

**A critical study of the treatment of public
relations information in Ethiopian News
Agency**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of**

MASTERS OF ARTS IN JOURNALISM

OF

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

BY

BINIYAM WUBISHET

JULY, 2006

Supervisors: Terje S. Skjerdal

and

Berhanu Tibebu

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank the Almighty God once again for giving me this chance to stand up again from another whirlwind of my life. Had it not been for the grace and mercy of God, *let al.*one completing this thesis, I would have been in a severe problem according to the drastic wave that has been blown weeks before the deadline.

The support and strong commitment of Terje S. Skjerdal, my external advisor, was not important, rather it was crucial. He gave me vital inputs; in some cases to redirect this thesis in to its current shape.

The commitment and input of my internal advisor Berhanu Tibebe is helpful. His timely correction and constructive suggestion is a great contribution to this paper.

Once again the support of my family and close friends shows that they are still there and care for me whatever difficulties I face and how many times I fall. I am grateful for them. I also thank my organization, the Ethiopian Press Agency for sponsoring my studies.

Abstract

Government public relations in Ethiopia have been strengthened over the past three years. The Ministry of Information has repeatedly underlined that the role of public relations in informing the public through the media must be strong and sustainable. One can easily see the contribution of public relations in the daily news-making process when reading or listening to news.

For several governmental and non-governmental organizations, the primary role of public relations is to promote the activities of the organization. The media on the other hand are expected to use diverse sources in order to present different sides of the story. This typically leads to a tense relationship between journalists and public relations officers.

Nonetheless, there is a symbiotic relationship between the two professions (media and public relations). Public relations need the media as a channel to broadcast its message, while the media need public relations to get access to source material.

This research has interrogated two issues. The first is the extent to which journalists in Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) use public relations information, and the second is what impact the relationship between ENA and public relations offices has in the news-making process. The research has used qualitative methods by means of data analysis, in-depth interviews as well as database material analysis.

The study shows that ENA do not consult other sources to crosscheck the information it receives from governmental public relations.

The study shows that the relationship between ENA journalists and public relations officers is a protective one because ENA journalists do not crosscheck the information they receive from the latter and public relations departments are almost the only way to access government information. The research also identified internal and external factors as reasons for the failure to crosscheck public relations information.

Journalists cited lack of professionalism; trust in public relations; deadline pressure; competition; and amount of news expected as internal factors that impede to crosscheck public relations information.

Journalists being powerless; geographical distance and poor infrastructure; public relations 'dictatorship' and gender issues were identified by journalists as external factors that hold back the critical investigation of public relations information.

List of Abbreviations

ENA	Ethiopian News Agency
ETC	Ethiopian Telecommunications Cooperation
PR	Public Relations
USA	United States of America

Table of contents

Acknowledgment	1
Abstract	2
List of abbreviation.....	4
Table of contents	5
Chapter 1: Introduction	
1.1 Introduction	9
1.2 Research questions	9
1.3 Objectives of the study	10
1.4 Methodology	11
1.5 Data collection methods	11
1.6 Significance of the study	11
1.7 Scope and limitation of the study	12
1.8 Application of results	12
Chapter 2: Literature review	
2.1 Defining public relations and its role	13
2.2 The Grunig and Hunt models of public relations	16
2.2.1 The press agent/publicity model	17
2.2.2 Public-information model	17
2.2.3 Two-way asymmetric model	17
2.2.4 Two-way symmetric model	17
2.3 A brief history of public relations	18
2.3.1 General history	18
2.3.2 Ethiopian history	20
2.4 Journalists and their responsibility in being fair and balanced	21
2.5 The relationship between journalism and public relations	24

2.6 How should journalists use public relations information?	28
--	----

Chapter 3: Research methodology

3.1 Introduction	34
3.2 Data collection method	34
3.2.1 In-depth interviews	34
3.2.2 The ENA database	35
3.3 Sample selection and size	35
3.4 Data analysis procedure	36
3.5 Qualitative content analysis	37

Chapter 4: Data presentation and analysis

4.1 Does ENA countercheck public relations information?	37
4.2 The relationship between ENA journalists and public relations practitioners	41
4.2.1 A friendly relationship	41
4.2.2 public relations as the gatekeeper for government information	44
4.2.3 Media contact with public relations	47
4.3 How do ENA journalists process the public relations information?	49
4.3.1 Internal explanations	50
4.3.1.1 Lack of professionalism	50
4.3.1.2 Trust in public relations	51
4.3.1.3 Deadline, competition and amount of news expected	52
4.3.2 External explanations	54
4.3.2.1 Journalists being powerless	54
4.3.2.2 Distance and poor infrastructure	55
4.3.2.3 Public relations dictatorship and gender issues	56
4.4 How do ENA journalist process press releases?.....	57

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion	59
----------------------	----

5.2 Recommendations	59
5.3 Suggestions for further research	60
References	61

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Throughout the world, public relations departments represent a major information provider to journalists. Many organizations, government offices and NGOs, as well as business firms, have their own public relations departments or officers that give information to journalists.

Nonetheless, there is a lasting criticism that they do not give information with the primary aim to inform the public. Critics claim that public relations officials give information to the media only when they think it would boost the reputation of the organization. Some even contend that public relations tend to hide information that could harm the reputation of the organization.

Even if the motivation of public relations departments is to promote their organization, journalists need the information. This is because in several institutions it is only through the public relations office that journalists can get timely access to information. It is therefore obligatory for journalists to have good contact with the public relations department while searching for information.

In other words, media and public relations have strong ties. The challenge for the media is that they have a responsibility to include more than the public relations' side of the story in order to maintain fairness and balance. For instance, if the public relations office of an organization gives information to a journalist about a development project; the journalist may also want to seek the views of the beneficiaries of the project, find out how workers react to the project, how surrounding residents of the village react, – and also, the journalist may physically go to the site and make a report. By doing so, the journalist will get more comprehensive picture of the project.

This approach will also enrich the the coverage as the various actors have additional information to that of the public relations' department. Their viewpoints may lead to a different story which is more interesting and more newsworthy.

Towards this backdrop, the researcher is interested in finding out to what extent Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) journalists use public relations sources exclusively or in addition to other sources in their news production.

The research picked ENA because it is the oldest news agency in the country and the major news provider for the government-owned media. It covers all the regions of the country with many regional offices. ENA feeds news to several media including Ethiopian Television, the Ethiopian Herald, Berissa, Al Alem, FM radio, Ethiopian Radio and Radio Fana among others. It also has its own website.

1.2 Research questions

The research will address the following questions:

1. Do ENA journalists crosscheck public relations information?
2. Do ENA journalists face problems when crosschecking public relations information? What are the problems?
3. Does the relationship between ENA journalists and public relations officers affect the journalists' effort to crosscheck information?
4. What do editors and journalists do to balance public relations information with other parties?

1.3 Objectives of the study

The *general objective* of the research is to find out how ENA journalists treat public relations information in their news-making process.

The *specific objectives* are:

- To show how the relationship between ENA journalists and public relations affects the news making process.
- To find out what ENA journalists do to balance the public relations information while making news.
- To find out whether ENA, as a governmental news institution, have an certain way to deal with public relations information that helps the government institutions to reach the public with its intended message.

1.4 Methodology

The objective of the thesis is to find out how ENA journalists process public relations information in their news-making process. The activity is process oriented and is difficult to analyze by means of purely quantitative method. The research will therefore mainly use qualitative research methods.

1.5 Data collection methods

The research will use both primary and secondary data. The framework of the research and the literature review is based on secondary data like books, journals and E-books.

The research uses mainly primary data for analysis purposes. The research collected three months of public relations sourced news from the ENA database and analyzed these based on whether they include other sources to the story or not. This part of the research was conducted by means of content analysis.

The research prefers in-depth interviews as the major method to collect information from journalists, editors and the head of ENA. This technique helps to get information that is not restricted or limited to the experience of the researcher. Hopefully, it also helps the respondents to be more open when sharing their experiences with the interviewers. It further makes it easier to ask follow-up questions that other methods like questionnaire do not cater for.

The study used telephone interviews to ask seven organizations' public relations departments how many professional public relations staff there are in their respective organizations.

1.6 Significance of the study

- The research indicates what kind of relationship there is between ENA and government public relations.
- The research will also indicate the problems that ENA faces when crosschecking public relations information.
- The study will make recommendation based on the findings
- The research will indicate how uncritical use of PR sources has a negative effect on journalistic methods.

