



**Journalistic Ethics in the Newsroom: The  
Case of the Amhara Mass Media Agency**

**Wolelaw Eshetu**

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**Examiner** \_\_\_\_\_ **signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Examiner** \_\_\_\_\_ **signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Advisor** \_\_\_\_\_ **signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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Chair of Department or Graduate Programme Coordinator

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Journalistic Ethics in the Newsroom: The Case of the Amhara Mass Media Agency**

**Wolelaw Eshetu**

**Addis Ababa University, 2012**

Journalistic ethics is a key issue of concern among not only journalists and journalism educators but also the general public, and particularly so in a transitional society. So, in the time of information society, getting ethical journalists in all media house is indispensable for the people to exercise the right to know the truth. As one can easily guess, truth or information is a power and gives people a big power. This power can transform the society in to a new level of development. Ethical journalists are the one who facilitate this power to be used by the people. When journalists become unable to accomplish this role, the society will lose the trusts and label journalists or the profession as a whole untrustworthy and dishonesty. However, the media have the responsibility of serving the people by providing fair, balanced and accurate stories in a responsible manner. So, this thesis aims at exploring the state of journalistic ethics in the newsroom of the Amhara mass media agency. In the newsroom, journalists (reporters) do not give due attention to journalistic ethical principles needed in the newsroom. That some people are heard complaining about journalistic ethics are violated and affected by journalist own biases, personal interest, subjective judgments and the like are the main factors of it. Thus, ethical issues and news credibility may be neglected. So, the researcher tries to identify ethical problems, observed in the newsroom in the case of the Amhara mass media agency. The study is conducted in Amhara mass media agency's newsroom. The researcher gathered data through individual in-depth interview and focus group discussion with Amhara mass media newsroom's editors and reporters (journalists) respectively. Moreover, to attain the research objective easily and reach at valid findings, the study tries to use the researcher's own observation. The results show that the major respondents have said; fairness and balanced reporting, objectivity, social responsibility and conflicts of interest are affected by different ways in the newsroom. In this particular research topic the researchers also able to find many details for internal and external factors of journalists that influence ethical decision making process in the newsroom. Those are: individual, small group (editors, managers, or colleagues), organizations, professional problems, economic factors, psychological factors, and self-censorship of journalists. Based on the finding, therefore, the researcher recommends the media stakeholders to work more on professional journalistic ethics, confident, responsible and skilled journalists are needed in the newsroom.

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## Table of Content

**content**  
**page**

### CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Background of the Study .....	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem .....	2
1.3. Objectives of the Study.....	4
1.3.1. General Objective .....	4
1.3.2. Specific Objectives of the Study.....	4
1.4 Research Questions .....	5
1.5. Significant of the study.....	5
1.6 Scope of the Study.....	6
1.7 Organization of the Study .....	6

### CHAPTER TWO

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	7
2.1 Ethics .....	7
2.2 Media Theories .....	8
2.2.1. Social Responsibility .....	8
2.2.2 The Libertarian View .....	9
2.2.3. The Appeal Of Utilitarianism .....	10
2.2.4. The Ethics Of Egalitarianism.....	10
2.2.5 The Rise Of Relativism.....	12
2.3 Ethical Theories in Moral Reasoning .....	13
2.3.1 Teleological (Consequence-Based) Theories .....	13

2.3.2 Deontological (Duty-Based) Theories.....	15
2.3.3 Virtue Theories .....	16
2.4 Journalistic Ethics.....	18
2.5 Significance of Code of Ethics for Journalists.....	20
2.6 List of Journalistic Ethics .....	24
2.6.1. Responsibilities of Journalists .....	24
2.6.2 Fairness .....	25
2.6.2.1. Unfair and Unbalanced Reporting.....	27
2.6.2.2 Factors That Affect Journalists To Write Unfair And Unbalanced Reports.....	28
2.6.3. Objectivity .....	29
2.6.4 Conflicts Of Interest .....	33
2.6.4.1. Factors of Conflicts Of Interest That.....	36
2.7. The major factors of journalist that influence ethical decision	
Making process in the news room .....	38
2.7.1. Individual.....	38
2.7.2. Small Group.....	38
2.7.3 Organization .....	39
2.7.4 Professional Problems.....	39
2.7.5 Economic Factors .....	40
2.7.6 Political Factors or Personal Agenda .....	40
2.7.7 Psychological Factors.....	40
2.7.8 Self-Censorship.....	41
2.8 Background Of The Organization .....	41
 CHAPTER THREE	
3. METHODOLOGY.....	43

3.1 Introduction.....	43
3.2 Design Of The Study .....	43
3.3 Sampling Technique .....	44
3.4 Data Gathering Technique .....	45
3.4.1 Data Source .....	45
3.5 Data Collection.....	45
3.6 Interview.....	46
3.7 Focus Group Discussion.....	47
3.8 Observation .....	48
3.9 Ethical Consideration.....	49

#### CHAPTER FOUR

4. FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS .....	50
4.1. Introduction .....	50
4.2 Bases of Code of Ethics.....	50
4.3 Importance of Code Of Ethics .....	52
4.4 The Major Journalistic Ethical Problems In The Newsroom and Their Causes .....	54
4.4.1 Unfair and Unbalanced Reporting.....	54
4.4.2 Conflicts Of Interest .....	56
4.4.3 Objectivity .....	58
4.4.4 Social Responsibility .....	60
4.5 Major Factors of Journalists That Influence Ethical Decision-Making Process in the Newsroom .....	62
4.6 Ways of Mitigation to Address Ethical Breaches .....	65
4.7. Findings .....	66

CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....68  
5.1 Conclusion .....68  
5.2 Recommendations .....70

REFERENCES

Appendix 1

Appendix

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the study

Journalism ethics is a species of applied (professional ethics). It is the application and evaluation of principles and norms that guide journalism practice with special attention to the most important problems in the field. The reason is that in the midst of a social transformation, the existing fabric of ethics and value may be under challenge or even erosion and journalists may find themselves pressed to renegotiate the meaning or even stipulation of their professional codes of conduct.

So, ethical dilemmas are all around us. They are woven in to the fabric of everyday life, persistently challenging our ethical sensibilities. Ethics reflects a society's notions about the rightness or wrongness of an act and the distinctions between virtue and vice. To accuse some one of laziness or incompetence is not to accuse that person of immoral cheating do imply the violation of ethical norms. Thus ethics is often described as asset of principles or a code of moral conduct (Day, 2003, 2-3).

Ethics involves the evaluation and application of those moral values that a society or culture has accepted as its norms. To suggest that individuals should set their or on standards of conduct is to advocate ethical anarchy. One may derive a certain amount of satisfaction from adhering to a personal code of conduct, but the violation of this code does not necessarily raise serious ethical questions (ibid, pp: 2).

The media are spreading ever wider across the globe they become more pervasive and gain more influence, yet the public perception in many areas of the world is of a decline in the ethical standards of the media. This apparent decline may only be a reflection of a general decline in standards of public and private life, or perhaps of a greater readiness to criticize. However, complaints about the media of bias, inaccuracy, unfair treatment, invasion of privacy and so on are continually increasing, with siren calls for stricter control and regulation of the press and broadcasters.

On the other hand, media ethics is about problems of conducts that practitioners in the media have to face as they go about their work. On the other hand, it is a cross roads where many roads meet. In thinking of the media, we first think of journalists and reporters but of course radio and television require a wider range of professionals than news men and news women (Mc Donald & Petheram, 1998).

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

The practice of journalism and ethics are intertwined in the way how journalists operate and function in the newsroom. Tanner (2005) argues that ethics is not an optional add-on but underpins the practice of journalism. The everyday routine of journalism is very much entrenched in the way how journalists gather, write and disseminate news to the public. This is because journalists are expected to maintain public trust-in addition to reporting accurately (Hargreaves 2003), and it is the ethical decision-making in journalistic practice that determines how much the public can trust journalists.

Basically the media have the responsibility of serving the people by providing fair, balanced and accurate stories in a responsible manner. (Ronning, 2002: 60).

As Kasoma (1994(b):5) puts it journalism ethics is concerned with making sound decisions in journalistic performance, and it assumes the presence of societal morality. Morality has to do with actions guided by generally acceptable human values and responsibilities.

According to society of professional journalists (SPJ) code of ethics, journalistic ethics play a significant role in shaping journalists' professional integrity and to be in the right track by exposing unethical practices of journalists and the news media.

Journalistic ethics is also helpful for journalists to be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information. It has also a great merit to minimize harm. Here, ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect. By recognizing that, gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. So, the pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.

Many people are heard complaining that journalistic ethics could not be applied properly due to many factors. Some of the factors are journalists own personal biases, subjective judgment, attachment, personal interest, emotions, Self censorship etc. Thus unethical journalists who are writing something that do not reflect the social reality and spoil the freedom of the society to know the truth and news coverage, editing and selection will also be twisted by those unethical journalists. Hence, many of the practitioners seem that they don't give due value for those governing journalistic ethics that needed in the newsroom. Like fairness, truth, balance, conflicts of interest, social responsibility, accuracy, objectivity, and other ethical issues are highly affected. At times they make errors or unethical-practices in the newsroom are done and hence ethical issues and news credibility may be neglected. Thus, the researcher tries to identify ethical problems and

their causes in the newsroom. The study mainly focuses on fairness, objectivity, social responsibility and conflicts of interest are the area of the study.

So, the researcher triggers to study journalistic ethics in the newsroom and related practices of ethical problems in the case of the Amhara Mass Media Agency on the bases of codes of ethics and professional journalistic ethics.

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.3.1. General objective**

The general objective of this research is to explore the state of journalistic ethics in the news room; in the case of Amhara mass media Agency. So, the overall aim of the study is to explore practices of journalistic ethics and the guidelines of code of ethics in the agency.

#### **1.3.2. Specific Objectives of the Study**

The study has the following specific objectives. These are:-

1. To explore how journalists utilize journalistic ethics in the newsroom.
2. To identify problems of journalistic ethics in the newsroom.
3. To distinguish the factors that cause journalistic ethics problems.
4. To find out factors that influence ethical decision making process of journalists in the newsroom.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

To address the above problems, the researcher specifically raises the following major questions:

1. How important is journalistic ethics to the practitioners in the Amhara mass media newsroom?
2. What are the bases of code of ethics?
3. What are some of the major internal and external causes and challenges of journalists who do not adhere to journalistic ethics properly in the newsroom?
4. How do the practitioners address ethical breaches in the newsroom?

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

Journalistic ethical issues in the newsroom seem to have not yet been given due attention, the study will be of paramount importance in discussing the issues, which have impact on credibility of media newsroom. Accordingly, the study is made with a view to imparting the following specific and practical benefits.

1. It will try to indicate where the real journalistic ethics problems lie so that the concerned bodies can take measures to address them.
2. It may help others who are engaged in the media sectors not to commit similar mistakes in the future.
3. It may also provide other researchers with ideas that are indispensable for their studies.
4. Media practitioners and concerned bodies, who have been practicing journalism as a field, will benefit from the study.

### **1.6 Scope of the study**

The study is conducted in Amhara region, Bahir Dar city which focuses on journalistic ethics in the newsroom: The case of the Amhara mass media agency. The agency contains both television and radio broadcasts in one newsroom .Since it is difficult to

cover all journalistic ethics within short period of time, the researcher is obliged to focus on fairness, objectivity, social responsibility, and conflicts of interest which are the main areas of the study. So, the researcher studies those selected journalistic ethics and related ethical problems accordingly, by its codes of conduct and guidelines.

