



**Comparative Content Analysis of State and  
privately-owned Amharic Newspapers Based  
on Journalistic Ethical Issues**

*For Partial Fulfillment of Masters of Arts in the Field of  
Journalism*

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**Statement of Declaration**

**I acknowledge this work is my own and I have acknowledged all sources and information used in the project.**

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Statement of the problem**

In twenty-first century, way of life is changing surprisingly fast enough almost everyday. It follows that the use of information in performing day-to-day activities in almost each and every professions effectively and efficiently becoming indispensable. In this regard, out-puts of information communication technology (ICT) are very crucial. Information about current or latest events could be one of these out-puts. The mechanism in which information and/or news distributed from place to place involves the field of journalism. Hence, journalism is a kind profession in which it helps to find out more and new things about events or phenomena in line with its space and time.

In Ethiopia, there is code of conducts designed by the Ethiopian Free press Journalists' Association (EFJA) as endorsed by its General Congress in 1998. However, follow up of this code of conduct would have a big importance for creating a vibrant press in the country more than its mere presence.

Ronning, (2002, p.122) calls journalism in Africa: 'vendetta journalism', which he argued that it is the type of reporting which is widely practiced in the continent. Ronning further explains that: "this is the type of reporting in which journalists know that what they are reporting is untrue but still go ahead and report it so that, they square up or hurt their enemy who is the subject of the news."

It is fact that African continent comprises around 54 countries with different level of press freedom. A research undertaken by Freedom of House (2004) rated African nation varies from 24<sup>th</sup> position (south Africa) to the worst level of press freedom Libya (94<sup>th</sup> position) from a total 193 countries all over the world.

In this regard, according to Kasoma's (cited Retief 2002, p.37) thought is better, said that: "African newspapers are characterized more by emotion than by understanding." Kasoma further discussed that, "African newspapers are all too often guilty of advocacy journalism and sensationalism, this always becomes worse during election times, and many so-called independent newspapers are nothing but mouthpieces for the opposition."

Following the basic principles of journalism or not would be very crucial here. What is at stake is a change of people's perception or sentiment for good or for bad. In the later case, the possible consequence is beyond what we think and could be very serious and dangerous. In this regard, the Rwandan genocide is good to mention, which is mainly the result of irresponsible journalism.

The project focused on checking the major Amharic newspapers whether they are following the basic ethical considerations or not. Moreover, the private media, which have much more average weekly publications compared to the state-owned media, are frequently blamed by some parts of the people and also the government for not respecting the basic ethical principles of journalism in which the profession is based. In light of this, the state-owned media are not also free from frequent critiques from the people. Therefore, checking both cases using scientific methodology and proposing problem-solving recommendations is the study's main motivating force in undertaking the study.

## **1.2. Objectives and Hypothesis of the study**

The main aim of the research is to undertake a pilot study by evaluating the major newspapers on circulation on the basis of the basic principles of journalistic ethics such as truthfulness, impartiality, social responsibility, and balance and fairness. The study's main aim is not to

end up in generalizations, but rather to evaluate the major newspapers based on some of the basic ethical considerations and by tacking a pilot study on Amharic newspapers able to reinforce and motivate further studies of broader scope and coverage.

The following are some of the main objectives of the study

1. To evaluate the major Amharic newspapers based on ethical principles such as impartiality, truthfulness, social responsibility, and balance and fairness.
2. To check whether the Peace or normal time newspaper's contents and the election period publications have any differences concerning respecting ethical issues.
3. To compare the state-owned newspaper with the private newspapers concerning maintaining the specific ethical issues mentioned above.
4. To check the absence or presence of any correlations between amount of weekly publications with status of following the ethical principles.
5. To forward the possible solutions and recommendations in resolving the problem of falling to maintain the ethical issues in news reporting.

### **Hypothesis of the study**

The following hypotheses are forwarded to guide the study:

- a) There would be a better level of acting ethically during the peace or normal period than the election period.
- b) The private newspapers are the worst concerning maintaining ethics of the profession compared with the state owned newspaper.

- c) There would be some negative correlations between amounts of one time publications (could be daily or weekly) with status of following the ethical principles.
- d) The major newspapers in circulation would witness a significant level of acting unethically in their front-page's contents compared with the inner page's body text contents.
- e) In most of the newspapers under investigation, the contents of the headlines are more partial as compared to the body text part.

### **1.3. Significance of the study**

Newspapers are one of the major means of communication. They are published and circulated for different purposes that are very essential to the people in general. Informing and educating are among the main themes of newspapers in general. News articles could be the main players in this regard.

Researches on journalism are very common in the many countries and very crucial in guiding journalists to follow what the profession requires. Specifically, researches on evaluating media out-puts based on the basic ethical principles would be helpful in maintaining the integrity of the profession and its merits to the general population.

Considering a complete absence or scarcity of researches in ethical considerations and evaluations of the Ethiopian media, the results or out-puts of this project would play a positive role in the fields of the study. The Study would have the following contributions:

1. The study will locate the status of the major Amharic newspapers (in circulation) concerning follow up of journalistic ethics, especially impartiality, truthfulness, balance and fairness and social responsibility. So that, able to motivate the concerned

- bodies to look for solutions if the problem is real and needs urgency.
2. The study may propose suggestions how to solve the problem of acting unethically if the problem really exists.
  3. It may also provide other researchers with ideas and findings that are useful for further studies, etc.

#### **1.4. Scope of the study**

Like the many other researches, undertaken all over the world in various fields, this project as well is bound to limited scopes. The research is undertaken using content analysis research methodology. It is only limited to newspaper's contents: meaning it doesn't primarily focus on analyses of interviews and other data gathered from press institutions like code of ethics and background of journalists.

Not all contents of the newspaper are going to be analyzed but restricted to only text contents of the newspapers. Pictures, images, cartoons and the like are not going to be analyzed. Due to the nature of the methodology of the research i.e. content analysis, the study included only some of the basic principles of journalistic ethics which are suitable to undertake the evaluation based on this methodology.

Journalistic principles like independence, which rarely can be figured out in content analysis methodology but by evaluating backgrounds of the journalists and code of conduct of the press institutions, would not be addressed. Even from the selected ethical considerations i.e. impartiality, truthfulness, balance and fairness, and social responsibility, only the better checking mechanisms which enables to indicate in content analysis methodology are utilized.

Since analyzing all the texts of the newspapers published within the time limit of the study is going to be a huge task to compete in a short period of time and with other deficient resources. Moreover, it would be

unnecessary to analyze all the general population items while it is possible to take representative samples with lesser utilization of resources. There fore, the study is forced to select stories from each of the sampled newspapers, which are selected from the four months' time publications.

Samples are selected in way to fairly represent the general population. Stories with headlines in the front-page of the newspapers are selected. The inner pages of the newspapers are also covered because most of the stories with headlines in front-pages of the newspapers end up in the inner pages of the newspapers. This sampling strategy helps to select stories which are only news. In other words, the study evaluate only news which started on the front pages and extending to inner pages. Hence, the project excludes evaluating newspaper's contents like: editorials, entertainment columns, advertisings and the like.

The reason for choosing this sampling strategy is to have some kind of unbiased criteria and to be fair and representative in selecting news stories. Moreover, front-page's news has high readability, importance, and needs to follow the ethics of the profession very seriously. Besides, front-page news items are more crucial for the people more than those contents which are editorials, entertainment columns, opinions of people, advertisings, cartoons which begins in the inner pages of the newspaper. As a result, I used this sampling strategy in selecting the news stories.

Newspapers are sampled both from state-owned and private-owned newspapers. Concerning the time scope of the research a total of four months are selected in a way to represent peace or normal time period and election period each period consists of two months. Not all the publications of the four-month time period are analyzed; rather samples are selected from the gross sample units or newspapers using systematic and judgmental sampling method.

### **1.5. Limitations of the research**

Data collection was one of the difficult jobs I have encountered. It is estimated that around 20 private newspapers, which almost all focus primarily on political issues, were shut down following the unrest in the aftermath of the 2005 national election. The second highest circulation newspaper i.e. *Ethiop* is also one of closed private newspapers and hence, finding the sampled newspapers from this newspaper was a very challenging task. Secondly, time given for the research to complete was also very short to effectively and efficiently complete the research.

## **2.Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1. General Background**

#### **2.1.1.Ethics from Philosophical Point of View**

Human beings have been searching a guide for leading their life: be it religion or philosophy or some other different life guiding mechanisms. In the field of academics, the second one i.e. philosophy, has been discussed widely since by its nature can be expanded and argued without limit. A number of philosophers said a lot about the different branches of philosophy in various times. For our discussion to say something about one of its branches, which is ethics, is very basic.

Like Socrates, Plato regarded ethics as the highest branch of knowledge; he stressed on the intellectual basis of virtue, identifying virtue with wisdom. (*Microsoft Encarta - 2004*)

The subject of ethics - the word comes from the Greek *ethos*, meaning 'character' - has been debated by philosophers for thousands of years. Greeks divided philosophy into of three parts: aesthetics (the study of beauty and ways to analyze beauty objectively); epistemology (the doctrine of knowledge); and ethics (rational choices between what is good and bad for the individual and /or society). (Retief, J. 2002, p.3)

Retief, J. (2002, p.3) further discussed the difference between ethics and morality. He noted that "although the concepts of ethics and morality are sometimes used interchangeably, there is a difference between the two." "The Latin word *mores* refers to the customs and conventions that govern the ways people behave." "More often than not, morality refers to prevailing customs."

James Fieser (2003) forwarded three branches of ethics. He argues that: "Philosophers today usually divide ethical theories into three general

subject areas: Meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics." He explains, "Meta-ethics investigates where our ethical principles come from, and what they mean: are they merely social inventions? do they involve more than expressions of our individual emotions?" Fieser define normative ethics by saying, it takes on a more practical task, which is to arrive at moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct. Finally, he defined; applied ethics as something, which involves examining specific controversial issues, such as abortion, infanticide, animal rights, environmental concerns, homosexuality, capital punishment, or nuclear war.

Louis Alvin Day (2003, p.2), on his part, defined the word ethics as it is derived from the Greek ethos, meaning "custom," "usage," or "character". He argues: "It is often thought of as a rational process applying established principles when two moral obligations collide." Day concludes "ethics often involves the balancing of competing rights when there is no "correct answer."

To substantiate the concept of Ethics, Day (2003, p.3) pointed out that "ethics reflects a society's notion about the rightness or wrongness of an act and the distinctions between virtue and vice." Day (2003, p.3) further argues that:

*To accuse someone of laziness or incompetence is not to accuse that person of immoral conduct. On the other hand, such actions as lying, stealing, and cheating do imply the violation of ethical norms. Thus, ethics is often described as a set of principles or a code of moral conduct. Ethics involves the evaluation and application of those moral values that a society or culture has accepted as its norms.*

David Berry (2000, p.58) described the issue of ethics: "ethics in one way of the other helps us to act responsively against our own self centered and behaviors which are not helpful or damaging at the society level or the public in general."

Code of ethics is designed most of the time in a way not to conflict with society's values. For example, showing pictures of someone who commit suicide in the scene on newspaper's front page under Ethiopian custom and cultures is not ethical. However, there are western world societies with norms and ethical values, which permit this.

Ethics is one of the ancient branches of philosophy, surely older than laws. Ethics is different from laws in a sense that it is not binding or forcefully punishable. Ethics used as a guide for individuals to live what they says "a good life" while, law is designed not to voluntarily choose as a guide but to punish citizens for committing an act, which is referred as a crime.

What has to be underlined here is that, in coding ethics or writing ethics of one specific field, the code has to be first designed in accordance with the legal issues and cultural values. Hence, it would not be in conflict with the existing laws, customs and traditions of a society.

There are cases, which are legal but not ethical, and the vice versa. The above example, showing a picture of someone who committed suicide could be one example of legal act but not ethical.

To mention examples from the other scenario i.e. ethical but not legal: many traditional tribes of Ethiopia were convinced to assume practices like: abortion, female genital mutilation, early marriage and the like practices as ethical and appropriate for the past many centuries. However, most of these practices are now a day banned and started to be counted as illegal acts and crimes against those ancient traditional and cultural values by justifying that these practices have long range psychological and other health damages and complexities on the victimized person.

Although the scope and definitions of ethics differs from one-writer or philosopher to the other, what is common is: ethics involves reasonable

critical decision-making of selecting what is good and bad. Having discussed the concepts and definitions of ethics from the point view of philosophy, it would be logical to proceed to the discussion part of ethics from professional perspective.

### **2.1.2.Ethics in View of Profession of Journalism**

Before going to the debates on the appropriateness of counting Journalism as a profession or not, it would be helpful to define the duties and responsibilities of journalism clearly.

Journalists are simply a bridge between the grass root population and well-privileged groups (generally include those who cause or create news i.e. politicians, scientists, wealthy people, naturally and artificially caused events etc). Hence, there must be a go-between or mediator to create a smooth and fast contact or communication between those who create news and those who receive news.

The level of awareness, attitude and even language of the two parties in a society or between societies's could be incomparable or different, hence there needs to be some kind of mediators who get ride of all these communication barriers like: language difference, terminologies, different preferences, various level of awareness, compatibility with public interest and soon.

Two groups of writers forward their own side of argument in support and against for the need of defined sets of ethical codes which the profession of journalism need to maintain.

One thing which differentiates journalists from ordinary citizen is they try to create as much communication by fully understand the sentiment and interest of their audience and accordingly modify and choose what is news, which is received from the news sources which are mentioned above. In doing so, there needs to be a guide, which the members of the

profession need to maintain and also needs to employ some techniques in creating fast and smooth communication among and between societies.

One of the techniques that the field of journalism requires could be a formula of 'KISS and tell the people'. Pape S. and Featherstone (2005) discussed that:

*It sums up exactly what a journalist should remember when writing newspapers stories: Keep It Short and Simple - and tell the story. Use short, simple words, phrases and sentences, don't use two or more words when just one will do and avoid long words when a shorter one is available, however authoritative and intellectuals the longer one might soured.*

To the contrary, Kovach & Rosenstiel (2000, p.18) argued in different perspective, they said to define journalism, is to limit it. In discussing the concept, they said "Maybe doing so violates the spirit of the First Amendment: 'Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press.'" They substantiate their argument by saying that: "this is why journalists have avoided licensing, like doctors and lawyers, they note." Pp.16

Regarding the question of the professionalism of journalism, MacDonald and Petheram (1998, p.77) argued that it depends on how 'professionalism' is defined. They argued: "The term is associated with competence, with training, with a body of knowledge, with standards of evaluation and improvement." To bolster their argument they said "Professionals also draw esteem, respectability, and, its members hope, better pay."