1.7 Scope and limitation of the study

Because of time and financial limitations, the research is restricted to a three-month period with a close reading of public relations sourced news. There are obviously different kinds of public relations that will be discussed in the literature review, but this study focuses mainly on government public relations. This is mainly due to the fact that most quoted public relations information in ENA news items come from government organizations. Also, the much criticized state media in Ethiopia makes it pertinent to focus closer on the government's use of public relations. Therefore, in the analysis and presentation chapter, the term public relations is usually meant to mean to government public relations.

The seven organizations that are sampled are the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Health, the Ethiopian Road Authority, the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporations, the Ethiopian Electric Power Cooperation (EEPCo), and the Ministry of Information. The research chose these organizations mainly because they are more reported on by ENA than most other organizations.

Even though ENA has branches in almost every part of the country, the research focuses only on the Addis Ababa desk, except one editor and one reporter from a regional desk who were also interviewed.

1.8 Application of results

The major beneficiary of the finding is the media institutions and journalists as well as editors. The finding would help them understand the trend and challenges of using public relations sources. It also helps them by its recommendation on how journalists use public relations information.

It would contribute its share to create awareness among journalists to minimize reporting only one side of the story. As a result of that, the journalists if taken the recommendation, would produce better quality news showing the different faces of the situation.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Defining public relations and its role

As a profession, public relations is misunderstood or only partially understood. Scholars like Olufemi Onabajo (2006) and authors like Philip J. Kitchen (2004) contend that many people understand only parts of public relations. They claim the negative attitude towards the profession emanates from this half or part knowledge. In Phillip J. Kitchen's words,

For many clients and publics, PR is confused with the activities of publicity agents and celebrity party organizers. To others, it is nothing more than a by-word for media relations, an execution service rather than strategic consultancy. 'Frankly, most of us find the words public relations unhelpful,' said countrywide communications chairman Peter Hehir. One can debate it endlessly but it no longer means what it should mean. (Kitchen, 2004: 1)

This argument has also some truth in Ethiopian context. The first connotation that comes with the word 'public relations' to a layman and even to journalists and public relation officers themselves is the activity of publicity.

During the discussion with several public relations officers while I was a reporter in the *Ethiopian Herald*, I learnt that they feel that their profession is not understood well. "We are always considered to be a liar and only promoter of our organization," said Ethiopian Post office public relations practitioners to this researcher five months ago. Even though public relations is engaged in managing reputation and good image, it is a paradox to find that it suffers from an image problem.

The major reason that writers attribute for this misunderstanding and confusion is that public relations is engaged in several activities. Olufemi Onabajo (2006) argues in his article 'Proactive corporate management and the dynamics of public relations':

The term public relations is widely misunderstood, and misused. Part of the confusion is due to the fact that public relations cover a very broad area. Depending on the context and one's point of view, it can be a concept, a profession, a management function, or a practice. (Onabajo, 2006: 119)

Similarly, Phillip J. Kitchen (2004: 31) adds that there is a degree of confusion as to the activities and the parts that make up public relations. According to him, public relations has several activities that includes publicity (press agency), advertising, public affairs, lobbying, issues management, financial PR and sponsorship.

As indicated above, public relations is not only engaged in publicity. In order to promote their organization's product or activities, public relations is also engaged in managerial functions. As a management function, public relations involves responsibility and responsiveness in policy and information to the best interests of the organization and its publics (Newsom *et al.*, 2004: 2)

In many organizations, the public relations office is arranged close to the management. The management informs the public relations office about new decisions reached, difficulties raised and solutions to curb problems. Similarly, the public relations office informs the management about the attitudes of their target publics. Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center and Geln M. Broom maintain in their book *Effective public relations*:

As those in top management act and speak, so go the interpretations and echoes created by the public relations function. Thus, public is inescapably tied, by nature and by necessity, to top management, with public relations staff providing counsel and communication support. (Cutlip *et al.*, 2006: 56)

The persuasion role of public relations is found in several definitions. In many occasions organizations need public relations to convince their target audience about their activities or products. This means that the information that public relations try to communicate has an objective and is directed to a specific goal. In her book *Public relations in business*, Jacquelyn Peake states,

Public relations is the planned persuasion to change adverse public opinion or to reinforce public opinion, and the evaluation of results for future use. (Peake, 1980: 1)

Jacquelyn Peake indicates that the profession is a planned task that aims at persuading adverse public opinion. The definition shows that the works of public relations also focuses on changing the public's unfavorable opinion towards their organization. This includes when their organization faces various criticisms that negatively affects their

activity, trust or good image. Thus the public relations practitioners have the responsibility to give information – and in many cases protecting their organization.

Other definitions of public relations raise an ethical dimension. Cutlip and Center state,

Public relations is the planned effort to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance, based upon mutually satisfactory two-way communication. (Cutlip and Center, 1978)

This definition gives another insight of public relations, namely that the communication is not one-way. Public relations practitioners will not only communicate *to* the public, but must also listen to the feedback *from* the public.

Also, public relation departments are sometimes required to communicate internally with the organization. However, the focus of this research is external communication, and will not deal with internal communication within the organization.

In order to understand the media relation of public relations, it is helpful to see the major role of public relations. This leads us to what objectives public relations have. In general terms, the role of public relations is to change or reinforce the attitudes of the public positively towards its client. Whatever the term, the basic activity consists of communicating information about an organization or an individual in the best light (Mencher, 1996: 386).

In addition to put the organization or individual in the best light, public relations should build the reputation of the client in a sustainable manner. This is because image building is a long-term activity. The task is made more difficult because of competition with similar institutions and personalities.

The primary role of public relations is to manage a company's reputation and help build public consent for its enterprises. Today's business environment has become so competitive that public consent can no longer be assumed; it must be earned continuously. (Onabajo, 2006: 119)

As already mentioned, public relations appears in different forms with different objectives. The most common kinds of public relations activities are performed for business and industry; government and public affairs; as well as non-profit, trade organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Because the main objective of this research is to interrogate how ENA treats public relations information, and since the major public relations information used by the news agency is governmental public relations, we will look closer at this type of public relations.

Government public relations are a critical link between the government bodies and the citizens. Scott M. Cutlip *et al.* state,

The diversity of technical skills, organizational goals, and specialized public activities of the function of government public affairs is far greater than of and/or traditional public relations practices. And the paramount difference is the public advocacy role played by government communicators to government decision makers. (Cutlip *et al.*, 2006: 410)

The government has different bodies with different tasks. The public relations working on these organizations are supposed to inform the public at large about the activities of their organization. Some of the organizations might consist of service delivery, while others are purely informational. They might have different policies but they are supposed to tell the public the activities of the government body they represent in the best light. They are there to inform the public in such a way that it helps the decision makers.

As we have seen, the role of public relations is to communicate the message of the client to the public. The purpose of public relations is to inform, shape opinion and attitudes, and motivate.

2.2 The Grunig and Hunt models of public relations

This chapter takes as a starting-point the four different models of public relations that Grunig and Hunt (1984) proposed. The different models indicate how the different characteristics and purposes contribute to the kinds of public relations. Grunig and Hunt explained they chose the term ‘models’ to describe four types of public relations that have evolved through history. The models should be seen as abstractions.

Grunig and Hunt categorized public relations in four different models: Press Agent/publicity, Public information, Two-Way Asymmetric and Two-Way Symmetric models. They said although public relations developed as a persuasive communication function, not all of these modes use public relations for that purpose.

2.2.1. The press agent/publicity model: Public relations serves a propaganda function in this model. In this model practitioners spread the faith of the organization involved, often through incomplete, distorted, or half-true information. Grunig and Hunt (1984) argue that not all public relations is persuasive.

2.2.2. Public-information model: The purpose here is the dissemination of information, and not with a persuasive intent. The public relations person functions essentially as a journalist in residence, whose job it is to report objectively information about his organization to the public.

2.2.3. Two-way asymmetric model: Practitioners of public relations have a function more like that of the press agent/publicist, although their purpose can best be described as scientific persuasion. They use what is known from social science theory and research about attitudes and behavior to persuade publics to accept the organization's point of view and to behave in a way that supports the organization. The press agent/ publicist's attempt at persuasion, in contrast, are more intuitive, seat-of-the-pants rather than scientific.

2.2.4. Two-way symmetric model: In this model practitioners serve as mediators between organizations and their publics. Their goal is mutual understanding between organizations and their publics. These practitioners, too, may use social science theory and methods, but they usually use theories of communication rather than theories of public relations.