### **1.7 Organization of the Study**

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one deals with the background of the study, statement of the problem and some of the objectives of the research. Chapter two gives a detail theoretical framework about journalistic ethics. It also discusses about some of the issue that force journalists not to decide report (write) independently in the newsroom by referring many author's articles. The third chapter mainly focuses on the methodology that the investigator used to study the problem. It also briefly explains the rationale behind to choose qualitative type of approach as a best way of studying journalistic ethics in the newsroom. Chapter four and five concentrates on analyzing the results and giving some recommendation based on the findings respectively.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Ethics

The word ethics comes from the Greek ethos, meaning something like ‘morals’. It means character, conduct, behavior. In fact, ethic is defined as the systematic reflection on what is moral. In this definition, morality is the whole of opinions, decisions and actions with which people express what they think is good or right so, in short, to think ethically, you need to systematically reflect on what people think is good or right.

Ethics is not a manual with answers on how to act. It is only a search for the right kind of morality. (Day, 2000:2).

We can distinguish two kinds of ethics. The descriptive ethics is involved with the description of existing morality. It is about facts. Descriptive judgments are therefore true or false; on the other hand, there is the prescriptive ethics, also known as the normative ethics. This branch of ethics actually judges morality. Normative judgments are therefore value judgments: they indicate whether something is good or bad.

The most important parts of normative ethical theories are values, norms and virtues. Moral values are matters/convictions that are worth striving for in general. Examples include justice, happiness, charity and such. The other normative ethical theory is moral norms; are rules that prescribe what actions are required, permitted or forbidden. The third moral virtues are character traits that make someone a good person and allow him to lead a good life. Examples of virtues are honesty, courage, loyalty, creativity, humor, and so on. (Day, 2000:4-6).

However, the researcher gives due emphasis for ethical theories that are pre-dominantly focused on moral reasoning.

## **2.2 Media Theories**

In this development the perception of the state-individual relationship underwent fundamental changes. Individuals were now conceived of as rational beings who could distinguish between truth and falsehood (and would do so, given the freedom to discern and choose), and not as dependent beings that had to be led and directed. Truth was no longer seen as the property of the powerful. Instead, the right to search for truth became an inalienable human right (Retief, 2002:12).

### **2.2.1. Social Responsibility**

The idea of social responsibility has developed as a counterpoint to libertinism. Although this theory continues to emphasize freedom, it holds that responsibility is necessarily a partner to freedom in institutional behavior. Codes of ethics are encouraged as a self-regulatory device to promote social responsibility. Some have taken issue with Friedman's traditional views and believe that conducting business is not a right but a privilege granted by society. Because the pursuit of profits has not automatically contributed to the public good, society has placed increasing demands on corporations to contribute to the correction of social ills. Affirmative action programs and increased availability of affordable legal services for the poor are two examples.

There is little doubt that corporate responsibility in contemporary society includes emphasizing ethical behavior for both management and employees. Some companies have instituted ethics programs, both for legal and public relations reasons. Some have even devised codes of ethics for their personnel. But the formality of written codes and

policies does not ensure ethical conduct. For example, for years Dow Corning was considered to be a leader in the area of corporate ethics programs but despite an ethics code implemented in 1977, ongoing ethics training sessions for employees and company's ethical guidelines, Dow Corning stood accused of manufacturing unsafe breast implants.

### **2.2.2 The Libertarian View**

However, this last statement is still a controversial one. Although the "let the buyer beware" philosophy that dominated until the early part of this century has been diminished by the efforts of consumer activists such as Ralph Nader, some still hold the libertarian view that "business is the business of business." According to this view, a company is socially responsible if it provides employment and a stable financial base for the community. This notion is reflected in contemporary society by the economist Milton Friedman, who has adopted the view that both individuals and corporations pursuing their own self-interests in a competitive market place will, in fact, contribute to the public welfare (Day, 2003:35-36).

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### **2.2.3. The Appeal of Utilitarianism**

Another approach to morality, one that is popular in contemporary American society, is the idea of utilitarianism. Two nineteenth-century British philosophers, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, are credited with introducing utilitarianism into the mainstream of modern western ethical thought. Mill's version of this philosophy is often referred to as creating the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Later utilitarians have argued that happiness is not the only desirable value and that others should be considered as well.

However, all versions of utilitarianism have one thing in common: they are concerned with the consequences of an ethical judgment. Rather than looking at the intention behind the act, as Kant suggested, one must explore the best outcome for the greatest number of people (Day, 2003:57).

So, utilitarianism strives to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of people. It boils down to this: if decisions have good results for the majority, then those decisions are good; if your actions harm the majority, then they are bad (Retief, 2002:8).

### **2.2.4. The Ethics of Egalitarianism**

Egalitarianism is based on the notion that all individuals should be treated equally in terms of rights and opportunities. In this respect egalitarianism resembles the Judeo-Christian ethic.

One contemporary version of the egalitarian idea is outlined by the philosopher John Rawls in his book *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls recommends that self-interested individuals enter into a social contract that minimizes harm to the weakest parties. They should step into what he calls an "original position" behind a hypothetical "veil of ignorance." They

are temporarily deprived of knowledge about themselves that is likely to influence judgments in their favor, such as sex, age, race, and social standing. Minority views are to be accorded the same standing as those of the majority. Behind this veil individual who have are asked to visualize what it would be like to be in each of these sociopolitical positions. The goal is to protect the weaker party in the relationships and to minimize harm. This process forces self-interested moral agents to think imperially and to consider the views of others without regard to their own cultural biases. Thus ethical decision can be made independently of social, political, economic and other distinctions. A case in point is the TV executive (the powerful party) who decides to air commercial free programming for children (the weaker party) out respect for the psychological vulnerable youthful segments of the audience in such case the moral agent accomplishes a noble objective while justifying his decision economically by having the commercial lucrative fare subsidizes the sustaining programs directed at children.

This veil of ignorance perhaps, a Romanized parable, encourages the development of a system of ethics based on equality according to what individual deserve rather special privilege. This is an egalitarian idea an admonitions that king and knave alike must submit to the throne of moral judgment and that justice should not be meted out arbitrary. In the other words, there should be no double standard of ethical treatment unless there is an important and morally defensible reason to discriminate. This principle is particularly relevant to journalists, who must make decisions backgrounds, from the famous to the ordinary (Day, 2003:58).

The egalitarian, or social responsibility, model is an important variant of, and counter point to, the libertarian concept of the media. Three main factors led to the development

of egalitarianism: the communications revolution, the concentration of media ownership in the hands of the Media's social responsibility, (Retief, 2002:13).

### **2.2.5 The Rise of Relativism**

Partially in response to the absolutist ideas of Kant, a school of philosophers has arisen espousing the virtues of relative values. These thinkers have rejected the approach of basing moral choice on immutable values.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and John Dewey (1859-1952) are the most notable proponents of this philosophy, sometimes referred to as "progressivism." Dewey, in particular, is credited with (or blamed for, depending on your point of view) convincing the public school in the United states that are should not be preoccupied with inculcating moral values in believe that this progressivism movement has worked to the detriment of the moral stability of youth. This movement may also explain why, until recently, the teaching of ethics in public school was looked on with suspicion.

Relativists believe that what is right or good for one is not necessarily right or good for another, even under similar circumstance. In other words, moral agents determine what is right or wrong from own point of view but will not judge the adequacy of other's ethical judgments.<sup>13</sup> Relativists have the attitude that "I will determine what's right for me, and you can decide what's right for me, and you can decide what's right for you." (Day, 2003:58).

### **2.3 Ethical Theories in Moral Reasoning**

From the forgoing discussion one could construct many different approaches to evaluating ethical behavior. But the perspective to which I am committed in this text is derived from three kinds of ethical theories, based primarily on the teaching of Aristotle,

Mill, and Kant. Thus the guideline that will be used in the moral reasoning model presented later in this chapter fall in to three categories: deontological (duty based) theories, teleological (consequence-based) theories. and virtue theories, represented by Aristotle's golden mean.

### **2.3.1 Teleological (Consequence-Based) Theories**

Teleological or consequentiality theories are popular in modern society. They are predicated on the notion that the ethically correct decision is the one that produces the best consequences. Consequentiality, unlike deontologists, do not ask whether a particular practice or policy is right or wrong but whether it will lead to positive results. Teleological ethics means:

- Result determines the rule
- Result is the basis of the act
- Rule is good because of result
- Result is sometimes used to break rules

There are, of course variations on the teleological themes. At one extreme are the egoists, who argue that moral agents should seek to maximize good consequences for themselves. They should, in other words, look out for number one. It is based essentially on self-interest.

At the other extreme are the utilitarian, represented primarily by the writing of philosophers such as, Mill. As noted previously, utilitarian believe that we should attempt to promote the greatest good (the most favorable consequences) for the greatest number of people. Utilitarianism is appealing because it provides a definite blueprint for making

moral choices. When confronting an ethical dilemma, moral agents should analyze the benefits and harms to everyone (including those affected by the decision) and then choose the course of action that results in the most favorable outcomes for the greatest number.

Appeals to the public interest to justify certain unpopular decisions by media practitioners, is a contemporary manifestation of utilitarianism at work. Thus, a socially beneficial consequence is sometimes used to justify an immoral means. Reporters who accept illegally recorded conversations from news sources on the ground of the “public right to know” are attempting to justify what they believe to be good consequences, even though the means of accomplishing the ends are questionable.

Particularly utilitarianism and one that is often overlooked is the focus on minimizing harm. Consequentialism recognizes that difficult moral choices sometimes cause injury to others.

When news stories are published that reveal embarrassing facts about private individuals, the potential for the harms is great. On balance, the consequences for the public might be greater than the harm to the subject of the story, but the reporter has a moral obligation to inflict only the harm required to put the story in perspective. To do more would only appeal to the morbid curiosity of the public. For example a story concerning the doctor’s personal life unless these facts relate directly to questions of the physician’s negligence or professional competence (Day, 2003:61-62).

Teleology strives for the greatest possible pleasure (against pain) and happiness (against sadness). It does not ask whether something is right or wrong for a person, but whether actions

will have positive results. Most journalists take easily to teleology, for they quite naturally think in terms of consequences (Retief, 2002:7-8).

### **2.3.2 Deontological (Duty-Based) Theories**

Deontologists (derived from the Greek word Deon, or “duty”) are sometimes referred to as “non consequentiality because of their emphasis on acting on principle or according to certain universal moral duties without regard to the good or bad consequences of their actions, the most famous deontologist is Kant. As noted earlier, this fundamental moral principle is his categorical imperative which is based on moral rules that should be universally applied and that respect the dignity of people. Deontological ethics means:

- Rule determines the result
- Rule is the basis of the act
- Rule is good regardless of result
- Result is always calculated within the rules

According to this duty-based theory, prohibitions against certain kinds of behavior apply even if beneficial consequences (after all foul deeds might produce good results,) deontologists emphasize the commitment to principles, that the moral agent would unknown result and the predictive powers of moral agents. How can we know, for example, that the government’s withholding of vital information relating to national security will be in the best interest of the American people.

