

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION
GRADUATE PROGRAM: MULTIMEDIA REGULAR**

Prioritizing Issues in Newsmaking: The Case of Addis Zemen Newspaper

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Declaration

- I. The undersigned individual hereby affirms that the present thesis is solely the result of their own intellectual contribution and has not been previously submitted to any other academic institutions. Furthermore, it is stated that all resources employed in the composition of this dissertation were duly utilized in accordance with the established scientific principles and guidelines of the respective university.

Student's Name: _____ signature _____ date _____

CONFIRMATION

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the university's advisor.

Advisor's Name _____ signature _____ date _____

- II. This thesis is submitted to Addis Ababa University, specifically the School of Journalism, in order to partially fulfil the requirements for the achievement of a Master of Arts degree in Multi Media Journalism.

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Abstract

This study examines the prioritization of newsworthy issues that significantly impact the lives of citizens in the state-controlled Addis Zemen newspaper. In light of the assumption that news media filters and shapes reality to align with the media's agenda, disregarding the interests of citizens, The study was based on a qualitative research method and used a phenomenology research design. The study use purposive sampling and the sample size was four participants namely two news editors and two senior news reporters, and 200 news contents were also selected intentionally from October to march to find news worthy issues since several news worthy events happened during that sample period. Data were collected using in-depth interviews and content observation and analysed using thematic analysis. The responses gathered from the participants and from observation of content of the news were subjected to qualitative analysis to ascertain the approach employed in prioritizing news in the Addis Zemen newspaper. The analysis reveals that newsworthy matters of citizens are not prioritized based on professional news prioritization criteria in in media literature. However, journalists in the newsroom typically prioritize news solely guided by the norm of reporting government achievements exclusively. Consequently, the study deduce that the Addis Zemen newspaper fails to prioritize public-interest issues that significantly impact the lives of citizens based on news value principles during news production. The findings of the newspaper's sample publication survey further substantiate the opinions of the respondents. Therefore, the board members of the Ethiopian Press Agency, Ethiopian media authority and members of the houses of people's representatives should ensure that the newspaper acts professionally and allows news reporters to operate independently guided solely by news value principles.

Key Terms: Prioritizing Issue, Newsworthy Issues, Public Interest Journalism, Agenda Setting Theory

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The Ethiopian Press Agency was subjected to severe criticism by the Members of the House of Representatives Legal and Justice Affairs Standing Committee during the regular meeting of the 6th House of Representatives in its 2nd year, held in November 2022. The committee voiced their concerns regarding the agency's failure to represent the interests and opinions of the wider public over the past four to five years.

Members of the house of people's representatives also stated that after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power (April 2, 2018), relatively few voices that represent the public at large were covered by *Addis Zemen* and other printouts of the press agency. At the early stage of the ruling party, news story selection was somehow prioritized based on merits of newsworthiness.

According to the House of People's Representatives Legal and Justice Affairs Standing Committee, the initial improvement in selecting and reporting stories that directly touch the public has been declined drastically. Based on the comments given by the members of the House of People's representatives, The Ethiopian Press Agency reports ignored public interest issues like deteriorating living conditions and displacements of the people from their home village.

In addition to the comment of members of the Ethiopian Houses of Peoples Representative a range of international and national entities such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Fragile States Index, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, various Ethiopian federal and regional government organizations, certain reports on social media, comments from active political participants, and the researcher's own observations, considered to be a valid measure of newsworthy matters, it can be stated that between October 2022 to March 2023, several incidents or events took place in Ethiopia. These included the displacement of residents from Addis Ababa, Wolega, and other areas and the resumption of a civilian attack allegedly carried out by unidentified gunmen.

In spite of all of these widely circulated story elements, Addis Zemen newspapers ranked some other subject as if nothing else newsworthy had happened.

The prioritization of issues in print media with regards to their placement, frequency, and spatial occupancy is essential due to the significant impact it has on the readers' perception. As posited by Rich (2010), the meaning created in the readers' mind is paramount. When certain issues are placed on the front page of the newspaper, the audience naturally regards them as more important than other issues. In newsrooms, journalists and editors prioritize news items based on their perceived importance. Furthermore, studies have shown that repeated coverage of certain issues in the newspaper increases their emphasis by readers. Similarly, the spatial occupancy of a news item is believed to attract more readers. Stories that occupy a significant amount of space on the newspaper sheet are given greater emphasis by the audience. As a result, audiences choose newspapers to read based on the location of the stories, the frequency with which the issues arise in the news, the size of the headlines and the length of the reports.

Prioritization of issues in news reporting holds significant importance in garnering readership and directing the audience's focus towards stories that have been ranked higher than others. Additionally, this practice enables the manipulation of attitudes towards supporting or opposing a particular cause, ultimately leading towards achieving the intended goal.

Moreover, prioritizing issues compels the government or any concerned entity to pay heed to a particular problem and take necessary measures to address it.

Article 29 No5 of the Ethiopian constitution stipulates that all media outlets financed by or controlled by the state must operate in a manner that ensures their ability to accommodate diverse expressions of opinion.

According to a report by Amnesty International in February 2022, which assessed the government's response to the conflict in the north, Ethiopian media failed to adhere to professional journalistic standards when selecting and prioritizing news packages. The report notes that the Ethiopian media either ignored actual events or distorted them, resulting in a degradation of journalistic ethics and principles in general.

The press secretary of the Prime Minister's Office of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia explicitly emphasized the necessity for the media to strictly adhere to journalistic principles and professionalism during the interview with Reuters conducted by the spokesperson, Billene Seyoum, in May 28/2021. Billene asserted that the media freedom environment has witnessed recent improvements and urged the Ethiopian press to prioritize stories that hold public interest and significance.

However, this assertion has encountered disapproval from specific academics in the discipline who contend that it lacks profundity and applicability in light of numerous studies that have noted the media's inclination towards highlighting narratives of lesser significance to the general public. Consequently, this failure to fulfil their pivotal function as advocates for marginalized communities and uphold their occupational obligations has been established.

According to Pavlik (2001), the media's role in serving the public forum is crucial, as it bring forth a variety of dominant subject matter to be published or broadcasted.

In instances when a community is faced with unusual incidents or deteriorating routine difficulties, people may feel powerless and voiceless. Amidst such circumstances, the media is assumed to be in favour of the public. However, when the media, particularly public media, neglects the top priority of large impact agendas and focuses on minor non-issues, the public may experience feelings of anger, grievances, and hopelessness.

Neverla et al. (2015) suggest that journalistic practices, roles, and advocacy for victims are not static or globally uniform. Instead, specific cultural, political, historical, and economic contexts relevant to individual regions and countries have a significant impact on the watchdog approach of the journalistic role.

As a result, journalism should be regarded as one of many societal components, as a significant institution with a certain identity, logic of practice, and emphasis on priority judgment, but yet immersed, dependent, and constrained in a social context.

In general, hot story aspects are pushed aside by the media due to external influence, biased story selection, vested interests, deliberate distortions, criminal connections, and unprofessionalism exacerbated by ethnic nationalism, religious grudges, or both.

In Ethiopia, there has been a severe social, economic, and political crisis in nearly all regions. However, those top public agendas widely circulated throughout multiple social media appear not to have been selected and published by local media based on journalism newsworthiness.

The government-owned Ethiopian public media has faced recurring criticisms regarding its selection and prioritization of stories. In a press freedom conference held on March 28, 2022, in South Africa, two U.S. Republican lawmakers, Adam Schiff of California and Mary Gay Scanlon of Pennsylvania, asserted that the public press has failed to provide a platform for public discourse. They reprimanded the press for featuring non-essential matters on its front pages and for its reluctance to prioritize significant public issues. Additionally, they accused the press of withholding information that could shed light on crucial public matters. The lawmakers also noted that the majority of the content on the front page of Addis Zemen Newspaper is either irrelevant or out-dated, thus undermining the newsworthiness of the reported events.

According to the January 1/ 2023 report by Reporters without Borders on the media landscape in Ethiopia, the press landscape under the leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed since 2018 is characterized by a lack of pluralism in citizen interests.

Regarding editors' roles in prioritizing news in print media and how top priority public interest issues are proportionally selected in newspapers, some studies have been conducted and published online as an article around the world. However, it is not abundantly researched whether Addis Zemen Newspaper prioritizes stories that have a large impact on the public based on newsworthiness.

The primary objective of this research is to ascertain the manner in which Addis Zemen Newspaper prioritizes issues in news coverage, while adhering to the tenets of newsworthiness in journalism, fulfilling the social responsibility mandate of the Ethiopian media, in accordance with the guidelines of the Ethiopian mass media authority, the Ethiopian constitution, the recommendations of the Ethiopian House of People's Representatives, and the standards set by international regulatory bodies.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The role of media in disseminating information regarding global issues and shaping public opinion about the same cannot be overstated (Entman, 2007). The media not only reflects but also selectively presents information, thereby playing the role of a gatekeeper. By emphasizing certain topics, repeating them, and giving them prime-time coverage or front-page space in print media, media can heavily influence public perception and create a sense of relief, positivity, or hope. Some scholars contend that the media's selection and ranking of news stories can divert people's attention and impact the way governments respond to situations. Journalists, media professionals, scholars, and audiences have expressed concerns that the media today face a significant challenge in prioritizing news issues.

Currently, the field of journalism has not limited only on traditional media such as radio and television (Pegu, 2015). Consequently, with the emergence of social media, journalists are compelled to adhere to the principle of newsworthiness in order to remain competitive against citizen journalism and social media.

The selection of news headlines by journalists can have a significant impact on the public's perception of an event, potentially leading to undesirable consequences (Sandmann et al., 2023). Moreover, when a journalist deliberately omits coverage of certain noteworthy events, it becomes increasingly challenging to maintain journalistic impartiality, ultimately undermining the credibility of the media organization.

It is a well-documented fact that Ethiopia is one of the world's poorest countries, consistently ranking at the bottom of the World Population Review human development indexes. To illustrate, in the year 2023, Ethiopia was situated at the twentieth position amidst a total of one hundred and ninety-five nations worldwide.

Walia (2007) accentuates the crucial role of media in reducing poverty, particularly in the context of prioritizing issues. The alteration of policies is frequently instigated by the shifts in public and political opinions. The reach of mass media is an essential force in augmenting public awareness and discourse.

In Ethiopia, journalists employed by the so-called public media often assert that they exert their utmost effort while attributing the responsibility for media ownership. Conversely, the

government contends that the so-called public media consistently prioritize news stories in accordance with public interests, a practice that serves the public.

Several studies have been conducted worldwide to investigate the prioritization of issues in news making on print media. One such study, titled "News you need to know: Examining the prioritization of news content in print and online publications," was carried out by Brannok in 2014. This research highlights the importance of news editors carefully regulating the content to ensure it includes diverse viewpoints from the larger public. However, the study found a lack of content diversity in news prioritization, suggesting that organizations may not be adequately considering the needs of print media readers or the community at large.

Another study, conducted by Otieno (2015), focused on the priorities of contemporary news journalism in *Kenyan media*. Titled "The role of newspaper editors in the prioritization of environmental news stories in the Kenyan media," the research revealed that despite the influential role of editors in terms of placement, frequency, and spatial coverage, environmental issues were not given priority in Kenyan print media. The researcher emphasized the need for further investigation to determine if any improvements have been made in this regard.

In Ethiopia, several studies have been conducted on how specific issues are covered in Ethiopian print media, although they may not directly align with the topic of prioritizing issues in news making. A research entitled "A study on how disaster issues are reported in the Ethiopian print media" was conducted by Mulatu (2013). This study specifically focused on the coverage of disaster issues. The research, which examined the content of three newspapers including Addis Zemen, revealed that the print media in the country seemed to have neglected reporting on disaster issues to the target audience.

Regarding the environmental issues coverage in *Addis Zemen newspaper*, Yirgalem (2005) conducted a research study titled "Analysis of environmental coverage in *Addis Zemen Amharic daily newspaper*." This study found that environmental issues were not considered important public interest issues. It further highlighted that neither the newspaper nor the editorial policy of the press set the public agenda, thereby neglecting the coverage of environmental concerns.

Another study, slightly related to the topic of prioritizing issues in news making, was conducted by Nigussie (2014). This research, titled "The coverage of democratic issue news in the

Ethiopian presses," revealed that the ownership style significantly influenced the degree of fairness and provision of balanced news.

Another research was done by Dawit (2019) about how *Addis Zemen newspaper* prioritizes issues independently guided only by professional journalistic principles. This research was done by comparing the content before the prosperity party and after the prosperity party has come. This research entitled 'comparative analysis of press freedom practice before and after the reform: case study of *Addis Zemen newspaper*. The finding of the study discovered that the state owned print media *Addis Zemen newspaper* news reporting before the reform was the same after the reform.

Therefore, in terms of prioritizing specific issues on print media like environmental, disaster, democratic etc. some researches were carried out globally and in Ethiopia. However, in terms of prioritizing issues based on newsworthiness criteria little researches have been done in Ethiopia recently. Thus the purpose of this Study is to fill this gap.

When faced with obstacles that could potentially jeopardize the existence of particular communities, the Ethiopian media has been criticized for neglecting to prioritize the welfare of the general public. Nevertheless, it is stated in Article 29 No. 5 of the Ethiopian Constitution that any media funded or governed by the state must function in a way that guarantees its ability to accommodate a broad spectrum of opinions.

Therefore, it is timely and worthy to study how *Addis Zemen Newspaper* selected and gave coverage to priority agendas in making news where the country has obviously been in long-lasting challenges and crises.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to assess whether news items are prioritized based on the impact of the issue on the large public or not. In other words, this study is intended to see how issues are prioritized in the *Addis Zemen Newspaper* in making news as per the newsworthiness principle of journalism.

The researcher's intention to choose *Addis Zemen Newspaper* is that to examine whether public media owned by the state are acting as per the law and professionally. The researcher believes that public media under the state control act similarly and if a research conducts on one of them

it is likely to represent other public media outlets. To this end, the researcher has select Addis Zemen newspaper to easily find news contents archives.

1.3 Objective or the study

The research set out to address the following objectives

1.3.1 General objectives

The general objective of the study was to assess how issues/events are selected and prioritized in Addis Zemen's newspaper with reference to news worthiness.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

This research also addresses the following specific objectives:

- To assess how professional *Addis Zemen Newspaper* is in selecting news items for reporting news
- To identify how *Addis Zemen newspaper* report on public interest issues that touche lives of the masses
- To find out factors of *Addis Zemen newspaper's* decision in covering top priority events.
- To examine professional obstacles *Addis Zemen newspaper* faces in covering stories of the newsworthiness as per by laws and or rules of the country and comments given by concerned bodies.

1.3.3 Research Questions

- How does *Addis Zemen newspaper* report on public interest issues that touches lives of the citizenry?
- How professional is *Addis Zemen Newspaper* in prioritizing news items?
- What are the factors that determine *Addis Zemen newspaper's* decision in covering top priority events?
- What are the professional hurdles *Addis Zemen Newspaper faces* in covering news?

1.4 Significance of the study

Rich (2010) emphasizes the significance of measuring news value not only in the field of journalism but also in providing coverage to issues that impact the general public. The importance of certain news items over others is established by organizations through commonly accepted hierarchical styles in printed newspapers. News stories that are allocated more space on a page, accompanied by larger headlines and additional features such as graphics and photos, are indicative to readers that these stories should be considered the most important.

Furthermore, due to the abundance of alternative sources of information available to audiences today, if conventional media (print or broadcast) censors or marginalizes the voice of people, the media will be left with a limited or non-existent readership, listenership, or viewership.

The investigation of the coverage and prioritization of issues in a national newspaper is widely believed to hold significant importance for both the media and other relevant parties, such as journalists and policymakers, as it may prompt further action. Additionally, it is crucial to assess whether the national printing press is fulfilling its duty as a voice for all, in accordance with journalistic principles and the profession.

According to Article 29 No. 5 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, media owned by the state is obligated to serve the interests of the public. This includes ensuring that media outlets financed or controlled by the state possess the capacity to present a diverse range of opinions, thereby incorporating voices from all parties and avoiding marginalization of any particular group or community.

Given that the constitution is the preeminent law of the nation, it was expected that Ethiopian media would discharge their duties accordingly.

As a result, this investigation will have practical value for the Ethiopian Press Agency in determining whether they are conducting themselves professionally, constitutionally, and responsibly. This inquiry is also crucial for the relevant standing committee of the House of People's Representatives to take further action against the inadequacies of the Addis Zemen Newspaper.

The Ethiopian Press Agency board may also consult this study to ascertain whether the news content of the Addis Zemen Newspaper is serving the people constitutionally by reflecting their sentiments.