On the contrary, there is an idea that argued: any one who wants to express his idea or opinion is free to do so, since the right belongs for all human beings not for certain part of the society or journalist alone. However, some governments request journalists to have a certain level of academic qualification and in our case some amount of money as a

prerequisite to have the license and practice the profession. In contrast, some of the western world countries like the US and British don't need any qualification to carry out Journalism.

On the other side, *Dennis, E. E. & Merrill, C. J. (1984)* argued by pointing out a proof for journalism that is accepted all over the world as a profession. They noted the presence of society of professional journalists as a proof.

*David Berry (2000, P.32)* discussed journalistic ethics in a bit detail:

*Journalistic practices are governed by codes of conduct which serve only as loose guidelines and therefore they serve as an ideal-type in terms of rules. Wrongdoing, or the deliberate process of lying to benefit commercially and for status in the profession has to be justified and if it fails to do so action should be taken against the perpetrators because the public lose trust in media practitioners why lie.*

It is straight forward that all professions don't have specific code of conduct. Only few professions, which are highly related to social values like: medicine, law and as well as journalism, have written code of conduct in many countries. Some countries used code of ethics as a self checking tool for journalism with out interference by other media and media related laws.

*Kovach & Rosenstiel (2000, p.12)* argued on the favor of the presence of clear principles that journalists agree on. They listed out what they leveled as "elements of journalism":

1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.
2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.
3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.
4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.

6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise
7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
8. It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional.
9. Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.

MacDonald and Petheram (1998, p.77) stressed on the need of professional ethics. They argued that "A Journalist has an expertise that a layman does not, namely, in news-gathering." They argued: "Journalism does have codes of ethics, and on some newspapers failure to adhere to them can result in dismissal."

Franz Krüger (2004, p.38) discussed level of acceptance of the journalistic code of ethics and/or ethical code at universal level. He said:

*The usefulness of codifying the ethics of the profession is not universally accepted. From the perspective of some governments, codes of ethics (together with the system of self-regulation) are not sufficient to keep journalists honest; and the more vigorous powers of law are required. At the other end of the spectrum, some see even a voluntary code as an infringement of media freedom. And in the litigious US, there are sometimes fears that codes can undermine journalists in the courtroom. Some lawyers fear that in a defamation suit, for instance, a plaintiff can use a written code against the news organization being sued.*

Regarding the role of ethics as self checking mechanism, Day (2003, p.47) forwarded that: "the most visible example of a commitment to self-criticism, as the presence, in some media organizations, of an ombudsman, hired to investigate questionable journalistic conduct and to recommend action."

We have said above that a Journalist is simply a bridge to connect the grass root population and the well-privileged group (generally include those who cause or create news i.e. politicians, scientists, wealthy people etc). Hence, there must be a go between or mediator to create a smooth

and fast contact or communication between those who create news and those who receive news.

If there is a communication barrier between different social hierarchies or groups, enabling communications between these different groups in a facilitated way is not going to be a layman task. It needs some techniques so that, able to prioritize the different news events or stories and presenting in a way that the grass root population could easily understand by removing all the technical terms, elongated and complex expressions, and many other hindrances for effective communication. In light of this argument, the need to implement some of the basics techniques of journalism in removing these communication hindrances involves in the field of journalism and it would be a mandatory thing.

## **2.2. Basic Journalistic Ethical Principles**

So far a lot has been discussed on the justification and appropriateness of journalistic ethical principles. Some of the basic ethical principles are social responsibility, balance and fairness, truthfulness, and independence.

In fact, these principles seem to be very similar and their differences blurred. In light of this point, it would be helpful to try to draw a line between them so that, to avoid confusions.

To begin with the very similar once, balance and fairness: mostly both fairness and balance treated as one full-fledged entity; usually not addressed separately. In fact, they have overlapping aspects, for instance, denying addressing positive aspects of the major player while deeply reporting the many sides of the other makes the story unbalanced since proportional chances not given for the major stakeholders. The story could also be unfair at the same time, since only some aspect of the

stakeholder's viewpoints forces to be interpreted unfairly on behalf of the readers.

Fairness seems more abstract than balance in a sense that to check a story's fairness, we have to deal first with contexts and meanings of words and phrases. Regarding balance, it is less complex than checking fairness and not subjected to individual interpretations of meanings. A story is balanced if it gives equal or proportional chances as much as possible in reporting event/s. In principle, a journalist must address all the view points of a story irrespective of his/her challenges to get information from news sources like: wealthy individuals, public figures, advertisers, government authorities, and soon. Whenever a journalist faces these challenges in getting information or data, he/she is supposed to justify or reason out the failure in achieving balance and fairness.

Certain news articles could be balanced but could not have fair meanings. The mere fact that all the major stakeholders of the story got equal chance and covered as many view points does not mean they are treated fairly concerning contexts and implications of meanings.

Franz Krüger (2005, p.83) pointed out that, a journalist could be addressed all sides but could be still unfair. He said "the tone of the story can indicate bias, for instance: the simple choice of the word 'claims' can indicate disbelief. He further discussed that "It is important; too, to bear in mind that fairness is achieved over time; even if an individual report lacks some perspectives that can be redressed later."

Truthfulness is a different concept compare to balance and fairness in a sense that the first one requires accurate reporting with out distortion (grammar and contexts misunderstanding) other than mere giving equal chances. The concept of truthfulness would be discussed in much deeper later on.

It is true that social responsibility seems a much wider and inclusive way of expression. Any kind of incorrect or distorted reporting; being impartial while reporting which makes the story skewed to one side; any kind of reporting which could not able to minimize harm to the society even if it is true and accurate; refraining or abandoning from revealing practices and events whenever they are found to be hurtful to the people directly or indirectly, sooner or later; and other cases could all be included as practices of the press which could result in acting socially irresponsible unless and other wise they are clearly justified.

### **3.2.1. Balance and Fairness**

Balance and fairness is very basic concerning the profession of journalism. Any story or article which does not give fair and equal chance to the maximum possible in reporting and unable to reasonably justify for doing so, makes the story or article no news at all or it is a practice which doesn't involve journalism. It could not be called other than propaganda, or entertainment, or preaching, or shouting.

Achieving balance and fairness could also be assured by adding background information regarding the main players just at the end of the story. To reinforce the argument by example: an individual who have done many good things for his country but reporting only something which kills that person's reputation (if it is real and have tangible evidence) is not only fair but also loses its news value since readers or audiences could possibly don't know that person's good works and they may count the news as nonsense.

The press should try to represent all-important viewpoints, not merely those with which the publisher or operator agrees; and in doing so, it should carefully identify all sources of news (Siebert et al. 1956, p.90).

Siebert pointed the reason for addressing balance and fairness as: "control of the press has become vested in fewer and fewer hands."

In contrast, Frost, C. (2003, p.42) argued in a different way. He pointed out that:

*For the most part balance is difficult to achieve. This is the notion that both (or more) sides should have equal time and equal space to put their argument. This balance, or fairness, is fine when two sides of the political divide are explaining their policies and the defects of their opponents' policies. But are we really suggesting in an article or report on child abuse that for every social worker or police officer talking about the problem we would have a child abuser extolling its virtues? If a journalist is reporting on a story that focuses on good and evil, should both sides get an equal share of neutral reporting?*

The problem in access to information or the need for long time to address as many sides due to elongated bureaucracy or challenges on behalf of the story's stakeholders are some of the impediments which forced a journalist to publish news or stories with out representing all or the possible major stakeholders' point of view.

Unbalanced news reporting is also a problem in local websites of our country. For instance, in our country, what is visibly and commonly witnessed in news websites either pro or government-critical is modifying some once source news and post it as if theirs with out citing the source. Mostly, they are doing it by removing backgrounds of the original source and some times they rewritten it in a way to give special emphasis according to their point of interest.

The above act is unethical at least for two reasons: Taking only the news items by throwing out its background information (even with citation) should be counted as unfair and hence unethical reporting. This is because of two reasons: one for devaluing the respect for following and practicing the profession's ethics of the source web cite.

The other reason is distorting the full sense and context or integrity of the story, because giving relevant background information is part and parcel of the news items. The background information gives the reporting together with the news items a full-fledged and complete sense of meaning. It is said before that giving background information boosts understanding. Moreover, it is a sign for being convinced for the fact that current events are a continuation or cause and effect of previous events. On the top of this, continuity of events could also attract public interest. Therefore, giving background information could also help in addressing diversified view points and hence, achieving balance and fairness in news reporting.

Journalists are also supposed to cross-check what sources are telling them with other sources to ensure that what they finally report corresponds to the objective reality (Ronning, H. 2002, p.122). Reporting or writing with out crosschecking could also expose journalists to be convicted of defamation, violation of privacy and other possible crimes that follow its publication.

MacDonald and Petheram (1998, p.60) argued that: "To ask for fairness and balance is to ask that evaluative language be avoided, that the material should not be slanted."

Some of the basic principles of journalism overlap each other and a bit difficult to draw a clear boundary between them. The following argument focus on the inseparability and also impossibility of fairness with objectivity:

*To be fair, we should spread out our resources as evenly as possible. No matter how we spread our resources, we'll never get it right. We might as well be honest, and listen to our subjective inner voices, and write and report from a neutral point of view. (Free Essays - Cliff Notes)*

A general criticism of notions of fairness and balance is that they are limited virtues, take a middle way, and thus exclude views that are extreme or, as their proponents would describe them, more radical (MacDonald and Petheram 1998, p.61).

On the other hand, Kovach & Rosenstiel (2000, p.46) argued that achieving balance by being fair by itself immersed journalist in another problem. They argued: "balance, also, is too subjective; balancing a story by being fair to both sides may not be fair to the truth, if both sides do not in fact have equal weight."

We may also think of failure in maintaining fairness and impartiality by taking as a compromise for economic integrity of the press organization. If stories and news are not attractive or not addressed human interest like: uniqueness, series of events, stories linked with feeling of nationality, oddness, newness, etc., then it follows that the news stories marketability would be endanger. Consequently, the sustainability of the press organization in general would be in question.

MacDonald and Petheram (1998:61) questioned how 'fair' and 'balanced' journalists can be? He questioned that:

*Is it possible for them 'to report an event or series of events in a way that does not reflect the reporter's attitudes about the events and people involved'? It is a dogma of sociology that the media fail to be 'objective'. This implication can be seen in the titles of many books about journalism: 'Bending reality', 'the manufacture of news' and 'putting reality together'.*

To substantiate the above argument Brian McNair (cited MacDonald and Petheram, 1998, p.61) noted in a recent textbook that: "Journalism, regardless of the integrity of individual journalists and editors, is always selective, partial account of reality, which can never be known in its entirety by anyone."

On the other hand, Retief J. (2002, p.84) underlined on the need of being fair. He argues that: "Remember the most basic ethical principles:

maximum truth, minimum harm; the more unfair you are, the greater harm you are likely to cause."

Unfairness could be expressed in different mechanisms for instance: statistics could be interpreted in a way of to transmit different implications and meanings. To give imaginary but exemplary example: If there were six schools in a certain city having three million population and six more schools were constructed within the last five or longer years. Then reporting by saying: "In a certain area the number of schools grows by 100 %" (grows by double) without explaining what that means to that much population (three million populations), would be precisely unfair even through the expression mechanism looks statistically sound and alright.

Finally, Retief, J. (2002, p.86) outlined honest attempts that a journalist should make in order to achieve fairness:

- Balance your report in such a way that no party is misrepresented either by your choice of words or by the lack of the proper context; that would be unjust
- Ensure that all parties get their say i.e. equality
- Give coverage to different parties in relation to their importance and i.e. moderation

### **2.2.2. Independence**

Independence is really the main criteria of a newspaper if it is to be a reliable news teller or not. It is the criteria of being independent which differentiate a newspaper from propaganda. In the later case the audience or readers hear or read only the good qualities of one side of the story and the bad or weakness of the other party.

Franz Krüger (2005, p.95) noted that: "independence is one of the fundamental principles of journalism ethics because it sets up a defense against conflicts of interest and competing loyalties." In an article posted on the web (Journalism.org 2005) stated that: "Independence of spirit and mind, rather than neutrality, is the principle journalists must keep in focus."

Matthew Kieran (1998, p.23) argued that: "it is a commonplace assumption of journalism that the media have a fundamental duty to be impartial in order to achieve the goal of an objective report or analysis of current events."

To reduce conflicts of interest one mechanism could be restricting the news organization's staffs from working on similar jobs like: working for other press organizations. Besides, giving attention to the interest of the public could bring better solution in resolving problems arising from conflict of interests.

Conflicts generally arise from the roles journalists play within society and, for that reason, appear to involve particularistic duties, rather than our general societal obligations; for example, a reporter should avoid endorsing political causes, but the rest of us are not so constrained (Louis Alvin Day 2003, p.209).

Karen Sanders (2003:42) also noted that, 'Due impartiality' doesn't mean just getting two sides of a story nor does it require 'absolute neutrality on every issue or detachment from democratic principles'. Sanders further argues that, it is a practice aimed at removing the distorting effect of prejudice from whatever source, ensuring that full and fair accounts are given of events.

However, Karen Sanders (2003:42) also pointed out that, subjectivity is part and parcel of the human condition and news stories have an intrinsic narrative structure. Sanders argues that, many stories can be

woven from the same material and they all partake of a lesser or greater degree of truth; they may all disclose reality to a lesser or greater degree.

Recent trends in journalism, at least from the vantage point of the *Economist*, suggest news is 'moving away from foreign affairs towards domestic concerns; away from politics towards human-interest stories; away from issues to people'. (David Berry 2000, p.137)

Keith Tester (200, p.37) argued that the journalist has to stop claiming to be the objective enquirer after truth and instead that character has to be one, which is able to manipulate the audience and other scarce resources so that their availability is maximized.

MacDonald and Petheram (1998, p.62) argues that:

*If journalism's failure to be objective is because it cannot free itself of value judgments, then we are all in the same boat, including the critics of journalistic objectivity. But it still looks as if it is possible for a journalist to produce a story that is accurate, promotes understanding and is free of prejudices.*

Addressing human interest in reporting seems to be very crucial. In the mean time journalists should dig up to the maximum in search for truth and accuracy. Journalists could address accuracy, truthfulness and fairness with out affecting human interest. Brent Cunningham (2003) argues that, "our pursuit of objectivity can trip us up on the way to "truth'."

Most of the private newspapers in Ethiopia, as they can generally be observed, are mostly reflects antagonistic view toward the government. "Most of the current private newspapers managers were servants of the former information minister or military Radio." "So, we can call this militant journalism" (Tamirat 2005).

The government newspapers on the other hand, widely blamed for having a pro-government stand. It is spoken widely by the people and the media

that the government journalists receive gifts or money for special coverage of business companies.