Another objective to consequentialism is that it does not always take in to account the special obligations to individuals or small groups that may conflict with our moral duties to society at large. Media practitioners who are intent on producing the greatest good for

the greatest number of people often overlook the needs of especial audiences. This neglect results, in a form of artistic majoritarianism in which, minority needs are slighted in the media marketplace.

Despite these objections, consequential ethics is a valuable tool for moral reasoning because it forces us to weigh the impact of our behavior on others. It provides a rational means for extricating ourselves from the confusion of rule conflict and thus helps to demystify the process of ethical decision making (Day, 2003:59-60).

According to Kant, all people have a duty to behave morally correctly, even if it is contrary to their character or desires. Kant asks: what are your duties? What responsibilities do you carry? An action is justified if the intentions of the doer are good—regardless of the consequences of the act (Retief, 2002:9).

### **2.3.3 Virtue Theories**

#### Aristotle's Golden Mean

Although duty-based and consequence-based theories differ in many respects, they have one thing in common. They are concerned with standards and principles for evaluating moral behavior. They focus on what we should do, not on the kind of person we ought to be. The ancient Greeks, on the other hand, were more concerned with character building than with what we think of as moral behavior. Plato and Aristotle viewed the acquisition of virtuous traits as central morality. They believed that acts performed out of a sense of duty did not necessarily reflect a person's character. Theories that emphasize character are often referred to as virtue theories.

However, if virtue theories are directed at the building of moral character—a long term proposition, at best—what relevance can they have for moral reasoning which is a systemic means arriving at ethical judgment in specify situations? How can virtue ethics assist us in confronting the moral dilemmas posed by the cases in the book?

Many writers in philosophy have rejected the idea that virtue ethics has an independent and primary status that it can be useful in the process of moral reasoning. However, one helpful theory can be extracted from virtue ethics: Aristotle's theory of the golden mean, discussed earlier. The golden mean provides a moderate solution in those cases in which there is identifiable extreme position neither of which is likely to produce satisfactory results.

Aristotle's golden mean, however, is not analogous to kind of weak compromise or middle-of the road “waffling” that one finds in political circles. The mean is not necessarily mind way between the two extremes; because, a moral agent must sometimes lean toward one extreme or the other to correct an injustice.

Thus, an employer might be justified in giving larger pay increases to some workers than others in order to remedy the effects of past salary inequities. As Clifford Christians, and his colleagues, have observed in their case book, media ethics: “the mean is not the right quantity, but it occurs at the right time, towards the right people, for the right reason, and in the right manner. The distance depends on the nature of the agent has determined by the white of the moral case before them.”

Aristotle's approach to achieving a virtuous resolution of a dilemma is exemplified, by the Federal communications commission's approach to regulating broadcast indecency. Although federal law prohibits the transmission of indecent material over radio and TV,

the commission has decided to prohibit such content only during times of the day when children are likely to be in the audience –an approach endorsed by the supreme court in 1978. this time period, which has actually shifted over the years, is referred to as the safe harbor.

However, my concern and attention is about journalistic ethics and hence, the researcher gives more emphasis and broad coverage about it. (Day, 2003:65-66).

## **2.4 Journalistic Ethics**

Taking in to account the purpose of the study attempts are made to define ethics in terms of journalism. This is done with a view to strengthening the issues that are discussed all the way through study.

In defining ethics various scholars commonly raise the issue of moral. According to them, ethics is concerned with moral concepts and its judgment on the rightness and wrongness. Kruger (2004:1) states that ethics “deals with right and wrong.” To give moral judgments or decisions of the rightness and wrongness, there needed to be considered certain issues among which culture is the major one. Intensifying this point Day (2003:5) says that “ethical decisions are always made within a specific context, which includes the political, social and culture climate.” Thus, ethics is described as “laying down norms or rules of right or of good behavior” (Ross, 1968:311).

As Kasoma (1994(b):5) puts it journalism ethics is concerned with making sound decisions in journalistic performance, and it assumes the presence of societal morality. Morality has to do with actions guided by generally acceptable human values and responsibilities.

Obligation of the journalists for the social and individual responsibility is given emphasis in media ethics. This is nothing but in reporting news the media practitioners are expected to make sound decisions to abide by the generally acceptable human values and responsibilities. Providing truthful information to the public is the major responsibility of journalism. Some intensity the point by saying that truth fullness is one of the primary ethical concerns in news and information (Baker and Michael, 2003:554).

Kruger states about ethics by relating with money, media and power. The 'political economy' approach rejects any notion of free, independent or objective news media. Rather, it sees the media as serving an ideological function, legitimizing the existing order on behalf of the ruling classes. Powerful elites dominate the media internationally and ensure that media products reinforce the dominant consensus. Where there is disagreement and debate, it remains within that consensus. In their 1988 book manufacturing consent, Herman and Chomsky say the media "Inculcate and defend the economic, social and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state." As stated by (Kruger, 2004:8).

Kasoma has argued that the standards generally accepted are based on in European morality, and that African journalists should look to their own moral heritage. He also says journalism based on African values would be kinder: "there is too much of the cold Euro-American brand of news reporting in Africa...Africa has the chance to restore the human touch to journalism." As stated (Kruger (2004:9-10)

This study advocates the idea that to maintain truthfulness in news reporting the journalists are expected to act ethically. This means they need to fulfill the basic components of truth in journalism, which include factual accuracy, balance and fairness

and adequate context” (Baker and Michael, 2003, 554). To implement all these journalists need to act responsibly, independently and ethically in general. On the other hand, failure to provide truthful information responsibly, independently and in a fair manner, is a serious violation of journalism ethics.

## **2.5 Significance of Code of Ethics for Journalists**

Many journalists in various parts of the world adopt codes of ethics to guide themselves in a responsible manner. As journalists do their duties “not for themselves but on behalf of the public, they need to have codes of ethics, which suggest that news must be accurate and error free.” (Kruger, 2004:3).

Having codes of ethics is of paramount importance for journalists that shoulder the big responsibility of serving the public. Kruger (2004:3) says, “codes of ethics are a good place to find lofty and sometimes even elegant expressions of the view that journalism is basically about public service”. Apart from this, the codes outline the conditions of journalist’s accountability, responsibility. This indicates that having or adopting code of ethics obliges the journalists to be accountable to the public, their sources, to their professions and accomplish their duties in a responsible way.

Code of ethics also plays significant roles in protecting the freedom, integrity and identify of journalism (Campbell, 2004:148). In particular codes are very essential in Africa, where there is no much freedom. This would play a role in easing pressure of interference. “If African journalists observed professional ethics, governments, individuals, groups, organizations and there pressure groups would find it more difficult to intervene and interfere with the practices of the profession.” (Mwaura, 19994:133).

Many media scholars say that lacking codes, among others, is one of the causes for journalism not to be considered as a profession. Having codes of ethics and enforcing journalists to abide by them, like other medical and legal profession. (Ronning, 2002:61) says supporting this that codes have been seen and developed as part of a process giving journalism a professional status Mac Donald, (1998) also says the following:

One way of asserting professionalism is to have self-regulatory councils and codes of practice. These have come in to being and also attempt at self-regulation in the face of public criticism maintain public credibility, to establish journalism as a profession. The adoption of a code can be seen as an important symbol of the fact that the occupation is seeking to justify itself in terms of professional norms (Mac Donald, 1998:78).

Keeble (2001:131) adds that professionalism is usually linked to the promotion of codes of conduct. "Ethical codes, in effect serve to create a collective conscience of a profession."

Journalists who are bounded by their codes again get credibility from the wider public. They use freedom of expression in a responsible manner. They are committed to protect their confidential sources. Ronning (2002:61) says that apart from restricting certain immoral practices on the part of journalists, codes of press conduct have another function to safe guard press freedom itself. "...media ethics becomes a guarantee for media independence. It is for this reason that press codes, for independence, commit journalists protecting confidential sources of information."

Some principal underlying values in codes throughout the world, according to Keeble(2001:14), are fairness, the separation of fact and opinion, the need for accuracy linked with the responsibility to correct errors, maintaining confidentiality sources,

upholding journalists' responsibility to guard citizens right to freedom of expression, recognizing a duty to defend the dignity and independence of the profession, protecting people's right to privacy, respecting and seeking after truth, struggling against censorship, avoiding discrimination on grounds of race, sexual orientation genders, language, religion or political or opinion; avoiding conflicts of interest (particularly with respect to political and financial they report on).

Therefore, journalists, including senior editors are advised to unite with others to adopt common codes of ethics, which are believed to improve the ethical environment of media institutions. Moreover, "such codes can also be cited as evidence of socially responsible institution that is unwilling to condone unethical practices." (Day, 2003:441).

Some may say that codes established at national level can serve all these purpose. However, the national codes are so general that they can hardly serve as a basis for genuine ethical blue print. "... The detailed standards of some news papers and the commercial TV networks for example can be valuable in at least serving as guide posts for journalists and other media practitioners as they confront moral dilemmas."(Day, 2003:44).

African journalists, in particular, need protection from the state, their editors and employers. However, they themselves are the best ones to secure their protection. This can be implemented through the amelioration of journalistic standards and observation of a strict code of professional ethics.

Kruger turn to raise an important and fundamental question: "why bother with ethics? For many people, morality is its own justification and we should behave properly because it's

the right thing to do.” As stated by Kruger (2004:3,) the US ethicist Day also highlights four reasons why societies develop systems of ethics:

- They serve societies need for stability, by giving us a framework which allows us to develop trust in each other;
- They serve a need for a moral hierarchy;
- They help resolve conflicts; and
- They help clarify values.

Journalists like to think of their profession in idealistic terms. Codes of ethics are a good place to find lofts and sometimes even elegant expressions of the view that journalism is basically about public service.

Journalism is practiced on behalf of the public; the media claim freedom not for themselves but for the citizenry in general (Kruger, 2004:3).

According to Harper says “ethics are important precisely because journalism is an imperfect profession. In the ‘global struggle between entertainment and serious information; ethics provides journalists with a defense against the pressure of market forces.” (Kruger, 2004:5).

## **2.6 List of Journalistic Ethics**

There are certain issues that should be considered as corner stone’s of media ethics. These are among other, objectivity truth, balance, fairness, accuracy responsibility some scholars add “minimizing harms” and “accountability” to their list. But here as the study has its major focus on fairness, responsibility, objectivity, conflicts of interest, and attempts are made to discuss only these four principles of ethics.

### **2.6.1. Responsibilities of journalists**

Journalists' first responsibility is for the people regardless of any difficulty, journalists' loyalty is to the citizens. The idea here is to put audiences a head of political and immediate financial interests.

Kovach and Rosenstiel explains journalists' loyalty,

It is the implied contract with the public, which tells the audience that the movie reviews are straight, that the restaurant reviews are not influenced by who buys an advertisement that the coverage is not self-interested or slanted for friends (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007)

The canons of journalism, (2003) have put over its principles about the journalists obligation to the citizens.

Promotion of any private interest contrary to the general welfare for whatever reason is not comment which knowingly departs from the truth, does violence to the best spirit of journalism; in the news columns it is subversive of a fundamental principle of the profession.