Furthermore, if the *Addis Zemen Newspaper* is acting in violation of the constitution, or it fails to fulfil its supposed commitment while given authorization, then this study will uncover the outcome, which will then prompt policy-makers and the Ethiopian Mass Media Authority to take appropriate measures.

1.5 Scope of the study

The study was limited mainly to the practice of the *Addis Zemen newspaper* in giving coverage to news that touches the lives of the people in terms of newsworthiness. However, feature stories, editorials, readers' opinions, and other forms or contents of the newspaper are beyond the scope of the study.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

The research was specifically focused on a selection of publications from *Addis Zemen Newspaper*, spanning from October 2022 to March 2023. This particular period was marked by numerous significant challenges in Ethiopia. Consequently, an analysis of these select publications may provide a general overview of *Addis Zemen Newspaper's* approach to story selection and prioritization, based on both public interest and news value. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that this study is limited in its scope, as it fails to encompass all the newspaper's news and non-news content during the aforementioned time frame.

Moreover, the researcher refrained from conducting a comparative analysis to gauge the standing of *Addis Zemen Newspaper* in relation to other media establishments, with regards to issue coverage and prioritization within the journalistic news value framework. This was done intentionally to evaluate the *Addis Zemen news paper's* news contents according to news prioritization criteria and as per rules and regulations of the country, not based on other newspapers. Besides, since state owned media and public media have distinct editorial policy and obligations ,the researcher found that evaluating *Addis Zemen newspaper* by professionalism news prioritizing criteria and public responsibility role as the state owned media is better off.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study was structured into five distinct chapters, with each chapter serving a unique purpose in advancing the overall research endeavour. The initial chapter provided a detailed overview of the study, which encompassed a comprehensive examination of the background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance, limitations, and scope of the study. Additionally, the chapter elucidated the organizational framework of the research paper. The second chapter was dedicated to an in-depth analysis of relevant literature pertaining to the study's topic. The third chapter incorporated the research methodology, which included a detailed discussion of the approach and methods employed, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and data analysis techniques. The fourth chapter focused on data presentation and analysis, providing a comprehensive examination of the research findings. Finally, the fifth chapter presented the study's conclusions and findings, serving as a culmination of the research journey.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Before justifying why the selected literatures are used and how they are related with the study Firstly, literatures related to the study are listed briefly. Secondly, the researcher has justified why these literatures are selected and how they are related to the study.

The field of journalism that caters to the needs of the general public, such as investigative reporting and coverage of local democracy, is public interest journalism (Rich,2010). This type of journalism often deals with topics that are crucial for the functioning of democratic system. The process of engaging in this form of journalism is difficult, intricate, and time-consuming; however, it frequently challenges those in positions of power and advocates for the voiceless.

Public media in Ethiopia that engage in this type of journalism, particularly at the local and community level throughout the country, are supposed to work public interest journalism. Public media controlled by the state are expected to be independent, investigative, not-for-profit, and they should exclusively focus on journalism that serves the public interest.

In the process of news production, it is rare for the account of an event as reported to be identical to the actual occurrence on the ground. According to Shoemaker et al. (1996), the mass media does not simply mirror the world around them nor do they serve as a reflection of reality. Any semblance of similarity between the reports of eyewitnesses and the news media's coverage would hardly be the result of a simple process. The news content disseminated by the mass media is carefully crafted, moulded, guided, and influenced by several actors. On occasion, the reality presented by various press outlets may not correspond with the world as one knows it, while at other times, it may. There are instances where two media organs report the same event in a similar manner, while in other cases, their accounts may diverge significantly.

In under developing nations like Ethiopia public media are supposed to act in a manner that covers top priority issues so that those community problems would get attention by concerned body. In countries where citizens are in political, economic and social problems public media are supposed to expose those community problems and should work for the better change.

Therefore, media controlled by the state are expected have legal and moral responsibility while selecting and prioritizing news stories. Particularly, if the media is in a developing country they should first bring citizens interest stories. The purpose of this literature is therefore to indicate professional guides to the aforementioned media.

2.2 Public Interest Journalism

Public Interest Journalism entails the delivery of impactful narratives that hold the potential to shape society, solely driven by the objective of uncovering veracity (Hardy, 2014). This particular form of communication primarily serves the purpose of exposing instances of governmental abuse of authority, corporate malfeasance, and social injustices. It serves as an indispensable conduit for conveying uncomfortable yet indispensable truths to the public, while exerting pressure on those individuals in positions of influence. In the pursuit of refining one's expertise in this domain, individuals will collaborate with esteemed investigative journalist Janet Anderson, alongside other prominent figures within the realm of journalism, thereby fostering the development of their skills (Entman, 2007).

Public interest journalism can be seen as the opposite of the negative aspects of media, such as fake news, propaganda and censorship (Rich, 2010). The consequences of public interest reporting can bring to light corruption, initiate royal commissions, remove unscrupulous politicians from their positions, and even lead to the imprisonment of wrongdoers. A commonly shared understanding among media professionals and scholars is that public interest journalism involves journalists seeking information that the public has a rightful claim to know (Weezel.2008).

In Ethiopia there has recently been several public interest issues such as mass killing of innocents, internal displacement, human right violations and so on which fulfil the criterion of news value. The researcher of this study has observed data which are newsworthy so that to compare this public interest issues with Addis Zemen Newspaper's front page news with the same period of occurrence.

Therefore, this definition and perspective of public interest journalism has served as an anchor or point of reference to gather top newsworthy happenings in Ethiopia during the sample period (October/2022 to march/2023). In other words it is based on this standpoint or definition of

public interest journalism that the researcher has gathered Newsworthy/public interest stories. Besides, the researcher has made decision whether the news published on Addis Zemen Newspaper has public interest story elements or not.

2.3 Factors that influence journalists' decision of prioritizing news items

Scholars posit that the mass media does not serve as a mere reflection of reality but rather presents a constructed reality. The content disseminated via mass media is a socially created product and does not reflect an objective reality as suggested by Shoemaker (1996). Thomas (2008) asserts that the construction of news content is influenced by a variety of sources, including individual media workers, media routines, media organizations, external media factors, and ideology.

According to Christiane's (2006) study, there exist four predominant determinants that appear to impact the journalists' verdict with respect to publishing or discarding a story as well as the mode of its presentation. These factors encompass the news factors, institutional objectives, the manipulative potential of news sources, and the subjective convictions of journalists.

The researcher of this study utilizes these four criteria for news selection and prioritization, with the aim of determining whether the various incidents and issues occurring in Ethiopia possess elements of public interest or newsworthiness. If these issues are deemed to have public interest value for citizens, then Addis Zemen newspaper is expected to provide coverage. Consequently, the researcher's evaluation is based on this standpoint or is anchored by this reference.

Moreover, if Addis Zemen newspaper produces impactful stories that are not included in the researcher's observational lists of public interest stories gathered through observation, then the researcher applies a definition of literature to render a judgement.

These four factors are listed and briefly discussed below:

2.3.1 The concept of news factors

News, in the words of Rudin & Ibbotson (2002), is something that is new, interesting, and true. According to Rich's (2010) enumeration, certain customary attributes are associated with news stories. Ascertaining which occurrences within a community are deemed newsworthy necessitates consideration of what factors.

The **human interest** aspect of news is a compelling one, as readers are drawn to stories about individuals who possess unique challenges, accomplishments, or experiences (Rich, 2010). The profiles of people who have triumphed over adversity or who are striving to enhance society often serve as a source of inspiration for readers.

Conflicts involving government entities or other individuals are frequently newsworthy, particularly when they reflect problems specific to the local community (Rich,2010).

According to Pual (2014) in the publication Study Smarter, **extraordinariness** is characterized by the unpredictability, rarity, or unusualness of an event. An event that contains an element of surprise is more likely to attract attention than one that is routine.

The **impact** of news events or angles that affect readers is significant, particularly in the context of major national incidents or tragedies. Newspapers often seek to provide local perspectives by discussing how people in their communities are impacted by the news (Paul,2014).

Proximity: An occurrence that transpires within the confines of a community or in close proximity to it may pique the interest of local readers (Rich, 2010).

Unusual Nature: Events that deviate from the norm, peculiar or infrequent happenings, or individuals engaged in extraordinary pursuits are deemed noteworthy (Rich, 2010)

Human Interest: Narratives that revolve around individuals who have encountered exceptional challenges, accomplishments, or experiences; portrayals of individuals who have surmounted obstacles or who endeavour to ameliorate society invigorate readers (Weezel, 2008).

Problems of the community: In the community, narratives often involve conflict and proximity and may reveal shifts or recurring patterns in issues (Rich,2010).

The aspect of **timeliness** is crucial in journalism, particularly with respect to immediacy in online and broadcast media (Entman, 2007). Events that occur on the day of or immediately prior to publication, or those that are slated to occur in the near future, are regarded as timely. Print newspapers similarly require updates for multiple editions (Wolfgang, 2014). Sometimes, past events can still be considered timely if they are reported on the anniversary of the incident, be it

one, five, or ten years down the line. Ultimately, the element of timeliness serves to answer the reader's question why is this information being shared now.

The researcher of this study, as mentioned above, has employed the notion of news factors or news prioritization criteria as a foundation when assessing the sample news articles from the Addis Zemen newspaper, spanning from October to March. Additionally, the researcher has utilized the concept of literature to determine the extent to which the news featured on the front pages of the Addis Zemen newspaper during the specified time period truly encompassed matters of public interest or were deemed newsworthy in comparison to the events occurring within the country.

2.3.2 The impacts of journalists' subjective belief

The impact of journalists' subjective beliefs is a significant factor in determining which news items should be given priority and featured on the front page of a newspaper. As per Shoemaker et al. (1996), a journalist's predisposition towards an event can influence their decision-making with regards to selecting and prioritizing news items. These predispositions may be shaped by past experiences, personal opinions, ideology, religion, or geographical proximity. Welbers et al. (2016) have identified several factors pertaining to the impact of journalists' subjective beliefs in determining the newsworthiness of issues or events to be prioritized in newspapers and other mass media organizations. These factors include personalization and news value, the target audience of the news, journalistic ethics, and the social classes of news journalists.

2.3.3 Organizational aims

In contrast to the concept of news factors, institutional objectives refer to the exceptional circumstances that a journalist encounters as a result of their employment terms and conditions (Wolfgang, 2004). Journalists prioritize goals to fulfil the objectives of their respective organizations instead of utilizing news selection criteria. Consequently, this practice has an impact on the form and content of news. The growth of publishing stories that are either non-issue for the newspaper's inhabitants or the increment of soft news items are commonly attributed to such objectives (Christiane, 2006). This implies that the pressure exerted on journalists or editors to focus on specific issues to promote specific political or ideological goals would undermine the professionalism of journalism.

The researcher of this study, as previously stated, has utilized the organizational goal of news prioritization or selection criteria as a perspective to determine whether the news materials collected during the sampled timeframe of the Addis Zemen newspaper are influenced by the subjective convictions of journalists rather than adhering to professional norms.

2.3.4 The impacts of media ownership on the contents of news

2.3.4.1 State ownership

News predominantly represents the interests and viewpoints of the upper and middle classes (Paul, 2014). According to Albarran (2016), ownership incentives are said to be based on the possible political and financial advantages of owning journalistic media. The significance of news media ownership in relation to journalism stems from the belief that journalism holds the potential to impact policy, culture, and public discourse. Thus, owners who seek to influence political developments exploit media to steer societies in a specific direction for the benefit of their vested interests (Hardy, 2014). Weezel (2008) provides a classification of media ownership, which encompasses state ownership. In countries where press freedom is safeguarded, news media performs two pivotal functions: watchdog and public forum for debates (Weezel, 2008). However, the role of media would differ substantially in countries where the ruling system is authoritarian (Yoon et al., 2014). Under a non-democratic government encourages state control of the populace by restricting access to information and limiting the public forum available for discussion and deliberation (Chirstiane, 2006). Within non-democratic states, the news content disseminated by media is subject to regulation by the governing body, which exercises influence through a multitude of controlling mechanisms (Yoon et al., 2014).

The researcher carrying out this inquiry has employed the notion of "state ownership" as described in academic literature as a framework for collecting data via interviews with participants. The aim is to establish a connection between the prioritization of news and the attributes of media ownership. Throughout the extensive interviews with participants, which consisted of two editors and two senior reporters, the researcher presented additional inquiries to further investigate this notion, drawing upon the aforementioned academic literature as a point of reference.

2.3.5 Nature of the government or ruling party

Party ownership has resulted in journalists aligning themselves with the party line and newspapers becoming advocates for a specific political program (Hallin et al., 2004). Scholars contend that justice, the rule of law, and the establishment of democracy in a country can be achieved if the media operates independently of the ruling party for several reasons (Mendel et al., 2017). The negative impact of ruling party-financed media on diversity is significant as the owners wield their power to influence public debate based on their political outlook and vested interests (Mendel et al., 2017).

In an authoritarian regime, a select few officials censor and control what the mass media reports (Hardy, 2014). This leads to pressure on press content, as seen in communist and Soviet-style administrations where the media supports the ruling party's policies and disregards news selection and prioritization based on newsworthiness value. Conversely, in a government that ensures the free flow of information and press freedom, topic selection and prioritization are solely guided by newsworthiness or news value (Mendel et al., 2017).

The researcher conducting this investigation has utilized the concept of the "nature of the ruling party or government" from scholarly literature as a framework for gathering data through participant interviews. The objective is to establish a correlation between news prioritization and the characteristics of the government or ruling party. During the comprehensive interviews with the participants, which included two news editors and two senior news reporters, the researcher posed additional questions to further explore this concept, drawing upon the aforementioned scholarly literature as a point of reference.

2.4 Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory posits that the mass media determines the salient topics for public discourse (Entman, 2007). The audience perceives these topics as the most important news and information given to them. (Weaver, 2007).

The researcher of this study uses this theory as a reference during data gathering or while making in-depth interview with the four participants or interviewees (two senior reporters and two editors). The predetermined research questions (show in the appendix part) are developed as per the perspective of this agenda-setting theory. Not only the predetermined research questions are

developed based on this theory, but follow up questions raised in the middle of the conversation are anchored are developed by making agenda-setting theory as a standing point. While analysing data gathered both from the interview and from the sample contents of news this theory was also employed by the researcher.

Scholars have categorized agenda setting theory into three types: public agenda setting, media agenda setting, and policy agenda setting (Weaver, 2007).

2.4.1 Public Agenda Setting

McCombs et al. (2014) explicated the factors that drive mass media to conform to public agendas and accord priority to them, with a view to garnering greater audiences or followers.

The researcher of this study has used public agenda setting theory both in developing one of the research questions such as how Addis Zemen newspaper report public interest (public agenda) issues, and whether this agenda setting is a professional hurdle while prioritizing and selecting news. Besides, the researcher has used this public agenda-setting theory while formulating interview questions for the respondents or participants. Moreover, in the middle of conversation while conducting the interview there were follow up questions raised by making public agenda setting theory as a standing point. During analysing contents of the sample news content this theory were also used as an anchor point.

2.4.2 Policy Agenda Setting

This is a scenario in which agendas exert an influence on the decision-making processes of public policy makers (Weaver, 2007).

The study's researcher has utilized the theory of policy agenda-setting. This particular theory was applied in the process of collecting data by formulating interview questions, as well as in the analysis of data extracted from both respondents and sample news contents of the newspaper, in order to assess the potential utilization of policy agenda-setting theory by the media.

