaires
The nature of the questions included in the questionnaires are both open and close ended question types.

Consequently, about 120 questionnaires were dispatched to members and non-member of the professional journalistic associations. And of which about 100 questionnaires were collected back. Here, the response rate can be said is safe to use the questionnaires for the study since 83.3% of the questionnaire is gathered back.

3.2.4. Focus group discussion
focus group discussion was conducted with five professional journalists who are journalism and communication graduates. Discussion points that were emanated from the research objective and questions were presented to the discussants and the participants gave their opinions.

3.3. Subjects of the Research and Data Sources
The subjects of the research and data sources were members and leaders of the professional journalists' association and journalists.

3.4. Total Population of the study
The total population of the study is all of the professional journalists' association. However, for obvious reasons of time and budget constraints, the researchers cannot study the total population. Consequently, the following sampling techniques will be employed in the study.

3.5. Sampling design and procedure
The study employs both probability and non probability sampling designs.

3.5.1. Probability sampling design
Probability sampling is also known as 'random sampling' or 'chance sampling'. Under this sampling design, every item of the universe has an equal chance of inclusion in the sample. It is, so to say, a lottery method in which individual units are picked up from the whole group not deliberately but by some mechanical process. Here it is blind chance alone that determines whether one item or the other is selected. (Kothari: 2004)

3.5.1.1. Systematic sampling:
In some instances, the most practical way of sampling is to select every nth item on a list. Sampling of this type is known as systematic sampling. An element of randomness is introduced into this kind of sampling by using random numbers to pick up the unit with which to start. Hence among professional journalists' association about four of three of them were selected systematically. i.e Ethiopian Free Journalist Association (EFJA), Ethiopian National Journalists Union(ENJU) and Ethiopian Journalists Association(EJA)

3.5.2. Non probability sampling design
Non-probability sampling is that sampling procedure which does not afford any basis for estimating the probability that each item in the population has of being included in the sample. Non-probability sampling is also known by different names such as deliberate sampling, purposive sampling and judgment sampling.

3.5.2.1. Purposive sampling
In this type of sampling, items for the sample are selected deliberately by the researcher; his choice concerning the items remains supreme. In other words, under non-probability sampling the organizers of the inquiry purposively choose the particular units of the universe for constituting a sample on the basis that the small mass that they so select out of a huge one will be typical or representative of the whole (Kothari:2004).

For this reason, the research employed purposive sampling technique in selecting members on the basis of their position in the association and their active role and participation within the associations. To be more specific, informants of the in-depth interview and participants of the FGD were selected based on positions in the respective associations, and their professional career.

3.6. Data processing, Analysis and Interpretation.

The data, after collection, has to be processed and analyzed in accordance with the outline laid down for the purpose at the time of developing the research plan. This is essential for a scientific study and for ensuring that we have all relevant data for making contemplated comparisons and analysis. Technically speaking, processing implies editing, coding, classification and tabulation of collected data so that they are amenable to analysis. The term analysis refers to the computation of certain measures along with searching for patterns of relationship that exist among data-groups. Thus, "in the process of analysis, relationships or differences supporting or conflicting with original or new hypotheses should be subjected to statistical tests of significance to determine with what validity data can be said to indicate any conclusions.(Kothari;2004:122)

Since the research employed a mixed research approach; the data generated from individual in-depth interviews, FGD and questionnaire was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively in a thematic approach.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Professional perception within the professional journalistic associations

The concept of professionalization is regarded as the process to achieve the status of profession. It has been interpreted as the process to pursue, develop and maintain the closure of the occupational group, in order to maintain practitioners own occupational self-interests in terms of their salary, status and power, as well as the monopoly protection of the occupational jurisdiction (Larson 1977). It a well known fact that for a professional association to be effective, members must acquire professional knowledge and skills and stick to their professional integrity.