The following table shows that how these models differ the kinds of public relations as the purpose and nature of communication differs. It also shows where these models are practiced in today's public relations.

Characteristic	Press Agency/publicity	Public information	Two-way Asymmetric	Two-Way Symmetric
Purpose	Propaganda	Dissemination of information	Scientific persuasion	Mutual understanding
Nature of communication	One-way; complete truth not essential	One-way; truth important	Two way; imbalanced effects	Two-way; balanced effects
Communication model	Source→Rec	Source→rec	Source→rec ← feedback	Group→Group ←
Nature of research	Little, “counting house”	Little, readability, readership	Formative; evaluative of attitudes	Formative; evaluative of understanding
Leading Historical figures	P.T. Barnum	Ivy Lee	Edward L. Bernays	Bernays, educators, professional leaders
Where practiced today	Sports, theatre, product promotion	Government, non-profit associations, business	Competitive business; agencies	Regulated business agencies

Table 1: The four models of public relations (Source: Grunig and Hunt, 1984)

The press agent/publicity model came first, in the period from 1850-1900, immediately following the historical examples that we described as public relations-like activities. The public-information model came next, beginning about, 1900 and continuing as the major model of public relations until the, 1920s.

The two-way asymmetric model developed in the, 1920s. The two-way symmetric model came much later, in the, 1960s and 70s, and even today practitioners are only beginning to adopt it (Grunig and Hunt, 1984: 25).

2.3 A brief history of public relations

2.3.1 General history

This is a very brief history of public relations. The importance of this section of the literature review is to give a background to public relations, a profession and practice, that has great impact on journalism since its establishment

Authors in who gives attention to the history public relations (Bates, 2002; Newsom, 2004), says there is no adequate literature produced on the history of public relations. They said the literature is scattered and unorganized. The profession of public relations lacks a serious, comprehensive history (Bates, 2002: 2).

As we have seen previously in the definition of public relations, the profession is engaged in persuasion to promote the activities of its organization. Therefore, some scholars argue that persuasion, which most of public relations activity is based on, is a very old practice. Therefore, they said there no conceptual founder of public relations since persuasion is dating back to several thousands of years. Doug Newsom, Judy Vanslyke Turk and Dean Kruckeberg says in their book *This is PR*,

Public relations as a concept has no central, identifying founder, national origin or founding date because it focuses on efforts to influence-not only opinions but behavior. (Newsom *et al.*, 2004: 22)

According to Newsom *et al.*, persuasion is still the driving force of public relations, and modern public relations people use many of the tactics that have been used by the leaders of society for thousands of years to persuade.

As we have seen in the definition, public relations is a planned persuasion to change public mind for future use. But public relations is not all persuasion.

Public relations probably has no single “founder,” but many public relations practitioners in the United States see Ivy Lee as the first practitioner of a modern-style public relations practice (Newsom *et al.*, 2004: 22)

On the other hand, the same writers said even though many Americans think that public relations evolved in the USA, and it is true that the united States has contributed greatly to public relations theory and practice, other regions have a long tradition of public relations practice with different forms or with different tactics. Newsom *et al.* say,

Van Ruler and Vercic report that European public relations has existed for more than a century, with the Krups company establishing a press relations department in 1870; the beginning of the practice in England was in the, 1920s, and the first departments appeared in the Netherlands at the beginning of the, 1920s , and the first departments appeared in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 20th century. (Newsom *et al.*, 2004: 24)

The beginning of public relations is arguable as different countries compete for being the first practitioners though with different features. Citing Betteke Van Ruler and Dejan Vercic's work *The Bled Manifesto*, Newsom *et al.* (2004) say the Dutch have the oldest public relations professional association in the world, established in 1946. This is two years earlier than public relations Society of America (PRSA), founded in 1948. More of a curiosity, Chun-Ju Flora Hung, in his paper "public relations in China" presented at the pre-conference workshop of the conference of the International Communication Association cited in Newsom *et al.* says that public relations in China started thousands of years ago.

This shows that it is difficult to conclude where and when public relations started. The supporters of the notion that public relations started in the USA say the century turn around 1900 was the start of public relations.

In the, 1900s, public relations evolved from individual press agents and publicists to counselling firms that offered their services as experts in the field. The nation's first publicity firm, The Publicity Bureau, was founded in Boston in, 1900 by George V. S. Michaelis, Herbert Small, and Thomas O. Marvin. (Bate, 2002: 9)

Cutlip (1994) also says the role of the Muckraking (crusading journalists of the early, 1900s in the US that promoting social justice by investigating wrongdoings of companies and government) was also great in promoting public relations. He indicates that the investigative works that the muckrakers did and their expose` were also the threat of organizations.

Due to this, various organizations started to show interest to hire professionals to win the public's trust and goodwill. As competition among different organization throughout the 1900s was fierce, the need for public relations practitioners became stronger.

2.3.2 Ethiopian history

The researcher has not found any literature on the history of public relations in Ethiopia. So far, the Ethiopian public relations practitioners do not have a national association. A public relations officer of the Ministry of Information, Zemedkun Tekle, was interviewed for this study. He informed that there is no national data about when public relations

started in Ethiopia and how many practitioners are found currently in the country. However, a survey is underway by the Ministry of Information to collect data on how many public relations practitioners there are in the country.

There is no public relations schools or departments in Ethiopian universities, although a few courses are given on public relations in language and literature departments in different colleges and universities.

Nearly all of the seven government organizations public relations practitioners interviewed by telephone for this study said the public relations department is understaffed. The Ethiopian Telecommunications Cooperation has the greatest number of practitioners, with 35 found throughout the country.

Ethiopian Road Authority has seven, Ethiopian Electric and Power cooperation 10, the Ministry of Information has nearly 20 staff members; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has nine and the Ministry of Health six public relations practitioners.

2.4 Journalists and their responsibility in being fair and balance

Educating, informing and influencing societies by providing information to its audiences are the roles media play. Media's position in shaping the attitude of the society is very significant. Media has the quality to speed up democracy as "The media is seen as crucial to the promotion of democratic values reflecting society in all its complexity and with many (legal) viewpoints as possible covered" (Allan, 2005: 55).

The news media are expected to feed the public with news that has impact and interest. Journalists have the responsibility to provide news to their audiences whom in most cases have no access and time to witness news events. In his writing *PR and the Press: Two Big Guns*, Simon Jenkins says,

Journalists working in the media are therefore the main information gatherers. The professional intention is to give the best possible version of "what happened", in the time and space available. (Jenkins, 2006: 47)

Nonetheless, all 'what happened' would not be news and of interest to the public.

Journalists, editors and media scholars set several criteria that determine news; so-called news values. When an event has more news values, its possibility to be covered by the media would be higher. Some frequently mentioned news values are conflict,

disaster, consequence, prominence, impact, novelty, human interest, proximity and timeliness. It may be representing a portion of the items covered in the media, but it has little to do with news (Kelly Leiter *et al.*, 2000: 38-39). On the other hand, the Missouri Group (1992) said this traditional news values are boiled down into three

By the, 1990s, however, the broadening had become an explosion while the most important criteria could be boiled down to three: relevance, usefulness and interest. (The Missouri Group, 1992: 13)

The Missouri Group (1992: 13) also said though the reporters' usual role is simply to find and write the facts, it turns out often to be not so simple

Media serve as a forum enabling different viewpoints to heard-not a single or few dominant groups monopolise others.

Journalists have several professional responsibilities that they are expected to discharge. And one of the most important journalist's responsibilities that this research will mainly focus is showing the truth or reality from varied viewpoints in their news stories. In other words, journalists are expected to entertain issues in a fair and balanced manner.

By representing different viewpoints of the same event, journalists help people reach informed decisions and understand what happened in a holistic manner. Thus, journalists are considered to be unbiased and fair. As Dennis L. Wilcox (2005) writes,

A journalist is usually employed by a news organization to gather, process, and synthesize information for the primary purpose of providing news to the organizations' subscribers, viewers or listeners. A hallmark of professional reporting is to present information in an objective manner. A reporter's personal preference may affect the choice of words and news angle but in general the reporter tries to maintain an attitude of strict neutrality. (Wilcox, 2005: 3-4)

By saying in 'an objective manner' Wilcox tries to illustrate that journalists should not include their opinion in their news stories. But objectivity is a controversial concept in journalism. Several scholars contend that a journalist like any other member of society cannot be indifferent to important issues and should be entitled to have their own stand.