2.5. Reflection on Agenda Setting Theory

The researcher of the study has made comparisons of several theories that might relate with this research. *Among multiple theories of such type the researcher found two types of theories namely political economy and agenda-setting theory.*

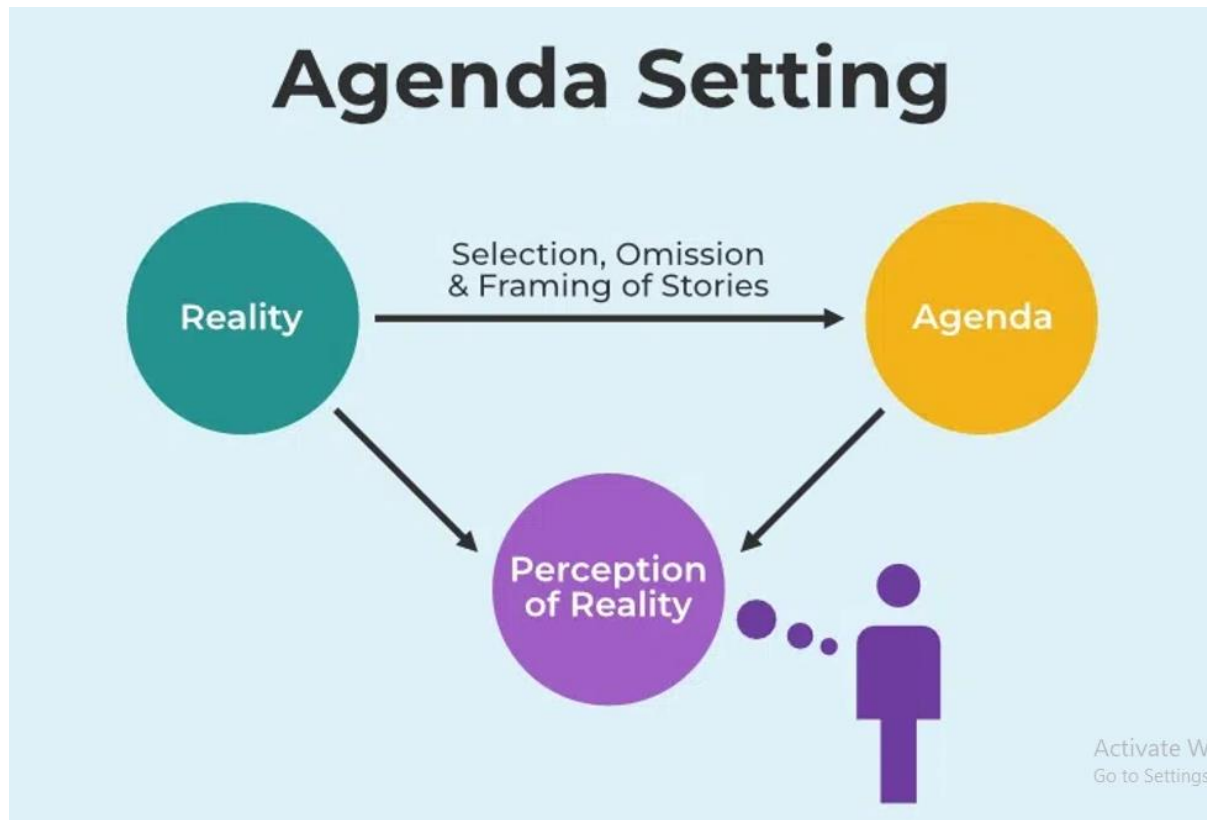
Political economy theory is about the examination of a nation's system of governance and administration, with particular emphasis on the economic and political components (Palan, 2005) it is scholarly investigation of a nation's management of its populace and markets. Political economy investigates into the examination of markets from a political and social standpoint; economics does not encompass factors of a social or political nature (Milonakis et.al, 2009)

Agenda-setting theory refers to the act of prioritizing issues based on their perceived importance (Hardy, 2014). This theory highlights the media's ability to influence the significance of events in the public's mind. According to Entman (2007), this theory posits that editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters have a crucial role in shaping political reality by selecting and presenting news. McCombs (2005) argues that the media's agenda-setting function correlates with the public's ordering of priorities. Those most affected by the media agenda are individuals with a high need for orientation. Moreover, the media's agenda-setting power goes beyond the amount of space or time dedicated to a story and its placement in the broadcast or on the page (McCombs, 2005).

The researcher has chosen agenda setting theory over political economy because political economy theory is more about the relationship between government administration and the market. Although it has to do with the relationship between government policies and the people it is more of the study of politics and the market and or economy. However, agenda setting theory, as mentioned above, has more to do with news stories of the media and their deeds while shaping the minds of people in perceiving news contents. Besides, it is agenda-setting theory, not political economy that has detail articulated views that serve to see the relationship between media firms in one hand and the citizens on the other hand. Moreover, it the role of media experts, reporters, editors and so on and their role in shaping people's perception through the news and other articles is more measurable by agenda setting theory.

Therefore, the researcher of this study has chosen agenda-setting theory as a base since this theory was found helpful to establish appropriate link between the research

questions/methodologies and the theory. To make analysis and to draw conclusions as well as to infer suggestions agenda setting theory is more appropriate than political economy theory according to the researchers viewpoints reading and understanding.



2.6 Empirical Reviews

Several studies have been conducted worldwide to investigate the prioritization of issues in news making on print media. One such study, titled "News you need to know: Examining the prioritization of news content in print and online publications," was carried out by Brannok in 2014. This research highlights the importance of news editors carefully regulating the content to ensure it includes diverse viewpoints from the larger public. However, the study found a lack of content diversity in news prioritization, suggesting that organizations may not be adequately considering the needs of print media readers or the community at large.

When compared to the study of this actual thesis, the previously research lacks focus about whether or not news prioritization is based on the interests of citizen in general. It was about how many hard news or how many soft news were made regardless of public interest journalism.

Another study, conducted by Otieno (2015), focused on the priorities of contemporary news journalism in *Kenyan media*. Titled "The role of newspaper editors in the prioritization of environmental news stories in the Kenyan media," the research revealed that despite the influential role of editors in terms of placement, frequency, and spatial coverage, environmental issues were not given priority in Kenyan print media. The researcher emphasized the need for further investigation to determine if any improvements have been made in this regard.

When compared to this study, the previous research was only prioritization of environmental issues. It didn't look in to other concerns of news of public interest.

In Ethiopia, several studies have been conducted on how specific issues are covered in Ethiopian print media, although they may not directly align with the topic of prioritizing issues in news making. A research entitled "A study on how disaster issues are reported in the Ethiopian print media" was conducted by Mulatu (2013). This study specifically focused on the coverage of disaster issues. The research, which examined the content of three newspapers including Addis Zemen, revealed that the print media in the country seemed to have neglected reporting on disaster issues to the target audience.

Although this previously research is in Ethiopia and about Ethiopian print media, it is only about disaster issue reporting. Thus, when compared to this current study its scope lacks to incorporate public interest top priority news coverage.

Regarding the environmental issues coverage in *Addis Zemen newspaper*, Yirgalem (2005) conducted a research study titled "Analysis of environmental coverage in *Addis Zemen Amharic daily newspaper*." This study found that environmental issues were not considered important public interest issues. It further highlighted that neither the newspaper nor the editorial policy of the press set the public agenda, thereby neglecting the coverage of environmental concerns.

However, in the context of prioritizing matters grounded on public interest journalism as well as the criteria for the selection and prioritization of news, this aforementioned study did not render substantial contributions. Nonetheless, it did provide insights with regard to environmental concerns.

Another study, slightly related to the topic of prioritizing issues in news making, was conducted by Nigussie (2014). This research, titled "The coverage of democratic issue news in the

Ethiopian presses," revealed that the ownership style significantly influenced the degree of fairness and provision of balanced news.

However, this previous study did not make a significant contribution in terms of prioritizing issues through the lens of public interest journalism and the criteria for selecting and prioritizing news. The focus of this study was primarily on democratic issues.

Another research was done by Dawit (2019) about how *Addis Zemen newspaper* prioritizes issues independently guided only by professional journalistic principles. This research was done by comparing the content before the prosperity party and after the prosperity party has come. This research entitled 'comparative analysis of press freedom practice before and after the reform: case study of *Addis Zemen newspaper*. The finding of the study discovered that the state owned print media *Addis Zemen newspaper* news reporting before the reform was the same after the reform.

However, the study conducted earlier did not make a substantial contribution in terms of prioritizing issues through the lens of public interest journalism and the criteria for news prioritization and selection. However, it did shed light on the topic of press freedom both prior to and following the reform.

Therefore, various research studies have been conducted both globally and in Ethiopia to determine the order of importance of specific topics in print media, such as environmental issues, disasters, and democratic matters. However, there has been a lack of research in Ethiopia regarding the prioritization of issues based on public interest journalism and the criteria for selecting and prioritizing news. Consequently, the objective of this study is to address this gap in knowledge.

2.7 Conceptual Frameworks

The term "theoretical framework" denotes the specific theory that a researcher selects to serve as a guiding principle in their research. Theoretical framework involves the utilization of a theory, or a collection of concepts derived from a single theory, to provide an explanation for an occurrence, or to shed light on a particular phenomenon or research problem.

On the other hand, a conceptual framework enables the researcher to formulate deductions, delineating the variables that may be employed in a study as well as the interrelationship among them.

According to Christiane's (2006) study, there exist four predominant determinants that appear to impact the journalists' verdict with respect to publishing or discarding a story as well as the mode of its presentation. These factors encompass the news factors, institutional objectives, the manipulative potential of news sources, and the subjective convictions of journalists.

Therefore, the researcher draws the following diagram assuming the above factors on the contents of news. As mentioned in the review literature judgement of news prioritization and selection or product of news content is affected by four factors. These are news factors, ownership impact, subjective belief of journalists and organizational objectives.

Since the specific objective of this study is about to find out factors that determine news prioritization in Addis Zemen newspaper then the researcher has conceptually used this conceptual framework variables in addition to the theoretical framework (theories used to underpin the study).



Diagram drawn to illustrate the conceptual framework of the researcher

2.8 Basic assumption of Agenda -Setting theory

The researcher has chosen this theory for the underpin the study based on the assumption that agenda-setting theory has more to do with prioritizing issues in news making. Scholars argued that one reason for journalists or editors to prioritize news items is the agenda they have been

given by the organization. Therefore, the researcher of this study believes agenda-setting theory has much more proximity to the topic studied.

Most research conducted on agenda setting has drawn two basic assumptions (Dearing and Rogers, 1988).

2.8.1 Assumption one: The news media are not the mirror of reality. They filter and shape reality to be believed by the public.

2.8.2 Assumption two: The media gives more space and prominence to certain news stories over others by reporting them continuously and creating amplified importance around them.

The rationale for the researcher's selection of this hypothesis is to investigate the application of agenda setting in news production at *Addis Zemen's newspaper*. This theory further facilitates an examination of how the agenda established by the Ethiopian Press Agency's board, the CEO, or the editors of Addis Zemen Newspaper influences the selection and prioritization of news items. As a point of reference, the researcher employs one of the assumptions of agenda-setting theory, namely that media motives filter and shape issues, to ascertain its practical application. This assumption is particularly relevant to answering the research question of this study, which is how Addis Zemen Newspaper reconciles issue prioritization with professionalism.

The second assumption of agenda-setting theory, which posits that media organizations accord greater space and prominence to certain news items by reporting them continuously and creating amplified importance around them, is also evaluated to determine its practical application. How are placement, spatial/occupancy, and frequency of issues prioritized in Addis Zemen Newspaper? Is it based on professionalism and the impact of a story, or is it predetermined by the agenda setters' quotas? Agenda-setting theory is better equipped to support these assumptions.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research study employed qualitative research methods and used a phenomenology research design. A phenomenological investigation examines into individuals' encounters and centres on their involvement with a phenomenon. To put it plainly, qualitative researchers employ phenomenological research frameworks to comprehend the inherent essence of a phenomenon by examining the perspectives of those who have undergone it.

Rose et al. (2015) Qualitative research designs encompass various methodologies such as interviews, focus groups, and observation.

The researcher of this study, therefore, has used interview and observation as a data gathering tools. The Interview was conducted with semi-structured approach, whereby a predetermined set of questions that are uniformly posed to all participants. Predetermined Open-ended questions, but allows flexibility, were posed on participants to explore a particular topic and the interviewer adjusts their line of inquiry based on the participants' responses.

Data was also gathered by making observation on the contents of news taken from Addis Zemen newspaper's six months sample editions.

Therefore, the researcher in this study employed both interview and observation.

The researcher interviewed four participants, namely, two editors and two experienced reporters from the news department of the *Addis Zemen Newspaper*. The researcher chose these individuals based on their experience in prioritizing and selecting news stories and their ability to speak candidly about their work-related experiences. Since there are typically few variables and numerous instances in qualitative research, the interview sample size is four. In qualitative research, a small number of variables—often four to six—are typically observed in conjunction with a large number of cases (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Semi-structured interview questions were used, asking participants with predetermined open ended questions. Flexibility in asking questions or raising other follow-up questions aside from the predetermined ones is possible.

For the purpose of data collection from a subset of news articles published in the Addis Zemen newspaper, the observation method was employed. A total of 200 news articles were gathered from a six-month span, spanning from October 2022 to March 2023. The decision to select 200 news articles was guided by the research objective of ensuring a representative sample size in each month, adhering to recommended suggestions for qualitative research. It has been noted that the optimal sample size for qualitative research content is approximately 30% (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Accordingly, the researcher followed this guidance and determined the total sample size accordingly.

The responses obtained from the interviewees, coupled with the results from observation of thematic contents of a sample edition of the newspaper, were used for the analysis. The analysis was made by combining these results.

3.2 Sample and Sample Size

The participants of the study consisted of the contents of the editions of Addis Zemen Newspaper and individuals who were interviewed.

A deliberate decision was made to utilize 200 news samples from the period of October 2022 to March 2023. This time frame was selected due to the belief that several crises, challenges, and significant newsworthy events took place during this period. The sample size of 200 was chosen in accordance with recommendations for qualitative research sample sizes. It is worth mentioning that the optimal sample size for qualitative research content is approximately 30% (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Hence, a purposeful selection was made of Addis Zemen newspaper's 24 publications (four newspapers per month) from the designated six-month period.

For the interview portion, four participants or interviewees were selected: two news editors and two news reporters, who were then subjected to an in-depth interview regarding news item selection and prioritization. All selected participants, reporters, and editors have been working at *Addis Zemen Newspaper's* headquarter office (Ethiopian Press Agency) news department. The relatively experienced editors and senior reporters were intentionally selected for the sampling, and their gender was not a factor.

To ensure the anonymity of the editors and reporters interviewed, their identities remain undisclosed. Anonymous interviews in an organization are believed to provide interviewees with a sense of security and increase the likelihood of obtaining accurate information.

3.3 Data Gathering Methods

To cite Kothari (2004), a range of methods can be employed to gather data in research, including questioning, interviews, observations and focus groups discussions.

For the present study, the researcher has utilized interview and observation. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with editors and senior reporters from the news department of the newspaper.

To investigate the presence of particular themes and assess whether top newsworthy stories are prioritized and/or selected in the *Addis Zemen Newspaper*, the researcher employed content observation data gathering tools. Data obtained from observing sample news contents would then be descriptively presented by the researchers.

Furthermore, the researcher has employed interviews particularly semi-structured interview. This approach involves asking predetermined open-ended questions that allow flexibility and coherence while enabling the researcher to evaluate the comments, stances, feelings, and pain of the interviewees.

Therefore, by utilizing content observation as a data gathering tool, the researcher provided descriptions of how public interest issues are prioritized based on the principles of news worthiness during the specified period (from October 2022 to March 2023).

For the interview segment, the researcher separately interviewed two news editors and two senior reporters using provocative and open-ended questions. The aim of these questions was to determine how issues are selected or prioritized while creating news in the *Addis Zemen Newspaper*. Finally, an analysis was conducted based on the responses of the interviewee to determine whether news items are selected and prioritized based on the news value principle of journalism, public interest, and as per laws, proclamations, etc. or not.

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

The utilization of qualitative data analysis techniques was employed to impart significance and perspectives to the data collected from both the interviews and the sample newspapers.

Therefore, Firstly, the researcher of this study employed qualitative analysis methods of a phenomenology research design content analysis to elucidate the actual meaning of the responses obtained from the respondents and from the sample contents of the newspaper.

Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand and describe the universal essence of a phenomenon or issue (Wheeldon, 2010), The approach investigates the everyday experiences of human beings while suspending the researchers' preconceived assumptions about the issue. In other words, phenomenological research studies lived experiences to gain deeper insights into how people understand those experiences.

Thus, the response obtained from the participants or interviewees of *Addis Zemen Newspaper interviewed* were analysed qualitatively by phenomenological design of qualitative research method in relation to professional news selection criteria.

Secondly, results obtained from the sample contents of newspapers were qualitatively analysed by content analysis. Content analysis is used to find specific words, themes, or concepts in a given set of qualitative data, or text (Wheeldon, 2010). Researchers can measure and examine the occurrence, significance, and connections of particular words, topics, or concepts by using content analysis.

Additionally, an analysis was carried out on professional obstacles encountered during the process of prioritization and news selection in the *Addis Zemen Newspaper*. This analysis was based on the responses of the participants. An assessment was conducted on the meaning of each respondent's answers according to journalistic and professional news criteria and ordering. The news content of the newspaper, taken and observed as a sample, was compared with current news issues that should have been prioritized at that time, and an analysis was provided based on the scientific principle of professional sequential arrangement of news issues.

3.5 Validity of the study

The validity of this research was established using two measures. Firstly, the same predetermined research questions were forwarded to each respondent separately to measure the validity of the result. Secondly, responses of the participants were compared to the e contents of Addis Zemen newspaper editions taken from the sample period.

Moreover, the inclusion of greater diversity of sample news contents (two hundred news) led the research to reduce its biasness towards only one type of outcome, creating a base for valid results. The other technique used was to restrict the amount of information shared with the respondents to make sure that the research was not biased with preconceived notions of the respondents. These steps helped to establish the validity of the results gained, proving the accurateness of the qualitative research. Further, the validity of the questionnaire was established using a panel of experts that reviewed the questionnaire. And hence the statements that did not go well with the subject of the study were removed.