In order to keep the standard of the profession, many media house prepare their own guidelines and try to mitigate ethical issues. However, the effort to minimize ethical problems in the news companies may be tough Keeble wrote on how difficult for the editors to catch problems before getting published since credibility is journalism's main intension many news agencies and mass media outlets have strict codes of conduct and enforce journalists and use several layers of editorial gate keeping to catch problems before stories are distributed (Keeble, 2001)

We focus on this particular principle of ethics to give emphasis on its significance in fair and independent reporting. Responsibility in the media means that reporters and editors must be careful as to how they should use the information they gather (Biagi, 1999:361). This means that journalist should feel responsibility in reporting a story. A report that does not entertain different sides fairly is not expected from responsible journalists. “The news media are the central nervous system of society and ought to act responsible and constructively to help the public better define and develop democracy.” (Dennis, 1998: xvi)

Ethical journalism acts responsibly facilitating the democratic process and serving the public interest (Belsey, 1998:11).

### **2.6.2 Fairness**

Fairness in news reporting, according to Kasoma, (1994) (a) : 336), “means that the journalist gives a hearing to all the contending sides in a story”. He further states that fairness gives “the accused the right to reply in the same story not waiting to publish what they say in a subsequent issue or worse still, never giving them a story at all”. (Ibid: 336-337). It is only when these sides have equal opportunity to reflect their views, a news story said to be fairly reported.

Pavlic (2001:93) says that fairness means nothing but “providing balanced coverage reflecting all sides of an issue”. It implies impartiality that the journalist has nothing personal to gain from a report, that there are no hidden benefits to the reporter or to the source from the story being presented (Biagi, 1999:346). When it is said a news story should be fair and balanced, it means that it should be impartial and without bias or the journalist is expected to give all sides of the argument a fair hearing (Frost, 2000:36). The

reporting must be made in such a way that it is not focused on a particular point of view. The issue of balance should be given due focus of attention. However, the reality on the ground in many countries is different.

To ask for fairness and balance is to ask that evaluative language be avoided, that the material should not be slanted (Mc Donald, 1998:60). However, many media scholars argue that journalism can never be value-free.

A report that is written by a journalist is expected to reflect his or her feelings, opinions and values. Ronning (2002:86) states that news media tend to construct accounts of events that are structured and framed by the dominant values and interests of the society in which they exist. That is way Mc Donald (1998:62) says: “journalism’s failure to be objective is because it cannot free itself of value judgments, it does not mean that one should not be concerned to maintain fairness in news making at all since efforts are made to represented relevant view points on matters of importance, it is definitely said the issue of fairness has been considered. On the other hand, the more unfair a journalist is the greater harm she is likely to cause. After all “No journalist can do without a commitment to fairness” (kruger, 2004:83).

#### ***2.6.2.1. Unfair and Unbalanced Reporting***

Unfair and unbalanced reporting is common practice in the war time, and racial reporting, (Harper, 2008).Unfairness and unbalance or biased reporting can be express by the journalist’s article in which they present the news subjects either in negative or positive way. The biggest problem in journalism is, using unfair and unbalancing reporting; journalists can spread hatred, bias, and stereotype to the world. Knowingly or

unknowingly which type of report harm not only the integrity of the media houses but also the audience who are affected by the unfair reporting.

A report is said to be fair if it tries to disseminate both side information as well as the full context of the event. For instance, a new story which emphasizes only on a three American casualties in a 100 dead people accidents unfair for the report only gives higher concern to the Americans' report is unbalanced if it does not represent the view point of two opposing groups.

David & Kittross defines fairness

*The act of keeping an open mind of suspending individual judgment until enough information is available so that judgment or decision can validly be made. It is impartiality but not ignorance. The media are not merely a conduit; they have the responsibility to access the validity or truth of the information they disseminate of particular important is the need to provide sufficient valid and reliable information that will allow readers, listeners and viewers to reach their own conclusion, (David & Kitross, 1999, p. 86).*

Journalism is about varying the information that is coming from somewhere and publishing the truth. It is unacceptable to broadcast news without any prior questioning about the believability of the source; otherwise it might end with unfair news.

Ward explains the standard of verification “verification calls on report to cross-check claims of potential whistleblowers against original rules or the number and quality of anonymous sources” (Ward.2009, p.299).

In order to reach at fair and truthful information “one strategy is ‘triangulation’. This is where claims or account provided from one source can be contrasted with those provided by another” (Sanders.2003, p.109).

When journalists write two opposing groups, the profession requires the practitioners to show disinterest for both contrary groups and treat them equally. They should transmit what exactly the interviewees said in the interview.

#### ***2.6.2.2 Factors that Affect Journalists to Write Unfair and unbalanced reports***

1. **Sensitive issues:** The first reason as explained in (Harper.2008) is when journalists faced with sensitive issue like war or election, the possibility of their story to be slanted to one side will increase. The 1917 American senator, Hiram Johnson, as cited in (Sanders, 2003, p.45) says “the first causality of war is truth “war times are good example that forces journalists to publicize unbalanced, unfair, biased and faked report.
2. **Politics:** is another reason journalists who are suppressed by the government would present the story through the government perspective. They would not have a freedom to present the opposite side of what the government is advocating.
3. **Bias:** is the third factor that leads journalists to write unfair and unbalanced news. Journalists own personal bias, stereotype and subjective judgment result unfairness in the news report (Retief, 2002: 193-194).
4. **The media agenda:** is another reason that shapes the news in to one side and make the story totally unfair and unbalanced (MacDonald and Petheram, 1998: 62).

5. **Financial problem:** would some time be the factor for this ethical problem. The reporter who has got freebies from a particular organization would finally end up with writing 'too much praise 'for the company (Sanders, 2003:122).
6. **Journalist attachment:** to a particular group, or company will pledge journalist to present the fact one sided or unfairly (Bell, 1998:16).

### 2.6.3. Objectivity

A part from the notion of fairness, this is the other controversial issue; not only in the profession of journalism but also in any other field of science many scholars and philosophers have had debated on the idea of objectivity. The social and natural science scholars have fought in the so called 'science war' (1980's) just because they couldn't reach at a clear understanding of objectivity, (Ward, 2009:11).

The concept of objectivity is not a recent phenomenon. The quest of objectivity begins with the Greek invention of rational inquiry in to society and natural in the 17<sup>th</sup> C.B.C. (/Ibid.:38).

The famous philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander, Empedocles, Democritus, and Herodotus have disclosed' truth based on the premises of their rational thinking. In order to arrive at a valid conclusion, these philosophers try to detach themselves from the actual event being recorded.

In this report about a victory of Greek over Persians, for example, Herodotus tried to show how detachment from personal belief is essential in reporting objective facts. "My job, through this account, is simply to record whatever I am told by each of my sources." Herodotus as cited in (Ward, 2009).

Ward divides objectives in to two types. These are traditional and pragmatic objectivity. The traditional ways of achieving objective reporting was very famous in the western world in the early 20<sup>th</sup>c its main idea is something much related with what the positivists advocate. The positivists support the idea of detachment and pure objectivity in the process of finding truth (Positivism, 2010).

According to the traditional objectivity outlook, there are six related standards that define the ideal and help journalists decide whether a report is objective or subjective. These are factuality, fairness, non-bias, independence, non-interpretation, neutrality and detachment.

The following explanation, which is extracted from ‘the invention of objectivity’ helps to understand each concept very clearly.

- A. Factually – reports are based on accurate, comprehensive, and verified facts.
- B. Fairness – reports on controversial issues balance the main rival view points, representing each view point fairly.
- C. Non-bias: prejudices, emotions, personal interests, or other subjective factors do not distort the content of reports.
- D. Independence: reports are the work of journalists who are free to report without fear or favor.
- E. Non-interpretation: reporters do not put their interpretation or opinion in to their reports.
- F. Neutrality and detachment: reports are neutral. They do not take sides in a dispute reporters do not act as advocates for groups and causes.

The difference between traditional and pragmatic objectivity lies on the last two defining points, which are non interpretation and neutrality or detachment pragmatic objectivity is developed by Ward, J.A. Stephen. According to pragmatic objectivity viewpoint, neutrality (detachment) and non-interpretation does not have any place in defining objectivity.

In the first place, this theory believes, journalism's neutrality (detachment) from all values and perspectives is not practicable. In addition to this ward believes there are legitimate reasons that make journalists to practice attachment. According to his explanation, the journalist's connection with public interest is one example of legitimate attachment.

Martin Bell (former BBC journalist) as cited in (sanders, 2003:43) says, there are times to be passionate and times to be dispassionate. Especially in the times of war, unless the journalism practitioners close their hearts to pity, the war report will disrespect the human dignity. In this case; the journalist, who feels pity for the warriors, is expressing his attachment.

Chapter two of the BBC's producers' guidelines says the journalist's attachment sometimes will be related with the democratic principles." Due impartiality (detachment) does not mean just getting two sides of a story nor does it requires absolute neutrality on every issue or detachment from democratic principles (BBC producers guideline. 2001).

The above points are small cases that prove the importance of attachment; however for the most of the journalism practice, impartiality is an indispensable principle to arrive at objective facts. Kieran says, "It is a common place assumption of journalism that the media have a fundamental duty to be impartial in order to achieve the goal of an objective

report or analysis of current events” (Kieran, 1998:23). Journalism’s codes of conduct underlines the importance of impartiality or detachment especially in the process reporting racial, religious, and gender issues (codes of ethics and canons of journalism, 2006). As (Sanders, 2003:42) puts over “impartiality is the way of eliminating reporting filtering by the more extreme kinds of religious, racial, or other types of prejudices.”, he also argues impartiality is “a practice aimed at removing the distorting effects of prejudice from whatever source, ensuing that full and fair accounts are given of events.”

Hence, except journalism’s attachment with public interest and democratic principle the need for detachment is not a free will of the journalists also need to detach themselves not only from two opposing groups in the news but also they have to be impartial from their individual vested interest Kieran says, “it is not just illegitimate but immoral to reconstruct news event merely because a journalist prejudice interests, or news agenda suggests things should be otherwise” (Kieran, 1998:34).

The second point while makes pragmatic objectivity differ from traditional objectivity is the stand point that pragmatic objectivity advocates towards interpretation. The theory of pragmatic objectivity says journalism is about interpreting a given issue.

Journalist use codes to compress data in to relatively short stories. When reporters cover complex events, such as a federal budget, they organize a blizzard of information by selecting the most important fact, picking the relevant issues, and choosing story angles. Editors construct an elaborative editorial plan that reduces the glut of material to manageable package of stories. This selecting, categorizing, and organizing of material are essential components of a coherent interpretation that readers can understand, (Ward, 2009: 295).

Many scholars agree the difficult to achieve objective reporting, because of the impossibility to practice detachment and write a report without any interpretation. Some scholars and journalists even say objectivity is an illusion and difficult to achieve, (Sanders, 2003:43). Unlike traditional objectivity, ward believes there is no pure or perfect objectivity, this is because “journalists bases reports on limited data, imperfect methods, conflicting values, and changing conditions.” (Ward, 2009).

#### **2.6.4 Conflicts of Interest**

Conflict of interest is a clash between professional loyalties and outside interests that undermines the credibility of the moral agent. Conflicts generally arise from the roles we play within society and, for the reason, appear to involve particularistic duties rather than our general societal obligations (Day 2003, 209).