A survey have been undertaken by School of Journalism and Communication of 2<sup>nd</sup> batch A.A.U students in 2005 G.C. by taking representative samples from both state owned and private newspapers. Conflict of interest, which arises from working in two similar jobs, is given great focus by the newspapers. As a result, eight of the eighteen newspapers had firm stand against working in another similar job. And, even five of them did not allow their journalists to work in any other income gaining jobs.

Lots of strategies and solutions are forwarded by the interviewed journalists to tackle or reduce the probability of conflict of interest like: by taking the public interest as the highest criteria, preparing detailed code of conduct, restricting their journalists from working in another competing newspaper, and some also said that they will give priority for the interest of the government: if it is a government media company and for the party interest, if it is a party newspaper.

Quite a good number of newspapers (around six or seven) agreed to allow their journalists to freely participate in politics without any political inclination or bias in reporting. The same or similar number of newspapers also implements in house policy not to encourage active political participation, even to take actions up to firing from work or changing their columns. Whereas, the party or government newspapers decided to allow their journalists to actively participate in politics if and only if they are competing or representing pro-government political party.

Ten out of the eighteen newspapers firmly answered that they receive no gifts whatsoever of the question about free gifts. But, as I have mentioned earlier, one can be skeptic of the truthfulness of their responses. Having this in mind, around five of the newspapers expressed

their willingness to accept gifts as long as it has no influence on the content of the news story. Surprisingly enough, one interviewee from the Ethiopian radio said that "As a result of a small monthly payment, we are forced to accept gifts, although our editorial policy forbids it". The same response was also given by the private newspaper called *Tobia*, an Amharic newspaper.

In this survey, most of the newspapers (nine of them) expressed their good cooperation experiences with the state court agencies and only one newspaper organization allowed his journalists to testify in front of the court only if it is confidential.

Generally speaking, hidden political agenda, high influence of economic benefits and personal and social relationships in line with other factors like editorial influences tended to be the underlying causes, which endanger press independence in Ethiopian newspaper.

Retief, J. (2002, p.99) discussed that "always remember the Rashomon effect: the reason why people perceive the same situation in a different way is precisely because of this subjectivity."

Having discussed the concept of independence in the context of journalism and related concepts like objectivity or impartiality, and subjectivity; questions could arise how to judge the level of independence of a press of any country. In view of this question, giving the criteria used in a research by Freedom House (2004) to rate the level of press freedom of countries is a good highlighter. The research analyses or evaluates the economic and political environments of the press. Economic and political environments are defined as follows:

**Political Environment** - Include the editorial independence of both the state-censorship; the vibrancy of the media; the ability of both foreign and local reporters to cover the news freely and without harassment; and the intimidation of journalists by the state or other actors, including

arbitrary detention and imprisonment, violent assaults, and other threats.

**The economic environment** - Includes the structure of media ownership; transparency and concentration of ownership; the costs of establishing media as well as of production and distribution; the selective withholding of advertising or subsidies by the state or other actors; the impact of corruption and bribery on content; and the extent to which the economic situation in a country impacts the development of the media. (Freedom House, 2004: xi)

It is not some thing unexpected or wrong doing for a certain press organization to address its economic sustainability and profitability without forgetting its' responsibility given from the society i.e. playing a watch dog role. Coming with stories which are under public interest to gain economic profit is one thing. Cheating the people by fabricating and interpreting events and news out of their natural contexts for the sake of maximizing profits and carried on other negative hidden agenda is another thing.

In our country, the private newspapers are frequently and widely blamed for having partial and sensational headlines with body texts discussing about something different contexts; or writing same concepts of paragraphs repeatedly with only slightly different ways of expression in a single story. In this case, there is no reason to justify for this unethical act and being socially irresponsible.

### **2.2.3. Truthfulness**

The concept of truth is quite discussable and plenty of writers argue in different directions for the past centuries.

One of the many philosophers, German philosopher G. F. Hegel proposed that truth is reached by a continuing dialectic, in which a concept

(thesis) always gives rise to its opposite (antithesis), and the interaction between these two leads to the creation of a new concept (synthesis) (Microsoft Encarta 2004). It seems according to Hegel truth emanates from comparison from its possible counter part. In this case it probably raises the need to see events on many angles as far as possible. Hence it is going to overlap with one of journalistic principles i.e. fairness and balance.

*Kovach & Rosenstiel (2000 p.42)* defined "Journalistic truth" as something which is more than mere accuracy. They argue that: "It is a sorting-out process that develops between the initial story and the interaction among the public, newsmakers, and journalists overtime."

Truthfulness is one of the very decisive ethical principles. Truthfulness is very decisive factor for a newspaper to be a trustworthy news teller or not.

Getting it right is, quite simply, the starting point for journalism ethics argued Franz Krüger (2004 p.58). He further substantiates his argument by saying, "if our business is truth telling, then accuracy must always be our first concern." He explains that, "Even apparently unimportant things like spelling errors, have a profound effect on the credibility of individual journalists and media, as well as the profession as a whole."

Ronning, H. (2002 p.80) also forwarded and discussed the three criteria for truth in news reporting. He has suggested that the first is accuracy; facts should be based on solid evidence; a news story should also promote understanding; and finally, reporting should be fair and balanced.

The profession of journalism is built on trust. The loss of credibility can be ethically fatal to a news organization (Louis Alvin Day 2003, p.92). In

fact, since it is difficult to find fault proof personality from humankind, there could be exceptional mistakes but cross checking even after the news publication would be advisable in view of maintaining the profession's ethical values and boosting credibility.

Admitting mistakes and responds or takes corrections as quick as possible by itself is one way of creating a news items. By so doing, it is also possible to boost credibility and transparency by showing the press institution's determination and deep believe in search for the truth.

To substantiate this argument, Retief, J. (2002 p.50) stressed that: "Reporting accurately is non-negotiable, whatever the cost. Retief further explains that: "accurate reporting is not the best way of doing journalism - it is the only way."

Utilitarians, argues from the point view of action's or event's results or consequences of events. Retief, J., (2002 p.71) discussed the concept of journalistic truth with Utilitarians point of view: "those who gauge the consequences of an act before making an ethical judgment, will argue that lying is acceptable as long as it is of some use to the public at large and in the public's interest. However, Utilitarians would not easily assume that lies and deception are harmless".

#### **2.2.4. Social responsibility**

It is true that social responsibility seems a much wider and inclusive way of expression. Any kind of incorrect or distorted reporting; being impartial while reporting which makes the story skewed to one side; any kind of reporting which could not able to minimize harm to the society even if it is true and accurate; refraining or abandoning from revealing practices and events whenever they are found to be harmful to the people directly or indirectly, sooner or later; and other cases could all be

included as ways of practices of the press which could result in acting socially irresponsibly unless and other wise they are justified.

The ethical imperative for journalists is to cover the news responsibly so as not to encourage or incite further crime and violence (Louis Alvin Day 2003, p.281).

The media are accused of promoting every conceivable form of antisocial behavior, from encouraging disrespect for authority to causing an increase in teenage suicide. (Louis Alvin Day 2003, p.286).

In contrast, Louis Alvin Day (2003 p.286) also forwarded the counter argument of this. He pointed out that some say violence is the result of a complex interaction of individual and cultural variables, and industry representatives argue that it is unfair to blame the media for all of society's pathologies.

In fact, even minor journalistic exercises have ethical implications. Why? Because everything a journalist writes or says, or neglects to write or to say, in some or other way has an influence on people, and influences can be good or bad (Retief, J. 2002, p.4).

Retief, J. (2002 p.4) supported his argument-using example. He forwarded that:

*If, for example, you are too lazy to check your facts, you have neglected your responsibility (read: you have acted in an unethical way to the public; if you did check your facts, the opposite is true). If you don't identify yourself to a source early and clearly enough as a reporter, you are misleading that person; if you do, you act in a responsible way.*

If the public choose to ignore unethical practices whether they are misrepresenting or faking information there remains the possibility that a *culture of indifference* develops as a level of social consciousness in certain sections of the community. (David Berry 2000, p.30)

Sensational news reporting (especially in headlines) generally witnessed in private newspapers. Sensational headlines are generally rare in state owned newspapers. Most probably, it is so because their survival does not depend on their attractiveness, most of them published in fixed number of copies and distributed to subscribers which are mostly government offices and international organizations. Hence, fees are collected irrespective of the newspaper's contents attractiveness. Provoking and sensational reporting could seriously affect the public negatively by changing their perception as well as it could be used as a way to maximize profit.

Because the media have enormous influence, it is of vital importance that journalism be practiced in an accountable and responsible way. When the media act irresponsibly, several things happen: unnecessary harm is done to people, the media lose credibility, this weakens the media's vital role as watchdog, and the wellbeing of democracy suffers (Retief, J. 2002, p.5).

The term "social responsibility" embraces matters pertaining to violence, obscenity, indecency, blasphemy, religion, and sex - with special reference to children (Retief, J., 2002, p.44).

Franz Krüger (2004, p.82) noted that "Journalists should separate facts from opinion so that to achieve their responsibility to the society." He argues that: "Here, it is useful to remind themselves of the three basic formats of journalism: reportage ('this has happened'), analysis ('this is what it means'), and opinion ('this is what I think about it')."

Therefore, the media (print or broadcast or the web) should act in away to primarily benefit the general people. Hence, primarily serving for the interest of the people could secure press institution's economic sustainability. At the same time, the media could use other mechanisms of enhancing profitability like advertising and reporting news and stories

which could benefit the people by raising awareness of citizens; creating peace and stability; informing and educating the general population.

### **3. Background of private and state owned newspapers**

#### **3.1. Historical background of state owned and private owned media in Ethiopia**

##### **3.1.1. Their establishment and objectives**

In Ethiopia press freedom is a recent phenomenon. Ethiopia has been led by totalitarian socialist government, which did not allow the expansion of free press. It is since 1993 G.C. that free press started to flourish in the country following the proclamation for registration of press organizations.

Reporters Sans Frontieres (2000, p.04) explains about the private press media in Ethiopia as: "About 50 privately owned newspapers publishing general news, most of them weeklies, are available from Addis Ababa newsstands." "Almost all these titles are in the Amharic language." "Ten or so political and financial weeklies are published in English."

"Although Ethiopia has no official body that monitors circulation figures, there is general agreement that *Menelik* is the largest-circulation newspaper, with 16,000 copies sold weekly" (Reporters Sans Frontieres 2000, p.04).

However, according to the 2005 G.C. yearly report of ministry of information, it is *Addis Admas* (34,555) that has the highest yearly average weekly publication, longer duration of publication and well known among the people during the specified time period. Although, *Netsanet* had the highest average weekly publication i.e. 50,000 in 2005 G.C. publication year, it is published only for five months started near the day of the 2005 G.C. national election and shut down by the government along with many other newspapers following the turmoil in the aftermath of the election. As a result of its very short duration of

publication, it is less known by the people. Concerning the state news outlets, without no doubt, it is *Addis Zemen* which has the highest circulation amount and area coverage of distribution far higher than the rest state newspapers.

Ronning, H. (2002:122) made a research on the African press, even though there might not be a common characteristics which all African countries share and level of press freedom differs from one African country over the other, Ronning pointed out that: "In Africa, what writer calls 'vendetta journalism' has been widely practiced."

Like most African countries, the practice of journalistic ethics in Ethiopia is not satisfactory. There are widespread critiques concerning violations of the ethics that the profession calls for.

According to the research Freedom House (2004: 94) the research expressed the level of press freedom of Ethiopia by saying: "In view of government's influence, while a 1992 law guarantees freedom of the press, the government restricts this right in practice."

The Freedom House (2004: 1194) ranked the level of press freedom of Ethiopia 145<sup>th</sup> position from a total of 193 countries and 34<sup>th</sup> position from a total of 48 countries found on African continent. The study leveled the status of press freedom of Ethiopia as 'Not Free' which is the worst level from the other two groups of status the research considered 'Free' and 'Partly Free'

Private media, broadcast (Radio and TV), or print and web, could be instrumental to express or show minorities group's ideas, and cultures. Therefore, they could defend minority groups from risk of being outshined or dominated by major role-playing groups. This could be used

to justify the true and fair interpretation of democracy, which is used in various countries with different meanings and interpretation.

The government publishes four newspapers: two dailies, in Amharic and English, and two weeklies, in Oromo and Arabic. Reporters Sans Frontieres (2000, p.04). They also said that "Four of the 9 regions in Ethiopia's federal system have their own publications."

### **3.2. Some Of the Challenges of the Private and State Owned Newspapers in Ethiopia**

#### **3.2.1. Lack of Professionalism**

There are lots of problems regarding the private press organizations. Most of these problems also shared by government or state owned media. I try to focus on the private press institutions since their problem is somewhat very serious and needs urgency in order to promote democracy and achieve diversity of ideas to be heard. One of the largest weaknesses that the press organizations of the country failed to solve are, issues regarding maintaining ethics of the profession. Some of these ethical misconducts are:

- Some of the newspapers in the country, especially the private newspapers are blamed for being the mouth piece of political parties rather than playing a watchdog role and in favor of the interest of the general population.
- There are lots of problems in reporting news truthfully and objectively. Regarding this issue, the state owned newspapers are not better than the privately owned newspapers. What is common in common is, they are distinguishably skewed to the side of their own groups: these are widely blamed characteristics by the people. The state-owned newspapers usually tend to report only positive

sides of the incumbent government. Most of the time, they do not even proposing constructive comment against the activities of the incumbent government. The privately owned newspapers on the other hand, tend to report what is critical of the incumbent government by exaggerating and making it sensational in their front pages.

- Many private newspapers also blamed by the people and by government that they do report news out of their context by taking only some part of the news of their interest and leaving the rest.
- Lots of cases was repeatedly broadcasted on the media that there are journalists both from the state and private newspapers who accept freebies, which do really hurt the credibility of news they produce.
- Defamation and violating the right to privacy (invasion of privacy) is also believed to be common problem in private as well as in state-owned press organizations.
- There are also widespread problems on reporting balanced, accurate and fair news. Although, limited information access could be the main reason in speak of the private newspaper.
- Generally speaking, most of the journalists in the country do not consider journalism as a profession like that of a lawyer or a medical doctor and are not willing to abide by the ethics of the profession.
- Lack of sufficient and up-to-date training is one of the very serious problems in both the state owned and the privately owned newspapers. Most of the press organization staff members or journalists are not in line with the advancing technology. As an example lack of sufficient know how concerning the unitization of computer and related ICT machines could be counted in this

regard. In the country, the field of journalism started to flourish very recently in line with the proclamation, which permits individuals and any non-governmental organization to establish their own colleges, universities and press organizations. There is only one school which train at the level of masters in this field i.e. School of Journalism and Communication at Addis Ababa University. Most certainly, there are better changes regarding level of professionalism of the field for the last few years. But, still much efficient training institutions needed in the field to achieve a vibrant media in the country.