Interviewees were from both editors and senior reporters of Addis Zemen Newspaper's news department to get diverse data. To get valid data the interviewee were subjected to an in-depth interview regarding news item selection and prioritization. The relatively experienced editors and senior reporters were intentionally selected assuming they have full background information. To provide interviewees with a sense of security and increase the likelihood of obtaining accurate information the anonymity of the editors and reporters interviewed, their identities remained undisclosed.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Data Gathered from both the interview and from observing sample contents of *Addis Zemen* newspaper's news were presented and analysed in this chapter.

Extracting Themes	Respondent1		Respondent2		Respondent3		Respondent4	
	Time	Date	Time	Date	Time	Date	Time	Date
Ignoring public concern	7 th min	Jul9/2023	5 th min	Jul9/2023	7 th min	Jul 11/2023	8 th min	Jul17/2023
Loyalty rather than professionalism	19 th min	Jul9/2023	10 th min	Jul9/2023	16 th min	Jul11/2023	14 th min	Jul17/2023
Discrediting news value	34 th min	Jul9/2023	17 th min	Jul9/2023	19 th min	Jul11/2023	25 th min	Jul17/2023
Intervention on journalists	39 th min	Jul9/2023	19 th min	Jul9/2023	22 th min	Jul 11/2023	28 th min	Jul17/2023
Novel writing in the name of editing	40 th min	Jul9/2023	28 th min	Jul9/2023	22 th min	Jul11/2023	31 th min	Jul17/2023
Intentional distortion	44 th min	Jul9/2023	33 th min	Jul9/2023	31 th min	Jul 11/2023	35 th min	Jul17/2023
Managerial rule influence	49 th min	Jul9/2023	42 th min	Jul9/2023	33 th min	Jul 11/2023	38 th min	Jul17/2023

Table 4.1: Extracted Themes by in-depth interview from *Addis Zemen* news paper's news editors and senior news reporters

And 200 sample news gathered from the 6 month's publications were presented below and the analysis was made jointly with the responses obtained from the respondents of the interview.

Themes extracted from the Newspaper's decisions	Number of News under this theme taken from the sample period(Oct/2022-March/2023
Success of Prosperous party	26
Ethiopia's economic progress	18
Wheat production	12
Park development	21
Students taking exam	07
Ethiopian military's victory	19
Other nation Appraisal Ethiopian progress	09
The prime minister's tour	24
Higher official gift to the poor	17
Planting trees	22
Harvesting crop	10
Voluntary works	15

Table 4.2: Themes extracted from six months samples publications of *Addis Zemen* news paper

Therefore, the analysis was made by bringing both data and intermingling them together in order to give meaning for the data. Besides, the analysis part is categorized with subtitles to make the results clear and understandable.

4.2 Public interest issues reporting

The subjects that capture the attention of the populace and have noteworthy influence on the societal fabric are not the primary focal point of news coverage provided by the *Addis Zemen Newspaper*. This observation was confirmed by the news editors and reporters of the aforementioned newspaper who were subjected to a comprehensive interview by the author of this thesis.

One of the respondents of the newspaper, who was interviewed regarding the approach the newspaper takes in reporting on issues that have significant impact and proximity to society, and that are of interest to the majority of the people, expressed the following verbatim.

Addis Zemen newspaper, in my opinion, has not adhered to the principles of professional journalism and public interest reporting. Although it is understandable that the Prime Minister's actions or statements may be newsworthy, the newspaper's front page is often dominated by his image and issues. This is not to say that the Prime Minister should not be featured on the front page, but rather that there are other pressing issues and events that are equally important to the public. The newspaper's focus on government speeches and institutions is also limiting, as it neglects to report on human rights issues and other public complaints. In fact, the newspaper has been known to discard news that is deemed sensationalized or that the government does not approve of, even if it meets the criteria for newsworthiness. Additionally, news that is perceived to have a promotional message may also be omitted. As a result, the *Addis Zemen newspaper* is not upholding the standards of journalistic professionalism and public interest reporting. A recent example of this was the newspaper's decision to ban the publication of a human rights report issued by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, as well as orders to not report on similar reports from other human rights institutions.

The editor's response in the newspaper carries significant weight, and the initial respondent's concern highlights that the newspaper, despite being labelled as public media journalism, is

essentially reporting on the promotion of individual image. The editor acknowledged that the front pages of the newspaper often showcase the Prime Minister's photographs and speeches. While the speeches and actions of officials and noteworthy individuals are undoubtedly newsworthy, it is unprofessional to consistently prioritize the Prime Minister's speeches when there are other pressing public concerns. The respondent affirms that this is not a professional approach to journalism. Although the Prime Minister's case is noteworthy news, it is often repetitive compared to other significant newsworthy events.

Numerous local and foreign human rights organizations have reported serious human rights violations in Ethiopia. However, the editor confirmed that the newspaper repeatedly denied publication of their reports. The editor, who has extensive experience in the field, stated that this confirms that the *Addis Zemen newspaper* did not adhere to the principles of professional journalism based on public interest. At the very least, the human rights violations report from human rights institutions should have been presented alongside the news of the Prime Minister, if the newspaper had established itself as a professional journalistic outlet.

It is acceptable to prioritize the speeches and activities of the Prime Minister and other government officials on the front page of the newspaper if they are newsworthy. However, if the speeches and actions of officials fail to meet the standards of newsworthiness, it is unprofessional to feature them as the primary news on the front page of the newspaper, especially considering that the newspaper is public media.

According to the respondent, human rights issues are not covered in the newspaper, only the Prime Minister and government officials' cases are repeatedly reported. The Prime Minister's case receives repeated coverage while other potential news stories are dismissed. This statement confirms that the newspaper prioritizes non-newsworthy issues and allocates space to specific parties on its front page. This approach is unprofessional and suggests that the newspaper selects news in an unprofessional manner. If this continues, it can be argued that the newspaper is not fulfilling its role of professional journalism but rather engaging in public relations work. Yoon et al. (2014) have stated that if a media outlet restricts access to information and limits the public forum available for discussion and deliberation, it is not fulfilling its watchdog role of focusing on public interest journalism.

During an in-depth interview with the researcher, another editor of the newspaper provided additional support for the aforementioned logic. He expressed that the *Addis Zemen newspaper* does not adhere to scientific criteria when selecting news stories. Instead, the newspaper primarily reports on government affairs as an organization. Furthermore, he opined that the professional reporting conducted by the newspaper, which truly captures the voice of the people and resonates with the majority of individuals, accounts for no more than 10 per cent of its content.

We do not adhere to the standard of journalistic science with regards to news selection. Rather, *Addis Zemen* conforms to the editorial policy of the organization and the directives of its superiors. Our primary focus lies in campaign work and we do not give much consideration to the nature of current public-interest news that satisfies the criteria of news. Our organization predominantly reports on state affairs and it is our belief that we have not adequately represented the voice of the community or reported on public-interest news. There is often much to be said about government affairs and on occasion, we will seek out an expert to provide clarification to the public. However, we cannot confidently say that our work is satisfactory. It is our understanding that the principle of journalism is to be a voice for the voiceless. Yet, we must concede that this principle is not being fully implemented in our country. The media in our country cannot operate based on the interests of society, irrespective of whether it is privately or government owned. Even if private media fail to act as the voice of the people, how can *Addis Zemen*, a government owned newspaper, realistically represent the people's voice? It is our estimation that 90 percent of news concerning the public's voice in the *Addis Zemen newspaper* goes unreported.

The Ethiopian constitution, being the supreme document of all laws, stipulates that any media that is funded by the government or managed under the control of the government must work for the public good, as stated in Subsection 5 of Article 29 of the Constitution. The provision further requires such mass media to operate in a way that is accommodating to diverse views of different parties.

However, the editors of the *Addis Zemen Newspaper*, who were subject to an in-depth interview, confirmed that they do not provide room for diversity of voices.

According to Yoon et al. (2014), a media outlet that promotes state control of the populace by restricting top newsworthy events and limiting the public forum available for discussion and deliberation is not fulfilling its watchdog role of focusing on public interest journalism.

This article's researcher conducted a study of the newspaper's 6-month editions and observed that the Addis Zemen newspaper neglected urgent social news and instead focused on public relations-like work, choosing only simple issues that do not meet news criteria and are out of date.

Among the newspaper issues included in the study, the sample of October editions prioritized the following topics as news by placing them on the front page and subsequent pages of the newspaper: Prime Minister Abiy's statement on achieving prosperity through the utilization of inner potential; the need for Tigray natives to condemn terrorist TPLF; active participation in national consultation by the people; 12th-grade students taking exams; the government's openness to a peace deal; the planned growth of summer wheat on 1 million hectares of land in Oromia; the new national identity card's potential to solve justice system problems; the defence force's strong capacity in all sectors; and the humiliation of the country's honour by terrorist TPLF for foreign powers' benefit. Additionally, it was mentioned that last summer, when voluntary work worth 14 billion birr was done, Westerners negotiated not for Ethiopians' benefit but to save the terrorist TPLF.

In October, the *Addis Zemen Newspaper* presented news content that was relatively small compared to the prevailing issues in the country at that time. The headlines of the newspaper were primarily filled with photos and speeches of top government officials, which is consistent with the editors' statements during an in-depth interview.

However, the newspaper did not cover the pressing issues in society that were of greater significance during that time. For instance, the national market experienced shortages of oil and sugar, leading to a significant price increase. Additionally, human rights violations in prisons and police stations have been a major concern for the people. The public has expressed dissatisfaction due to Ukraine's termination of aid to Ethiopia. In the Oromia region, the country's largest, innocent people have been killed, and citizens have been displaced based on their ethnic identity.

Moreover, militants killed the governor and six other people in the Benshangul Gumz region, but the *Addis Zemen newspaper* did not report on the matter. Similarly, when residents of Gurage Zone held peaceful demonstrations, the police shot and injured innocent citizens, but the newspaper did not cover this issue.

Basic services were interrupted in many cities, including Shire, Alamata, Korum, Sekota, and Robit, causing people to voice their grievances. However, the *Addis Zemen newspaper* did not report on these matters. The government's primary responsibilities include providing light, electricity, and telecommunications and maintaining peace. Nevertheless, the newspaper's reportage was only focused on mentioning the terrorism of the TPLF.

The newspaper's front pages were filled with news stories about regular day-to-day activities, such as students taking exams, the government's plan to produce wheat during the summer, and the main way of overcoming poverty being production. The newspaper also reported on the progress and success of the Prosperity Party, the issuance of ID cards, the victory of the country's defence forces, volunteer work, and condemnation of the West.

According to Pegu (2015), news coverage of the main issues that are of public concern can make the government or other relevant bodies pay attention to the issue or respond immediately. Article 29 Subsection 5 of the Ethiopian Constitution stipulates that any media established in the name of the people and supported or managed by the government should prioritize the main issues of the people.

However, the *Addis Zemen newspaper* appears to neglect news selection criteria by frequently reporting on mundane daily government activities rather than focusing on newsworthy topics. In essence, the newspaper's news editors, when interviewed by the researcher, admitted to disregarding scientific news standards and selection criteria in their reporting.

Furthermore, the newspaper's October news coverage exemplifies a lack of public interest journalism, despite the affirmation of the newspaper's news editors.

In a country where human rights violations occur frequently, it is unproductive to prioritize student examinations as news. Such news is less significant than next year's summer wheat

irrigation, which is scheduled to be planted during a time when basic consumer products, such as oil and sugar, have become scarce in the market.

It is unprofessional for the issue of "Ethiopia's prosperity to succeed" to be front page news when citizens are being displaced in their own country and innocent people are being killed by militants.

McGregor (2002) asserts that public interest journalism should prioritize relevance, significance, and the public's interest.

In a country like Ethiopia, which is facing political and economic crises, if pressing issues are not reported with the necessary attention, they may not receive adequate solutions. Experts in the field suggest that reporting non-current issues instead of newsworthy pressing issues can distract people from their primary agenda, leaving the problem unresolved.

The content of *Addis Zemen newspaper's* news reports in October indicates that the newspaper is not practicing public interest journalism in a professional manner.

This is further confirmed by the responses of experienced news reporters from *Addis Zemen newspaper*, who were interviewed in-depth by the researcher.

Respondent 3 was asked to elaborate on how the newspaper reports news according to the basic principles of journalism and based on the needs of the people.

As previously mentioned, I posit that the primary goal of the organization is not to uphold the ideals of impartial journalism and public advocacy, but rather to endorse and sustain the policies and strategies of the government. In essence, the objective is to provide backing for governmental initiatives.

As confirmed by an experienced news editor of the *Addis Zemen newspaper* to the researcher, the newspaper does not adhere to journalistic principles or the public interest, but instead is dictated by state officers. In essence, the role of a news report is to bolster the government, resulting in the rejection of critical issues even if they are newsworthy and impact the masses.

Thus, the respondent's testimony supports the criticism made by various parties in the previous chapter of this thesis, stating that the *Addis Zemen newspaper* neglects public interest and does not adhere to professional news standards.

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, it was noted that state-owned media in Ethiopia have faced criticism from institutions such as the Ethiopian House of Representatives, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, and the Ethiopian Human Rights Council for their failure to fulfil professional responsibilities as outlined in the constitution. News editors and reporters from the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, who were interviewed for this study, acknowledged these criticisms.

One reporter who was interviewed stated that the newspaper does not prioritize or properly select news that is of public interest and professional. He attributed this to the Ethiopian Press Agency's lack of encouragement or allowance for journalists to follow scientific news selection and arrangement.

When engaging in the selection of news one may encounter errors in adhering to professional selection criteria and the implementation of professional news practices. The extent of such deviations varies from one newspaper to another. In contrast to reporters in newspapers who follow a specific order of news arrangements, we prioritize the work that aligns with the interests of the newspaper. This means that if a particular diplomatic or political issue arises, it will receive preferential treatment and be featured on the front page. Conversely, even if there are significant news stories, they may be postponed or discarded if they do not align with the newspaper's priorities. It is worth noting that at times, the inside pages of a newspaper may contain more newsworthy content than the front page. Additionally, seemingly trivial issues that support the government may be given priority over more newsworthy topics that do not. It is my sincere hope that my message is clear. I am of the opinion that *Addis Zemen newspaper* does not produce news reports that adhere to professional standards and public demand. The house approach does not facilitate optimal performance, and as a result, functionality may be compromised. For instance, while people may want news on the escalating cost of living, our focus is elsewhere. The selection of news items among various competing issues is influenced by the varying needs of media outlets. As

an *Addis Zemen newspaper*, it is evident what kind of issue the newspaper would prefer. Journalists may select content based on prioritizing news items that support the government.

All the newspaper editors and news department journalists, who possess extensive experience, have verified that the newspaper fails to adhere to the fundamental principles of journalism by prioritizing news based on the criterion of news selection merit. In addition, the researcher affirms that the respondents' answers correspond with the evaluation results of the sample newspaper reports. Rich (2010) further asserts that if a newspaper overlooks newsworthy events of the public interest and instead focuses on a few powerful individuals or government officials with less critical issues, then the media is pursuing public relations work, not public interest journalism.

It is pertinent to examine the significant events that occurred in Ethiopia during November before scrutinizing the top news stories of *Addis Zemen Newspaper* to facilitate a comparison. These events were reported by human rights organizations, various government institutions, and members of the independent House of Representatives. The researcher promptly registered these newsworthy events that were widely circulating on various social media platforms.

During this period, there was a great deal of public discontent owing to the police's noncompliance with court decisions and the increased violations of human and democratic rights. Additionally, there was a public outcry that the government was not giving priority to the development projects that the people wanted. People were resentful that the government allocated the budget to non-urgent luxury projects that they did not want. In the Oromia region, there were several disturbances, including the displacement and killing of innocent people and a gunfight between the government forces and the Oromo liberation army militants in the Welega district.

Before the parliament lifted the terrorism charge against the TPLF, the delegation headed by the speaker of the House of Representatives of Ethiopia met with TPLF officials in Mekele, which raised questions against the government's legality. Additionally, the event was broadcasted live on mainstream channels such as ETV. In northern Ethiopia, public complaints and peaceful demonstrations were held following the interruption of basic services in the Tigray and Amhara regions.

The complaints of the 1997 E.C. waiting lists of condominium lots of Addis Ababa's residents and the arrest of officials suspected of corruption were other major events that occurred at that time. Furthermore, the increase in the price of basic consumer goods and the cost of living problem were further exacerbated.