Many news organizations have specific policies relating to conflicts of interest, such as banning the acceptance of perquisites and freebies from news sources or the participation in political or community organization by members of the editorial staff. The professional codes also admonish media practitioners to avoid conflicts of interest. The code of the public relations society of America (PRSA), for example, prohibits members from representing conflicting or competing interests without the express consent of those involved or from placing themselves in a position in which the members’ interest might conflict with those of a client. The code of the society of professional Journalists (SPJ) reflects a concern with potential conflicts of interest, as well as actual conflicts, when it observes that journalists should avoid conflicts of interest, “real or perceived” ( ibid,209).

The notion of a ‘conflict of interest’ could only arise in a setting where reporters were expected to tell the truth without fear or favor, their prime duty being to purvey news

rather than promote views. In other words, the notion that a 'conflict of interest' is a moral problem entails a specific understanding of what journalism is (Sanders, 2003:120).

In part, the ethical issues about conflicts of interest arise from the set of expectations we have about certain practices. On the other hand, intentions and motives can be found to be at odds with those publicly declared. On the other, the very motives and intentions themselves can be considered dishonorable. Intentions and motives are tricky things to disentangle (ibid, 121).

Frost also stated about conflict interest like other scholars by raising a question. He rises just how impartial should journalists be in their personal lives? This is a subject that is not often talked about amongst journalists. It tends to be accepted automatically that although a journalist may belong to a political party, he or she will write fairly about a range of political issues. The only sensible response that can be made to this dilemma is for reporters to ensure that may avoid working on any story which would bring a conflict of interest (Frost, 2000:162-163).

Conflict of interest "raises some basic questions concerning fairness and justice, two important and fundamental Values" Retief as cited in (Day 1991, 156). No news organization can allow a situation to develop in which doubt is cast on the organization's commitment to be duly impartial (Retief 2002, 133).

Some of the most prominent international ethical codes make no bones about this: the American society of news paper Editors: "freedom from all obligations except that of fidelity to the public interest is vital". The society of professional Journalists also in the US: "Journalists must be free of obligation to any interest other than the people's right to

know.” The BBC: “our viewers and listeners should be confident that editorial decisions are made only for good editorial reasons. The outside activities of program makers must not improperly influence, or be thought to influence, BBC programmers’”. Retief as cited in (producers, Guidelines, 1996: 88).

Gorden and Kittross put their idea on what ethical and practical limitations should be placed on communicators that will enable them to retain their credibility, do their job- and like their lives.

Gorden takes the position that the Journalist must be completely above suspicion. He also said that Journalists and public relations practitioners must obtain from and “private” activities that might be seen as creating conflicts of interest in their professional endeavors.

While Michael and Kittross ask that readers, viewers, and listeners trust media practitioners until or unless they are proven unreliable in the message they construct. He also said that the credibility of the mass media will not be lost if honest practitioners are left unrestricted in their roles as citizens and humans (Gorden and Kittross 1991: 256-261).

However, both Kittross and Gorden agree on some points about conflict of interest:

There is no excuse for extortion and prostitution, for lying to the audience about something in exchange for many or other favors. This is cheating the public. And the second point is, any restrictions on practitioners should apply as well to publishers, general managers, and owners (ibid, 256).

#### ***2.6.4.1. Factors of Conflicts of Interest That***

##### **Journalists can be influenced**

Journalists can be influenced by any number of factors among the following are:

- A. Freebies:** when journalists accept favors, gifts, or other special considerations from vested interests or news sources, it raises serious questions about their objectivity (Retief 2002, 134). According to the BBC: “Individual must not accept personal benefits, e.g. goods, discounts, services, cash, gratuities, or entertainment outside the normal scope of business hospitality, from organizations or people with whom they might have dealing with on the BBC’s behalf” (producers’ Guidelines 1996,95).
  
- B. Affiliation to organizations:** The problems that can emerge when journalists affiliate themselves to organizations are self evident. This can seriously compromise journalists’ credibility and independence. On the other hand, some journalists argue that being affiliated to organizations gives them the opportunity to meet people, build contacts, and identify possible sources. The important point is that journalists remain sensitive and don’t allow any situation to influence negatively their professional activities (Retief 2002, 136).
  
- C. Bribe:** is a favor done or given to a journalist in order to influence him or her to report favorably or unfavorably or not to report at all. So, problem of journalistic practice is said that the cancer of African journalism is corruption, particularly bribes. For a gift or favor to qualify as a bribe, the journalists should know and understand that it is intended to influence his or her journalistic professional work (Kasoma 2000:96).

**D. Buche, Freebies, Junkets and perks:** these points pose a question of credibility, balance, objectivity, and fairness and the like. The reason is many journalists in the country, holist's low pay.

**E. Affiliation to political activities:** the BBC Producers` Guidelines (1996, 91-92) states that anyone is entitled to belong to apolitical party. That is the journalists right. Office holding may be acceptable for people in low level editorial positions, but not for their more senior colleagues( with higher program responsibilities ).If a journalist is selected to fight a seat, and therefore becomes a prospective parliamentary candidate, his or her work for the BBC must be divorced from political issue.

A good journalist will always put his or her professional duties first. If you don`t have credibility as a journalist, you may as well look for another job. It surely will pay better (Retief, 2002:137).

## **2.7 The Major Factors of Journalists that Influence Ethical Decision Making Process in the Newsroom.**

### **2.7.1. Individual**

As an individual, journalists are very much influenced by their internalized set of beliefs in the way they report. Masterson and patching(1997)argues that journalist are very much influenced by their biases their perception of the audience, and their own interpretation of the core 'news value' of consequences proximity, conflict, human interest, novelty, and prominence.

A study conducted by Voakes (1997) found that personal, intrinsic values, does influence the decision making process of journalists.

Studies have shown that journalists are drawn to the profession by a sense of social responsibility (Schultz 1998). This includes journalists striving to report the truth in fairness and as accurately responsible in order to serve the public interest (Kovach and Rosenthal 2004).

### **2.7.2. Small group**

This newsroom culture norms can be interpreted as the small group social influence, and is confirmed by Schultz's (1998) 1992 media and democracy survey that 'colleagues are consistently the most significant source of guidance for the journalists surveyed'. Findings invoked (1997) survey support this view as it is found that colleagues and editors often embolden a journalist to take some risk ethically. So editors and managers are also influencing journalists to seek other perspectives in their daily decision making process. Within the newsroom culture, it is the fellow journalists and editors that one mostly seeks advice and help from. This is crucial as the more experienced senior journalists and editors will be able to help journalists make ethical journalistic decisions.

Journalists are products of the society. They live in the society, they imitate what the society is practicing, and their day to day thought is shaped by society's culture. As a result, journalists may develop a culture of creating a faked report (Sanders 2003:44).

### **2.7.3 Organization**

It is also found in Voakes (1998) study that the organization continues to highly influence decision making by scoring the highest value. Another study by Johnstone et al (1973) found that the type of organization has a bearing on how a journalist defines his

responsibilities. It also found that the larger and more powerful news organizations allow the journalist to play a more active role in their decision making process.

Johnstone argues that an organization by its very nature places restriction on individual autonomy .In her speech, Venkiteswaran (2008) said that most journalists working in local mainstream media had their stories killed or altered in order to protect the interest of the media owners.

#### **2.7.4 Professional Problems**

It has been sufficiently demonstrated that journalists in all mass media organizations joined the profession without having journalistic qualification. Those, from language and literature background were dominating the field (Birhanu, 2009: 95).

#### **2.7.5 Economic Factors**

Journalism is one of the profession which gives lower salary for its practitioners in a developing countries like Ethiopia,(Kasoma, Journalism Ethics in Africa, 1994:106), (Sanders, 2003:122).This situation aggravate the issue of creditability, balance ,objectivity and fairness may not given due attention by the journalists .As a result, “accepting freebies, gifts ,favors ,free travel, special treatment or privileges can compromise the integrity of journalists and their employers. Nothing of value should be accepted.” A bribe, the journalists should know and understand that it is intended to influence his or her journalistic professional work (Kasoma, 2000: 96).

#### **2.7.6 Political Factors or Personal Agenda**

The need to satisfy the political leaders and individual vested interest are also another reason for the journalists to create a story. Journalists who are affiliated with political parties or to some cases will be pressured to write false propaganda. The definition shows

that propaganda is a way of transmitting ones interest through lying reports to get public acceptance. As a result propaganda can also invoke fake reporting (propaganda,2011).The ethical issue usually revolves around the degree to which outside relationship and vested interests are likely to influence one’s professional judgment(Day, 2003:220).

### **2.7.7 Psychological factors**

Sometimes journalists fabricate news stories or feature articles just because they enjoyed to be admired and loved by the staffs, bosses and by the readers (Shapiro, 2006). “A deep desire to get in to the paper; ‘the thrill of getting a good story’ and especially to make the front page”, is another reason for journalists to fabricate, (Ibid).The other form of psychological factors as written by Shapiro is that journalists try to deceive in their writings because they want to avoid rejection.

### **2.7.8 Self-Censorship**

This is one of the main reasons that journalists practice omission especially in the environment where suppression exists, journalists will self censor themselves and omit important detail of facts. Kasoma express this situation as “the most malignant journalistic disease in Africa (Kasoma, Journalism ethics in Africa 1994: 109).

## **2.8 Background of the Organization**

Amhara mass media agency is located in northern part of Ethiopia which is 565km away from the capital city of Ethiopia. The agency is found in the capital city of the region, Bahir Dar city. It consists both television and radio broadcasts.

In history, Amharia region was the first to establish the station of radio among the Ethiopian regions. The medium functioned in the name of Amhara national, regional

voice. It was established on 1 may 2005 with computerized and digital production studio. The programs were transmitted via Ethiopia radio station which was an hour air time to cover the programs every evening. On 19 may 2005 both the regional state and Swedish aid had contributed more than 11 million birr to establish medium wave radio station on Zeghie.

This helped the station to increase its airtime from an hour to six hours per a day.

After a month, its air time was exceeding into nine hours per a day including short waves. In addition to medium wave, FM Bahir Dar 96.9 program was giving service to residents of Bahir Dar and the surrounding area for two hours per a day before noon. Starting from one May, 2002 it has been expanding its infotainment programs to six hours per a day.

The Amhara television program was established on April 16, 1999 which was worked under cultural and tourism bureau of information department. The agency started its transmission by buying air time from Ethiopian television program which was half an hour per a week.

Through time, the program had massive audience and designed to buy extra air time to cover more programs and news. As a result, on January 2004 its transmission was exceeding in to an hour per a week. However, the region is so wide and difficult to cover all social, economical and political issues within an hour air time per a week. Starting from on August 9, 2007, it was becoming three hours per a week. In the process, after two years its transmission has been increasing to six hours per a week.

So, the agency has been working strongly by using modern technology and television production studio so as to achieve its mission and vision.

The agency has its own guidelines and principals of journalism ethics, which the code of ethics and morals that journalist are supposed to up hold. These include a commitment to revealing the truth, objectively and without being influenced by self interest, maintaining the secrecy of sources and attributing what is said to the appropriate source.

The state or quality of being without bias or prejudice, detached, impersonal and also the journalists' job is to report the facts as truth full and honest as possible. These are the cornerstone of the agency's goal.

The main point of this chapter is to give a more in-depth analysis on the status of journalistic ethics in the newsroom, in the case of the Amhara mass media agency.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodology used for the study of journalistic ethics in the newsroom of Amhara mass media agency. The study employed qualitative methodology and discussion will focus on the research design and methods of collecting data, which will be discussed alongside the related literature and practical experience. The field of study, as Jensen (2002:237) suggests, requires a kind of formatting both theoretically and in designing a system and method of collecting data.