Disrespecting the codes of ethics of the profession is one of the commonly told and to some extent visible characters of the journalists in the country be it private or state owned press journalists. There are cases that journalists themselves suppress press freedom and discourage development activities in the country.

In this case it is good to mention one example which is Ethiopian Television's (ETV 2003) broadcast under an investigative program called '*Aynachin*'. The case involves repeated intimidations and treats of a private journalist against a private mineral company owner known as Bure mineral water P.L.C. The journalist threatens to publish stories, which could damages the reputation of the company unless the owner gave him some thousands of birr and the owner refused to do so. Finally, the journalist did as he said. In consequence, the owner accused the journalist for written defamation against his company reputation and its own personality. The journalist ended up in jail based on tangible evidences. But, the company's reputation was already damaged and the owner forced to change its company's name and also started to produce some other new products.

In considering the above case, there is no need for humanitarian and associations of journalists to shout for the arrest of the journalist. The

journalist was bargaining to sale his own people and his country's interest (i.e. investment and opportunity jobs for many apart from it is a violation of human rights) in exchange for his individual pursuit of for money.

The state-owned journalists are no better in this respect. I remember a TV and Radio announcement which urges journalists working in state-owned institutions to stop demanding money while performing their duties. It was quite widely spread rumor among the people. The journalists were asking money to broadcast or print stories that advertise companies by sandwiching in a story; and even broadcasting newly released music's and video clips as frequently as possible depend on the amount of payments by the artists.

### **3.2.2. Information access**

Regarding access to information state owned press organizations are much better than those of the private once. A free press is essentially the same as free speech. The Ethiopian Constitution also, at least in principle, tried to show their inseparability by including freedom of press under freedom of expression. Article 12 of conduct and accountability of government states that:

*Every one has the right to freedom of expression without any interference. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through and media of his choice.*

Information access is also another problem especially for the private newspapers to face unlike the state owned news organizations. Most of the private newspapers are not allowed to attend some of the press conferences, panel discussions and even meetings of the parliament.

To some extent fairness and balance also are related with or affected by level of information access. If you do not have any means to access the

information and data on all the sides of the story, there would not be any mechanism to make the news or story as balanced as it has to be.

### **3.2.3. Legal enforcements**

As it is fact that Ethiopia known to some extent with poor level of press freedom even compare to African states (also according to a study known as freedom of press 2004 G.C., which is carried out by in 2004 G.C. at global level). One of the main reasons for this poor freedom of press in the country is abuse of legal acts of and proclamations in order to jail journalists not to enjoy their freedom of press. By implication this could mean, suppressing the people's freedom to listen or read diversity of ideas with out limit.

In many occasions loopholes and vague expressions of legal terms and terminologies within the proclamations creates a play ground for the incumbent government to play and twist meanings as necessary according to its interest.

It is only the year 2004 G.C. that only one journalist arrested; else quite a number of journalists arrested with and without charge depends on the temperature and mode of the political environment every year. For example, following the unrest in the aftermath of the 2005 G.C. national election around 20 journalists jailed by the reason from the government that they are fermenting and conspiring genocide and instability in the capital and other areas of the country.

According to the research made by Freedom House (2004, p.94) the research expressed the level of press freedom by saying that: "In view of government's influence, while a 1992 law guarantees freedom of the press, the government restricts this right in practice." The study stated that: "Throughout 2003, laws concerning publishing false information, inciting ethnic hatred, libel, and publishing articles offensive to public

morality were used to justify the arrest, detention, prosecution, and fining of journalists."

Here, it would be a thorough discussion, if we include also legal accusations forwarded out side of governmental bodies. For instance, investigative journalists could be accused and intimidated by individuals and companies for written defamation and violation of privacy. This is a challenge faced by the private owned journalist although rarely seen in state owned press journalists.

### **3.2.3.1 Press law**

Democratic right (i.e. right to vote, right to be elected by its people, etc) and the right to live are classical and appropriate examples of human rights. If so, sentencing or failing a person (he/she could be a journalist) with out substantiated or vague evidence directly mean denying the above-mentioned examples of human right. To enforce this argument, these human rights are rights, which are not given by the government or Ethiopian people, or nationalities rather granted for every citizen as a result of he/she is a human being. In other expression, these are rights given by nature.

### **3.2.3.2 Other Media Related Laws**

In Ethiopia, article 21 of the constitution which is ratified in 1991 G.C. (subsequent to the fall of the *Derg* regime) forces any press institution (includes newspapers, magazines, books, TV, radio, pictures, films, cartoons, music and results of animation and graphics, and news agencies) to be registered.

Registration could be a violation of human rights if it is misused to as a cover up. To make it more clear, registration of press institutions could be used to restrict or control according to the interest of ruling parties. Some of the mechanisms in doing so are: charging or requesting a lot of money for registration fee or as a reserve, denying registration at all, and

discouraging to act as a legal press media by creating lengthy bureaucracy and so on tricks.

In fact, the rational behind registration of press media as it is forwarded by governments could be: in order to be taxed, to create integrated and concrete data for researchers, and to grant legal personality and soon.

### **3.2.4. Other Challenging Factors**

1. Official Censorship and Self-censorship - in Ethiopia journalists (both private and state-owned) are not free from influences of either of government bodies related to the press or their editor's influence. Lack of editorial independence is one of the most a common problems in the press institutions.

Generally speaking, regarding state-owned newspapers editor's influence could much more repressive. It is common to hear well known journalists working in state owned press institutions got fired off as a result of limit full and unethical working conditions.

#### 2. Economic Environment

3.1. Ownership of Media - In our country most of the private newspapers (since there are no private broadcasts: Radio or TV) owners are editors of the newspapers, hence there influence could be viewed as editorial independence. Especially, before the shutdown of around 20 newspapers following the instabilities in the aftermath of the 2005 G.C. national election, some of the government-critical newspapers were owned by few individuals and hence there were a process of conglomeration of private newspapers under a few individuals. For example, *Netsanet* and *Tsegreda* (all focus on political issues) are owned by Ato Zekarias Tesfaye; *Asqual*, *Minilik*, and *Satenaw* (all focus on political issues) are owned by W/ro. Eskedar; *Moged* (focus on political issues) and

World sport owned by Ato Wendemeneh Negusse (interview from journalists of the press institutions 2006).

3.2. Costs of establishing, publishing and distributing production - here the government's role in restricting or intimidating press freedom had been very limited. But, the government could influence the press freedom by imposing tax and controlling the prices of commodities like: paper, ink etc and by imposing quotas on utilities used for publishing process had been determined as results of market forces i.e. demand and supply.

## **4. Methodology and Evaluation Criteria of the research**

### **4.1. Methodology of the research**

Newspapers in Ethiopian press can easily be categorized in either of the two blocks i.e. state-owned and private-owned. As a result, the project addressed the newspapers by taking samples from the two blocks. Hence, it can able to show the comparison between the two blocks based on some ethical considerations.

The study addressed the top two Amharic private newspapers and one state-owned newspaper out of a total of 35 Amharic newspapers, which report social, political, and economic issues as current affairs, on the basis of circulation amount according to the data obtained from Ministry of Information (2005).

The reason behind considering only Amharic and highest circulation newspapers is because they can be read by a greater number of people. The greater the number of circulation, the greater would be its effect on people's perception.

Moreover, only a few major Amharic newspapers constitute considerable proportion of the weekly publications of the total private newspaper's weekly publications. According to the 2005 G.C. yearly report of Ministry of Information monitoring and regulation department, the highest top two private newspapers in circulations with long duration of publications in 2005 G.C. were: *Addis Admas* (34,555) and *Ethiop* (27,520) comprises about 20.3 % of the yearly average weekly circulation from a total of 35 Amharic private newspapers which reports current issues on social, economic and political aspects.

From the state-owned newspaper, *Addis Zemen* is the only one with highest one time circulation (19, 514), duration and frequency of

publication (daily except Monday during and before the year 2005 G.C.) currently published daily.

Content analysis is the chosen methodology because what is going to be analyzed is a text. Only text is going to be analyzed, to mean cartoons, pictures advertisements, and so on would not be included in the analysis. Even from the text parts all texts would not be evaluated rather the study excludes those texts for advertising reason, editorial and sport coverage and so on. The reason for this is, the project focus on social, economic and political issues rather affairs, which are more of entertainment because these have a lesser role in deciding the fate of the country.

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis would be undertaken. Categories have been set and evaluated by coders. To ensure their reliability, inter-coder reliability had been checked. Therefore, able to judge whether the contents are partial or not, socially responsible or not, and the news reporting is balanced and fair or not and etc. Sorting what is opinion? And what is fact? Checking the presence of certain words and phrases comparing with their contexts, checking the presence of balanced news reporting whether the story stakeholders' view is represented or not are some of the mechanism in rating the contents. Effort also has been made to investigate on ethical codes of the press organizations under consideration.

### **Data collection**

The main data are the sampled newspapers but effort has been made to collect data from each press organizations and journalists working in the press institutions about their code of ethics and the like data. However, since most of the top private newspapers are shut down currently, it was difficult to collect those data.

## **Sampling method**

Regarding the sampling method, I have used stratified and judgment sampling. The first one is one of the probability sampling methods and makes it possible to calculate the sampling error. In other words, it is possible to predict the degree to which the sample differs from the population. Therefore, it is an advantage for using this sampling method.

The project grouped the total population i.e. Amharic newspapers in to stratum: state and privately owned newspapers.

From the state owned newspapers *Addis Zemen* is the only one and published every day except Monday during the sampled time period, it is now published seven days per week. Wednesday's and Saturday's publications are selected to find similar stories with the private newspapers: *Ethiop*, and *Addis Admas* which are published on the respective days. Therefore, I took two publications from *Addis Zemen* and one sample from each of the two private newspapers in two weeks time, which makes number of samples from *Addis Zemen*: 16 and eight newspapers from each of the two private newspapers. As a result, a total of 32 newspapers are evaluated from the three newspapers in time period of four months.

To limit the content to be evaluated, sample stories are selected from front-page's of the newspapers since the main scope of study focus on news rather than entertainments, editorials, cartoons and other contents. More over, I want to compare the closest possible publication dates of the newspapers.

The study mainly focuses on the 2005 G.C. national election and normal time period. There fore, the study consider those publications which were published during the two months election time (May and June) and two months during the peace or normal period (February and March) of the

same year. It is so, in order to check if there is any impact of the election results on the newspapers for acting ethically or unethically.

The time period selected to be during the election and normal period time. One reason for this is: it is widely reported by the government and has been a controversial issue among the people for the city's newspaper to follow the basic ethical principles of the profession or not, especially during specified time period and the other is to compare level of respecting the basic ethical considerations between these two periods and able to recommend ways and advantages of respecting ethics of the profession.

Following the aftermath of the 2005 G.C. national election most of the private newspapers were closed for the reason of fermenting to overthrow the incumbent government and the constitution. They were actively participating in the pre and post election period. Up to now, around twenty journalists from the private media are believed to be detained in prison. As a result, the mere fact that as many as around 20 private newspapers are detained could have negative influences on the rest of the private newspapers, which are in circulation, to report especially government-critical stories.

Currently only few private newspapers from the private press are struggling with tight rules and regulations of the country. As it can be commonly visualized, currently they are fewer private newspapers that are publishing political and controversial or sensitive issues compare to the election time or before may be for fear of the legal and verbal intimidations from the government.

Data collection was one of the most difficult jobs in doing the research. One of the three newspapers addressed in the research were already closed and its journalists and editors jailed following the turmoil in the aftermath of the 2005 G.C. national election. As a result, finding all the

sampled newspapers were a bit tiresome work. It was cumbersome to find their previous publications easily. Moreover, doing some interview and data gathering concerning these press organizations were almost impossible: as a result the study forced to stick primarily on content analysis methodology in doing the research.

Data (Newspapers) were gathered mostly by buying from newspapers dwellers and some from my relatives who kept it in their house for their own purpose. Newspaper, which could not be found in either of the previous methods are analyzed by going into public libraries.

Stories are selected from the three newspapers based on systematic sampling. These were done by choosing odd number ordered stories on the basis of their precedence of headlines on front-pages of the newspapers. As a result, 97 stories from *Addis Zemen*; 29 from *Addis Admas*; 21 stories from *Ethiop* were evaluated from their four month time publications (Jan., Feb., May, and June of the year 2005 G.C.)

To boost reliability of the coders' evaluation results, effort has been made to evaluate a single newspaper's samples by two or more coders so that able to minimize bias. This was chosen as a mechanism to decrease bias. As a result, I found around 95 % similarities of evaluation results by the four coders' of the same stories and with various newspapers.

#### **4.2. Evaluation Criteria and their Justifications**

The following criteria are going to be used in evaluation of the newspapers contents, which are designed on the basis of some of the principles of the profession. The following considerations are forwarded to help in understanding the evaluation process.

- Interviews would not be analyzed unless they were presented in news form.

- Newspaper's status of respecting ethical considerations evaluated by grouping into two groups: government vs. private newspapers. Different publication dates of the newspapers were also analyzed by grouping in two periods: normal time and election time.

## **I. Balance and Fairness**

- i. Do the story tried to balance the major stakeholder's point of view?

Justification: Unless it is justified, it is very basic to report news by giving fair and equal or proportional chances to express their own side of view points (especially whenever there are opposing view points).

- ii. What stakeholders' types are already addressed? And which are not?

Justification: It can tell us, which stakeholders found in most of the stories are difficult to find information? Hence, able to predict the level of information access for each sampled newspapers and to figure out the stakeholders that are the most problematic in getting information.

- iii. Prominence - precedence of story types: what story types are the most prominent and what are not? And which tone of reporting allocated for what level of prominence?

Justification: giving proportional chances of prominence for different story types is one of the mechanisms which fairness could be addressed.

- iv. Background information - how many stories in a newspaper include sufficient and relevant information in a way to boost understanding for the readers and achieve fairness and balance?

Justification: Adding background information can help in promoting understanding for readers and hence, enhance readability and news value. Moreover, it can also create a chance to balance stories when ever there is a problem in accessing

- information. Reporting the previous events and developments could be one of mechanisms in achieving balanced and fair pictures of events in readers mind. It is so, because most of the time, events came as cause and effect or one follows over the other.
- v. What is the tone of the major stakeholders presented in the story? It is figured out by judging how the major players of the story reported (positively, negatively, or neutral: with out support or criticize the major stakeholders).