Martin Bell, as quoted by Campbell (2004: 160), said “I am no longer sure what ‘objectivity’ means: I see nothing object-like in the relationship between the reporter and the event, but rather a human and dynamic interaction between them.”

Tumber (1999) tries to illustrate that objectivity in journalism is somehow different than in other discipline. He contends,

For journalists, objectivity does not mean that they are impartial observers of events- as it does for the social scientist-but that they seek out the facts and report them as fairly and in as balanced way as possible. As Phillips notes, by having journalists define objectivity as being the balanced reporting of the facts, the question of whether or not objectivity is possible in its scientific sense is neatly side-stepped. (Tumber, 2001: 311)

In one way or another scholars indicate that fair inclusion of several viewpoints will help audiences see the reality or truth from several perspectives. This in other words will help journalists to uncover the different facets of what happened out there for audiences who are not there at the scene.

In order to do that journalists use sources as a source of information and by doing so they win credibility. This will also help journalists to defend them selves that their report is not their own perception of the reality. A message is more believable to an audience if the source has credibility, which is why writers try to attribute information and quotes to people who are perceived as experts. (Wilcox, 2005: 37).

But almost all stories have different viewpoints if the journalists try to include the response of different actors in a single news story. Therefore it is the responsibility of journalists to include that other side of the reality by asking other sources (both human and document) with different perspective. According to the Missouri Group (1992)

There are no instant replays in news. There are, however, different viewpoints from which every event or issue can be observed. Each viewpoint may yield a different interpretation of what is occurring and of what it means. There is also, in journalism as in sport, the possibility of human error, even by the most careful reporters. (The Missouri Group, 1992: 14)

As the Missouri group clearly indicates there are several viewpoints on every single event. For instance a feeder road is constructed in one part of Addis Ababa. The public

relations officer of the Road Authority will tell you how the newly constructed feeder road will help the congested traffic in that part of the town. But if you ask residents, they will tell you that there are people who are evacuated from their home and they have been thrown in a place where basic infrastructure is poor. Other residents will tell you that the newly constructed road is a threat for accidents and they are afraid that their children will be exposed to car accident. Drivers will tell you that they find the new road very helpful to the long traffic. The quality supervisor of the road will tell you another story. Etc....

Including more than one source in news story also increase the quality of reporting.

One of the most basic questions about the value of a work of journalism is the nature of its sourcing. How deep is the sourcing, what are the ranges of views offered, and how much can the audience decide for itself what to think about the story? These are the essential elements in trying to assess the quality of reporting. (Annual report on American journalism, 2005)

Sometimes, the other viewpoint will bring you another potential story that would be interesting and strong. Especially if there are two opposing groups, journalists are expected to include the two different sides. The Missouri Group (1992) states,

Fairness requires that you as a reporter try to find every viewpoint in a story. Hardly ever will there be just one; often there are more than two. Fairness requires that you allow ample opportunity for response to anyone who is being attacked or whose integrity is being questioned in a story. Fairness requires, above all, that you make every effort to avoid following your own biases in your reporting and your writing. (The Missouri group, 1992: 14)

As Jenkins (2006: 47) said, the professional intention is to give the best possible version of “what happened”, in the time and space available.

However, the task of journalists in getting facts and the best version of ‘What happened’ is not easy. There are difficulties that reporters face in the information gathering business. The Missouri Group (1992) states,

Daily journalism presents still more complications. Usually, as a reporter you have only a few hours, at most a few days, to try to learn as many facts as possible. When you take into account all these realities and limitations, you can

see that just to reach the best obtainable version of the truth is challenge enough for any journalist. (The Missouri Group, 1992: 13)

Deadline is one of the major difficulties that make journalism to check and counter-check as much facts and information as possible. In other words, journalists become unable to seek out the facts from all 'legitimate' sides of an issue, and then to report it in an impartial and balanced way because of this limitation.

This is of course in addition to the lack of enough skilled journalists and resources.

2.5 The relationship between journalism and public relations

The relationship between journalism and public relations is way back to the infancy days of public relations. It in fact started before the existence of public relations. This seems ridiculous. But as we have seen previously, it dates back in the age of press agency that was the foundation of public relations.

As we have seen, journalists and public relations practitioners have something in common. That is giving information to the public. But the goal of giving information is different based on their professional role. Besides, the media and public relations practitioners claim that the information they provide to the public is objective. Both journalism and public relations feel themselves to be handling a common product, objectivity (Jenkins, 2006: 45).

Nonetheless, this idea is not convincing for several scholars and professionals. Specially to journalists who are suspicious of the objective of public relations, the notion that public relations practitioners objectively provide information is not realistic. Simon Jenkins writes,

As a journalist, my inclination is to say the similarity stops there. Journalism does indeed seek to describe the world as it is, not as someone might wish it to be. It is to be a witness to the world, and tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The profession of public relations is quite different. (Jenkins, 2006: 45)

The premise for the argument that public relations information should be scrutinize arises from the role of the profession it self. This premise indicates that it is difficult for the media practitioners whose aim to entertain information in fair and impartial manner to

use only public relations Information that aims at 'persuade and motivate'. We previously saw that the role of journalists is to give 'what happened' from different directions and point of view so that the reader will see the reality in a holistic manner. But for public relations practitioners this is not their priority. Lee Salter states,

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

Journalists' suspicion to use public relations information without analyzing and including another viewpoint valid.

The impact of public relations in the daily news gathering practices of journalism is easily observable. One could realize how public relations information is vital to the news gathering process by looking the amount of public relations sourced news. On the other hand, the same is true with public relations.

Describing the relationship between these two professions as symbiotic is common in several occasions. By symbiotic scholars meant to say that the two professions are highly depending upon each other. Randolph Hearst in his writing public relations and lobbying industry says:

The relationship between the news media and the public relations industry is a complex and increasingly symbiotic one. The media is the central vehicle for much of the PR industry's messages. PR practitioners want to place their stories in the news or other publications and programmes. Without being able to do this, PR would lose one of its main avenues for communication with the public. (Hearst, 2003)

Randolph indicates that how public relations need media to transmit its message. This is because Media has the potential to reach millions of people in very short period of time. In addition to that, media has the potential to carry the message of public relations information regardless of space and infrastructure impediments that it is hard and costly for public relations. Dennis L. Wilcox (2005) states the role of media in communicating message as a cost effective method.

The media, in all their variety, are cost-effective channels of communication in an information society. They are the multipliers that enable millions of people to receive a message at the same time. Through the miracle of satellite communication and the Internet, the world is a global metropolis of shared information. (Wilcox, 2005: 306)

Therefore one could easily understand how the work of public relations would be negatively affected if its relationship with media is bad. This means that if their relationship with the media is poor, public relations face problems in reaching the public at large. As a result of that amount of news coverage about their organization would be lessened. Good working relationships with media personnel are always important for smooth functioning, but they are particularly crucial when they can facilitate, impede or even destroy a public relations program (Newsom *et al.*, 2004: 276).

If the relationship between journalists and the public relations practitioners is edgy, journalists may lose an important news source. A poor relationship backfires on the media. If the media reject and decide not to use public relations information at all, then it will suffer source and information shortage. At the same time, if the public relations stops giving information to journalists and prefers to have rough relation with journalists, his/her information that needs to be communicated with the public about his organization would fail. James L. Horton writes:

So, do reporters and PR practitioners need each other? Yes and no. Reporters who avoid PR practitioners shield themselves from potentially useful information resources, while PR practitioners who ignore media limit their skills or who abuse editorial access destroy their credibility. (Horton, 2004: 2)

But the different roles of the media and public relations are the impediment for the two professions to stay close with out scrutiny all the time. On the one hand, there is the interest of the public relations practitioners to impart information that its organization needs to communicate. On the other hand, there is this interest of journalists to inform their audience without taking sides in a fair and balanced manner. Therefore, there is always conflict of interest between journalism and public relations. Dennis L. Wilcox. (2005) says:

Public relations professionals and journalists have had a long love-hate relationship. There are flashpoints of friction and distrust, but there is also the realization that they are mutually dependent on each other. (Wilcox, 2005: 304)

This distrust between journalists and media practitioners makes their relationship filled with suspicion. Journalists fear that the information that the public relations sent to their media is only promotional and become reluctant to use it. At the same time, the public relations practitioners will accuse journalists for not using their information for no convincing reason. No two professions feel themselves so traduced as journalism and public relations (Jenkins, 2006: 45).