However, the headlines and contents of the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, as observed in the month of November, differed from the current issues, complaints of the majority, and prominent events within the country. The front pages of the newspaper featured news stories such as the confirmation of the cause of constant conflicts in the country through research, Ethiopia's economy achieving growth despite influences, efforts to obtain 145 million dollars from neighbouring countries through the sale of electricity, an upcoming inauguration of a mineral fish development project, the commencement of Ethiopian Youth Month celebration at Arba Minch University, the imminent International Internet Management Conference to be held in Ethiopia, the celebration of African Statistics Day, Ethiopia's safe level in air transport service, the peace agreement's significance in strengthening Pan-Africanism, foreign forces opposing the peace agreement being enemies of the people, and the peace agreement destroying the dreams of those interfering in internal affairs.

Moreover, General Birhanu Jula emphasized the resolution of psychological problems resulting from the war, readiness of cooperatives to supply more than 2 million 850 thousand quintals of wheat to the foreign market, the need for all political forces to work towards the peace agreement's fruition, the consensus reached at the Nairobi talks regarding the peace agreement's implementation, the peace agreement's positive role in increasing Ethiopia's foreign direct investment flow, and the crucial headlines on the front and subsequent pages of the newspaper during the specified period, such as the significance of Sidama mediation services and the severity of traffic accidents.

A reader who perused most of the newspaper's news during that month may have concluded that Ethiopia had no problems. However, most of the news sources or speakers consisted of the ruling party's prosperity party officials. Despite numerous public issues of great impact, the newspaper overlooked them. For instance, the increment in the cost of living and the price of basic consumer goods had sparked public grievances, yet the newspaper reported on the country's economic growth and improved living conditions. Celebrations of Ethiopian Youth Day,

Statistics Day, and Internet Day, among others, were trivial news items for a country where frequent massacres, citizen violations, and rights abuses were rampant. The newspaper should not have reported the celebration of Pan-Africanism Day or Internet Day in advance during a time when peaceful citizens were being killed, displaced, and abducted by the police without a court order.

When a large number of citizens are displaced from one region to another within their own homeland and undergo migration, the *Addis Zemen Newspaper* maintains a conspicuous silence on this top-priority issue. It seems ironic that the newspaper prioritizes and reports on the celebration of Pan Africanism Day when internal migration and displacement are prevalent features in the country. For citizens who fall victim to ethnically-motivated attacks within their home country, news about pan-Africanism celebrations is not of primary concern.

The newspaper's news for the specified month is inconsistent with the principles of public interest journalism when viewed in terms of news prioritization and arrangement. The issue of sorting and prioritizing news, however, is not the only problem at hand. The news featured on the front page of the newspaper does not adhere to basic news requirements, such as impact, human interest, prominence, oddity or novelty, puzzle, timeliness, and proximity, but instead focuses on slogans and advice.

The primary news of the newspaper contradicts Article 29 No. 5 of the Ethiopian Constitution, which states that any public media supported by or under the control of the government must address different ideas and viewpoints. For instance, in November, the Ezema party, which holds a seat in the House of Representatives, released a statement urging the government to put a stop to armed forces attacks. Nevertheless, the *Addis Zemen Newspaper* failed to address or report on this idea.

The news editors and producers of the newspaper, who were interviewed by the researcher in this article, stated that "we prioritize news that supports the government; addressing diverse voices is not the focus of the newspaper's news."

This indicates that the results of the joint evaluation of both the content of the news published in the newspaper and the responses obtained from the participants reveal the same conclusion: the

prioritization of issues in the *Addis Zemen newspaper* is unprofessional and based on the goodwill of the officials.

One of the participants provided an example to support this claim.

I cannot confidently state that our journalistic endeavours and reportage are based on professional principles and driven by public interest. In fact, it can be reasonably inferred that the contrary holds true.

The respondent's opinion was that the *Addis Zemen newspaper* predominantly focuses on issues that may not be of immediate concern. Despite the on-going issues of high living costs and citizen displacement, the newspaper has neglected to report on these newsworthy topics. This failure to prioritize professional journalism based on public interest is a significant concern.

To gain a greater understanding of how news impacting citizens' lives and capturing public interest is reported in the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, the researcher thoroughly analysed two months of publications, drawn from six months of samples.

In January, a significant number of citizens, approximately 800,000, were displaced from different regions and migrated to the Amara region. The kidnapping of 10,000 youths from the northern Ethiopian city of Alamata, who later went missing, was also a topic of discussion. Journalists and other individuals were abducted unlawfully without a court order.

In Parliament, members of the House of Representatives of Ethiopia expressed concern over the hasty appointment and dismissal of ministers. Senior and middle leaders from the Ethiopian Human Rights Council were arrested in Sebeta city. Reports showed that the score of 12th grade students in the country had decreased, with a passing grade of only 3.3%.

Furthermore, the lifting of fuel subsidies, South Sudanese soldiers crossing the Ethiopian sovereign border, and the dismissal of 1,500 workers from Tandaho Sugar Factory who submitted their grievances to the *Addis Zemen newspaper* were other news items of public interest and great impact in January.

Health institutions also released a statement regarding the high level of the malaria epidemic in Ethiopia. The Addis Ababa city administration's suspension of land-related services caused complaints among customers.

Despite meeting the criteria for public interest journalism, such as proximity, impact, timeliness, human interest, odd novelty, and suspense, the above-mentioned news issues did not receive sufficient news coverage from the *Addis Zemen newspaper* at the time. This failure is inconsistent with the principles of public interest journalism advocates, like Rich (2010), who argue that a newspaper's neglect of newsworthy events that are of public interest in favour of a few powerful individuals or government officials holding less newsworthy issues indicates that the media is pursuing public relations work, not public interest journalism.

In January, the *Addis Zemen Newspaper* gave attention to other news items instead of those mentioned above. The researcher's argument is not, in fact, why the newspapers did not cover the news that other media, human rights institutions, or government offices were concerned about.

The purpose of the researcher's observation and survey is to determine whether the news reports that the newspaper has taken up by itself are issues that should be prioritized and affect the lives of citizens when measured by scientific news selection criteria. The evaluation of news reports on the front page of January's edition of the *Addis Zemen newspaper* reveals that they are mostly published with less newsworthy issues. The issues presented are more advice than news and communicate non-issues to the large public, ignoring top-priority matters. The newspaper has reported the regular day-to-day operations of government institutions as news, which is not newsworthy.

For instance, the newspaper published a horse show in Enjbara, the Sidama region anti-corruption committee's work, the importance of the baptism festival, the anti-corruption committee's work in the Gambella region, and the construction of a women's reform and skill development centre on the front page as the main news headlines. However, the fact that a horse fair is to be built when citizens have been kidnapped by unidentified gunmen on a mass scale is not news of public interest. Making news that the anti-corruption committees of the Sidama and Southern regions are going to do their work at a time when journalists and human rights institutions are being kidnapped is a divorce or conflict with the profession of public interest

journalism. The fact that the anti-corruption institutions of the states are going to work is not a new thing or news; it is part of the daily routine or regular activities of the government.

In January, when the South Sudanese soldiers crossed the Ethiopian sovereign border, 1500 workers and their families who were dismissed from the Tendaho Sugar Factory fell into trouble. However, at this time, the focus of the newspaper's news coverage was that the people appreciated the work of peace in Ethiopia.

At a time when the problem of killing and displacement occurred at a high level in the country, especially in Oromia and Benshangul Gumz regions, the news stories in the *Addis Zemen* newspaper were concerned with other normal daily routines. For instance, the newspaper reported that efforts were being made to increase the digital economy, a women's rehabilitation centre was going to be built, crops grown on 385 thousand hectares of land in Oromia were harvested, it was said that chemicals should not be released into water bodies, and many people visited the National Museum.

The news featured on the front page during the aforementioned month, including reports of tax collections and recommendations received by the Federal Anti-Corruption Committee, were routine occurrences of institutional daily activities and not particularly noteworthy in comparison to other major events transpiring in the country at that time.

In an effort to address issues plaguing their respective communities, cities were encouraged to be part of the solution rather than the root of the problem. The Oromia Peace and Security Office also worked diligently to ensure that religious celebrations were conducted peacefully, while emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural values. However, the news stories selected by the newspaper for the month of January did not seem to reflect the reality of an Ethiopia where problems such as hunger, migration, displacement, suppression, disease, and epidemics are rampant. Rather, these headlines seemed to belong to a country enjoying luxury and peace.

In light of this, the comments made by experienced reporters and editors regarding the *Addis Zemen newspaper's* failure to prioritize and report on issues of public concern were consistent with the sample news content evaluated. In media outlets where public interest journalism is practiced, the news media plays a critical role as both watchdog and public forum for debate

(Weezel, 2008). However, in the case of the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, practical public-interest journalism appears to be lacking.

The month of February was selected by the researcher as a sample to examine the news content of *Addis Zemen newspaper* for professional news reporting that prioritizes human interest in news coverage.

During February, a multitude of events unfolded that captured the attention of various human rights institutions. Notably, in the Borena zone of the Oromia region, 1.7 million individuals were at risk of starvation. In addition, the South Sudanese militants violated Ethiopia's sovereign border and began renaming districts. Furthermore, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission issued a statement condemning unconstitutional rights violations, including killings that occurred in Oromia. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council also called for the government to stop harassing black-clad Orthodox believers. Additionally, the disproportionate action taken by the Wolkite police in Gurage Zone led to the killing of three innocent individuals, which sparked public outrage.

Other newsworthy events that took place during this month include over 68,000 people in Waghhemra zone in the Amhara region being infected with malaria and measles, IDPs in Afar region losing their hearing, hundreds of thousands of individuals being endangered by drought in South Omo, a dramatic increase in the number of IDPs in the Amhara region, and violations of peaceful protesters' rights in the Somali region and Wolaita zone. Furthermore, a nationwide internet ban and user complaints, the release of a research statement by the Center for Human and Democratic Development stating that 63 journalists were abducted without the law in Ethiopia in the last two years, and more than 60 human rights organizations writing a letter to the United Nations accusing the government and the banks of the Tigray region of a money shortage problem were of public interest and significance.

Despite the gravity of these events that have a significant impact on the lives of many, most of the current news reporters at *Addis Zemen Newspaper* have not reported on them. Instead, they have focused on simple, routine assignments or less newsworthy issues compared to the events that have occurred in the country.

During the period under review, the front pages of newspapers reported a number of issues, such as the efforts of Ethiopia in reducing the risk of climate change and the announcement of the cultivation of summer irrigated wheat in Batu City of the Eastern Shewa Zone. Additionally, a chart was to be prepared for a digital project in the Harari Region, while the Abrhot Library was hosting a substantial number of readers per day. Furthermore, it was noted that summer irrigated wheat per hectare was up to 111 quintals. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed also held talks with Malta's Prime Minister Robert Abella. However, while these events were significant, the news lacked timeliness and newsworthiness compared to other issues affecting the majority of citizens, such as immigration, displacement, and illegal abduction, as well as mass killings, and the high increment of the cost of living.

In a country where disasters caused by drought put citizens at risk of death, issues such as the number of people entering the Abrhot Library or the preparation of a map of the Harari region for a digital project should not have received priority or been reported as extensively. These stories are not top-priority issues and are not newsworthy compared to the more pressing problems that affect people's lives, such as the high cost of living.

In a similar vein, news about the preparation of a map of the Harari region for a digital project at a time when South Sudanese soldiers have crossed the border of Ethiopia and taken steps to change the names of districts shows a lack of attention to the issues or problems that affect citizens' lives. Such issues should not have been prioritized or reported in the news.

During the month of February, when citizens in the Gurage zone held a peaceful demonstration demanding that their basic needs be met, complaints were heard about the banks of the Tigray region not providing services due to a lack of cash, and the problem of displaced people deteriorated in the Afar region. However, the headlines of Addis Zemen newspaper mostly focused on the Prime Minister's speech or on those who tried to advise the public, which are not newsworthy compared to the more pressing issues and events of that period. The headlines in the news were not scientific or professional journalism, but rather normal daily activities.

At the time, the *Addis Zemen Newspaper* reported on various news themes, including the fruitful international diplomacy talks of the prime minister, the need for Ethiopia to focus on economic diplomacy, the abundance of renewable energy sources in Ethiopia, the upcoming intake of new

students at Addis Ababa University, and an upcoming conference of international religious institutions. However, the newspaper failed to prioritize important issues such as the letter of reprimand and profile written to the United Nations by over 60 human rights institutions, which accused the Ethiopian government of violating the human rights of its citizens.

During the time when the Ethiopian police killed three peaceful protestors and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission condemned the unconstitutional rights violations committed, the Addis Zemen newspaper's headlines focused on ordinary daily issues, such as the number of people reading at the Abrhot library. This indicates that the newspaper failed to address issues that are crucial to the public's interest.

In February, despite the 68,000 complaints of malaria and measles in the Amhara region of Waghembra zone and the difficulties faced by displaced people in the Afar region, the Addis Zemen newspaper prioritized news stories about Ethiopian Airlines being Africa's hope, the Ministry of Revenue's tax collection efforts, the importance of hospitality towards guests in Addis Ababa, and the need for active public participation in ensuring peace. These news stories were not newsworthy compared to the public's needs and problems at the time, lacking timeliness, substance, and impact.

Overall, the *Addis Zemen newspaper* failed to cover issues that significantly impact the lives of citizens. According to Rich (2010), newspapers should prioritize community problems as priority news. However, the investigation conducted on the news contents of the *Addis Zemen newspaper* and the statements of interviewed editors and experienced reporters revealed that top-priority issues that affect the public were not given sufficient attention.

4.3 Professionalism in prioritizing news items

The next core issue addressed in this thesis concerns the professional system of news prioritization and ordering employed by the *Addis Zemen newspaper*. Experts in the field contend that news arrangement should be based on news value criteria, a principle that is firmly established in the basic tenets of journalism.

As per the criteria for news selection, the most significant event, idea, or speech is accorded first priority, followed by the next in order of importance, with the lowest news value being placed at

the end. Rich (2010) identifies issues or problems in the community, proximity, timeliness, impact, unusual nature, human interest, and conflicts as crucial factors for ensuring professional news prioritization.

The researcher of this thesis conducted in-depth interviews with senior news reporters and editors of the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, who confirmed that they do not adhere to this professional system of news arrangement and prioritization, a view shared by many experts in the field.

One news editor from the newspaper in question admitted that they make decisions about the order and prioritization of news not based on professional criteria, but rather in accordance with a superior order from the leaders, regardless of whether the news is intended or suggested.

In recent times, the *Addis Zemen newspaper* and other newspapers and magazines under the organization have witnessed the emergence of agendas set by the leaders. Previously, editors and reporters would sometimes discuss news issues, regardless of whether they were in line with the agenda set by the officials. This practice has since ceased. Presently, the newspaper officials announce the agenda for the week or month, following which suggestions, press releases, and planning news are executed in accordance with the guidelines established by the officials. The news agenda is largely formed from recommendations by various institutions, accompanied by recommendation letters from government, private organizations, or public relations experts, specifying the date and place. Events that have the potential to raise issues related to the government's policy and enforcement position are then reported. Private organizations are not given much attention. Government communication officers and experts sometimes write and send newspaper statements or press releases without our attendance, which are reported as news if they align with the newspaper's agenda selection. Planning or project news is also covered, despite being limited to the given topic.

The editor, who possesses extensive experience in the realm of newspapers, asserts that the news agenda is selected and prioritized in accordance with orders from officials. Specifically, within the previous 4 to 5 years, the officials' directives have consistently dictated the selection and prioritization of news agendas. Although the respondent acknowledges that past attempts to professionalize the ranking and selection of news were less than satisfactory, such efforts were at

least made. He contends that the officials' handling of the news selection and placement process is wholly unprofessional.

The editor or respondent confirms that officials are apprised in advance of planned or projected news, and that the topic is restricted. In-depth interviews conducted by the researcher with news editors from the *Addis Zemen newspaper* substantiate the claim that the prioritization and selection of news issues is unprofessional.

When selecting news from a multitude of issues, our decision is not based on prioritizing news in a professional manner, but rather according to directives issued by officials and in adherence to the traditional direction set by the institution. These directives are grounded in the policy established for the agency. The policy of the Ethiopian Press Agency is to execute government decrees and maintain communication with both the government and the people. This implies that matters concerning the prime minister, the presidency, and ministers are given precedence, with national matters following suit. If community needs are included in our news, they are placed at the end. Personal matters are generally not given much attention in our institution.

The news editor of the newspaper has stated that the prioritization of top-priority newsworthy and public-interest news that has an impact on the larger public is not the primary focus of the newspaper. According to the respondent, community interest is placed on the subsequent page rather than the front page, if news of high officials' speeches and events is missed.

From this explanation, two things can be inferred. Firstly, issues of public interest, even if they are influential, are not the preferred type of news for the *Addis Zemen Newspaper*. Secondly, these types of public-interest news and social problems or complaints will only be addressed if news related to another government official is not available, or if *Addis Zemen Newspaper* has a shortage of news.