The highlights of the chapter are as follows: study design; methods of data collection; data source sampling procedures.

#### **3.2 Design of the Study**

In order to study the research problem, the researcher had to see the case not only in the reports` Perspective but also managers` and editors` perspective. Hence, in addition to observational method, the researcher has applied two types of data collection methods, which are individual in depth interview and focus group discussion. While focus group discussion has distributed to the reporters, the interview has been conducted with the managing editor of the newsroom, editor in chief and deputy editor of the newsroom.

This is because the results that are found through the sole focus group discussion should be triangulated with the interviews that are undertaken with managing editor, editor in chief and deputy editor. By doing this the researcher has able to fill the gap, as well as, prove what the research subjects have been saying in the focus group discussion part.

The majority section of the research analysis is inclined to describe the journalists' activity to keep the journalistic ethical standards in the newsroom.

The study is employed qualitative approach. As explained by (Holloway, 1997, p.1) qualitative research approach

Is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they living. Researchers use qualitative approaches to explore the behavior, perspectives and experiences of the people they study.

### **3.3 Sampling Technique**

An appropriate research technique is important to any research as it will guide the process for collecting the desired data. In a situation where lack of time and money is prevalent, sample is the best way to study a given research problem.

In this study, the researcher has applied sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique used to select key informants of the interview section. The sample is practical for the informants of the focus group discussion. Snowball non- probability or chain sampling method has been used.

According to Fridah:

*Identifies, cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich, which is good expels for study, good interview subjects. What you do is to get hold of one and he/she will tell you where the others are or can be found. When you find those others they will tell you where you can get more others and the chain continues (Fridah, n-d).*

For snow ball sampling, you identify one member of the population and speak to him or her, then ask that person to identify others and so on. The sample thus “snowballs” in size. This technique is useful for hard-to- reach or hard- to identify, (Engel and Schutt, 2005, p.123).

### **3.4 Data Gathering Technique**

#### **3.4.1 Data Source:-**

In this study, the researcher used primary and secondary data types as a main source of information.

The secondary data types are gathered from books, journals (articles), internet resource and other printed materials. And these data`s are used mostly in review of literature as a wary of presenting the theoretical paradigm.

The primary data types in other words are collected by the means of individual in depth interview, focus group discussion and participant observation.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

In depth individual interviewees and focus group discussion supplied the data. The interviewees are managing editor, editor in chief, and deputy editor.

Focus group discussions were also used to collect data. Twelve participants were divided in to two groups of six reporters each. This included two females.

This research used qualitative research methods to collect data. Kruger (2003, 18-19), notes that such methods create openness and allow subject to discuss pertinent issues, clarifying ambiguity or confusion. He also notes the advantages of qualitative over quantities research, nothing “it certainly seems reasonable to suggest that one may have

better understanding of community members' situation by reading a descriptive passage than just looking at demographic statistics.” This research conducted the in depth interviews and focus group discussion, acting as interviewer and moderator.

Based on snow ball sampling, twelve reporters were selected and divide in to two groups function as focus group discussion. Managing editor, editor in chief and deputy editor were interviewed from the Amhara television and radio newsroom agency. This sampling method helped to identify those with long and rich experience and to obtain detail data. Selecting appropriate informants/interviews presupposes that the researcher has knowledge of the situation to be researched/ investigated (Flick et al, 2004:169).

### **3.6 Interview**

The qualitative interview provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail. Kvale (1996:21) defines qualitative research interviews as “attempts understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations. The method enables the researcher to engage in dialogue, with the interviewee as the measuring instrument.” It is not easy to conduct good qualitative research interviews Hancock, Windridge and Ockleford (2007:21) note that a good interviewer needs to put an interviewee at ease, needs good listening skills and needs to be able to manage the interview situation so as to collect data that truly reflects the opinion and feeling of the interviewee concerning the chosen topic.

The virtue of a qualitative interview is its openness. Apart from certain standard choices, this openness and the absence of a prescribed set of rules creates a variety of opportunities for the researcher. These opportunities demand more skills, knowledge and

intuition from the interviewer compared to standardized social science methods (Kvale, 1996:84,105; Seidman, 1998:9-11).

The qualitative interview is flexible, dynamic, non- directive, unstructured, non-standardized and open- ended. (Taylor and Bogadan (1984:77) see the qualitative interview as “repeated face- to face encounters between the researcher and informants perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations are expressed in their own words.” qualitative interviews are particularly suitable for studying individuals’ understanding of their world for describing their experiences and self- understanding and for clarifying and elaborating their perspective of their world (Seidman, 1998:3-4). In light of this, this research attempts to explore how journalists apply journalistic ethics in the newsroom and understand their ethical problems.

### **3.7 Focus Group Discussion**

A focus group is a group of interacting individual with some common interest or characteristics brought together by a moderator who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990:12). Kruger (1998:47) defines a focus group as “a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment.” The researcher believes that the method helps to gain information about the specific issue, using interaction to bring the researcher and group to gather and reach consensus on issue emanating from the interview.

Denezin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that the group interview is essentially a qualitative data gathering technique that finds the interviewees moderator directing the interaction

and inquiry in a Structured or unstructured manner, depending on the interview's purpose.

In order to get relevant data information from the participants snow ball non- probability sampling method has been used snow ball or chain sampling as explained by Fridah;

For snow ball sampling, you identify one member of the population and speak to him or her, then ask that person to identify others and so on. The sample thus "snowballs" in size. This technique is useful for hard-to- reach or hard- to identify, (Engel and Schutt, 2005, p.123).

### **3.8 Observation**

The third technique that has been taken as a researching is observation method. The investigator used this technique to find out the truth of whether news media's have their own ethical guideline or not. At the time of data collection, the research checked all the collected data and investigates some of the questions which need special attention such as checking whether the media house have their own ethical guideline or not, observing whether editors and journalists use these guidelines while writing their article. This is because, when media companies operate without having guidelines, journalist will find themselves doing something wrong. According to Hutton as cited in (Belt, 2007), journalists lack of familiarity with the paper's rule is one factor for the journalists to deviate from the basic standards. The researcher has also employed observation tool to check if there are any unethical manifestation of journalists in the newsroom.

To conclude the researcher used qualitative research methods (in depth individual's interview. Focus groups' discussion and observation because they were helpful in

investigating the topic from an insider's point of view. The methods helped to gather data on journalistic ethics in the new room: The case of Amhara mass media agency.

### **3.9 Ethical Consideration**

Throughout all the research stages, the researcher has kept most of the ethical issues. Some of the ethical issues that were implemented in this research were giving official letter for the concerned body, asking permission from the stake holders, informing all the participants about the objective and keeping their confidentiality. In order to preserve their privacy, the researcher tries to keep the anonymity of the participants.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **4. FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

In this particular chapter, the researcher has tried to review the responses given by the focus group discussion, as well as in the individual interviews. The data obtained through both formats are analyzed and presented simultaneously, so that we might get closer to know the precise thinking of journalists in relation to journalism principles and ethics. This chapter will also disclose the status of journalistic ethics in the newsroom mentioned in the preceding chapters.

Additionally, the research below will attempt to review the major internal and external factors and forced journalists to engage in journalistic ethical problems in the newsroom. Finally, it should be held in mind that this research is based on the information gathered from reporters, editors and general manager who are working currently in the newsroom, not those who have worked in the past.

#### **4.2 Bases of Code of Ethics**

Generally speaking, the definition of media culture covers journalistic practices, professional standards and ethical considerations as determined by political, economic, social, historical, legal, cultural, linguistic and technological parameters.

Code of ethics can be derived from either universal value or local (which considers social, economic, cultural, and political agenda of the domestic community or mixed type of ethics). Kasoma has argued that the standards generally accepted are based on in

European morality and that the African Journalists should look to their own moral heritage. As stated in (Kruger, 2004:9-10).

Global ethics or universal ethics stresses on the basic principles such as to report the truth, to avoid bias, to distinguish news, and opinion to serve the public etc. Kruger (2004: 8) also states the ‘political-economy’ approach rejects any notion of free, independent or objective news media.

However, Chomsky (1997) has written using crosses- cultural comparisons when discussing the principles of Media ethics, and giving due weight to African, Indian and Eastern ethical systems. This raises the issue of how different tradition of journalism ethic should be used and brought together to form a richer cross-cultural approach.

To make ethical judgments from a situational perspective, it is necessary to focus regularly and primarily on the elements of the specific persuasive, situation at hand. Virtually all perspectives make some allowances, on occasion, for the modified application of ethical criteria in special circumstance. However, an extreme situational perspective routinely makes judgments only in light of each different context. Criteria from broad political, human nature, religious, or other perspectives are minimized and absolute and universal standards are avoided.

From these perspectives, participants of the interview and participants of focus group discussion were asked to give their opinion on the bases of code of ethics in the newsroom.

*They all said that the bases of code of ethics are mixed type. That means both global and local values are incorporated. According to them, the initial notion of the newsroom journalistic ethics is universal standards of journalistic code of*

*ethics. However, this ethics is adapted based on the regional reality of the community. This means, the adoption is considered the realities of social, economical, cultural and political context of the society. And it also focuses on developmental and peace journalism to secure development and peace issues of the society.*

So, the above analysis answered the question of bases of code of ethics and its construction in the newsroom of Amhara mass media agency.

### **4.3 Importance of Code of Ethics**

Everything that a journalist does has ethical implications, to a lesser or greater extent. This is because everything that a journalist writes or neglects to write or to say in some or other way has an influence on people. The influence can be good or bad. One participant of focus group discussion said “If we are adhering journalistic ethics properly, we will do balanced news stories, the media gets credibility from the audiences and also it keeps the good image of the journalists and the organization of the media.” So, ethical journalism must begin with safety for media and their staff.

*“Ethics does not simply ask how to live well. It asks how we should live well ethically, that is, in goodness and in right relation with each other, a task that may require us to forego personal benefits, to carry out duties or to endure persecution” (Participant of the interview).*

Generally, the interviewees and participants of focus group discussion have said: - If journalistic ethics are not adhering properly by practitioners of the media, the following things will happen:

*Unnecessary harm is done to people; The media loses credibility; it weakens the media's vital role as watch dogs and the well being of democracy suffers.*

According to one of the interviewees, we are forced to follow ethics because of the following things:

*Social reasons : media have an enormous influence, it is of vital importance that journalism could be practiced in an accountable and responsible way; philosophical (moral) reasons – harm and( or) mutual aid; professional reasons: as a profession journalism should have ethical standards to be governed by those codes of ethics and media can be a source of conflict: when media practitioners do their work, un- professionally and their products can be potentially harmful to individuals, organizations, society and the world at large.*

Ethics are concerned with making rational judgments as well as sound moral decisions in daily journalistic performance. Codes of ethics are a good place to find lofty and sometimes even elegant expressions of the view that journalism is basically about public service as stated by (Kruger, 2004; 3), Day highlights four reasons why societies develop systems of ethics; according to the finding, it shares similar things. Those are:

- ◆ They serve society's need for stability, by giving us a framework which allows us to develop trust in each other ;
- ◆ They serve a need for a moral hierarchy;
- ◆ They help resolve conflicts and
- ◆ They help clarify values.