Their conflict, if they can't find a way to work together, would take these professions to a dead end where no one benefits. Because they need each other, despite their suspicion, their relationship is still there and probably will be always there.

Journalists need public relations' information to meet deadline. The news media with its limited number of journalists, compared with events and potential news stories, makes it difficult for them to be there all the time. Dennis L. Wilcox says:

In other words, public relations materials save media the time, money and effort of gathering their own news. Indeed, no medium-including the New York times-has enough reporters to cover all the available news. As one editor of the San Jose (CA) *Mercury News* once said, Publicists are the Newspaper's 'unpaid reporters.' (Wilcox, 2005: 306)

Journalism also contributes to the development of public relations not only by covering public relations information, but also strengthening its human resource. Journalism gives its most skilled human resources to the public relations profession since the later start to establish itself. Ian Hargreaves writes,

It is not a coincidence that the history of journalism and PR is very closely connected. Some of the great figures in modern journalism's earliest days, also operated as paid agents for powerful interests. And, in the last hundred years, journalists or ex-journalists, have created the modern PR industry and continue to supply much of its expertise. (Hargreaves, 2003: 187)

The crucial question is: Do journalists have to discard all the information provided by public relations?

2.6 How should journalists use public relations information?

As previously explained journalists use various sources including public relations to enrich their information. It is important for journalists to use sources to be credible. “To a limited degree this helps to insulate both journalists and their news organization from charges of bias and inaccurate reporting” (Tumber, 1999: 31).

Nonetheless, sources have different motives. Some sources would benefit by offering journalists information while others by hiding that would be very important to journalists.

There are several scholars who are still suspicious to the motive of the information provided by public relations. Barbara Aysen *et al.* argue in their book *Reporting in a Multi-Media World*,

Public relations officers can be a fast and efficient source of information that might once have required hours on the phone tracking down the right contact. But PR exists to serve a corporate or organizational cause, not to public interest. (Aysen *et al.*, 2003: 36)

With all this distrust, journalists are forced to use public relations information. But all these definitions that we have seen did not clearly states what will happen if journalists publish whatever public relations give them. It would have been better if some of them would give us how their relationship is shaped.

News values are not as crucial to sources as it is for journalists. There is a possibility that sources would manipulate information to get benefit out it. Some public relations practitioners also support the criticism that public relations information is biased. As Harold Burson, head of Burson-Marsteller, one of the largest public relations firm in the world quoted in Mencher (1996: 385) said, “We are advocates, we are being paid to tell our client’s side of the story. We are in the business of changing and moulding attitudes, and we aren’t successful unless we move the needle, get people to do something.”

Wilcox (2005) also quotes Burson as saying public relations practitioners serve the public interest when it is also serving their client. This shows that public relations practitioners themselves agree that truth is not the guiding principles of public relations –

you are now putting all PR agents into one bag, but surely, they are different. Some are more ethical than others. Burson directly quoted saying “we are not journalists. That (serving the public interest that doesn’t serve client) is not our job. (Wilcox, 2005: 4)

Sources, by giving or hiding information they might protect or promote their organization or personal reputation. That is why journalists should always maintain a critical distance to what their sources say. As Howard Kurtz said,

In this overheated environment, the degree to which basic facts can be massaged, manipulated, and is truly troubling. And that raises the fundamental question; amid the endless noise, whom do you trust? (Kurtz quoted in Hargreaves, 2003: 186)

The role of journalists is not only covering what happened. They are supposed to show the consequences of the ‘what happened’ to their readers. They are also expected to inform the reader what does the ‘what happened or to happen’ means? In order to do that and get the better view of the reality, journalists are supposed to give the unseen or hidden structures of the things beyond the appearance. Lee Salter says:

Rather, journalists should attempt to ‘get outside’ the appearance of the reality they see, which has long been the objective of many critical artists and journalists. This is not to say that such appearances are not real, or that they are merely relative, rather, they stand as they are but the point is to uncover the hidden structures that underlie the appearances. (Salter, 2005: 7)

In order to show this, it is important for journalists that only using one source, that might a hidden agenda like promoting or protecting the organization, would negatively affect the quality of their news.

Of all the sources public relations, by the very nature of their profession provide information that its organization need to impart. The public relations practitioner’s job is to carry out the agreed PR programmes, the aim being to gain maximum knowledge and understanding of the clients’ or employee organization, products or services (Jefkins, 1992: 88).

As we have seen, several scholars are criticizing the information of public relations as one sided and self-serving. They argue that this is because of their professional role and loyalty to their organization they represent. While a reporter is

supposedly enslaved to the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, public relations must be enslaved to the client, the whole client and nothing but the client (Jenkins, 2006: 48)

The claim is not only that public relations give information benefiting their organization. They also argue that public relations will manipulate the information to get the set goal by biasing the information.

Public relations, by its very nature, is intended to benefit those creating the message, whether the source is public or private. In the information marketplace, public relations manipulate the news by packaging information of the media with specific clients interests in mind. There have been laudable uses of public relations, but on the whole the practice serves to flood the media biased news. (Dennis and Merrill, 2002: 174-175)

Because of public relations motive, the possibility that the information that they offer to the media might be biased or one sided would be higher. In some cases, the critics said they give another appearance to the reality. Some of the critics of public relations contend that the whitewashing by the public relations expert covers truths that often are better opened to the public (Mencher, 1996: 395)

This is contradictory to the role of the media to entertain different viewpoints to maintain fairness and balance. That is why media practitioner and scholars are concerned and try to counter this difficulty that journalism faced.

Journalists and media scholars forwarded different solutions to this problem. One of them is a doctrine that proposes not to use public relations information at all. Ian Hargreaves said,

According to it [the Northcliffe doctrine], news cannot come from PR men. It must be hard-won. Anything which arrives in a press release, or in the form of an official announcement, or even as official guidance, is at best worthless and most likely a lie. (Hargreaves, 2003: 179)

But many scholars who consider public relations as a helpful source of information do not share this idea. They argue, as we previously see in 'the relationship between journalists and public relations' that the lack of enough reporters, and shortage of

financial limitations as well as the existence of deadline make it impossible for journalists to work with out the help of public relations.

Dennis and Merrill (2002) points out in their book that it is not only public relations that manipulative force in news making. They cited editors' fears, reporters' biases, advertising pressures and government secrecy. But they give light to the idea that even though public relations have some manipulative behavior; it has a significant contribution for the media. Public relations, in spite of normal manipulative aspects, is a valuable-even essential-adjunct to the news dissemination activities of journalism (Dennis and Merrill, 2002: 175)

By discarding all public relations information, there is a chance that journalists miss important information for their media. The relation between journalists and public relations practitioners is just like you can't live with it and at the same time you can't live without it. Public relations sent press releases to the media that might help or manipulate the news making process The Missouri Group said,

As a reporter, you must recognize that news releases are both a help and hindrance to a newspaper. They help because without them, newspapers would need many more reporters. They are a hindrance because they sometimes contain incomplete or even incorrect information. Most of the time, in one-way or another, they are self-serving and, unlike objective journalism, start with a point of view. (The Missouri Group, 1992: 182)

As indicated above, the public relations information might have some incomplete information that as a journalist you might get it from other sources. In order to give the best light to their organization, there is a possibility that public relations don't give the whole truth to the media.

Therefore it is the duty of journalists to counter check the information they receive from public relations. Otherwise, the information sent by public relations that aimed at benefiting the source will succeed. Dennis and Meril say,

When the press is unable to verify the reports, due to the sheer quantity of information available or because of laziness, distorted public relations reports appear in the media as objective facts, and the news has been distorted to favor the public relations position. (Dennis and Merrill, 2002: 174-175)

One of the fears that journalists face is that they have no resources like public relations practitioners. The fear among journalists is that they no longer have the resources to counter the increasingly sophisticated munitions of their traditional enemy; that journalism is being hung out to dry by the not-so-hidden persuaders (Hargreaves, 2003: 180).

Finally, using public relations information if it fits the news value and important for the media is acceptable. But because of the potential that the public relations might manipulate the information at their disposal to promote their organization, it is the journalists' responsibility to check the information from several sources.

Journalists have to consult different documents; experts that work and do not work in that organization, beneficiaries and at the same time their rivals to get the best obtainable version of the reality.