Justification: Regarding evaluating a newspaper content based on fairness and balance is concerned; evaluation based on story's tone of representation of stakeholders could be very expressive. Normally a newspaper should strive to report as many view points of the major players of a story. Information access could be one of the reasons for skewed or one sided reporting of events. But, even stakeholders of a story with out sufficient information access should be reported fairly and with out bias and mixing up of opinion of journalists.

## **II. Truthfulness (according to Sourcing)**

- i. What words or phrases used to express the anonymous sources?

Justification: It is wise and advisable to quote sources properly in a way to exactly express them uniquely and with out vagueness. When ever there is a problem for naming sources, journalists should express the reason why the source could not want to be named? Cases out of the previous two cases would not be acceptable according to ethics of the profession.

- ii. What source categories are anonymous?

Justification: Some of the source categories like: government officials and offices could be difficult for the private newspapers to access the information they needed. There fore, this criterion helps

to find out the degree of information access for private and state-owned newspapers.

- iii. What are the phrases or words in the headlines which are ambiguous or vague expressions?

Justification: Distorted interpretation of statistics is one of the mechanisms in which the people could vaguely or ambiguously perceive or understand the news contents. Statistical data could be interpreted in way sound to statistical analysis but not with the right context of meanings as a news item or in expressing what it means to the general population. Statistics could be interpreted without expressing what it means to the life or well being of the grass root population. Hence, statistics could be used to be perceived news vaguely or ambiguously by the people. Words and phrases with many meanings and contexts could be used for mere profit maximization or eluding the people.

### **III. Impartiality (Usage of biased words and terms)**

- i. How many stories of a single newspaper from the sampled stories witnessed for including coined words and phrases.

Justification: It is a very determinant factor for a news story to be free from journalist's opinion or suggestion. Otherwise, it would not be any more news but simply propaganda or opinion writing. It is figure out by looking the presence of injection of personal opinion by differentiating with what is actually news or fact? Biased words are checked by comparing with the main context of stories?

- ii. What story natures are mostly exposed to partial or opinion affiliated story reporting?

Justification: What makes the field of journalism differs from other fields like: propaganda, advertisement etc is the first should stick to truth and fact or what is really going on with: out mixing opinion with facts.

- iii. Is there exaggeration of news headlines as compare to the news main theme? Is there sensational and opinion injected news reporting in headlines and body texts?

Justification: Some of the reasons for sensational or exaggerated reporting could be economic interests. The press institutions at least in principle should be free from economic interests, negative influence of social relationships; owner's influences; editorial censorship; and finally journalists have to have the courage to report cases which involve government official, influential individuals and any other individual, if they have all the evidences which needs to defend themselves in front of the court.

Prioritizing either of the above mentioned factors are clearly not ethical. In other words, these are ways of practicing irresponsible journalism. If so, devoting all the time and other resources and vague or exaggerated news reporting mechanisms in order to achieve profitability rather than playing a watchdog role would be unethical. Exaggeration could be one of the mechanisms that could be used for prior advantage of profitability. A socially responsible newspaper should report as much stories of various types so that able to inform the public about all the latest and important events; able to solve or motivate the society and the government to solve problems of wider perspectives or fields; educate as many fields and hence able to raise awareness.

## **V. Social responsibility**

- i. Nature of the story - How many stories in a single publication of a newspaper are informative, educative, entertainments, developmental/ awareness rising and other types?

Justification: I have also evaluated story types in comparison to their level of prominence in front pages. My justification for this is that a socially responsible newspaper should report news events which are of various types (political, social, and economic issues). Comparing story types of newspaper with their level of prominence in front-pages could also reflect the newspaper main focal point of interest, or to some extent the objective of the newspaper. Since the society's problems are well diversified, there is a need to address all or at least most of the problems. Press institutions should not focus only on a single issue for instance on political issues while there are other main serious problems like: AIDS, poverty etc.

- ii. Similarity of contexts of headlines with the body text part.

Justification: One mechanism of cheating readers is by presenting headlines sensational; including words or phrases which are confusing or have many interpretations and meanings; presenting headlines with different contexts as compare to their body texts. By doing so, the headlines in front-pages, which is the most readable part of a newspaper, can be perceived differently by different readers depend on their perception and other factors. And hence, boosting attractiveness to end up in profitability or exercising some hidden agendas using the cover of press freedom would not be fair to the society. There could be cases in which the headlines have

different connotations or contexts as compare to the body text part. Sometimes even these two parts of a news story can speak about totally different things.

- iii. Prominence of headlines as compare to story types, level of exaggeration, and Tone of stories.

Marketability is the newspapers source of income and hence it is a survival mechanism. However, when we found this economic interest superimposed over public responsibility, here also could be controversial or just not right.

- Follow up of the basic ethical principles are also checked in time bases. Peace or normal time vs. election time evaluations undertaken to see whether there is differences in level of violation of ethics of the profession during the elections time as compare to the normal time.

Justification: The reason I want to compare these two periods is because violation of ethics of the profession in election time is very sensitive and could end up in massive damage (damage in the perceptions of individuals or in stability and integrity of a country) as compare to any other normal time. During the election time the political mood is very volatile and people are very much sensitive and look events very attentively. As a result, any misuse of ethics of the profession like: inciting violence, or ethnicity, or religion, which are mostly results of acting unethical, could cause a great human and material damage far more than as it can happen in the normal time especially in countries like Ethiopia were democracy is in its infant stage.

## **5. Findings and Discussion of the study**

### **5.1. Discussion and presentation of results of the project**

In this chapter; the findings of the project and their interpretation, discussion and explanation would be presented. It begins with the discussion of the main characteristics of the private and state-owned newspapers.

#### **5.1.1. Types and Styles of Prominent Stories in Front-pages**

*Ethiop's* front-pages are mostly full of large font and bold headlines without even a single sentence of body texts. This can imply how much they are profit-oriented rather than prioritizing for informing and educating the public.

The most frequent feature manifested on *Ethiop* newspaper is lack of reporting variety of issues in its contents. The topics posted on the page are mostly mono-content. One can simply observe and tell that there are more than one sub-headings on the most prominent stories (Ex. 4/4/97 E.C. publication) which could be naturally one story.

What is a common feature for the sampled private newspapers are they dominantly report political stories. It may be because sampled time is close to the national election or because they specialized on reporting such type of stories or other reasons. However, both of the private newspapers registered in ministry of information to report social, economic, and political stories (Ministry of Information 2005).

Pointing out as many headings from a naturally single story is very common on *Ethiop* newspapers. There are more than one separate sub-headings on the most prominent stories which are naturally one or two stories. (Ex. 4/4/97 E.C. publication).

The following bar graphs show the prime focal issue and level of prominence of story types of the newspapers. As it can be seen in the bar

graph, *Ethiop* witnessed around 98 % of its stories purely political. While the newspaper was meant and legally registered to publicize economic and social issues correspondingly. Concerning *Addis Admas* and *Addis Zemen* newspapers: they have some how comparable level of addressing other story types other than politics. *Addis Admas* is the better one in this respect, around half of the stories focus in issues which are not purely political in nature as compared to *Addis Zemen's* (around a 1/3 of the stories are non political issues).

Unlike the private newspapers (especially *Ethiop*) *Addis Zemen* allocated little space for headlines. Moreover, in many *Addis Zemen* publications almost half of the story's body texts are posted on front-pages and even some of the stories end on front-pages. On the other extreme layout style of *Addis Zemen* newspaper, allocating greater space for body texts on front-pages could hamper attractiveness to readers.

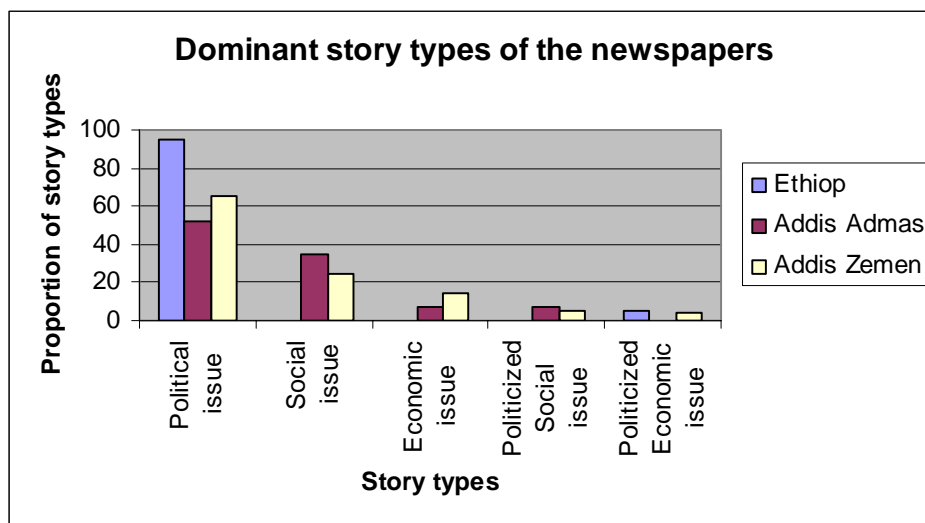


Figure 1 Percentage of stories based on their story types in the newspapers

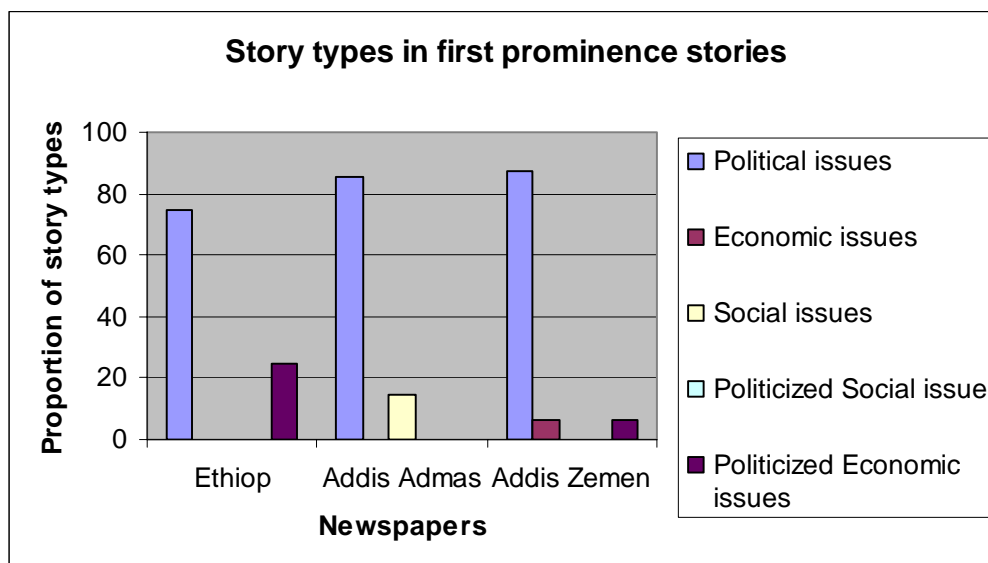


Figure 2 Story types vs. prominence of stories

### 5.1.2. Level of Impartiality in News Reporting Based on Tone of Stories and degree of deviance from personal opinions

The private newspapers, (especially *Ethiop*) proved that it is very critical of the incumbent government but very supportive of the previous dictatorial *Derge* regime in most of related stories.

On the other side, the government newspaper could not present government official's press releases along with people's attitude and ideals in almost all the time.

In government newspapers, it is also visible that direct quotes from officials or known persons presented in headlines as if the newspaper proofed that there is a consensus with the general population or as if reporting well known facts . (*Addis Zemen* 17/10/97 E.C. Friday, story no. 36)

The body texts evaluation of *Ethiop's* stories witnessed that there are ways of presenting events or news items as if they are facts. In this case, they don't put it either the form of opinion or as anonymous sources. The newspaper report as if it is conformed or as if they undertake polling in

many issues especially political issues by saying, it is a perception and thinking of the majority of the people.

Mostly *Ethiop* newspaper is written in a way to respond against government's stand or point of view. Of course, it is no wonder to criticize the faults and undemocratic activities of the government based on concrete evidences. What makes it unhealthy in case of *Ethiop* is that its stories are mere oppositions using full of anonymous sources. In addition, it does look things not from the point of view of the interest of the people. They often give responses to government claims and reports in detail as if they are opposition parties by themselves.

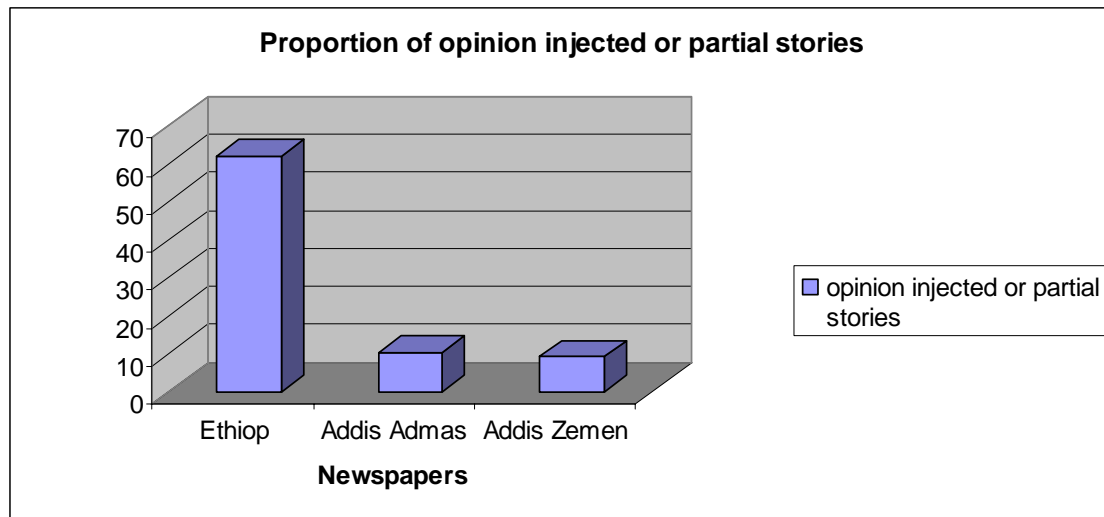


Figure 3 Proportion of opinion injected or partial stories in newspapers.

### 5.1.3. Balance and Fairness in News Reporting

It is also one of the findings that specific story tones are allocated for specific story types. For instance, in reporting political stories, *Ethiop* reports the government in nearly 100% of the cases negatively.

On the other side, *Addis Zemen* (nearly 35 %) and *Addis Admas* (70 %) are neutral. As a result, they are some how much better than *Ethiop* in neutral reporting.