The respondent's opinion that "even if there are more newsworthy public problems and questions, they are not prioritized in a professional manner" is similar to the news contents of the newspapers that were evaluated by the researcher. This indicates that professionalism is not being prioritized in the *Addis Zemen Newspaper's* news segment. When journalists do not align themselves with professionalism in journalism newspapers become advocates for a specific

political program, rather than a public forum (Hallin et al., 2004). Therefore, *Addis Zemen newspaper*, which does not prioritize professionalism, leads to community problems remaining uncovered as news.

In December, the news reported as a priority by *Addis Zemen Newspaper* was inconsistent and different from the news issues that were to be prioritized at that time.

During that month, local human rights institutions, which are believed to be independent, members of the House of Representatives, statements by various government institutions, other international news networks, and social media news sources discussed many issues. Many of these issues are newsworthy, with high public interest and impact. Many of the issues were on the agenda of the majority of the people due to their high level of problems and the fact that they were discussed on the news agenda.

During this time, innocent citizens were killed and displaced in the Oromia region. In the Waghhemra zone of the Amhara region, over 67,000 people were facing starvation. Harassment and arrest of members of political parties, such as the killing of an Izema member in Gurage Zone and the abduction of Balderas and NAMA party members, were problems. International humanitarian organizations, including UNICEF, have reported that people are at risk of starvation in many areas of Ethiopia. Another incident in December was the public turmoil over the plan to wave the Oromia flag in Addis Ababa. It was announced that the price of basic commodities had risen sharply, and inflation had increased by a staggering 35.1 per cent.

These significant events that occurred in December in Ethiopia, such as the challenge of the rising cost of living and the disappearance of teff and wheat from the market, the refusal of the police to accept court orders and the suppression of journalists without court order, the disappearance of cement from the market, the increase in service fees of government hospitals, the displacement and complaints of residents caused by the establishment of Sheger City, the malaria epidemic in North Wollo with 18 thousand people infected, Raya and Wolkait's controversy again, holding a joint conference of the Enat Party, MEAD Party and All Ethiopia Unity Party, Izema's statement that he is going to sue the Addis Ababa Education Bureau, were brought to the forefront and emphasized by national human rights institutions, members of the House of Representatives, political parties, and relevant federal and state government

institutions. Despite the fact that these issues were of greater newsworthiness compared to the news reported by Addis Zemen newspaper that month, few of them were covered in the news section.

Among these December news issues, although very few incidents were reported by the newspaper, the angle was changed, and they were reported with a different meaning. In other words, they deliberately distorted the main public question or the direction of the issue that needed attention and pretended that the problem had been solved or that the public had been advised to do so.

For instance, the newspaper reported that the government is working to produce products that are in line with demand regarding the rise in the price of basic consumer products. The newspaper did not report the interruption of electricity and telecommunication services in northern Ethiopia on time, but reported the issue after the service was restored without reporting the problem initially and waiting for it to be fixed.

Even in cases where the newspaper reports stories that have a large impact and are proximate to human interest, the message would either be misrepresented or deliberately distorted. These few cases are reported as news after their timeliness has passed, and they are arranged at the end of the news order.

According to one of the news editors of the newspaper who was interviewed in depth by the researcher, the idea that public questions and problem news are dealt with only if there is no other news that supports the work of the government was confirmed by the review of the news contents reported by the researcher.

Pavlik's (2001) research postulates that during instances of unusual incidents or deteriorating routine difficulties, a community's individuals may experience powerlessness and a lack of voice. In such circumstances, the media is expected to act in the interest of the public. However, when the media, particularly public media, fails to prioritize significant, impactful agendas and instead focuses on lesser, trivial matters, individuals may experience emotions of frustration, resentment, and despair. Therefore, it is highly probable that if the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, a public media outlet, shirks its responsibility of covering top-priority newsworthy events that

concern the public at large, similar grievances would emerge within the Ethiopian community, as is currently happening.

In December, amidst the turmoil of conflict, displacement, and famine in the Benshangul Gumz, Oromia, Amhara and Tigray regions, the front pages of the Addis Zemen newspaper proclaimed the Prosperity Party's efforts to elevate Ethiopia to a better stage.

Whilst the judiciary's autonomy faces questioning, the Addis Zemen newspaper's front page praised Morocco's commendation of Ethiopia's progressive developments.

During the same period, as wheat and teff prices spiked and retail stocks dwindled, Addis Zemen newspaper reported on the national project's benefits for the populace.

Despite UNICEF and other international institutions' dire assessments of Ethiopia's hunger crisis and the Chief Auditor's revelations of widespread corruption and theft, the Addis Zemen newspaper downplayed these issues, placing greater emphasis on less salient topics such as the Prime Minister's receipt of the African Leadership Award, the Prosperity Party's call to support the national consultation forum, the transformative impact of the peace accord, the use of combine harvesters for crop harvesting in Oromia and the harmful effects of water pollution.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, amidst rising prices of basic commodities, human rights violations, displacement and conflict, urged the government to maintain peace and order and highlighted the state's failure to safeguard the populace. It underscored that lives were lost, and people's movements limited due to the state's inability to safeguard them. The news prioritized by the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, therefore, paled in comparison to the aforementioned issues.

In essence, the *Addis Zemen newspaper's* news selection and prioritization principles placed greater emphasis on public relations and commendation than journalism, as stated by a veteran news reporter who opined that the Ethiopian Reporter Newspaper prioritized and covered influential news of public interest in a more professional manner.

When arranging the news, the priority criteria are not followed for posting on the front pages. The selection criteria of the Ethiopia Reporter is not adhered to when selecting and prioritizing news. Priority is given to news that supports the government's work and high-

ranking officials. As there is no shortage of such issues, they are typically arranged first, second, and third, and appear on the front page of the newspaper. Any significant issues that become news may be postponed if the house does not desire them. Interestingly, the inside pages of a newspaper may sometimes be more newsworthy than the front page. Conversely, other simple issues are given priority if they support the government, even if they are not newsworthy.

Therefore, based on the investigation of the researcher and the affirmation of the newspaper's news reporters and editors, it can be concluded that the *Addis Zemen newspaper's* news sequencing does not adhere to the principles of professional journalism and the news values of prioritization and selection. As a result, scholars assert that the failure of journalists to prioritize newsworthy events threatens the existence of professionalism. Sandmann et al. (2023) argue that deliberate omission of coverage of noteworthy events by journalists poses a challenge to maintaining journalistic impartiality, ultimately impairing media professionalism and the credibility of media organizations.

4.4 Factors in addressing newsworthy matters

4.4.1 Ownership impact

The coverage of top-priority events is influenced by various factors, as noted by McQuail (1997). News, as the author asserts, is a socially constructed phenomenon and not an objective reflection of current affairs. Media professionals, comprising journalists and editors, determine news content and how issues or events are portrayed. In essence, news is selected based on the discretion of these professionals and their respective organizations; it is not solely determined by the newsworthiness of the event or issue.

Thus, the journalistic principle that high news value events are more likely to be chosen as news is not always applicable. Conversely, events with little or no news value may receive coverage, contrary to journalism's newsworthiness principle. This is due to various reasons, and as Rich (2010) states, four main determinants of news prioritization are the media's controlling entity, the size and scope of the news organization, the nature of the ruling party or government, and the influence of advertisers or sponsors.

When asked about why top-priority news affecting people's lives is not prioritized or published on the front page, newspaper reporters and editors confirmed that pressure from the ruling party or government was to blame. Therefore, news content is shaped by media ownership, news organization size, government's or ruling party's nature, and subsidy or sponsor influence.

In our nation, the primary factor behind the coverage or omission of priority issues is that the Ethiopian Press Agency functions as a government-controlled media outlet. While the *Addis Zemen newspaper* is ostensibly a public media entity, it is effectively managed by the ruling party. Therefore, the selection of news stories and the prioritization of events are subject to government preferences. Notably, news items that fail to uphold the interests and policies of the governing body are typically not covered, even if they satisfy the criteria of newsworthiness. It is worth noting that many high-ranking officials and editors in the government media are members of the ruling party. Furthermore, recent appointments of board members to the Ethiopian Press Agency have been drawn from the ruling Prosperity Party, who prioritize their political agenda over professional considerations. Although the editor possesses the authority to accept or reject news items that are deemed trivial, they are not empowered to make decisions regarding top-priority issues. While editors are often viewed as the primary decision-makers in journalism, this is not the case for the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, where the final decision rests with the manager and their deputy.

According to one of the news editor who was extensively interviewed by the researcher, the priority given to news coverage is influenced by the ruling party's desire to control the selection of events. The government aims to receive unreserved praise for its policies and actions; hence, prioritizing news based on professional journalism principles and news value criteria is not feasible for the *Addis Zemen newspaper*.

The respondent confirmed the existence of ruling party officials in the newsroom, from the editor-in-chief to a few board members, and their involvement in the news selection and prioritization process. The respondent highlighted that priority issues are not selected based on traditional journalistic principles of news value criteria and news order. For instance, the head of the newsroom pre-arranges the issues to be covered every month.

It is evident that the government's control or management of the media influences the newspaper's news content.

Hallin et al. (2004) argue that party media ownership results in journalists adhering to the party line and the newspaper becoming a political program advocate and advertising agency. Although the author initially referred to the now-out-dated media ownership model, Ethiopia's ruling party still owns media such as the Ethiopian Press Agency, including the *Addis Zemen* newspaper and other print media. The editors and reporters interviewed by the researcher revealed that while the *Addis Zemen newspaper's* name is public, it is, in fact, owned by the government or the ruling party. Consequently, the newspaper's ownership by the ruling party is one reason why priority events are not usually covered.

4.4.2 Unprofessional intervention on editors

The editor of another newsroom informed the researcher that the news editor, who is considered the "king of the house" according to professional journalism principles, should decide on the priority of news issues to be reported. However, this procedure is not implemented in the *Addis Zemen newspaper*. The lack of critical authority of the news editor is one of the reasons why issues that affect the public and have a significant impact on society are not professionally reported and prioritized. The respondent confirmed that the ruling party's ownership of the media is the reason why the news editor lacks the power to decide.

The interviewed individual noted that in recent years there has been a heightened inclination of media authorities to curtail the professional autonomy of journalists, resulting in a decline in the quality of journalistic output. In this regard, the problem of professional influence is manifested in the content of the reports.

Officials from the organization would be better suited to address your inquiry. From a personal standpoint, as an editor, I am of the opinion that professional freedom is not afforded to reporters. The editor as well faces challenges in this regard. The work is also impacted by government bureaucracy, the will of authorities, and the decisions of media management. This is due to the fact that news is often approached from the perspective of national interests. It is not uncommon for outside individuals to influence the decision to run a news story. Consequently, I do not believe that senior reporters or editors are able to fulfil the

requirements of their profession. This issue is not unique to this particular media organization, as owners of various media outlets may have differing interests depending on their respective countries. The primary factor contributing to this phenomenon is the ownership of the media, which hinders news editors from utilizing their expertise to prioritize pertinent issues.

It is appropriate to examine other published news reports of the newspaper to corroborate the testimony of the respondents that the issue caused by the unprofessional intervention of government officials with the newspaper's editors and reporters can be clearly affirmed by the published contents.

Hence, within the six months of newspaper news reports considered as a sample in this dissertation, the news contents of January and February were scrutinized for the testimony of the respondents.

Among the key news topics, public issues, and crises that emerged in Ethiopia in March, there were various issues that Ethiopian human rights institutions and members of the House of People's Representatives reported, which are deemed impartial and independent.

Based on the information gathered by the researcher, the reports of these independent domestic and international human rights institutions, the statements and recommendations of the relevant federal and regional government institutions, as well as the issues that were highlighted and widely circulated in social media at the time, the following were the major issues in Ethiopia in March:

During this period, farmers in the Borena zone of the Oromia region were emitting distressing sounds as their animals perished due to drought. There was another crisis in the same zone caused by the change of name in East Borena. It was in March that TPLF was removed from the terrorism list. Complaints and protests were sparked due to the difficulties faced by residents displaced by the Sheger City project. Complaints and anger were also raised as people from the Amhara region on the entrance road were prevented from entering Addis Ababa by government security officials. The rise in the price of teff and wheat exacerbated the situation for the residents of the capital city.

It was also a month when internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Debre Berhan camp complained that they were starving because they had no food to eat. In Addis Ababa, there was a problem with tap water in many areas of the city. It was also in the month of March that there was a complaint that political parties were not allowed to hold a conference; there was a public grievance that public houses commonly known as Kebele houses were handed over to individuals over insufficient evidence in Addis Ababa; there was an increasing question of regionalism in Gurage Zone; and the residents of Wolaita protested that the government did not solve their problems.

The demolition of sheds belonging to small and micro enterprises in Addis Ababa prompted the workers to file a complaint against the government, leading to peaceful street demonstrations organized by the workers. However, despite the significance of these events, they were not covered in the *Addis Zemen newspaper* during the month of March.

Upon conducting interviews with the newsroom's editors and reporters, it was discovered that the authorities' decision to prioritize certain news was the reason why important matters were not reported in a timely manner. A comparison of the newspaper's news content with sample editions from March confirmed this idea.

During the month of March, when priority news events occurred, the *Addis Zemen newspaper* featured headlines about minor projects by the ruling party's PP and speeches by the Prime Minister. While there were several urgent issues that required immediate attention from the government, the newspaper chose to focus on less significant matters.

Examples of the newspaper's priority news reports during this time included the acceptance of Ahmed Ali Mirah as the 15th Sultan of Afar, the planting of wheat seeds on 1,626 hectares of land in the Sidama region during summer irrigation, and the interest of 20 investors in the sugar industry.

In contrast, the *Addis Zemen newspaper's* front page focused on future projects by Mayor Adanech Abebie, the construction of dams to utilize Ethiopia's water resources, religious institutions' fight against theft, and the importance of consumer participation in their rights. Philanthropists pledging to donate eyeballs also made the news.

While few in number, some top-priority news stories were selected and prioritized during this month. These included reports on the inflation of wheat and teff prices and their disappearance from the market, as well as a headline about 3.7 million people being exposed to poverty due to drought in the country. This news had a significant impact as it affected millions of people and was a matter of survival.

However, the majority of the news reports in the *Addis Zemen newspaper* fail to address the numerous problems facing Ethiopia, instead focusing on a country where residents lead lavish lifestyles.

During a time when farmers were in urgent need of assistance due to the death of their livestock from starvation, the *Addis Zemen newspaper* prioritized reporting on the unremarkable news that the younger generation had confirmed Ethiopia's prosperity. Similarly, when hundreds of thousands of individuals were displaced from their homes and left crying in the fields as a result of the establishment of Sheger City, the *Addis Zemen newspaper* chose to prioritize reporting on wheat seed sowing in the Sidama region through summer irrigation.

One of the key factors for prioritizing news is the potential impact of the event or the magnitude of the victims or participants. According to Thomas (2008), news events or angles that have a significant impact on readers, particularly in the context of major national incidents or tragedies, are essential. Newspapers often attempt to provide local perspectives by exploring how the news affects people in their communities. For instance, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of individuals from Sheger City and their grievances should have been given top priority in any news format. However, the *Addis Zemen newspaper* repeatedly chose to prioritize mundane issues that were still in the planning stages.

Therefore, the manner in which news was prioritized in the *Addis Zemen newspaper* during the specified period was unprofessional in comparison to the events that were unfolding.

During the month when there was a major public riot and crisis in the Walayta and Gurage zones in the South region, when individuals from the Amhara region were unable to enter Addis Ababa even for medical treatment and faced difficulties on the road, and when the price of teff and wheat was a significant issue for basic consumer products, the front pages of the newspaper featured relatively unremarkable news such as "let consumers actively participate in their rights,"

"number of eyeball donors has increased," "mayor repaired houses of the weak," "religious leaders should teach people to prevent corruption," and "building a dam is good for Ethiopia."

Compared to the events unfolding in the country during this given period, these issues were non-news and commonplace daily activities, resembling either slogans or advice.

4.4.3 Public relation role for the ruling party

According to the researchers' in-depth interviews with the newspaper's news editors and reporters, the majority of officials recruited to lead the Ethiopian Press Agency/*Addis Zemen newspaper* are members of the ruling party or staunch supporters of the party.

The respondents expressed that if journalism is not managed independently of political party members, and those running the media are political members of a certain party or loyal supporters, then the balance, which is the foundation of journalism, would be lost. This respondent's idea is consistent with Christine's (2006) statement on the negative impact on news content when journalists are not professionally independent. "The growth of publishing stories that are either non-issues for the newspaper's inhabitants or the increment of soft news items is commonly attributed to organizational objectives (Christiane, 2006)." This implies that the pressure exerted on journalists or editors to focus on specific issues to promote specific political or ideological goals would undermine the professionalism of journalism.