If journalists rely on the information of only very few sources and public relations practitioners, the chance of entertaining varied viewpoints in the media would be limited.

Having this framework the next chapter will deal on how do Ethiopian News Agency journalists use their public relations information.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology and Analysis

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will illustrate what kind of research methods and procedures that the researcher followed to answer the research questions and attain the research objectives.

The research is based on qualitative research methods in order to exploit the rich experiences of journalists working in Ethiopian News Agency in dealing with public relations information. The experience of each journalist is different, thus the interviews will also be different. In other words, the research is process oriented and cannot easily be quantified.

Qualitative research favors a flexible questioning approach (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003: 111). Although a basic set of questions prepared, the researcher can change questions or ask follow-up questions at any time.

3.2 Data collection method

The researcher used two methods to collect data: In-depth interviews and the ENA database. The major data collection is in-depth interviews, in order to get adequate information about how ENA processes public relations information. To get an overview, at least an indication, of the public relations sourced news that ENA makes, the researcher used ENA's news database in a three-month period.

3.2.1 In-depth interviews

As previously indicated, the aim of this study is to find out the extent to which ENA journalists use public relations information and how their affiliation with public relations affect their news-making process. Interviewing journalists and editors was found to be the best method to achieve this.

The interviewees (editors and reporters) are the ones who meet public relations officers on daily bases. Editors have a decisive role in the news-making process, while reporters do the actual newsgathering. Since editors and reporters might have different experiences, they need to be interviewed and asked follow-up questions independently. A

questionnaire form would be more limited and it tends to limit the answers to those suggested by the researcher. Therefore, the research prefers in-depth interviews with ENA reporters and editors.

Intensive and well performed in-depth interviews provide detailed background about the reasons why respondents give specific answers. It elaborates data concerning respondents' opinions, values, motivations, recollections, experiences, and feelings (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003: 127).

In-depth interviews are more detailed; and as Wimmer and Dominick (2003: 127) argue, when compared to traditional survey methods, intensive in-depth interviews provide more accurate responses on sensitive issues.

Generalization is sometimes considered as contrary to the nature of in-depth interviews, but the researcher in this study has increased the sample size to get a broader picture of the situation.

3.2.2 The ENA database

The research asks how ENA journalists maintain fairness and balance when making use of public relations information. The researcher opens with a study of the general characteristics of public relations news made by ENA. This part of the study will survey the trend of crosschecking public relations information in the news agency.

To do this the researcher collected three months of news articles from the ENA database. It was necessary to read the entire news stories over the three-month period. The public relations sourced news stories were copied and documented in to one document. The researcher then divided the six public relations sourced news in different folders for further analysis.

3.3 Sample selection and size

Even though ENA has more than thirty branch offices in Ethiopia, most of the interviewees were selected from the main office found in Addis Ababa. This is mainly because of time limitation, and is not thought to have any significance influence on the data collected.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the head of ENA, five editors and five reporters.

Purposive sampling was used meaning that individuals are handpicked to be participants because they have certain characteristics that are believed to make them especially good sources of information (Orcher, 2005: 100).

The purposive sampling tried to be representative of all actors who engage in the newsgathering and writing process. This includes head of the organization, city reporters, editors and regional reporter and editor, both women and men.

Stratified purposive sampling was used for each of the above categories. Orcher (2005: 103) states that in order to stratify, subgroups of interest in the population must first be identified. Then participants from each subgroup must be selected so that all subgroups are represented in the sample. In other words, stratification is used to ensure that all important subgroups are included in the sample.

The six public relations offices were selected due to their frequent information provision to ENA. They came from the Ministry of Information, Ethiopian Road Authority, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development, Ethiopian Electric and Power Cooperation, Ethiopian Telecommunication Cooperation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

3.4 Data analysis procedures

Unlike quantitative approaches, which tend to wait until all the numbers are in before the analysis begins, data analysis in qualitative studies is done early in the collection process and continues throughout the project (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003: 111).

Qualitative researchers use an inductive method: Data are collected relevant to some topic and are grouped into appropriate and meaningful categories; explanations emerge from the data themselves (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003: 111).

The nature of relationship among ENA journalists and public relations practitioners is one of the three major thematic categories that this study would discuss. A 'love-love' relationship (that is not filled with suspicion); public relations the only way to information in government offices and its impact on news production; as well as media discussion with public relations are the sub-categories of this thematic category.

The second thematic category concerns how ENA journalists process the public relations information. The sub groups in this category are internal and external problems. The internal problems consist of lack of professionalism, trust on public relations, deadline, competition and amount of news expected. The external problems on the other consist of journalists being powerless, distance and poor infrastructure, public relations dictatorship and gender issue.

The third major thematic category concerns how ENA journalists process press releases.

The findings will be presented, illustrated and corroborated by quotations arising from the in-depth interviews with the head of ENA, editors and reporters. The interpretation and discussion will be guided by the objectives of the study.

3.5 Qualitative content analysis

The aim of this qualitative content analysis is to find out whether ENA crosschecks public relations information from another source. Therefore, the researcher surveys the three-month public relations news and evaluates them whether they use another source or not.

Chapter 4

Data presentation and analysis

4.1 Does ENA countercheck public relations information?

The aim of this section of the data analysis is to outline the trends and characteristics of public relations sourced news made by ENA. Its objective is not to deal with every news stories; rather it tries to give the general picture. Therefore, the researcher will only analyze the major aspects of the public relations sourced news.

During the three months, ENA made 1333 stories. 258 of these sourced different public relations offices as a major information provider. The seven organizations that this researcher took as a sample sourced 67 stories during the period. This does not include public relations' role in mediating with other sources in their organization like professional and experts. This means that the study don't include stories that came from organizations other than public relations offices.

Only two stories were crosschecked from other bodies like beneficiaries' complaints while the remaining stories (65) were sourced only public relations information. Here follows the major characteristics of the sample public relations news.

Ethiopian Electric and Power Cooperation: All the stories that came from the public relations department of this organization is about the effort of the cooperation to electrify the country. Out of the six stories that ENA made, only one was crosschecked. The story is about the complaints from the public when it took several days to process their electric bill payment. ENA took this information as background and asked the public relations offices for response. The public relations office expressed its apology for the delay and announced that they prepare a new and improved way of collecting the electricity bill. The story shows different versions of the same situation.

Nonetheless, the remaining stories are about the activities of the cooperation to electrify the nation, and how many people are benefiting from this activity. For instance, there is one story that says rural women ceases to use the millstone as they start to use the electric mill. But there is no viewpoint of the rural beneficiaries in the story. The entire story is seen from the viewpoint of the public relations officer of the cooperation. The

rural people might have a different viewpoint. They might agree that their life is improved because of the electrification activity or they might say the cost of the electric mill is very expensive and they don't use it. All the stories of the public relations officers are based on the interview they gave to ENA.

Ethiopian Road Authority: Again, all the stories sourced from the public relations department of this organization promote the effort of the authority to construct new roads or the completion of roads. Out of seven stories during the three months, only one included a story has different voice than that of the authority. The story is delayed that the road construction between Kansusi recreational area and Burayu creates complaints from drivers and residents of Burayu. This story includes the response of the mayor of Burayu. It also includes the public relations information.

Stories like the expansion of road decreases the rural people who walks several hours due to lack of road by half without including the viewpoint of rural people is witnessed in ENA news. The information from the public relations office was seen as sufficient to write a news story. The public relations gave information about the plan of their organization to expand roads and the total cost of the project. The information was not crosschecked.

Ministry of Information: The Ministry of Information is the government's official spokes 'person'. Almost all news items covered by ENA about the ministry emanate from press releases sent by the ministry to ENA. All the content of the press release is the stand of the government. All the 12 news items that ENA made out of these press releases did not include other viewpoints. Most stories call upon the public at large to work for some actions like poverty eradication and government's commitment in various sectors to develop the country.

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development: Non of the six ENA news from the public relations of this ministry was not crosschecked. One of the news stories was resettles in four different areas start to export their products in addition to their food self-sufficiency is one of the stories that ENA made as news. But the story does not include

the responses from resettled people who are the beneficiaries of this program. The resettled people might have several concerns that the government would address. But what we learned is only the ministry's side, that is also responsible for the resettlement program.