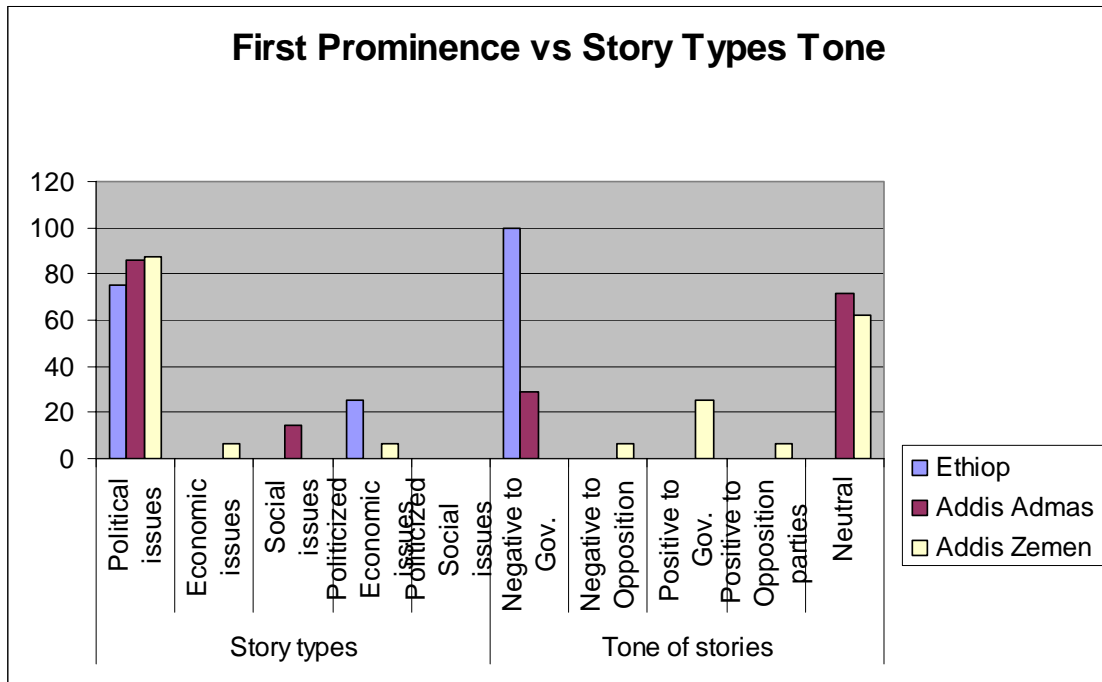


Figure 4 Comparison of first prominence story types with their tones

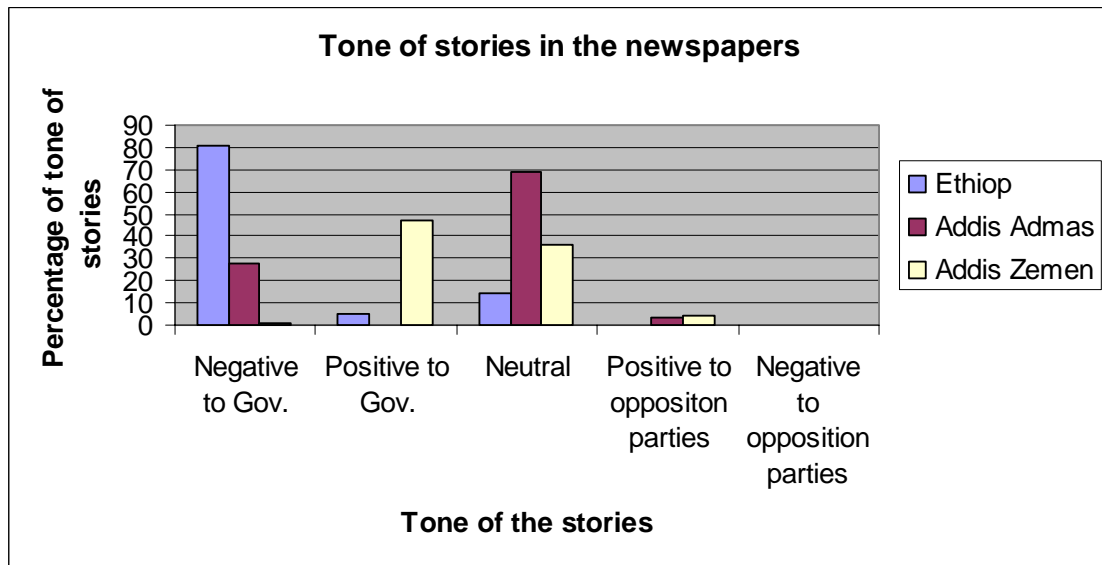


Figure 5 Percentage of stories based on their tones in respective the newspapers

The following graph shows the level of balance of the stories under investigation. Indirectly, it could also reflect the level of information access. On this regard, *Addis Admas* is the better one (above 80 % of the stories are balanced) in giving fair and proportional chances for the

major stakeholders in expressing their own point of view. *Addis Zemen* tries to report in a balanced way in almost 3/4 of the stories as compared to *Ethiop's* only 1/3 of the sampled stories, which shows the newspaper has a serious problem in expressing or presenting opposing ideas or view points of stories.

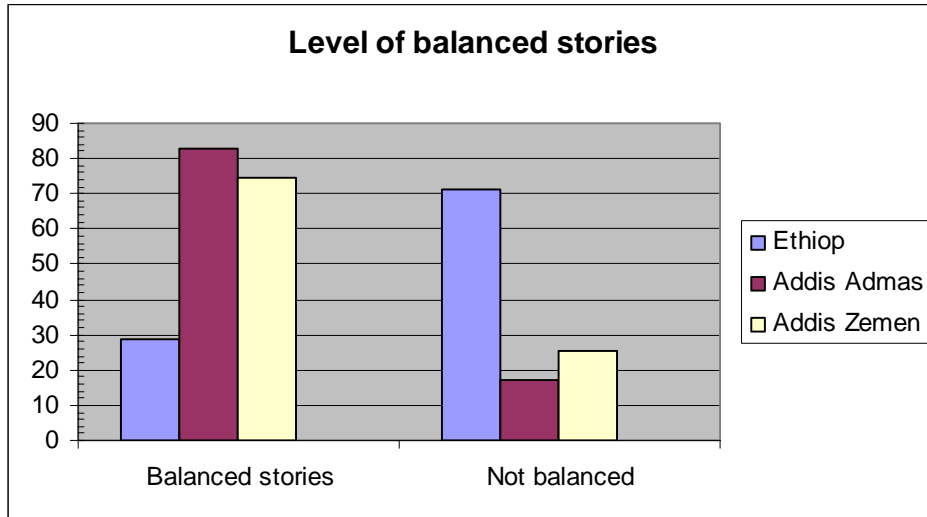


Figure 6 Degree of balancing major players' point of view

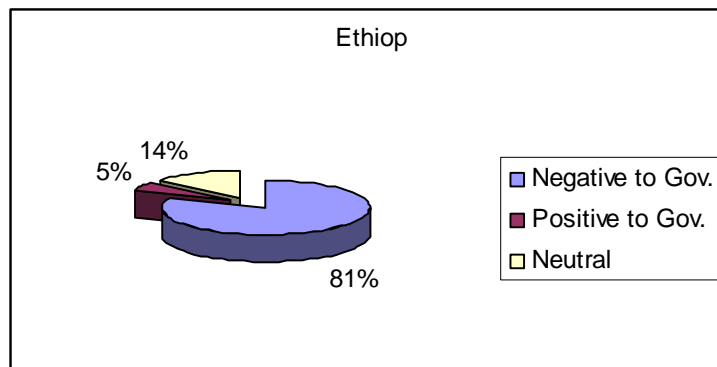


Figure 7 Pie chart showing *Ethiop's* status of balanced news reporting

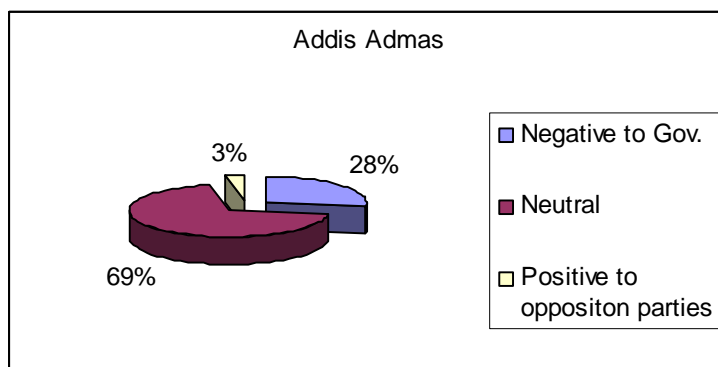


Figure 8 Pie chart depicts status of addressing opposing view points of major stakeholders in *Addis Admas* stories

The government state owned newspaper (*Addis Zemen*) neglects the other side especially when it is critical to the government: only 1% of the stories are government critical. But, more than half of the stories are purely pro-government.

On the other hand, the private one's especially *Ethiop* newspaper reports both opposing view points whenever it finds the issues or topic is essential or influential even though the story slanting to the opposition's arena.

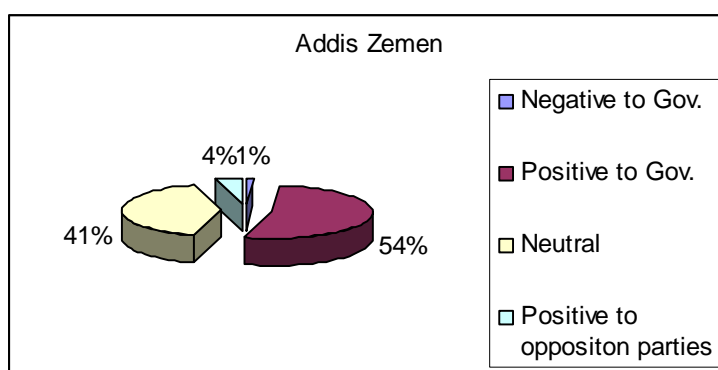


Figure 9 Pie chart level of balancing stories in *Addis Zemen* newspaper

#### 5.1.4. Level of Information Access Based on Sourcing

The level of access to information could be reflected by frequent use of anonymous sources. The study shows that the state-owned newspaper uses very limited anonymous sources in most of stories.

It seems that the state press newspaper has better privilege concerning access to information whereas the private ones have limited access to information. However, the level of information access differs among private newspapers. In this case, *Ethiop* uses considerable portion of the story's source allocated for anonymous sources whereas as *Addis Admas* has only 31% of the stories with anonymous sources.

In *Ethiop* newspaper from a total of 21 sample stories published in the fourth month time period, 13 stories (61 % of the stories) reported mostly with anonymous sources. In turn, from the 13 stories in which government officials and offices became anonymous at least in three of the stories; individuals and people sources reported unnamed and one story with anonymous international source.

During the course of the evaluation, many anonymous sources could be figured out especially in *Ethiop* newspapers with source expressions which could not either justify or reason out why the source preferred to be unnamed?. Moreover, the terms and words used to express the anonymous sources are very general and vague. As a result, this could pave a playing ground for writing fictions or fabricate news and speculative reporting.

On the top of this, in many cases the difference between anonymous sources and opinion is blurred especially in *Ethiop* newspaper.

*Ethiop* used words and phrases to express anonymous sources (as they are contextually translated) like: 'observers', 'witnesses in the area', 'our citizens', 'our received report', 'sources', 'the majorities', 'close sources', 'a member of CUD's leadership', 'the released prisoners' and so on. More over, there are cases in which "news stories" reported without either a single anonymously source or direct quote. It is reported as if it is fact and known by the majority people.

It is a common feature for *Ethiop* newspaper to consider itself as if they had undergone polling and speaks certainly as if the newspaper opinions represent the majority population of the country. In general, the newspaper (*Ethiop*) responds by forecasting and speaking on behalf of the people rather than reporting what really the people said.

Sources are either inaccessible or intentionally neglected in *Ethiop* newspapers. A considerable usage of anonymous sources found in *Ethiop* newspaper stories (almost 70 % of the cases). However, the same private newspaper i.e. *Addis Admas* proved that only lesser number of stories reported anonymously (only nearly 1/3 of the stories).

Name of Newspaper	Total no. of stories analyzed	No. of stories with anonymous sources	Source categories and their no of stories with anonymous sources							Proportion of stories with anonymous sources from the total stories (%)
			Gov.	NGO	ASS.	Ind.	group	Int.	Opp.	
Addis Admas	18	9	6	1	3	1		2	2	31.1
Addis Zemen	97	6	1		1		1		3	6.1
Ethiop	21	13	3			4	5	1		61.9

Table 1 show number of stories with anonymous sources

What is instrumental in *Ethiop* newspaper is mixing of a well known fact with news items to certify that something takes place in real or to boost credibility so that able to reinforce the argument. But, the facts naturally have no direct relation with the event took in the news items.

On Ethiop (17/9/97 stories no 14) its head line says "Opposition parties left only 38 seats to establish a government". In deviance, the inside body text part discusses that they left 38 seats to establish a joint government together with the incumbent government not on themselves alone.

In any aspect, giving sufficient and mostly relevant data; attractiveness of headlines; and some other the mechanisms might enables the private newspapers to have larger number of newspapers circulation. As a result, the private newspapers have far greater circulation than that of the state-owned i.e. *Addis Zemen* newspaper, which is circulated mostly for governmental and international organizations which are permanent subscribers (with fixed number of permanent subscribers) for the newspaper.

The following bar graph depicts that the private newspapers (*Ethiop*, 76 % and *Addis Admas*, 79 %) are better once in including relevant and sufficient background information

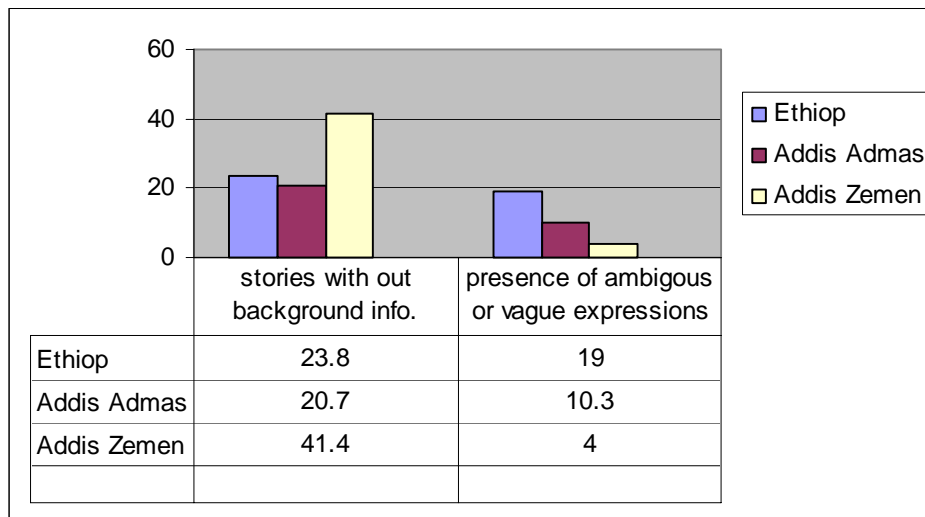


Figure 10 Level of inserting relevant background information in news stories and presence of ambiguous or vague expressions.