So, code of ethics play a significant role on the duties of the journalists to further by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. So, conscientious journalists from media specialties strive to serve the public with

thoroughness and honesty. So, codes of ethics have numerous benefits for the practitioners of the media and the well being of the society and for the organization itself. Hence, the above discussion answered the question of the significance of code of ethics to the practitioners.

#### **4.4 The Major Journalistic Ethical Problems in the Newsroom and their Causes**

##### **4.4.1 Unfair and Unbalanced Reporting**

According to Harper (2008), Unfair and unbalanced reporting is common practice especially in the war time, and racial, reporting. Unfairness and unbalanced or biases reporting can be express by the journalist's article in which they present the news subjects either in negative or positive way.

From the result of the study, there are different factors for unfair and unbalanced reporting. The first actor is political affiliation. As one participant of the focus group discussion pointed out that political affiliation and (or) political views have their own influence on a journalist's overall task. He said,

“Journalists who have more contact with one political party tend to be more inclined and write in favor of the party” (Participant of the interview). The other factor, according to one of the interviewee is journalists who have their own agenda might twist the story and make it unbalanced. He also said, “A journalist who wants to transmit his own agenda will only stress on information that he wants to advocate.”

Capacity problem (lack of skill) to balance a story is the next big factor. According to one participant of the interview, lack of knowledge affects journalistic quality of writing. He also stated that the source of lack of skill is related with the low quality of education.

The next crucial factor for unbalanced and unfairness reporting is journalist's attachment. As Bell states, journalist's attachment to a particular group, or company will pledge journalist to present the fact one sided or unfairly (Bell, 1998). As one of the interviewee said,

*“There are some journalists who are addicted by different drug addictions and their salary could not afford to cover their expenses and get financial problem. As a result, they attach themselves in order to get freebies from a particular organization would finally end up with writing too much praise for the company”*  
(Participant of the interview).

The other big factor is also sensitive issues. As explained in (Harper, 2008) is when journalists faced with sensitive issue like war or election, the possibility of their story to be slanted to one side will increase.

Johnson as cited in (Sanders, 2003, P.45) says “The first causality of war is truth” war times are good example that forces journalists to publicize unbalanced, unfair, biased and faked report.

According to one participant of the focus group discussion said, “There are some sensitive issues that could not be fairly reported if the issues are being considered as a national interest like war. During this time, there is a possibility of slanted or biased report since the issue is sensitive” (Participant of the focus group discussion).

The other factor is the media agenda. As one participant of the focus group discussion said,

*“The media is state media and there will be pressure from government bodies. It might be another reason that shapes the news in to one side and make the story totally unfair and unbalanced”* (Participant of the focus group discussion). Here,

*the media has its own agenda that lead journalists to write unbalanced and unfairness news. The other thing is journalists own personal bias, stereotype and subjectivity judgment result unfairness in the news report. According to informants, unfair and unbalanced reporting has been attacked by political affiliation, journalists' vested agenda, lack of skill, journalists' attachment, media agenda, sensitive issue and personal biases of journalists.*

Those the above points are a great factor that affect journalists not to a write/report fair and balanced reporting stories and answered the question of factors that affect journalists not to be fair and balance during they write/report their stories in the newsroom.

#### **4.4.2 Conflicts of Interest**

According to Day, conflict of interest is a clash between professional loyalties and outside interests that undermines the credibility of the moral agent. Conflicts generally arise from the roles we play within society and, for the reason, appear to involve particularistic duties rather than our general societal obligations (Day, 2003:209).

In addition to Day, Sanders also says conflict of interest could only arise in a setting where reporters were expected to tell the truth without fear or favor, their prime duty being to purvey news rather than promote views. It is a moral problem entails a specific understanding of what journalism is.

From the result of the study, journalists can be influenced by number of factors according to informants. The first big factor of conflict of interest is poverty. According to one participant of the focus group discussion said, “We journalists could not cope up with this alarming rate of living standards and are paid very low salary” (Participant of the focus group discussion).

*He also explained it by comparing with other media outlets like BBC, Al-jazeera journalists. According to him, “those journalist are being treated by different incentives; such as plane ticket, accommodation, pocket money and the like are covered and they always give due emphasis for their professional obligation. But, ours are not encouraged and journalists look at outside of the organization.”*

The second factor is freebies when journalists accept favors, gifts or other special considerations from vested interests or news sources, it raises serious questions about their objectivity as Retief explained. According to the BBC: “Individual must not accept personal benefits, example, goods, discounts, services, cash, gratitude’s, or entertainment outside the normal scope of business hospitality, from the organizations or people with whom, they might have dealings with on the BBC’s behalf” (producers’ Guidelines 1996:95).

Similarly speaking, the Amhara mass media codes of ethics also give strong restriction on the relationship of journalists from the outside organizations or people with whom, they might have dealings. This means, the code of ethics strictly forbidden to accept food, bed, drinks and other expenses from the information sources.

The third factor is bribe. According to Kasoma, bribe is a favor done or given to a journalist in order to influence him or her to report favorably or unfavorably or not to report at all. So, problem of journalistic practice is said that the cancer of African journalism is corruption, particularly bribes. The points are paused a question of credibility, balance, objectivity, fairness and the like (Kasoma, 2000:96).

From one of the informants has said, 'buche' or bribe in this time is common for every practitioner of the media. He said, "Many journalists' first aim is identifying places which have good 'buche' before they have been sent to field report" (Participant of the focus group discussion). This idea also re-strengthened by one of the interviewee. He said,

*"There are some journalists who are always arguing when they are assigned to field report. They simply stretch up their hands to gain 'buche' rather than serving the society. Those journalists have been advised and punished in accordance with ethical problems."*

The other thing is being affiliated to political activities. He or she will always be associated with that party and will have no credibility, whether writing against the opposition or about his or her own party. So, journalists should not be out of their professional track because they are the ears and eyes of the society.

So, conflict of interest is a disease that affects the development of the media organization and also the country. Therefore, journalists should avoid such malpractices. And this, analysis can answer the question of major journalistic ethical problems in the newsroom and their causes.

#### **4.4.3 Objectivity**

Many scholars agree the difficulty to achieve objective reporting, because of the impossibility to practice detachment and write a report without any interpretation. Some scholars and journalists even say objectivity is 'an illusion' and difficult to achieve, (Sanders, 2003:43).

According to Day (1991:74), objectivity is a controversial value and not all media theorists and practitioners ascribe to it. Day asserts that it is probably impossible to achieve it. “The reality however, is that all people are subjective, partial and biased” (Retief 2002:99).

From the result, there are situations that can influence journalist’s objectivity. According to one of the interviewee, objectivity can be attacked by different ways. He said,

*“Ambiguity of facts can influence journalist’s objectivity if he/she cannot find the source to help him/her verify them:” The other situation is, where the news source becomes reluctant to provide the details of news account because of fear of being misquoted in the story. According to him, it may also happen that journalists can neither determine the credibility of the source of news information nor the validity of news events due to circumstances surrounding the events.*

Objectivity is a commitment and presentation of factual accounts of events using neutral news reporting techniques.

According to one informant from the focus group discussion has pointed out where a reporter can be biased when reporting certain events. He said, “When the information the reporter has collected in his beats is imbalanced and when the account of facts gets distorted in process of transmission from one person to other”. The other informant also said, “When the facts collected lack clarity because the source of information misinformed the reporter and the editor in this situation can get the information will be totally wrong”.

According to the informants, objectivity can be attacked by the following things. They are:

Journalists' lack of commitment to the ideology of objective journalism in which journalists do not only look at the newsworthiness of stories, but also consider the impact of the news on the viewers and readers as Ward (1999) has explained; ownership of the media can influence journalist's objectivity, news editor's relations with the owner of the media can also affect objectivity. Because the most important news stories are killed; in order to prevent the interest of media owners and political or ideological convictions of a journalist can also affect objectivity. If journalists are being affiliated with political activities or ideological convictions, they could not objectively gathered and reporting stories against their party or ideology.

Therefore, the above analysis can answer the question of major ethical problems in the newsroom and their causes.

#### **4.4.4 Social Responsibility**

Responsibility in the media means that reporters and editors must be careful as to how they should use the information they gather (Biagi, 1999:361). Dennis also said, "The news media use the central nervous system of society and ought to act responsibly and constructively to help the public better define and develop democracy" (Dennis, 1998:xvi).

So, as many scholars have pointed out that journalists' first responsibility is for the people. Regardless of any difficulty, journalists' loyalty is to the citizens as explained by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2004).

However, from the result of the study, social responsibility and journalists' role have been misinterpreted by journalists in the newsroom. As one informant from the focus group discussion said, "Most of journalists forget their duties and not dare to reveal social issues. They simply wait until they are told by their bosses to do so. According to him, this occurs due to some reasons.

From the reasons, one is pressure from government. Here, the media is state media and sometimes it gives priority for government activities rather than social issues (Participant of the focus group discussion).

The other great problem is lack of coordination amongst editor, journalists (reporters) and newsroom leaders. Editors need to be strong journalists and newsroom leaders. As one participant of the focus group discussion said,

*"In rare cases editors are simply appointed with lack of skills, however, editors are not simply proofreaders but also most editors have reporting experience or reporting skills. They also pay attention to matters of taste and language, which vary depending on the local culture. So, some times, social responsibility may not be given due attention because the editor gives due attention to government activities."*

From this, social responsibility has been ignored due to pressure from government and lack of coordination amongst editors, reporters and newsroom leaders.

Thus, the analysis can answer the question of major ethical problems in the newsroom and their causes.

#### **4.5 Major Factors of Journalists that Influence Ethical Decision-Making Process in the Newsroom**

Journalists have faced many factors that influence their decision-making while they report or write stories. Many scholars also confirm that the problems are various and vast that diverts journalists' decision-making process in the newsroom.

According to Voakes (1997) says that there is a hierarchy of social influences that influence journalists' decision-making in ethical situations at most of the times, whether explicitly or not. The view is shared by Tanner (2005) who argues that journalists wrestle daily with their consciences in making ethical decisions in the newsroom.

Whatever it is, undisputed that conscientious decision-making is vital and influences ethical journalistic practices in the newsroom. The purpose of this section is to examine the various factors that influence decision-making process and how journalists are guided in their ethics by intrinsic motivations (such as religious upbringing, personal moral compass, or desire for career advancement) and external heuristic (such as code of ethics, peer pressure, or the threat of reprimand) (Voakes, 1997).

From this perspective, the finding of the study has also shared similar factors of journalists that influence decision-making process in the newsroom. Almost all factors have been analyzed before this part. However, the great factors of journalists could be presented as follow:

The first factor is individual or personal, intrinsic values, does influence the decision-making process of journalists. According to one of the interviewee, there are some journalists who do not give due attention to the basic news element like human interest, novelty, prominence. As a result, rather than strive to report the truth in fairness and as

accurately responsibly, to serve the society, they simply tuned by their internalized set of beliefs in the way they report (Participant of the interview).

The second factor is senior journalists influence on junior journalists. According to one informant, senior journalists do not co-operate each other and even load much of their tasks to junior journalists. She also adds they could not share their experiences rather they simply confuse junior journalists. As a result, decision-making process will be highly influenced in the newsroom. So, peer and senior journalists' pressure would undermine the profession of journalism. However, within the newsroom culture, it is the fellow journalists that mostly seek advice and help from more experienced senior journalists and editors.