Ethiopian Telecommunications Cooperation (ETC): During the three-months period, ENA made seven stories interviewing the Ethiopia Telecommunications public relations. As we have seen in other public relations information, ENA journalists use the ETC public relations information as news without consulting other actors. All the stories promote the effort of ETC to improve the quality of its service both in rural and urban parts of the country.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: All the 12 news items that ENA made from this ministry is from the press release that the public relations department sent to the news agency. All information that the public relations sent was diplomatic releases. It shows how Ethiopia's bilateral and trilateral relations among different countries are getting momentum. It also shows how Ethiopians in the Diaspora supports the government's effort to peace and democracy. In addition to that, the story included international meeting programs that Ethiopia participates with its agenda. It also shows how Ethiopian beer are demanded in Germany.

There are no other viewpoints in the stories than the foreign ministry press releases.

Ministry of Health: The eight news items from the interviewees of the public relations department of this ministry were not crosschecked. This are some of the news stories that sourced from this ministry: 13.5 million birr malaria medicine distributed, health coverage of the country reaches to 82.9% and the ministry express more than 7 thousand health extension professionals are going to be trained.

As we can see there are several unanswered question in these press releases that needs to be crosschecked. For instance, the ministry indicated that 13.5 million birr worth malaria medicine is distributed through out the country. But what is the response of

regional health offices that malaria is endemic and the public at large who are the victims of this disease?

Overall, only two of 67 news items were crosschecked or included a viewpoint other than the public relations department's. Hence, the news items are one-sided and promotional in essence. One could easily say that the mass media seems to be channel to for the public relations information.

4.2. The relationship between ENA journalists and public relations practitioners

A main objective of this study, as previously said, is to record how Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) journalists use public relations information. Media are expected to stage different viewpoints of an issue to avoid one-sidedness. Presenting different viewpoints increases fairness and balance. Giving different viewpoints also adds to the credibility of the news. Particularly if one source can benefit from dispatching certain information, it is crucial to include different sides.

Journalists should be critical as public relations tends to have a promotional purpose (see for instance Ian Hargreaves, 2003; Simon Jenkins, 2006; Wilcox, 2005; and the Missouri Group, 1992).

Recognizing the importance of understanding news production processes, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the activity of news sources and their relationship with the news media (Allan, 2005: 189).

Thus, it is important to deal with the relationship between ENA and public relations practitioners before dwelling how ENA journalists treat public relations information.

4.2.1 A friendly relationship between ENA and government public relations

As we have seen in the literature review, the relationship between public relations and journalists are strong, but also filled with suspicion. As Dennis L. Wilcox. (2005: 304) puts it, public relations and journalists have a long love-hate relation-ship. This emanates from the different roles the two professions play.

In Ethiopia, the current relationship between ENA journalists and public relations officers was found to be somehow different from this international trend, according to the

journalists who were interviewed. Almost all of the journalists (five editors and four reporters, as well as the head of the Ethiopian News Agency) agreed that there is no hate or suspicious relationship between ENA journalists and public relations.

Several ENA journalists suggested that, one of the reasons for the peaceful relationship is the absence of investigative work in their routine news making process.

Editor 5: “We mainly focused on developmental journalism. We mainly cover developmental activities. We don’t have any conflict with public relations. We are not engaged in investigative work. We don’t disturb them. Therefore we are close. We almost promote their activities.”

(Personal interview with editor 5, May 2006)

Despite the fact that editor 5 (regional desk editor) believes journalists should basically work for their consciousness, media and the public; he said the situation in Ethiopia makes it an obligation for government journalists to promote development activities by dispatching what public relations of government offices said. The editors and reporters attribute the editorial policy as one of the corner stones of their professional activity. Promoting government activities to the public is one of the major goals of the editorial policy, said the ENA head and other editors.

Another journalist (reporter 1) said they are unable to do investigative work and expose it to the public because they were told their role is to promote developmental activities and cover their proceedings.

Reporter 1: “Because we are told to promote developmental activities, we are not able to expose corruption under the name of development. Due to this reason, we are working friendly and comfortably with public relations practitioners. We call each other and extend greetings.”

(Personal interview with reporter 1, May 2006)

According to his informant, the ENA-public relations relationship is based on ‘I provide you with information, you return it by promoting me’ and the journalists obey to this deal. Thus, the ‘positive’ relationship is continuing as the government public relations have access to the media with the privilege of using it in line with its goal.

The regional editor (editor 4) said one of the difficulties for doing investigative stories is that ENA is mainly supposed to engage in developmental journalism.

According to him both the news agency and the government offices to promote development in the country. ‘I believe they [media and pr] have to work closely for the same cause.

Some journalists like reporter 2 maintain that the government ownership of both Ethiopian News Agency and public relations offices makes it difficult to crosscheck and engage in investigative work.

Reporter 2: It is obvious that government media reflect government’s stand. It is impossible for government media to report something that gives bad image of the government. That is why government media and government public relations have no major conflict. Government media journalists go to the government offices public relations.”

(Personal interview with reporter 2, May 2006)

Most of the interviewees said their positive relationship with public relations is based on at the expense of the public’s right to know. Most of them accept that this behavior is both unethical and unprofessional. All of them said that to include alternative viewpoints to the public relations information is necessary for the media to be credible.

These journalists argue that working for the same employer (the government) is one of the reasons for their positive relationship with government public relations. An excerpt from the interview with reporter 3 exemplifies this:

Researcher: “How do you explain the relationship between journalists and public relations? In some parts of the world journalists are suspicious of public relations and their relation is filled with care. Is it the same in Ethiopian context especially with your news agency?”

Reporter 3: “We (journalists and public relations) know each other. They know what we want and we know what they provide us. Therefore I know what to ask and they (pr practitioners) know what to answer. Why? Because both of us are working for the same government. Both of us are responsible for the same government. We don’t ask questions that infuriate public relations. They also expect questions that are always asked. Even though they know there is a problem in their organization, they will hide it. Otherwise it is like a suicide if the media gets it. We are working with a compassionate manner.”

(Personal interview with reporter 3, May 2006)

Reporter 3 agreed that this is unethical. He said, “Journalism is a profession that you inform the public what you found. There is no journalism principle that teaches to hide information.”

Editor 4: “The relationship between journalists and public relations should not be at the expense of the public’s right to know. A journalist should serve as a bridge between the government and the public. It should not be by violating the public’s right and interest. Reporting 90% of the road is completed while there is a damaged road that was constructed etc. is not acceptable.”
(Personal interview with editor 4, May 2006)

Editor 4 said the above when commenting on the relationship between ENA and government public relations. The editor at the same time does not appreciate a hostile relationship.

It seems from the interviews with several journalists that their relationship with public relations is warm because they are not engaged in investigative journalism. Journalists mention government ownership of ENA and governmental public relations as one of the major contributions to their ‘affectionate’ relationship.

4.2.2 Public relations as the gatekeeper for government information

ENA journalists (reporters 1-5, editors 1-5) said there has been an increasing trend in government offices over the last three years, that every piece of information and contact with experts should pass through a public relations officer. They said this new procedure to get information from government offices brings a dramatic change in their news-making process.

The journalists said they are unable to interview experts in most cases without the knowledge and permission of a public relations office. This, they said, brought difficulty in practicing their ‘watchdog’ role as a journalist.

Some of the journalists maintained that it is essential to have a responsible body that provides information to the media like public relations and that can facilitate interviews with pertinent sources.

Reporter 2 says, “public relations are contact persons of organizations to journalists. Centralizing information is good. It will help to prevent publishing and broadcasting wrong data that come from non-pertinent department or individuals.”

Editor 4 also said that public relations offices are more responsive to media requests for information because they know what information means. According to this informant, other professionals and experts do not consider giving information as part of their job. “We are experts and we have a lot of things to do. Leave us alone, they would say,” added editor 4.

Editor 3, another journalist, also recognized the role of public relations in providing and facilitating contact. He said if the journalist is well aware of his professional duty, the information provided through public relations is essential. In his words:

Researcher: “Generally speaking, how do you explain the information you receive from public relations?”

Editor 3: “Whatever the information is, if journalists do their homework, public relations information is important. At least it would serve as background information. It would serve him/her as one point of view that would be completed from other stakeholders or actors. If the information provided by the public relations is false, then it would guide us to the true information.

When I say public relations information is important I don’t mean all of it. The important thing is how do journalist treat that information? If the journalist discharge its professional responsibility, what ever that comes from public relations is important. I mean if the journalist do not paste that raw material to news directly.”