### **5.1.5. Sensational and Exaggerated Headlines**

In a publication of *Addis Zemen*, especially (20/9/97 E.C.), there is a considerable biased or misinterpretation of statistics against their true meanings to the society. And hence, there is a massive exaggeration witnessed in reporting.

Sometimes in *Ethiop* (2/6/97 stories no 7) in its sub-headings: says "A tongue of an ox, which is owned by a supporter of the opposition party, has been cut". It is used to exaggerate things and attract readers by creating oddness. However, there were reports of killings and burning of houses in the story which are perhaps more serious than this one.

In *Addis Admas* (6/9/97 E.C., Saturday story no. 1), even though it's front-page story referenced to page 26, it doesn't exist anywhere in the inner pages of the newspaper.

In *Addis Admas* sub-headings are more common only for the most prominent stories. Moreover, *Addis Admas* headlines are less sensational and less exaggerated sub-headings as compare to *Ethiop*.

### **5.1.6. Ambiguous and Vague Headlines and Body Texts**

There are times that the state-owned newspaper reports events which took place in certain areas as if they are taking place in all areas of the country and the vice versa E.g. *Addis Zemen* 3/10/97 E.C., Friday story no. 27 on the headlines. It reports as if it is true for all over the country (since the expression is vague and it's default meaning slants to think of the issue at a country level). However, the body text says there are still schools which are undertaking the examination.

In government newspaper, it is also a common feature that the headlines lacks specificness and sometimes vague as compare to contexts of the inner body texts.

There are also occasions where numbers used to perceive wrongly compare to their true or genuine interpretation by manipulating or hide

some of the information. For example, in *Ethiop* 15/10/97 E.C., story no. 20 the body text of the news item try to compare the unspecified payment period of 20, 000 birr with specified (monthly) salary of 5, 000. Moreover, it has also inserted background information which is totally not relevant compare to the news main theme.

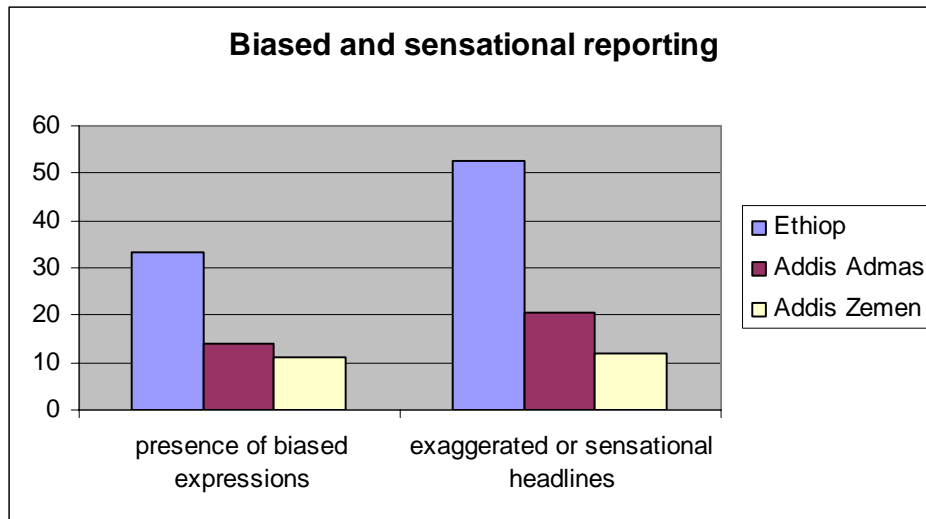


Figure 11 statuses of biased expressions and exaggerated headlines in news reporting

### 5.1.7. Comparing Headlines Contexts with Their Body Text's Contexts

The state newspapers have headlines with half and more texts of the story on front-pages. This is probably for the reason that profitability or market is no concern. And the other reason is, since they are daily they may lack as much attractive news which are under public interest and may not have sufficient time to write news in organized form and in color similar to that of the private once which are both weekly.

In *Ethiop* newspaper, most of the news topics have more than one headlines and sub-headings and presented separately but does not have any page references, since it is naturally one news story. Most probably, they are doing it to attract readability and profitability using mechanisms of exaggeration and giving prime focus of profitability at the expense of their responsibility they received from the people dawn grading.

In some occasions (*Ethiop* 1/10/97 E.C. Wednesday story no. 17) commentary and analysis of different news item sandwiched within the main news item in headlines or the headlines leads to the commentary or analysis part of the body text part.

In some instances, part of interviews were taken in away to form news but with different contexts usually distorted compare to the main or dominant theme of the interviews E.g. *Ethiop* 15/10/97 E.C. Wednesday Story no. 19 could be a good example.

Figure 9 shows that percentage of stories which contains biased expressions, exaggerated headlines, and body texts. Stories with different contexts of headlines compare to their body texts are plenty especially in *Ethiop* (nearly 40 %) compare to .

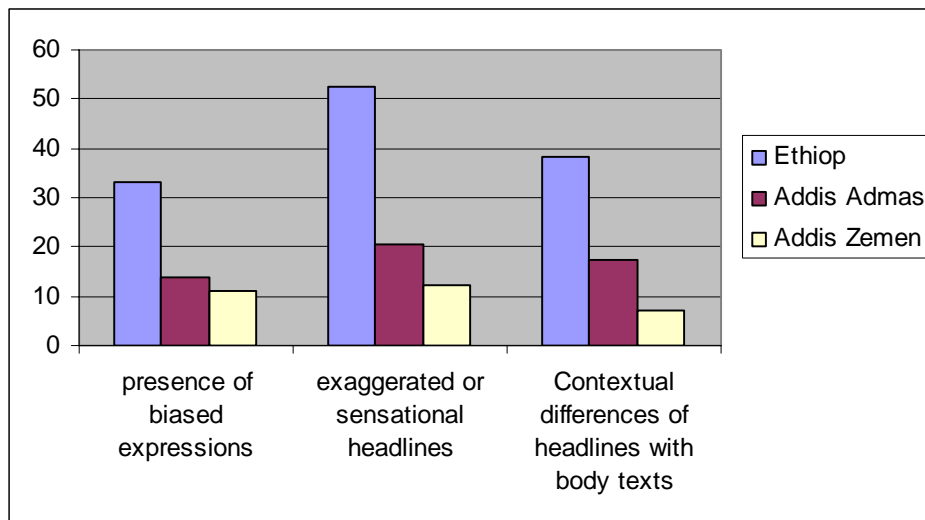


Figure 12 Percentage of stories with contextual differences of headlines as compare to their body texts

Regarding distorted interpretation of expressions of statistics, only one story is with distorted statistical interpretation in each of the four newspapers. This is so insignificant because the newspaper report in almost all the stories especially political issue which is by its nature rarely needs statistics. Statistics are more common on economical and to some extent in social issues.

### 5.1.8. Differences in Results of the Evaluation of the Ethical Principles in Time Bases

Periodical evaluation of analyzed to see the difference of status of maintaining ethics of the profession during the election time to that of the normal time. As a result, it is visible that a considerable violation of ethical issues is more prominent in election time as compared to that of the normal time evaluation result.

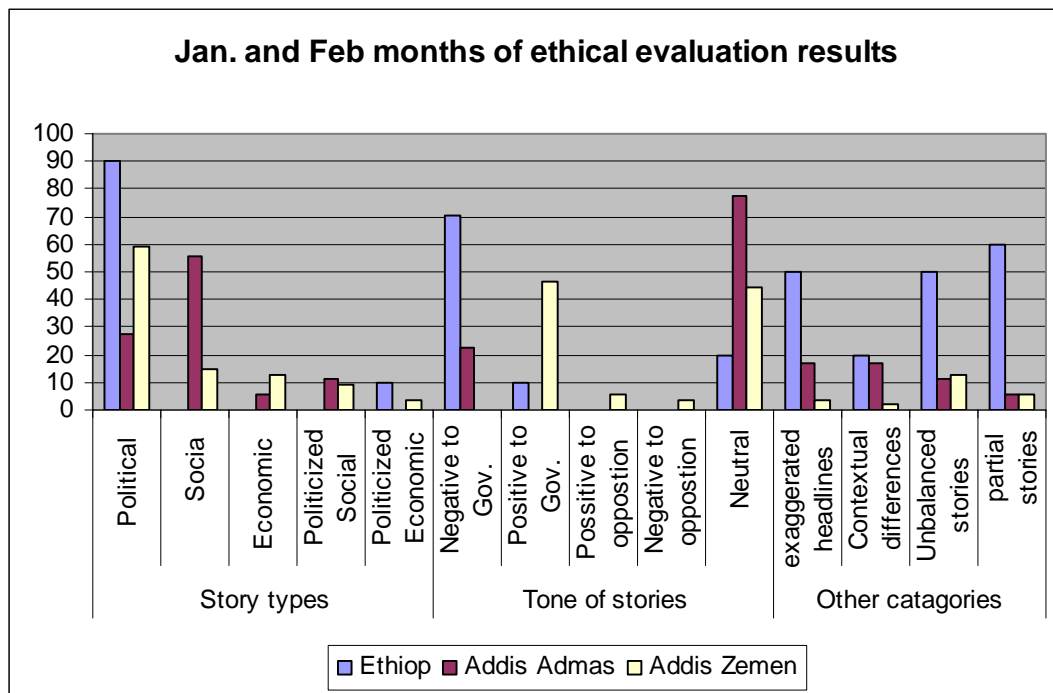


Figure 13 Graphs showing January and February ethical evolution of newspapers

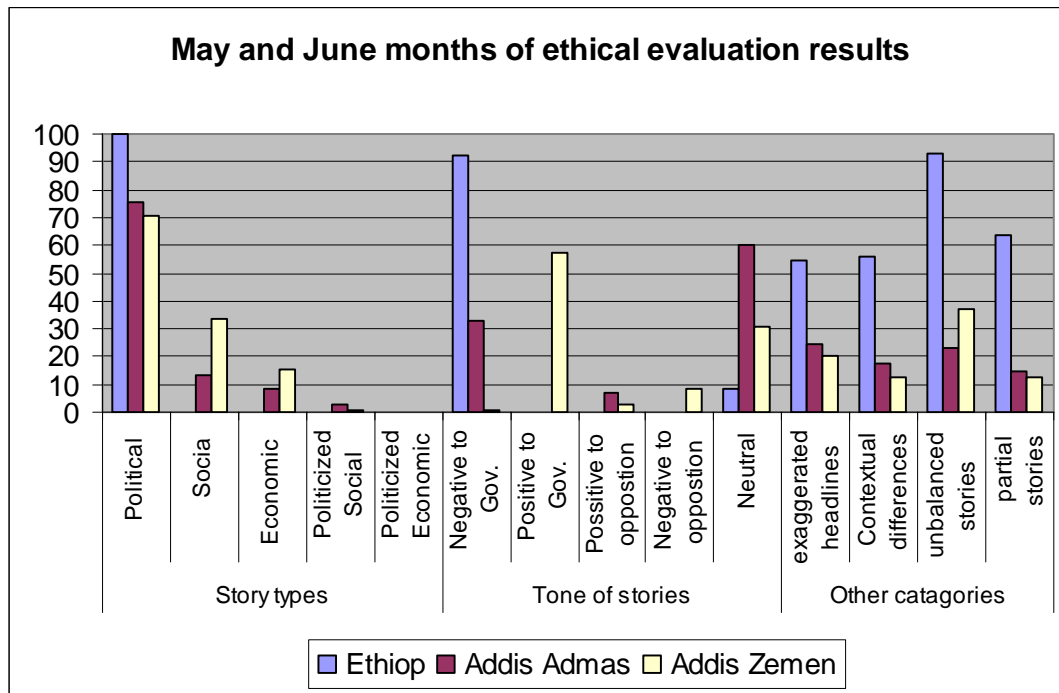


Figure 14. Graphs showing May and June ethical evolution of newspapers

Respecting ethical considerations could also rescue journalists from being sued legally by governments or individuals. The worst newspapers concerning evaluation ethics in this study is *Ethiopian* and it is closed. On the other hand, *Addis Admas* which is the better of the two newspapers (including the state-owned *Addis Zemen* newspaper) is still operational. Therefore, it is respecting ethical concerns of the profession is a matter of sustainability. It is a matter of bread and butter for those who are working in the press institutions. The profession of journalism is a source of income and spends their life time on it; hence they may be in trouble to work and engaged in other field of profession if this one fails.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

### 6.1. Conclusions

Similar to my initial hypothesis the study proves that there is correlations between weekly average circulations with level of maintaining ethical considerations. Newspapers with the highest circulation would have the highest level of acting unethical and the vice versa. *Ethiop* newspaper which has the highest weekly average circulations is much more unethical as compare to the lowest one time circulations newspaper i.e. *Addis Zemen*. On the other hand, *Addis Admas*, which has higher weekly average circulation than *Ethiop*, is ethically the better acting newspaper. Therefore, there is no a clear correlation between no. of one time circulations with level of following ethics of the profession.

The reason for the highest publication newspapers the more unethical is probably because they are primarily focus in attracting reader's attention by exaggerating headlines and using various cheating mechanism like presenting headlines with totally different contexts as compare to their body parts and headlines with contexts of meaning of assurance and conformed but the body texts did not say so and simply speculative or opinion oriented.

For newspapers like those with the highest circulation especially private newspapers could not be filtered by the forces of market, since they are able to achieve greater number of publication which is even much higher than the much better ethical newspapers like *Addis Admas*. Therefore, checking mechanisms for them could only be independent ombudsmen which can check them frequently and continually to follow the basic ethical considerations of the profession.

Generally speaking, the private newspapers are much more focus on profitability by attracting readers using different mechanisms like: making as many headlines as possible with large fonts and bold;

expressing a single event or news in different perspective or context so that to add many sub-headings; exaggerating headlines; infecting speculations and opinions in order to make the subject matter more attractive.

Most of the news stories in *Ethiop* newspapers are sourced from opposition parties without giving a chance for balancing the story. Further more, it can show also the newspaper's level of information access form opposition parties and hence it can be said they are mere mouthpiece of opposition political parties.

One thing that depicts journalists or editors' partiality is news selection, limiting depth of reporting and even in selecting what could be attractive part from interviews and series of events. In writing headlines from interviews request individual list of event which could be depend on: culture or way of life; level of education and experience; individual preference etc. In one way or the other, these factors influence and reflected in their carrier.