The other thing is organization (owners of media); editors and newsroom leaders (managers) could put pressure on journalists' decision-making process. Here, most of the informants have come up with conclusions:

Organizations (owners of media) by its very nature places restriction on individual autonomy and stories killed or altered in order to protect the interest of media owners by news editors and newsroom leaders.

However, some key informants could not deny that organizations have a bearing on how a journalist define his responsibilities and allow journalists to play a more active role in their decision-making process.

The next factor is professional problems. According to informants, limited professional experience and without having journalistic qualification may influence journalists' decision-making process. They also say, there are some journalists and editors who have

not self confidence to decide independently. Even though, skill training is given to journalists to build their capacity and fill their skill gap, still, some of them lack skill.

The fifth factor is economic pressure that leads to bribe and other unethical practices. According to them, it is obvious that journalists earn low amount of money and always bears its influence on journalists' decision making process in the newsroom.

The next is political factors or personal agenda. They said, "Journalists who are affiliated with political parties or to some cases will be pressured to false propaganda. As a result, he/she will be influenced on their decision-making process".

The last but the least factors are, psychological and self-censorship of journalists. As one participant of the focus group discussion said, "Sometimes journalists fabricate news stories or feature articles just because they enjoyed to be admired and loved by the staffs, and (or) newsroom leaders. At that time, he/she may deceive in their writing and is being influenced by psychological fearing.

The other one is self-censorship of journalists. According to one of the interviewee has pointed out that there are some journalists who are censored themselves and omit the most important story which might be significant for the society. He also adds self censorship is a disease of journalism that influences journalists' self-decision making process in the newsroom" (Participant of the interview).

Generally, according to informants, journalists are highly influenced on the decision making process in the newsroom by the following core points. Those are:

- ◆ Individual
- ◆ Economic factors
- ◆ Small group
- ◆ Political factors or personal vested agenda

- ◆ Organization
- ◆ Psychological and
- ◆ Lack of skills
- ◆ Self-censorship

So, the above analysis answered the question of major factors of journalists that influence ethical decision-making process in the newsroom.

#### **4.6 Ways of Mitigation to Address Ethical Breaches**

According to Odell, the basic concepts and theories of ethics provide the framework necessary for working out one's own moral or ethical code. So, ethical principles are necessary preconditions for the existence of a social community. Without ethical principles it would be impossible for human beings to live in harmony and without fear, despair, hopelessness, anxiety, apprehension, and uncertainty (Odell, 1983:95).

So, measurement in every organization of media house is a must and indispensable for the journalists and the society. Generally, different media organizations have different ways of mitigation on unethical journalists. According to one participant of the focus group discussion has pointed out his experience when he was in Fana broadcasting corporate FM radio. He said "If a journalist break the ethics and receive some amount of money from organization or individuals for a story, he/she automatically returns the money and fired from the organization" (participant of the interview).

However, Amhara mass media agency is a state media that has its own procedure to take measurement. According to one of the interviewee, first a journalist has been informed by the disciple committee whether he/she breaks the ethics. And then, he/she will be informed oral warning up to money punishment.

Finally, if the action has been done redundantly, he/she will be fired from the organization. Of course in this agency, apart from money punishment there is no severe punishment to be fired from the organization.

Hence, the above points answered the question of how do the practitioners address to ethical breaches.

#### **4.7 Findings**

The researcher gathered data through individual in-depth interview and focus group discussion with Amhara mass media newsroom's editors and reporters respectively, and found the following:

- Bases of code of ethics in the newsroom are mixed type that is derived from universal and local code of ethics. It mainly focuses on development and peace journalism.

♣ Journalistic ethics problems in the newsroom can be affected in different ways:

⇒ **Unfair and Unbalanced reporting can be attacked by:**

- ♠ Political affiliation
- ♠ Capacity problem (lack of skill)
- ♠ Journalist's attachment
- ♠ Vested agenda of the media

⇒ **Conflicts of interest can be affected by:**

- ♠ Poverty
- ♠ Freebies
- ♠ Bribe /'Buche'

- ♣ Being affiliated to organizations

⇒ **Objectivity is also affected by:**

- ♣ Journalists' lack of commitment to the ideology of objective journalism
- ♣ Ownership of the media
- ♣ News editor's relations with owner of the media.
- ♣ Political or ideological convictions of a journalist.

⇒ **Social responsibility is also attacked by:**

- ♣ Pressure from government
- ♣ Lack of coordination amongst editors, reporters and newsroom leaders.

Generally, internal and external factors of journalists that influence decision making process in the newsroom are:

- ☞ Individual (by their internalized set of beliefs)
- ☞ Small group like editors, managers, peer (colleagues/,
- ☞ Organizations /owners of the media/
- ☞ Professional problems
- ☞ Economic factors
- ☞ Political factors and/or/ personal vested agenda
- ☞ Psychological factors
- ☞ Self-censorship of journalists

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to probe journalistic ethics in the newsroom of the Amharan mass media agency. I have focused on journalistic ethics in the newsroom and how journalists apply those media ethics; what are the challenges and major factors of journalists while they write (report) stories in the newsroom.

Media ethics is the guide for journalist's daily operation. When its media practitioners deviate from the normal standard, the quality and indeed the power of media goes to a minimum level. Among these ethical issues, objectivity, fairness, conflicts of interest, and social responsibility and reporting a story in an unbalanced manner affect the public's trust towards the practitioners.

This study was conducted with the major objectives of and reached a conclusion of

- Ethical problems in the newsroom of the Amhara mass media agency has been explored the causes of the problems and influence ethical decision making process of journalists in the newsroom. Furthermore, the aim was to explore the main factors that contributed a lot for the exacerbating of the problem.

According to Kruger (2004:1) states that ethics “deals with morality, moral judgments and the meaning of concepts like right and wrong.” To give moral judgments or decisions of the rightness and wrongness, there needed to be considered certain issues among which culture is the major one. Intensifying this point Day (2003:5) says that “ethical decisions are always made within a specific context, which includes the political, social

and cultural climate.” Thus ethics is described as “laying down norms or rules of right or of good behavior” (Ross, 1968:311).

As Kasoma (1994(b):5) puts it journalism ethics is concerned with making sound decisions in journalistic performance, and it assumes the presence of societal morality. Morality has to do with actions guided by generally acceptable human values and responsibilities.

In spite of the fact that most respondents think the problem of this journalistic ethics are showing some improvements, the problems still exists in the newsroom. Those journalistic ethics (objectivity, fairness, conflicts of interest, and social responsibility) that influence decision making process of journalists have been attacked indifferent ways. Some of the factors, which let journalists to practice different journalistic ethics, discussed in this study include:

The main cause for journalists to write unbalanced and unfairness story is identified. According to respondents, the main reasons are:

Being affiliated political activities, capacity problem (lack of skill), journalist’s attachment and the media agenda.

Objective also can be attacked by the following things. According to them; journalists’ lack of commitment to the ideology of objective journalism, ownership of the media, news editor’s relationship with the owners of the media, and political or ideological convictions of a journalist can also affect objectivity.

The other big problem is conflicts of interest. According to informants, the reasons are: poverty (economic factors), journalists’ attachment, freebies, and bribe.

The fourth journalistic ethic is social responsibility. According to informants, the common factor is: pressure from government, lack of coordination amongst editor, journalists' /reporters/ and newsroom leaders, misconception of journalists about their duties.

Generally, according to informants, the common internal and external factors of journalists that influence decision making process in the newsroom are: individual (by their internalized set of beliefs), small group like editors, managers, peer /colleagues/, culture, organizations-owners of the media, professional problems, economic factors, political factors and /or/ personal vested agenda, psychological factors, and self-censorship.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The media should represent the public and speak for and to the public interest in order to hold government accountability (Schudson, 1998:31). Taking this basic issue into consideration the researcher proposes the following recommendations.

- In order to achieve the quality of the media, journalists should do their work responsibly for the general good of the society. To enhance this, the media house delegates and other concerned bodies give due attention to the issue of training for journalists to get ethical journalists and to avoid factors of journalists that journalists could get confidence to write or report fair and balanced stories in the newsroom.
- Code of ethic has a paramount significance in journalism profession. As journalists do their duties “Not for themselves but on behalf of their public” (Kruger, 2004:3), they need to have codes of ethics which suggest that news could be accurate and error-free. Therefore, journalists across the country need to join forces and chart out their own

code of ethics. The government and other concerned bodies' may also assist and encourage initiatives' taken by journalists to follow code of ethics strictly without any interference.

- Journalists dare to tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so. And also they examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others. It means seeking a greater diversity of sources in stories, and telling such stories from the perspective of non-dominant groups and includes issues of social justice and their historical context, not just daily events and facts. That is helpful for journalists and marked a trust by the citizens.
- Journalists strive to avoid conflicts of interest remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility. Journalists also adapt the habit to expose unethical practices of journalists and admit mistakes and correct promptly as long as they are serving the societies' interest.

Generally, the researcher has studied journalistic ethics in the newsroom dominantly on fairness, objectivity, conflicts of interest, and social responsibility. However, in the future the researcher will study the rest of journalistic ethics enthusiastically.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Questions for In-depth Interview**

1. How important is journalistic ethics to practitioners?
2. In what bases are the codes of ethics established?
3. What do you think the problems of journalistic ethics in the newsroom?
4. How can journalists achieve the following journalistic ethics in the newsroom? /Fair, balance, and objective reporting/
5. What are the causes of conflicts of interest while journalists (report) write news stories?
6. What are the most prevalent ethical problems among these journalistic ethics /unfair and unbalanced reporting, conflicts of interests, lack of objectivity/?
7. What are the causes of those ethical problems?
8. How do journalists adapted on the practices of journalistic ethics in the newsroom?
9. What kind of standards or systems you use to identify ethical problems?
10. Is there a way to mitigate this problem? How?
11. Do you think unbalance, unfairness, conflicts of interest and irresponsibility can be decisive factors for journalism ethics? Why?
12. What are internal and external factors of journalists that are not to apply properly those media ethics in the newsroom?
13. Is there any influence on junior journalists by senior journalists in the newsroom? If yeas, how can you alleviate the problem?
14. What is the contribution of professional codes of conduct regarded to reduce conflicts of interest, unfair and unbalanced reporting in the newsroom?
15. How do the practitioners address to ethical breaches?
16. If you have any more idea, please mention?

## Appendix 2

### Questions for group discussions with reporters/Journalists/

1. What does media ethics mean to you?
2. What is the significance of codes of ethics for journalists?
3. How do journalists adapt on the practices of journalistic ethics in the newsroom?
4. How does code of ethics structured? In what based does the code of ethics structured established?
5. How can journalists achieve the following journalistic ethics in the newsroom (fair, balance, and objective reporting)?
6. How do you entertain the following journalistic ethics; are they applied correctly in the newsroom? If not, why?
  - ♠ Social responsibility
  - ♠ Objectivity
  - ♠ Fairness
  - ♠ Conflicts of interest
7. What are the causes of conflicts of interest while journalists report /write/ news stories?
8. What do you think the main internal and external factors of journalists that influence decision making process in the newsroom?
9. How do the practitioners address to ethical breaches?
10. What are the factors that affect journalists to write unfair and unbalanced reports?
11. What is the contribution of professional codes of conduct regarded to reduce conflicts of interest, unfair and unbalanced report in the newsroom?
12. If you have any more idea, please mention?