The respondents also noted that the primary source of professional obstacles in the news coverage of *Addis Zemen* was the media's owner, the ruling party. They explained that media ownership is the root cause of most challenges facing the journalism profession and that owner who seek to influence political developments exploit the media to steer societies in a specific direction for the benefit of their vested interests (Hardy, 2014).

Therefore, it is highly likely that the owners of the media, i.e., the ruling party, are the root cause of the absence of news that impacts the community at large on the front page of *Addis Zemen newspaper* or the next subsequent page.

4.4.4 Agenda setting factor

The news section editors interviewed by the researchers confirmed that one of the professional obstacles to prioritizing or covering *Addis Zemen* was the means of finding the news agenda.

One respondent noted that, especially after three or four years, most of the agendas for the news are selected by officials. However, he added that they are not allowed to follow the standards and selection methods of the news profession and report on what is actually happening in the country. The respondent confirmed that when they are deployed, calculating which issues support the government's policy and the actions of the ruling party is a significant professional obstacle.

To provide a comprehensive overview, encompassing the *Addis Zemen newspaper* and other periodicals affiliated with the organization, it has become increasingly apparent that leaders are consistently instigating agendas in recent times. In contrast, several years ago, editors and reporters would occasionally deliberate on news issues, irrespective of whether they aligned with the officials' agenda. Notably, this practice has since been abolished. Subsequently, the newspaper's officials will communicate the agenda for the week or month, and any suggestions, press releases, or news planning will adhere to the guidelines established by the officials. Presently, we receive news agendas from various institutions that submit a recommendation letter from the government, private organizations, or public relations experts, specifying the date and location of the event. We, in turn, report on events that we believe would raise issues related to the government's policy and enforcement position. Private organizations are of minimal concern to us. Planning or project news is also feasible, albeit restricted to the predetermined topic.

Another journalist with a prominent position within the news department was consulted by the researcher. According to this source, the primary factor influencing the reporting or omission of priority news items in the *Addis Zemen newspaper* is the failure to adhere to professional standards of news prioritization and selection.

The determination of which news events or issues are given priority in our newspaper, resulting in them being published as the first news or not published at all, rests with the managerial staff. The professional prioritization of news has not been implemented nor is it anticipated at our institution. In general, news agendas in *Addis Zemen* or as part of the Ethiopia Press Agency are formulated based on the direction provided during editorial discussions in the morning. Reporters then divide and work on the agenda as it stands. Our responsibility is to identify the sources that can provide us with explanations and information

regarding the given issue. This is the modus operandi of our work. Suggestions received via phone from government organizations may also serve as a point of departure. The main reason behind this is the political decision of the authorities appointed to enforce the government's policies and support its actions.

Hence, based on the testimony of the surveyed individuals, it can be reasonably inferred that the ownership by the state has had an adverse effect on the news coverage of the *Addis Zemen* newspaper. This assertion is consonant with the views of experts in the field such as Dragomir (2021). As per Dragomir (2021), the degree of influence that direct financial subsidies wield over media coverage is contingent on the type of political regime and governance structure in place. In a well-functioning political system, providing subsidies to print media can bolster their capacity and uphold editorial autonomy. However, in nations with weak legal frameworks, such subsidies may impede media coverage by stifling diverse viewpoints and perspectives.

4.5 Challenges in Reporting High-Priority News

4.5.1 Absence of professionalism

The present study sought to address the following inquiry: What are the impediments confronted by news editors and reporters of the *Addis Zemen newspaper* when producing professional reports on news prioritization and selection?

As per the responses provided by the newspaper's news editors and seasoned reporters who were interviewed on the professional hurdles encountered in news coverage by the newly-established newspaper, it was confirmed that the absence of a professional journalistic approach is attributed to the fact that experts are not required to adhere to professional standards. Instead, the requisite is to remain loyal to the ruling party and prioritize news items that reflect a pro-government stance.

The respondents made it clear that the lack of a professional news production process, which involves selecting news based solely on its news value and news element criteria, giving the news editor the professional freedom to edit the news in a professional manner, avoiding prior constraints or censorship, or eliminating pre-screening of the news, is a major impediment to their professional work.

In the view of the newspaper's news editors and reporters who were interviewed by the researcher, *Addis Zemen newspaper* has not been engaging in professional journalistic work but rather in public relations activities.

Upon summarizing the professional hurdles cited by the respondents in news prioritization and coverage, it was found that firstly, a professional obstacle encountered in news production and organization is that news is not selected or prioritized based on news value or criteria, but rather by managers' orders. This raises the question of what would happen if the news agenda set by the head of the news department meets the criteria of newsworthiness or if it is chosen based on news selection criteria. However, in the past (3 or 4 years ago), news reports that were deemed newsworthy by reporters were occasionally published even if they were not part of the chief's orders and plans. Nevertheless, the respondents explained that such professional practices no longer exist, and news selection criteria are no longer applicable. Secondly, the newspaper's newsroom editors and reporters, who were interviewed in-depth by the researcher, stated that the professional obstacle they aim to overcome is the restriction to specific issues designated or assigned to them by their leaders. The respondents explained that they cannot produce news without the instructions given to them by the head of the department or even if there is a matter of great public interest and a high-impact newsworthy event other than the one on which they are ordered to work.

The findings presented by the respondents suggest that the process of setting agenda and recruitment of individuals for news reporting in *Addis Zemen newspaper* lack professionalism and impartiality. This, in turn, poses a challenge for prioritizing and reporting news in a professional manner.

During the research, one of the editors from the news section of the newspaper was interviewed extensively. The editor disclosed that the inability to adhere to scientific news selection criteria or a chronological order is due to the management's reluctance to allow the reporting of public issues. This presents a significant professional obstacle for the news section.

The newspaper primarily focuses on political issues and tends to separate them from economic concerns. Rarely are core societal issues that affect the heartbeat, problems, and living conditions of the populace reported. The Prime Minister frequently appears on the front

page of the newspaper, with issues he rises being given prominence. Next to political matters, significant economic issues are also given news coverage. Despite being considered a public media, the newspaper only occasionally covers questions of the majority of society, placing them at the third level and not on the front page.

4.5.2. Selective reporting on achievements

One additional challenge encountered by the editors and reporters who responded pertains to news coverage, specifically, the fact that the *Addis Zemen newspaper* restricts their ability to report on any issue of significance beyond the government's successes.

In Ethiopia, the main reason for the selective coverage or non-coverage of priority issues is the fact that the Ethiopian Press Agency is a government media, with the *Addis Zemen newspaper* being managed under its purview. Although it is regarded as a public media, the ruling party has practical control over it. Consequently, the government determines priority events when selecting news stories. If news stories do not align with the work and policies of the King, they will not receive coverage, even if they meet the criteria of being newsworthy. Most of the time, chief editors and officials of not only the *Addis Zemen newspaper* but also other government media are members of the ruling party. Recently, some of the board members of the Ethiopian Press Agency were recruited from the ruling Prosperity Party, with their approach being political rather than professional. Editors may decide whether to accept or discard light news, but they do not have the authority to decide whether top-priority news should be passed or not. In the *Addis Zemen Newspaper*, the manager and his deputy are the decision-makers.

As per the confirmation of the respondent, urgent major events that affect people's lives are not typically selected and prioritized as news in the *Addis Zemen newspaper*. Even if such events are covered, they are often reported after their relevance has passed or after the news value of the issue has diminished.

According to the respondent, had the matter been made public, the concerned government body could have responded to it immediately. However, the *Addis Zemen newspaper's* tendency to only report on the successful work of the government and the speeches of officials, while disregarding other problems, is a professional obstacle. The respondent further remarked that

when a significant national issue arises, the newspaper remains silent for a prolonged period and only reports on it after it has been resolved. This approach is unprofessional and hampers the quality of news coverage.

The respondent revealed that editors and reporters are not authorized to determine the news agenda. Instead, the editor-in-chief or other higher officials of the *Addis Zemen newspaper* determine what agendas should be selected. This aligns with the proponents of the agenda-setting theory, which posits that the mass media decides the salient topics for public discourse (Weaver, 2007).

Rich (2010) suggests that in the pursuit of their agenda, the media may publish false news via deliberate distortion of facts, exaggerations, and sensationalism, which closely resembles lies. The media's adherence to the agenda-setting theory is responsible for this. Furthermore, the media may choose not to cover crucial news items if they do not align with their agenda.

From Rich's argument, it can be inferred that the issues associated with the agenda-setting theory mentioned above have an adverse impact on the news content of the *Addis Zemen newspaper*.

Another respondent affirmed that reporting news solely following the success of the government or only when work is thought to have been accomplished by the government, as well as not adhering to professional news selection criteria, is a professional obstacle for the news coverage of the new era newspaper.

Regarding simple or soft cases, the editor may exercise discretion. However, when it comes to top-priority matters, the editor does not have the authority to decide whether to publish or not. Despite the conventional belief in journalism that editors are content decision-makers, such power does not exist for editors in the *Addis Zemen Newspaper*. The manager and his deputy are the decision-makers.

One of the issues raised by the news editors and reporters of the *Addis Zemen newspaper* pertains to the impediments encountered while conducting news coverage. Specifically, the lack of inclusion of both experienced news editors and reporters in editorial meetings is a significant professional hurdle. This is due to the fact that editors are commonly regarded as the ultimate decision-makers within the newsroom or media house, exerting control over the content of news

and other programs. Hence, their exclusion from editorial meetings undermines their supposed professional authority.

4.5.3 Exclusive Editorial meeting nature

When asked about the involvement of experienced journalists and editors of the *Addis Zemen newspaper* in editorial meetings, Respondent 1 stated that they had previously participated four to five years ago, but no longer does so.

Editors used to participate in editorial meetings in the past, but currently, only the editor in chief, who leads the department, attends. This is the current procedure.

The additional participant, a seasoned journalist affiliated with the newspaper, conveyed that individuals who are editors or journalists are precluded from engaging in the editorial colloquy, barring the individual who holds responsibility for the department.

The issue of whether the morning's discussed topics were reported according to the agreement is a highly debated and controversial topic. Additionally, there exists a procedure for replacing news without the consent or knowledge of the journalist or editor, leading to further disputes. This matter is further complicated by the argument that journalists and editors should have been informed of any changes to their work.

The researcher's interviews with other news editors and highly seasoned journalists corroborated the absence of any established custom of editorial participation among their ranks.

Journalists and editors are not typically involved in editorial meetings. Instead, the editor-in-chief of each sector is responsible for participating in these meetings. This is a change from previous practices, which involved the participation of senior journalists and editors.

As per medical science, the nurse is considered the most crucial professional in healthcare institutions, while the editor is believed to be the most important individual or "king" of media institutions (Hardy, 2014). In journalism, the editor is bestowed with the authority to approve news content, reject it, and determine whether it will be published or not. Except for the editor, other officials in charge of the news department or any other department of the media institution do not have the power to decide on broadcasted or published news content, except for coordinating and managing administrative matters.

Therefore, the purpose of the editorial meeting is to select news or program contents and determine the operation of the news to be covered. Thus, journalists, especially editors, must participate in the professional principle of journalism. The involvement of editors and reporters in editorial meetings is essential because they deal with the public and follow daily news events (Rich, 2010). The head of the newsroom or program department usually spends most of their time on administrative meetings and tasks. Therefore, editors and reporters are more knowledgeable about news content issues and are more proximate to the public than the department head or editor-in-chief.

It is crucial for editors and experienced journalists to participate in the editorial meetings of *Addis Zemen newspaper*. Respondents who were asked by the researcher confirmed that not attending the editorial meeting is one of their professional obstacles because it does not allow them to present their opinions on the selection of current issues and news agendas. According to the respondent, one of the reasons for the lack of timeliness of the newspaper's news content and the fact that many of them do not meet the criteria of news is that editors and journalists do not participate in editorial meetings.

The above argument of *Addis Zemen newspaper's* editors and reporters is supported by field scholars such as Pavelka (2014). According to Pavelka (2014), having an editorial meeting without editors or journalists is like having a ministerial meeting without ministers. He argues that the king in the newsroom, particularly the editor, must participate in the editorial meeting. However, this core assignment has not been applied to *Addis Zemen newspaper*, which is a professional hurdle.

4.5.4 Absence of professional freedom of editors

Another professional obstacle mentioned by the responding journalists is the problem associated with the lack of independence of editors during news editing in the news coverage of *Addis Zemen newspaper*.

As per the participants' feedback, news editors lack the power to sanction and prioritize crucial cases. They are typically mandated to seek approval from the department head. Consequently, this poses a significant professional challenge in their line of work.

The respondents highlighted another predicament that journalists face during news editing. While attending an event or a meeting and submitting a report, the head of the department - who is often confined to the office - exerts pressure to manipulate the news. This is instead of relying on the journalist's first-hand experience.

The third hindrance to newspaper news coverage in relation to news editing is the issue of distortion or misrepresentation of the primary message. This is due to multiple cuts during the editing process.

According to the respondents, news editors have no autonomy to dictate news topics or to prioritize and select based on professional journalism independently.

The first respondent asserts that the editors of the *Addis Zemen newspaper* news section are not granted the authority to determine the publication of news.

Editors do not have the authority to pass or reject news that is deemed to be of high priority or hard news. Although it is widely believed that editors are responsible for deciding on content, this is not the case at *Addis Zemen newspaper*. Instead, ultimate decision-making authority lies with the chief executive officer and his deputy.

The second respondent concurs with the first respondent's opinion regarding the editors' jurisdiction.

Editors do not have complete autonomy over all news matters. They may choose to pass or discard news stories that are deemed to be of common or simple nature. However, it is only in rare cases where the criticality of an editor's role is evident.

Similarly, the third respondent also supports the contentions made by the first and second respondents regarding the lack of authority granted to news editors at the *Addis Zemen newspaper* in terms of determining the prioritization and selection of news.

As an organization, officials are better suited to answer questions regarding professional freedom. From a personal perspective as an editor, it is my opinion that reporters lack professional freedom. This is due in part to government bureaucracy, the will of authorities, and management decisions within media institutions. News must be reported in the interest of

the country, which can result in external individuals influencing the decision to pass or reject news. Therefore, I do not believe that editors or senior reporters are able to fully carry out their professional duties. This is not unique to our media organization but is a common issue in media ownership, which can prevent editors from prioritizing important issues based on their expertise.

Likewise, the fourth respondent aligns with the viewpoints expressed by the previous two respondents concerning the role of news editors at the *Addis Zemen newspaper* in prioritizing and selecting news headlines.

My answer to your question about whether editors can pass or discard news on their own authority is that they cannot. It is decided in a group meeting whether certain news should be made, if it is made, how it should be shaped, and when it should be reported. In rare cases, the editor may pass them over at his own discretion. But I personally don't think this shows the importance of the editor. In my view, the importance of editors depends on the issue. As far as I know, for example, if it is the Prime Minister's or ministers' report on national affairs, war, etc., they will not be the ones to decide on it. Other than that, in smaller there is a lack of clarity in the process of deciding whether news should be approved or rejected. Typically, experienced journalists will engage with the editor-in-chief before proceeding. The journalist may report on events attended throughout the day, and the editor-in-chief will provide direction on how to angle the story. In cases where the news is deemed to be of a lesser priority, the editor-in-chief may discard or approve it at their discretion.

The response provided by news editors and journalists unambiguously indicated that a notable professional predicament pertaining to the news coverage of *Addis Zemen newspaper* is the editors' inability to proficiently edit news content.

4.5.5 Distorting in the name of editing

Furthermore, the respondents identified another professional hurdle associated with news editing, as they highlighted that the content tends to be altered when subjected to editing. This assertion was made by one of the respondents who underwent an in-depth interview with the researcher.

While engaging in the process of editing news within our newspaper the primary aspect that undergoes revision is the content. What precisely does this signify? As you are aware, Addis Zemen newspaper adheres to its own editorial policy. Though referred to as public media, it can be construed as government media. When news of a special nature emerges, it is promptly deemed perilous and consequently omitted. More specifically, it is edited and disseminated in a manner that aligns with the preferences of *Addis Zemen newspapers*. On occasion, it would be advantageous if news items of greater significance, which directly concern the public's welfare, were presented. However, these news items are meticulously modified, either by omitting certain details or by excluding them entirely. This approach is flawed, as the publication of such news would have fulfilled the criteria of public interest or influence, thereby capturing the attention of readers. Alternatively, it would have been deemed newsworthy, prompting readers to take notice. Consequently, by exposing or highlighting these news items, the likelihood of finding a resolution is heightened.