To this end, president of Ethiopian National journalists' union (ENJU) president Antenhe Abreham asserts that

> It is a recent phenomenon that universities of our country have begun training journalists. For a longer period of time the media has long survived with the effort of individuals who have been literature graduates and from some other professional background. This has made the professional leap forward very remote rest upon. Even today, I have seen that there is a professional gap among members of our association and other similar journalistic association. And to our concern, we have tried to fill the gap with short term trainings and symposiums. (Personal interview on june , 2016)

As can be noted from the above opinion lack of a through understanding of the profession has weakened the proliferation of a strong and viable professional association. Though efforts are underway to bridge the gap of professionalism through launching departments of journalism in some universities, the trainings should go in line with the actual practice on the ground. To this end, wendwosen mekonen, president of Ethiopian Free Press association added that.

Fig 1.1. Professional defects

As can be noted from the fig. above, among the gaps within the professionalism, ethical fraud is one of the stumbling blocks towards the maturity and a steady forward evolvement of the associations. With the follow up questions that states how lack of professionalization affects the growth of the associations, the respondents came up with reasons associated with the gaps in the formal and informal trainings.

Apart from knowledge and skill gaps, how a person sees him/herself as a professional within their profession influences, how they view their work and how they behave as they do their job severely affects either positively or negatively the person's professional self. A person's professional identity is one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences (Ibarra, 1999). It is well documented in the sociological studies by Evetts (1995,) that professional identity construction begins during the educational process and is consolidated through occupational and professional socialization.

4.2. Intrinsic synthesis of the professional associations

Here, once again, it's imperative to look into the synthesis of the professional associations taken as a sample in the study. It is obvious and straight forward that the thoroughly thought, professionally designed and research based formation of an association will have a greater chance of coping up challenges and be on a better position of discharging professional duties and responsibilities.

The associations are established based on the freedom of association stipulated under the constitution of the country. The FDRE constitution article 31 recognizes the right to form an association with proscribed rights and expected duties. "Every person has the right to freedom of association for any cause or purpose. Organizations formed, in violation of appropriate laws, or to illegally subvert the Constitutional order, or which promote such activities are prohibited." (FDRE constitution article 31). So it can be seen that other than illegal actions to subvert the law of the land the constitution acknowledges forming professional or other associations. Besides the legal ground which is mandatory, the associations are guided by professional code of conduct and binding

associational principles.

Concerning how ENJA (Ethiopian Free Journalists Association) recruit members, Tsegaleul W/kidan ,secretary general of the association, put forward that members are taken on primarily based on their willingness and then they will be briefed the terms and conditions that they need to comply to within the association.

Fig. 1.2. Professional inquiry in recruiting members

Hence it can be inferred from the above data that during the inception, members' recruitment and steady move forward of the professional association, they should rely on enlisting committed and responsible journalists. As can clearly be seen from the quantified data above majority of the respondents that accounts for 76 % responded the need for professional inquiry during enlisting members. As it is always the case, the strength of the associations definitely depends on the strength of the individual members. Hence, right from the start, apart from the willingness of the individual, professional capability and integrity should be taken in.

4.3. Consequences and challenge of the professional associations

Financial problems

Problems associated with professional identity

Political reasons ,factors or polarization

Lack of awareness regarding the essence of the association

The cleavage between government owned media journalists Vs private media journalists

Ideological difference that resulted in name calling and blaming

Lack of managerial or leadership ability by the top management

Lack of commitment

Doubt by many journalists concerning the loyalty of the association to the profession and the professionals.

Lack of continuous professional development to the members and the leaders.

Weak ties with the media to create awareness to the public

Low privileges offered to member

Feebly communication of the associations with similar associations of their kind in the continent or far abroad.

Ill willingness or sometimes unwillingness of the local journalist to join the associations.

Direct and indirect intervention of the government.

Decline of membership

Fig1.3 major challenges of professional journalistic associations

The figure above shows that the associations are facing a challenge ranging from political influence to polarization between government and private journalists. The follow-up questions reasons out how the political intervention manifest itself. And majority of the respondents, taking into account that some left it blank, tried to justify that the influence of the politics is seen in a manner of secretly controlling the association and appointing political party members or supporters of the governments as leaders of the associations. Political partisanship as one of the major reasons behind journalists' reluctance to become union members, with the existing associations seen to engage only in political rather than professional activities (Skjerdal, 2012).