### **Summery of Findings of the study**

- 1 There is better level of acting ethically during the peace or normal period than the election period.
- 2 The private newspapers are the worse concerning maintaining ethics of the profession compared with the state owned newspaper.
- 3 There will be some correlations between amounts of one time publication with the level of following the ethical principles. Generally, the highest yearly average weekly publication newspapers have the highest level of acting unethical.
- 4 The major newspapers in circulation would witness a significant level of acting unethically in their front-page contents compared with the body contents.

- 5 Generally speaking *Addis Admas* is the better newspaper concerning respecting ethics of the profession.
- 6 Results of the study indicate that the private newspapers all *are* not on the same level ethical follow up. There for, *Addis Admas* could be grouped under the better and *Ethiop* under the worst performing private newspapers concerning respecting ethics of the profession. On the other hand, this research highlights that the private newspapers themselves could not be counted that they have the same status of respecting ethical considerations. To mean that there could be more private newspapers (e.g. *Addis Admas*) which are acting better than the state owned newspapers (e.g. *Addis Admas*) in respect to the ethics of the profession?
- 7 In most of the newspapers under investigation, the contents of the headlines are more partial as compared to the body text part.
- 8 The private newspapers *Ethiop* are score the worst in almost all the ethical evaluations. Where as *Addis Admas* and *Addis Zemen* score the highest or the better compare to above two newspapers.
- 9 A considerable portion of *Ethiop* newspaper's stories are referenced to anonymous sources, most of them don't have justifiable reason for their being anonymous. Therefore, in light of this, it can be said that their credibility is hugely at risk.

## **6.2. Recommendations**

One of the newspapers i.e. *Ethiop* is closed which made giving recommendations concerning this newspaper less meaningful. However, concerning *Addis Zemen* and *Addis Admas* it is wise and important to give some of the weaknesses in maintaining or following the ethics of the profession the as to improve level of respecting the ethical issues of the profession so that there credibility, readership, attractiveness, in general

able to serve interest of the people into the maximum level possible would be practical and real.

The free market place of ideas is essential for a free press and free speech, which are the corner stones of democracy. (Vincent Campbell, 2004:54)

African media in general and Ethiopian media in particular have a crucial role to play in promoting democracy.

The existence of news media is required for mass democracy to function, and it can only function properly if the news media are free. Part of the requirement of being informed is access to a diverse range of viewpoints, as diversity is a primary issue in contemporary journalism. (Vincent Campbell, 2004:55)

It is common knowledge that for a strong democracy, we must have a Legislature, an executive and a judiciary that is sensitive and committed to serve their people. But in a country like Ethiopia, where cases manifesting the improper functioning of these three bodies, are common, it is the duty of the fourth estate to act as a watch dog for them and strengthening democracy.

Democratization process is started very lately in Ethiopia. It is now which became a focal point of government issues. Therefore, for the Ethiopian government to facilitate this process, it should guarantee freedom of press by decreasing its influence and various mechanism of censorship on the media.

Citizens therefore expect to be informed about decisions their governments make on their behalf. Free press provides a right to know of the people by serving as a watchdog over the government, helping citizens to hold government accountable, and questioning its policies.

And for Ethiopia to facilitate democratization process it would be mandatory to grant journalists access to public meetings and public documents on time.

There is a considerable proportion of anonymous source especially whenever the stakeholders are found to be government offices and officials. There for government offices should open and provide information for the private newspapers as well like they provide it to the state owned press institutions. They should also give the information in time since it is the press's constitutional right for the government office to provide information unless national security and the like factors are at stake. Timeliness is one of the important news values, anything, which is not on time, cannot be counted as news.

If we take *Ethiop* newspaper the fact that they used mostly anonymous individuals and people, in one side, decreases legal intimidations like: violation of privacy, charges for character association etc. On the other hand, it hampers credibility of the press institution. These mechanisms pave the way to pursue there objective (mostly against public responsibility or the ethics of the profession).

It is not only the government's role to facilitate democratization process; the press should also contribute for it, by acting responsibly. Democracy requires the public to make choices and decisions. In order for the public to trust the press, journalists must provide factual reporting based on credible sources and information and able to eradicate false reporting and avoid using press for political party.

Press outlets should establish their own editorial boards, independent of government control, in order to separate information gathering and dissemination from editorial processes.

To reduce conflicts of interest one mechanism could be restricting the news organization's staffs from working on similar jobs like working for other press organizations. Besides, giving attention to the interest of the public could bring better solution in resolving problems arising from conflict of interests.

On the other hand, the private presses should strictly follow the code of conduct designed by the association of journalists; if needs they should modify it by themselves and include punishment mechanism for those who don't follow it.

To conclude, the press facilitates democratization process by providing citizens right "right to know," by serving as a watchdog over the government, helping citizens to hold government accountable, and questioning its policies. In order for the public to trust the press, journalists must provide factual reporting based on credible sources and information and able to eradicate false reporting and avoid using press for political party.

## Appendixes

**Table 2. Categories and criteria used to evaluate balance and fairness at each story level**

Story Number	Name of Newspaper and publication date (and day).	Is this story includes biased words and phrases as compare to the context of the story? (If possible mention it)	Is there exaggeration or sensationalism of headlines as compare to the news main theme? (If possible mention it)	Is there exaggeration of headlines as compare to the news main theme? (If possible mention it)	Is there distorted interpretation of statistics against their true contexts? (If possible mention it)	Are there words and phrases that are impartial or opinions injected in news within the body texts? (If possible mention it)	Remark
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

**Table 3. Categories and criteria used to evaluate Truthfulness (according to Sourcing) at each story level**

Story No.	Name of Newspaper and publication date (and day).	If there are anonymous sources in the story, What words or phrases used to express the anonymous sources?	What source categories are anonymous?	Remark
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

**Table 4. Categories and criteria used to evaluate Impartiality (Usage of biased words and terms) at each story level**

Story No.	Name of Newspaper and publication date (and day).	No. of stories to be evaluated in the newspaper	Story Type Category	Tone of major stakeholders presented in the story	Do the story tried to balance the major player's point of view? Which stakeholders' point of view lacks?	Is there sufficient and relevant background information included in the news? (Yes or No)	Are there ambiguous or vague phrases in the headlines? (Yes or No) if possible mention it.	Remark
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								

**Table 5. Categories and criteria used to evaluate Social responsibility at each story level and newspaper level.**

Story No.	Name of Newspaper and publication date (and day).	Is there similarity of contexts of headlines with the body text part? (Yes or No) If possible mention.	What is its story nature category?	What is its level of prominence	Remark
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					

## Index/ Description

<b>Story type categories</b>	<b>Definitions and descriptions</b>
1 - political issue (PI)	Election, political debates and conferences, and other with considerable political implications.
2 - social issue (SI)	Social problems (prostitution, early marriage, street children, bad and/or good cultural habits), culture (language, traditional dressing style and hair cut and various activities done to fulfill traditional values). <u>Example</u> , news about diseases could be grouped here. Though, they may have economic effects.
3 - economic issue (EI)	Development issues involve investment, construction, poverty, etc, economic terms and concept like: inflation.
4 - politicized social issue (PSI)	Naturally social but some how effort has made to make it a political issue.
5 - politicized economic issue (PEI)	Naturally economical but twisted in a way liked with politics.

<b>Story natures categories and symbols</b>	<b>Definition and descriptions</b>
<b>Developmental</b> /awareness raising - <b>Dev.</b>	If the story forwards others good experience of doing things in a way to create awareness among the people. So that to improve way of doing things. Or, if the people urges the people the people to stand to solve problems. <u>Questions</u> : Can the story enhance awareness in among the people and convince the people for positive changes? Does the story creates impressions that the existing culture or way of doing things is wrong and forward arguments in support of it.
<b>Educative</b> /Informative - <b>Edu.</b>	If the story discusses or explains in some detail concerning certain concepts or facts which is useful to the public.
- <b>Entertainment - Ent.</b>	If the story includes: jokes and funny narrations or fictions and mind games etc. If the story dominantly relaxes or enjoy the people in its context's even though it also includes some facts and useful concepts.

### **Clarifications of terms and concepts**

**Stakeholders' type**: stakeholders are the major players of a story. A story directly implicates the stakeholders.

Representations of stakeholders' types: government officials and offices - Gov., opposition parties - Opp., Non governmental organizations - NGO, Society in general - Soc., international

organizations - Int., associations or group of people - Ass., people - Peo.  
etc.

**Prominence:** Prominence reflects level of importance and focus given to specific story types. Proportionality of headlines fonts compare to their sources (font size or boldness or visibility of headlines with other on the same front page) could also be used to judge its prominence level.

**Tone of the story:** how the context of the story depicts stakeholders in the story (what impressions dominate the story concerning the major each stakeholders). If the story dominates criticisms or negative reporting concerning one of the major player/s, its tone would be negative for that specific stakeholder/s. Similarly, if the story dominate praising or discusses the good side of the other stakeholders, its tone would be positive to the one that one which is praised. Neutral is somehow in between, if the story or news praises or supports and criticizes all the major players of the story almost equally. Reporting with out considerable criticisms or praising any one of the major stakeholders could also be grouped under this group.

**Symbols used in representation:** Negative tone (-), Positive (+), and Neutral (+ & -)

**Is there difference of contexts headlines with their body texts:**

Representation:

No - they are similar in context.

Yes - they are not similar in context. Example, if the story's headline is "Eritrean president to come to Ethiopia" but its body text talks about that the ministerial meeting of AU but not able to certify the headlines confirmation or assured way of reporting.

**Precedence of story types** - answers, which stories types, get most prioritized and focused. Selecting stories starts from the top left most stories and precedes down wards until the right most bottom news story.

Representation: 1, or 2, 3, depends on the location of headlines of the stories appear on the front pages.

**Ambiguous or vague phrases**: These are words or phrases, which have more than one meaning or reference and exposed people to perceive differently against their main contexts. Example, Headline "The president accused of 14 years old girl while, in the body text body text talk about concerning a one of the regional presidents (in case of Ethiopia), hence any one who read only the headline might be perceived wrongly. Therefore, the word "The President" is vague.

**Biased words and phrases**: these are words and phrases determined by many factors to be biased, context of the story could be one mechanism in which we will figure out those biased expressions. Example,

She became a businessman afterwards.

He became a businessman afterwards.

In the first sentence the word 'business men' is biased compare to its context (mean to say business person or business women)

Negative to whom stakeholders category and similarly if it is positive - Positive to whom stockholders category)

**Source categories** - government officials and offices - Gov., opposition parties - Opp., Non governmental organizations - NGO, individuals - Ind, international sources - Int., etc.

**Anonymous sources**: are those sources, which are not named irrespective of the reason. Example 1, According to one of the officials who attend the meeting...Example 2, According to a reliable source...etc Example 3, "our country scores growth rate of ..." - PM, is named sourcing, since it can clearly identify him from the rest of the population in the country.

**Credible sources**: are those, which are quoted with names. Example 1, "We have a firm stand concerning ...", said the defense minister", Example 2, According to the report from BBC....Example 3 According to an individual called Abebe says...etc

## **Actual Results of the project**

**Table 6. Level of inserting relevant background information in news stories and presence of ambiguous or vague expressions**

	Stories with out background info.	presence of ambiguous or vague expressions
Ethiop	23.8	19
Addis Admas	20.7	10.3
Addis Zemen	41.4	4

**Table 7. Percentage of stores with biased words and phrases, exaggerated headlines, and contextual differences of headlines with body texts**

	presence of biased expressions	exaggerated headlines	Contextual differences of headlines with body texts
Ethiop	33.3	52.4	38.1
Addis Admas	13.8	20.7	17.2
Addis Zemen	11.1	12.1	7.1

**Table 8. Percentage of stories with balanced and unbalanced opposing view points in a story**

	Balanced stories	Not balanced
Ethiop	28.6	71.4
Addis Admas	82.8	17.2
Addis Zemen	74.8	25.2

**Table 9. Percentage of partial or opinion injected stories**

	opinion injected or partial stories
Ethiop	61.9
Addis Admas	10.3
Addis Zemen	9.1

**Table 10. Percentages of stories in respective of the newspapers based on their tones**

	Political issues	Economic issues	Social issues	Politicized Social issue	Politicized Economic issues
Ethiop	75				25
Addis Admas	85.7		14.3		
Addis Zemen	87.5	6.3			6.2

**Table 11. January and February months' publication on the basis of Story types in respective to the newspapers**

	Political	Socia	Economic	Politicized Social issues	Politicized Economic issues
Ethiop	90				10
Addis Admas	27.8	55.5	5.6	11.1	
Addis Zemen	59.2	14.8	13	9.3	3.7

**Table 12. Ethical evaluation of January and February publications based on tone of stories in the newspapers**

	Negative to Gov.	Positive to Gov.	Positive to opposition	Negative to opposition	Neutral
Ethiop	70.4	9.6			20
Addis Admas	22.2				77.8
Addis Zemen		46.3	5.6	3.6	44.5

**Table 13. Ethical evaluation of January and February publications of the newspapers based on the ethical evaluations**

	exaggerated headlines	Contextual differences of headlines with body texts	Unbalanced stories	partial stories
Ethiop	50	20	50	60
Addis Admas	16.7	16.7	11.1	5.6
Addis Zemen	3.7	1.9	13	5.6

**Table 14. Ethical evaluations of May and June months publications based on story types**

	Political	Socia	Economic	Politicized Social issues	Politicized Economic issues
Ethiop	100				
Addis Admas	75.6	13.5	8.3	2.7	
Addis Zemen	70.4	33.4	15.6	0.9	

**Table 15. May and June month's publications percentage of stories based on their tones**

	Negative to Gov.	Positive to Gov.	Positive to opposition	Negative to opposition	Neutral
Ethiop	92				8.6
Addis Admas	33		6.8		60.2
Addis Zemen	1	57.1	2.8	8.6	30.5

**Table 16. Ethical evaluation of May and June month's publications**

	exaggerated headlines	Contextual differences of headlines with body texts	unbalanced stories	partial stories
Ethiop	54.8	56.2	92.8	63.8
Addis Admas	24.7	17.7	23.3	15
Addis Zemen	20.5	12.3	37.4	12.6

**Table 17. First prominence stories vs. their story types, tones, and level of exaggeration in headlines**

	Story types					Tone of stories					Presence of exaggerated headlines
	Political issues	Economic issues	Social issues	Politicized Economic issues	Politicized Social issues	Negative to Gov.	Negative to Opposition	Positive to Gov.	Positive to Opposition parties	Neutral	
Ethiop	75			25		100					25
Addis Admas	85.7		14.3			28.6				71.4	42.9
Addis Zemen	87.5	6.3		6.2			6.3	25	6.2	62.5	0

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