Among the responses provided by the participants, the assertion that "the reporting of even slightly unusual news is curtailed due to its perceived danger" is a clear indication of the distorted presentation of news content. In journalism, news refers to a distinct and influential occurrence of human interest. However, the respondent's statement contradicts this notion. In the case of the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, any such unique occurrences or peculiar events are promptly discarded or trimmed. As explained by the respondent, the newspaper's news content is distorted and edited unprofessionally due to the policy of supporting and appreciating the government that the newspaper endorses.

This issue is, without doubt, a major roadblock to news coverage and contradicts the fundamental principles of prioritizing and selecting news based on its newsworthiness. As per Rich (2010), noteworthy events include occurrences that deviate from the norm, unusual happenings, individuals engaging in exceptional pursuits, and issues of a peculiar or uncommon nature.

Another professional obstacle to distorting news content that arises during newspaper editing is the presentation of a secondary issue as the primary one or vice versa, or the introduction of an issue not mentioned at the scene as the central agenda. The respondent in this regard is a

professional from the newspaper's news department who was thoroughly interviewed by the researcher.

There is a possibility of modifications in the substance both prior to and subsequent to the editing of a news article in the esteemed *Addis Zemen newspaper*. The alteration in content implies that the proposed focal point of the event will be modified, thereby bringing forth additional repercussions. To illustrate, if the subject matter under discussion during a meeting pertains to the cost of living, our news report will convey that the government has endeavoured to regulate the cost of living. This pertains to the alteration of the content of the news or the distortion of the message. Consequently, a disparity will exist between the state prior to and after the editing of a news article. However, if the message of the conversation aligns with the favour of the monarch, it shall be presented without any alterations to the content or distortion of the message.

The issue at hand concerns the act of undermining the primary matter and misrepresenting the news report through the emphasis or creation of an alternative concept that is not news-related and was not originally mentioned. This, undoubtedly, undermines one of the fundamental principles of news, namely accuracy. Consequently, the actions of *Addis Zemen newspaper* have compromised the integrity of news making as a profession.

According to the respondents, one of the obstacles faced by journalists in news coverage related to editing is the distortion of news messages, often due to self-censorship. This is precisely what the officials of *Addis Zemen newspaper* is seeking, and is therefore a significant impediment to professional news coverage.

By the way, apart from the editors and managers, there exist certain journalists who distort the report's content by claiming it aligns with the institution's desires. This is problematic as a reporter would come with a different perspective than the event or issue that happened. However, it is the editorial policy that primarily causes the distortion of the report's content. Journalists are well aware of this policy and adhere to it during their work, which results in alterations to the content before and after editing. The prioritization of this newsletter lies in producing a report that serves the interests of the state. This is the rationale behind it.

During the modern age of news coverage, journalists encounter a notable professional challenge regarding the potential distortion of news content. This issue arises when reporters deviate from accurately relaying events as they occurred, opting instead to impose their own interpretation by stating "this is what happened" rather than reporting what was directly witnessed during their on-site investigation. It is crucial that journalists remain vigilant in their efforts to accurately report events and relay information to the public.

The individual most well-informed on the subject matter, surpassing all others, is the journalist who attended the said event or meeting. It is the reporter who possesses comprehensive knowledge regarding the circumstances and the prevailing ambiance. However, the superior of the news department unduly influences the reporter assigned to cover the news, operating within the newspaper's news division. The head of the newsroom commanded the journalist to transcribe the contents of my current discourse. Additionally, the journalist was instructed to fabricate an event that did not transpire on-site or to present an idea that was not raised during the meeting. It appears that it was not the journalist who was present at the scene, but rather the head of the department and the news editors. The journalist assigned to cover the news is privy to the conversations that took place; they are not a mere body confined to an office. This predicament is highly prevalent. Regrettably, this is erroneous. Consequently, the conclusion to be drawn from this is that the journalist's proficiency also plays a significant role in rectifying and amending the news. Certain journalists, without contesting the orders they receive, fabricate events or statements that never transpired. They willingly distort the news as instructed. As relayed by a reporter, since this statement was not made, I should not report this news. However, journalists who raise such arguments find their news either unreported or discarded.

The respondent's statement indicated that the editor in chief, who was not physically present at the scene, frequently alters news reports to appear as though he was present. This suggests that within the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, there are editors in chief that use news coverage as a guide for writing novels. This practice poses a significant professional challenge to news coverage.

When the editor or editor in chief disregards the journalists' prioritization and angle methods from those present at the scene, it creates a major professional obstacle for the newspaper. The respondents' responses suggest that editors intentionally distort news content until the message loses its original meaning to communicate homogenous messages throughout the country.

However, this intention to homogenize messages through systemic state structure has an unfavourable impact on a country's democracy (Harrison, 2013). In situations where non-democratic regimes control the media, state ownership of the environment adversely affects the selection and prioritization of news and other media formats (Harrison, 2013). The dominance of state ownership leads to homogenization, where newspapers owned by the state reach a consensus on newsworthiness, adopt collective views, and assume similar styles (Harrison, 2013).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The present chapter showcases the outcomes and inferences derived from research that validate the notion of how matters of public interest are ranked and afforded coverage in the government-run *Addis Zemen newspaper*.

In this investigation, the news wing of the Ethiopian Press Agency's *Addis Zemen newspaper*, which is one of the media entities supervised or funded by the government, was scrutinized. The participants, who were editors and experienced reporters from the newsroom, were chosen purposively. A selection of newspaper publications were intentionally examined to observe the news content. The responses of the participants and the content news of the newspaper samples underwent qualitative analysis. The data gathered in this manner was scrutinized using the principles of professional journalism and the criteria for selecting and prioritizing news.

5.2 Summary of findings

The findings of this study are summarized based on the statement of the problem presented in chapter one.

According to the principle of journalistic news selection and prioritization criteria, how top priority public interest issues are prioritized in *Addis Zemen newspaper* to make news?

All four participants who underwent in-depth interviews with the researcher confirmed that the news department of the *Addis Zemen newspaper* does not accord priority to issues of public interest that have a direct impact on the lives of citizens. The participants affirmed the absence of a systematic procedure for selecting issues of public interest that would qualify as news, based on the criteria of scientific news selection. The participants attested that, in instances where the newspaper covers or prioritizes issues that could potentially impact society en masse, according to the criteria of news selection, the content of the news is either distorted or out-dated. On occasion, when government officials fail to deliver speeches that laud the activities of the state, issues that are of public interest and concern may be delivered as news with deliberate distortions, aided by expert explanations after the news has lost its timeliness.

All of the four respondents interviewed in depth for the *Addis Zemen newspaper* confirmed that news is prioritized based on the extent to which it supports the actions and policies of the government. Nonetheless, the respondents affirmed that the *Addis Zemen newspaper* do not follow the criteria and principles of prioritizing news as per the principles of professional journalism. The respondents further confirmed that the newspaper mainly focuses on successful activities of the king and speeches of officials, with no implementation of the function of creating news. The survey results of the newspaper sample print were also found to be associated with the opinion of the respondents.

The participants confirmed that the primary reason for neglecting crucial events with high news value is the presence of a constraining system that hinders journalists from executing their duties professionally based on the criteria of news selection and prioritization. It was also verified that the newspaper's objective is to support the government's policies. The respondents attested that the news segment of *Addis Zemen newspaper* and its higher-ups were inclined to exclusively publish content that glorifies the government's function. Additionally, the outcomes of the newspaper's sample print survey corresponded with the perspectives of the participants.

The challenges of journalistic autonomy, the encroachment of news department officials on reporters and the resultant pressure to manipulate news content, the inadequate capacity of news editors to independently edit news items, and the absence of past practices where editors participated in editorial meetings except for the news department leader, all contribute to the professional impediments identified by the respondents. The outcomes of the print survey conducted on the *Addis Zemen newspaper* corroborate the opinions expressed by the respondents.

5.3 Conclusion

Based on the findings that were revealed, the ensuing comprehensive conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, it was discovered that all the respondents possess a profound comprehension of the newspaper's approach to prioritizing and reporting public interest issues that affect the lives of citizens. The newspaper was found to not place priority on public-interest issues that impact citizens' lives. The outcomes of the newspaper's sample publication survey also validate the respondents' opinions.

Secondly, the responses gathered from all the participants indicate that *Addis Zemen newspaper* does not adhere to professional journalism principles and professional news selection criteria when selecting news. The results of the newspaper's sample print survey support this notion.

Thirdly, from the respondents' feedback, it was ascertained that there are impediments to covering top priority events, namely a restrictive system that dampens journalistic initiative and professional news prioritization and selection criteria. Respondents confirm that journalists were given a job description that requires them to support the government's policy direction upon being hired by the Agency. The results of the newspaper's sample print survey aligned with the respondents' views.

Fourthly, it can be inferred from the respondents' feedback that there are professional obstacles to the news coverage of the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, such as the lack of professional independence of journalists, newsroom officials interfering with reporters, pressuring them to distort news content, and news editors' inability to edit news by their own professional discretion. Furthermore, the former practice of editors participating in editorial meetings, except for the individual who leads the newsroom, is absent. The results of the newspaper's sample print survey were consistent with the respondents' opinions.

Fifthly, the hypothesis that media do not mirror the reality and they give more space and prominence for certain stories over others by reporting frequently and by creating importance around them was proved.

5.4 Recommendations

In terms of the prioritization and selection of public interest issues that impact the lives of citizens, and in the context of adhering to the principles of professional journalism and professional news selection criteria, it has been determined that the *Addis Zemen newspaper* has not acted in a professional manner. This can be attributed to a lack of government policy that encourages journalists to conduct their assignments with professionalism, in accordance with news prioritization and selection criteria that are independent of the ruling party's desires. Additionally, the pressure exerted by newsroom officials to distort news content, as well as the inability of news editors to professionally edit news on their own, and the absence of previous

practice of editors participating in editorial meetings have been identified as professional obstacles to prioritizing issues and producing news, as revealed by this study.

Therefore, the following recommendations are hereby made.

Firstly, the supervisory board chairpersons and members of the Ethiopian Press Agency are urged to implement necessary measures that will enhance the capacity of the news section of the *Addis Zemen newspaper* to independently prioritize and report on issues of public interest that are impactful to the lives of citizens. Additionally, they are advised to adhere to the principles of professional journalism and professional news selection criteria, while allowing journalists the freedom to exercise their professional autonomy. It is crucial that they prevent news department officials from interfering with reporters and applying undue pressure on news content. Furthermore, it is essential that they ensure that news editors are permitted to carry out news editing in their professional capacity without any form of interference. To achieve this, the newsroom officials should refrain from any attempts to influence news content and allow editors to participate in editorial meetings, as was the norm a few years ago.

Secondly, the *Addis Zemen newspaper* appears to be deviating from the prescribed practice of "Public media under the control and management of the government must work for the public good by handling various types of ideas," as outlined in Article 29 No. 5 of the Ethiopian Constitution, which serves as the highest legal document in the country. Consequently, it is imperative that the House of Peoples Representatives should exert pressure on the *Addis Zemen newspaper* to rectify this dearth of accountability.

Thirdly, the Ethiopian Media Authority, established with the aim of monitoring and enhancing capacity to ensure that the media in the nation fulfil their pluralistic and responsible duties, should provide support and oversight for the news section of *Addis Zemen newspaper*, as it appears that the news department of the paper is currently falling short of its obligations.

Fourthly, it is recommended that the researchers embark on an additional investigation to corroborate whether the remaining columns of the *Addis Zemen newspaper*, aside from its news segment, adhere to the principles of scientific journalistic and professional news selection and prioritization, while also tackling significant concerns that impact the populace.

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<https://in.indeed.com/career-development/agenda-setting-theory>

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Interview questions for news reporters

1. How do you get news for your station?
2. How do you choose news for your story among multiple items?
3. Who is the decision maker when you select items for your news story?
4. For what kind of items you are allowed to select news story by your own?
5. Tell me how your organization set agenda for news story to be covered?
6. What kinds of agendas are being set mostly by your immediate editor or editor- in chief?
7. How do you make sure that about those agendas been set by your immediate manager go in line with public interest journalism?
8. Tell me what are your/ your organization basic criteria to select an issue/event to make news?
9. How do you compare the content of your news before they got edited by the editor and after editing by your editor?
10. How often and how much your editor change/distort/ the actual meaning of your news?
11. What are the hurdles in covering public interest issues in your news story?
12. What are the factors that hinder you from acting as professional news reporter?
13. Do you believe that public interest issues that touch lives of the large public are often covered in your news? How?
14. Do you agree that news worthiness and other core principles of professional journalism are practiced in your organization when you make news? How?

Appendix 2: Interview questions for news editors

1. What types of issues are mostly included in your news story?
2. What are the contents of your project news/pre planed news?
3. Tell me about your attention/focus when you edit news items?
4. Which types of stories are favourable for your news and which ones are often discarded?
5. How Addis Zemen newspaper report on public interest issues that touches life of citizenry?
6. How professional Addis Zemen Newspaper is in prioritizing news items?
7. What are the determining factors in covering top priority events?
8. What are the professional hurdles in Addis Zemen Newspaper in covering news?
9. What are the ideas frequently debated in your regular editorial meeting ?
10. Where do you get the agendas for your news story?
11. Which entities/individuals propose agendas for your news story?
12. What are the factors that hinder you from acting as professional news reporter?
13. Do you believe that public interest issues that touch lives of the large public are often covered in your news? How?
14. Do you agree that news worthiness and other core principles of professional journalism are practiced in your organization when you make news? How?

Appendix 3: Extracted Themes by in-depth interview from Addis Zemen news paper’s news editors and senior news reporters

Extracting Themes	Respondent1		Respondent2		Respondent3		Respondent4	
	Time	Date	Time	Date	Time	Date	Time	Date
Ignoring public concern	7 th min	Jul9/2023	5 th min	Jul9/2023	7 th min	Jul 11/2023	8 th min	Jul17/2023
Loyalty rather than professionalism	19 th min	Jul9/2023	10 th min	Jul9/2023	16 th min	Jul11/2023	14 th min	Jul17/2023
Discrediting news value	34 th min	Jul9/2023	17 th min	Jul9/2023	19 th min	Jul11/2023	25 th min	Jul17/2023
Intervention on journalists	39 th min	Jul9/2023	19 th min	Jul9/2023	22 th min	Jul 11/2023	28 th min	Jul17/2023
Novel writing in the name of editing	40 th min	Jul9/2023	28 th min	Jul9/2023	22 th min	Jul11/2023	31 th min	Jul17/2023
Intentional distortion	44 th min	Jul9/2023	33 th min	Jul9/2023	31 th min	Jul 11/2023	35 th min	Jul17/2023
Managerial rule influence	49 th min	Jul9/2023	42 th min	Jul9/2023	33 th min	Jul 11/2023	38 th min	Jul17/2023

Appendix 4: Themes of sample news extracted from six months publications of Addis Zemen news paper

Themes extracted from the Newspaper’s decisions	Number of News under this theme taken from the sample period(Oct/2022-March/2023)
Success of Prosperous party	26
Ethiopia’s economic progress	18
Wheat production	12
Park development	21
Students taking exam	07
Ethiopian military’s victory	19
Other nation Appraisal Ethiopian progress	09
The prime minister’s tour	24
Higher official gift to the poor	17
Planting trees	22
Harvesting crop	10
Voluntary works	15

Appendix 5: Observational Lists

5.1 Top priority newsworthy events during the sample period

(Gathered from domestic and international human right institutions, various local and international media, Ethiopian federal and regional government offices and researcher's observation)

Themes Extracted from newsworthy events of the sample period	Coded news
High cost of living	1,14,25,37,49,61,71
Human rights violation	2,16,33,41,53,71,75
Emergency aid demand	3,18,35,43,52,70,76
Internal displacement	4,8,34,48,50,69,77
Civilian attack by un identified gun men	5,17,36,47,51,68,78
Popular demonstration	6,19,32,46,56,67,79
Service demand	7,22,31,42,58,60,66,80
Parliament debate	10,21,30,44,57,65,81
Violation of rule of law	13,23,28,45,55,64,73
Sovereignty and diplomacy	12,24,27,38,54,63,82
Intervention on secularism	11,20,29,40,49,62,74,83
Drought and endemic	9,15,26,39,48,59,72,84

5.2 Website and you tube observational list source

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/abiys-ethiopia-press-freedom-flourished-then-fear-returned-2021-05-28/>

<https://apnews.com/article/africa-cape-town-media-journalists-south-africa-209e18215f1f43ad4c80ea82f2636cfc>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/ethiopians-in-social-media-blackout-for-second-month/>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13349401>

<https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/mrdira-sustainability-index-africa-2008-ethiopian.pdf>

<https://rsf.org/en/country/ethiopia>

<https://apnews.com/article/africa-cape-town-media-journalists-south-africa-209e18215f1f43ad4c80ea82f2636cfc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHf-UhJnGE&t=495s>