4.4. Regional media Vs professional associations

The three associations taken as a sample for this study are national based associations which are supposed to include and back regional journalists too. However, the associations are geographically and professionally limited to the capital. Etenesh Fekade, editor at AMMA, forwarded her opinion concerning the trivial efforts made by the associations to include regional journalists. She added that

The associations are so weak that they could not even address the interest of the journalists where the associations are residing let alone going to regions and work with them. To my point view the associations are fragile due to ambivalence; sever connections and irrelevance resulting in declining membership and reduced participation and engagement. Besides, the tensions between pure professionalism and 'organizational professionalism' are consequences and the bureaucratic natures of associations that regulate, prescribe and standardize processes to the point where autonomy is diluted and professional status is undermined have seriously slowed down the growth of the associations. Hence, as a journalist working in regional media, all the stake holders need to work each other including us to strengthen the associations and make them comprehensive to the extent that addresses regional journalists. Otherwise, journalists working in regional media will be forced to establish their own association and that too, most likely, will be in a vicious cirle like the national ones. (Personal

interview on july,2016)

It can clearly be seen from the views of the informant that journalists working in regional media have lost their trust in the associations. Regional media journalists are not confident at all that the national association will strengthen themselves and be inclusive of the regional media associations. Another informant working in AMMA, a senior reporter, said that it is the government that does not want strong, statutory, impartial and self-sufficient associations to be be established. He adds that the government does not want a media house or associations which are out of its control. "So they neither wanted to abolished and nor needed to be strong. They simply wanted to be remain as they are."

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
5.1. Conclusion
Prominent belief in international debates about journalism concerns the role of professional associations in advancing the professionalization project. The literature points to the widespread belief that journalists who belong to professional organizations more readily identify with and are socialized into the profession; in addition, they are better placed to defend their autonomy from external intervention (Schein, 1972; Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005; Weaver, 1996, 2005). The Ethiopian experience of weak collective identity and participation in national professional associations unfortunately confirms this scholarly viewpoint. This study identified political partisanship as one of the major reasons behind journalists' reluctance to become union members, with the existing associations seen to engage only in political rather than professional activities (Skjerdal, 2012).

The finding of the study also showed that almost no effort has been made to include regional media journalists as members of the national associations. For one thing the capabilities of the associations are highly limited to stretch out and be inclusive at the same time journalists working out of the capital are so skeptic about the freedom of the associations from political affiliation.

From the group discussions and the response of the informants, a logical conclusion can be made that the role of these professional associations in knowledge dissemination and communication is so weak that it is not even felt by professionals.

Professional Associations rely on volunteers to form their Boards, committees, work groups and project teams. A smaller membership means a smaller pool of people from which to attract volunteers. The implications of declining membership have far reaching reverse effects for education and advocacy and shrinking of economic base. because as the number of members increase so does the membership fee.

To this end, the researcher, informants and discussants all together noted that the effort of the associations to use easy and accessible technological communication ways like social media is not well thought of and should be given a due attention.

5.2. Recommendations
Relying on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for all the concerned groups.

The issue of professionalism within the professional journalists' associations is still under a big questionable mark. So Professional associations should support members through the provision of continued professional development, trainings, networks, publications, opportunities to participate in the work of committees, working groups and Boards and the provision of standards and guidelines.

Associations should recruit members reckoning on the level of prestige appropriate for the profession; certify attainment of specialized knowledge and maintaining the integrity of the profession.

Since the Divisive, distrustful, and suspicious relationships between government and private media journalists has contributed to weak and fragile professional associations, forums for discussion and professional debate should be arranged so that a chance can be

Created to arrive at a shared view.

The professional associations should give a special spotlight on temporary and constant financial base plan, developing timely research based guidelines and publications for members, skill and knowledge dissemination schemes, lobbying and promotional plans, leadership and managerial qualities and devising strategies to handle challenging circumstances.

The cyber world enables professional associations to experience conferences, training programs and seminars without physically attending; hence, associations should scale up their use of modern media like the social media and that improves their virtual participation with members and the outside world.

Associations need to work with all their power to win the trust of the regional media journalists and increase the pool of their membership. Because that will widen up the economic and professionals base and help them achieve what the associations stood for.

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