(Personal interview with editor 3, May 2006)

The degree to which public relations play a role in getting information is explained by reporter 3:

Reporter 3: ‘There is no way that you get information without public relations. Most of the departments and individuals that you want to interview refer you back to the public relations. If you ask a project manager about the project he is responsible for its completion, he said ‘I am ordered not to give information and come through public relations.’”

(Personal interview with reporter 3, May 2006)

All the journalists (editors and reporters) were concerned about this relationship since it gives great power to public relations officers and compels the journalists to obey in order to get information.

Editor 3: “I personally don’t agree with this trend that force you to get information only through public relations. In the first place the experts and other sources will not give you information confidently. There is a high possibility that the public relations practitioner would manipulate experts. They convince experts to give you information that helps the build image of their organization.”
(Personal interview with editor 3, May 2006)

The journalists’ concern is not only the monopolistic potential of public relations, but also the quality of information provided due to this ‘only through PR’ way.

Editor 4: “You could easily see the problem of information monopoly by public relations people. Because they are not experts, for instance you could see the difference where an expert tells you animal husbandry and public relations people tells you. The expert will explain to you technical things in detail and professionally, whereas the public relations practitioner will only give you information about general things and figures. You could see that he is reporting the reports he received from pertinent bodies. Then it is very difficult for them to explain professional things that need explanation beyond the report. There is this difficulty to understand and describe technical things among public relations. After the news was broadcasted, the experts complained about it and said the public was misinformed and the blame will be on journalists. If you take Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry it has 27 different departments and only three or four public relations will represent these departments. This limitation has negative impact on our news making endeavor.”
(Personal interview with editor 4, May 2006)

The lack of knowledge and explaining technical issues is also the concern of reporter 4.

Reporter 4: “Public relations working for agriculture is not an agriculture professional. In most cases public relations are graduate of language studies. There is an economic development bureau in the region I represent [Amhara region], and the public relations practitioners has no economic background and public relations professional background of the organization they represent. I am not an economic expert. Both the public relations practitioner and I don’t have economic knowledge.”
(Personal interview with reporter 4, May 2006)

Another concern of the journalists, for instance expressed by reporter 3, is that if the public relations office of an organization is weak in gathering and making information available then the public's right to know will be negatively affected. What do you do if the only gate is locked? He asked. According to him reporters raised the issue to their editors.

Dependency is the concern of several journalists who face the 'only through public relations' policy. ENA journalists said this growing trend that gives much power to public relations makes them to ask for information as 'alms'.

Editor 5: "This trend decreases journalists' professional effort. You cannot see the quality of newsgathering. It will weaken the 'nose for news' thing. It increases dependency on public relations information and bias the public as it provides information that might not be right."
(Personal interview with editor 5, May 2006)

He also said the trend will give information that is tuned to promote their organization.

Journalists said immediacy is another challenge.

Reporter 5: Many organizations have several departments, and public relations cannot feed you information instantly. He/she should ask pertinent departments. And he might not have the knowledge of several of them. The speed would also affect the clarity."
(Personal interview with reporter 5, May 2006)

Reporter 2 also raised immediacy as a concern. He said news by its very nature is timely. What happens today must be reported today.

Reporter 2: "You might find a resource person that is responsible. If he gives you the information with out informing the public relations, then it's transgressing the rules and regulations of its organization. Therefore, your resource person would say either the public relations will tell you or ask him to tell me to give you the information. You could see willingness, but you don't want to cause trouble to people. But the procedure is time consuming. There are several public relations that request your questions to be faxed to their organization. Therefore, it is difficult to maintain timeliness."
(Personal interview with reporter 2, May 2006)

In summary, the journalists cited difficulty in explaining technical and professional issues; they faced high dependency on public relations offices for obtaining information; and expressed delay in getting information when forced to follow 'only through public relations' policy.

4.2.3 Media contact with public relations

As we have seen, public relations offices have a great impact on the news-making process in ENA. ENA and the Ministry of Information have therefore arranged several meetings to discuss about their relationship and imparting information to the media.

According to head of ENA, Ato Hadush Kassu, there is no government regulation or stand that all information should pass through public relations. He maintained this policy is actually based on a misunderstanding.

Researcher: "Is it government's firm stand that any information should be provided by public relations?"

Hadush: No! There is no government policy regarding this. There was the assumption that public relations should be the owner of their organization's information. Government, local and international journalists have questions and they [the public relations] repeatedly were unable to meet these demands. The government doesn't want them to be only protocols and luggage holders for their bosses. But there is no directive by the government that all information should go through public relations.

Their role is only facilitating information provision. For instance, the Ministry of Information is the mouthpiece of the government. But the Ministry doesn't give all press conferences. Every other ministry, for instance Agriculture and Rural Development; Economy and Finance etc... gives information to the media independently. The country doesn't have the policy.

'Be responsible for information flow' is what was said. The minister has no time to give interview to all journalists. But if you [public relations] are responsible, then journalists would get information needed for the public. But this doesn't mean that you give information that should be given by the minister.

The problem was that journalists were complaining saying they don't get information. 'Department head is in meeting. The expert is in fieldwork. The Minister is out of town or Ethiopia.' If the public relations is owner of the information, and able to give information authoritatively, then journalists will not be mistreated and information will be provided timely."

(Personal interview with Ato Hadush, ENA head, May 2006)

Ato Hadush said ENA called all governmental, nongovernmental and private public relations practitioner for discussion. He said the aim of the discussion was to get responses from public relations about out news that sourced public relations. “They tell us problems in our news writing, editing and translation,” he said.

The Ministry of Information also conducts discussions among government media and public relations offices to improve the relationship between the two. The ENA head said the discussion raises from one important point.

Hadush: “We [the Ministry of Information and public relations] work for something similar. Both of us do image building. We also work to make people reach consensus. We cannot work these common things separately. At least we need information to achieve them. If there is an information gap, we cannot build the image of the country and make people reach consensus on major national issues. This would be done if we inform what is done in every office. We have to inform failure stories as we do success ones to be credible.”

Researcher: “What results so far you get from this discussion?”

Hadush: “So far the first meeting was an awareness-raising forum. What we are thinking now is common directives, common plan related to information providing and receiving. We planned to meet in August for the third time. What is important here is that we reach at consensus. We reach an agreement that we will raise the image of the country and make people reach at national consensus on major things if we work together.”

(Personal interview with Ato Hadush, ENA head, May 2006)

Furthermore, Hadush said that the media, including his own, raised their a concern in the trend of ‘only public relations information’.

Hadush: “Let’s establish one thing here: The role of public relations [government office] is to inform to the public about its organization. They would face limitations in explaining technical issues. When you want information from an engineer, then the public relations want to give you information. It would be good if there are levels who is responsible to give what kind of information. There are issues that a Minister, professional and other heads of organizations (if it is policy and strategic issues) should inform. I believe public relations could give the activities of the organization. We recommend this in our first meeting.”

(Personal interview with Ato Hadush, ENA head, May 2006)

4.3 How do ENA journalists process the public relations information?

As indicated in literature review (Dennis and Merrill, 2002: 174-175; Hargreaves, 2003: 180,186) journalists are normally expected to include different viewpoints in their stories.

The researcher major aim is to show how ENA journalists use public relations information. Therefore, the research will not focus on the mediation role of public relations between experts and managements with journalists. Thus, it concentrates only on the direct information that the public relations give to the journalists.

The journalists said there are two ways that they receive information through public relations. One of them is by directly interviewing them while the other is by press releases and documents that the public relations send to ENA. In addition to that, they say public relations officers try to communicate their message or content by sending materials such as brochures, press kits, among others, which for this purpose the research categorize them in to 'documents'.

All journalists and editors interviewed told the researcher that in almost every case an event has a potential of more than one source. Therefore, they said it is the journalists' role to entertain different viewpoints in their stories. Having these theoretical principles in mind, they all admit that they usually do not crosscheck the information that comes through public relations. They said if they doubt some of the information that comes from public relations, they crosscheck it only from public relations practitioners.

They attributed internal and external causes for the lack of crosschecking public relations information.

4.3.1 Internal explanations

Journalists argue that journalists and the media are responsible for not crosschecking the public relations sourced news. One of the problems they all mentioned in this regard is the lack of professional training.

4.3.1.1. Lack of professionalism

The notion that news sources are exclusively public relations officials is nothing but lack of professionalism, said editor 4. "I believe that ignoring the potential of the public to be used as a source is lack of professionalism," she added.

She cited the low number of journalism education institutions- and the, weakness of journalists to update themselves with the profession as contributory to the manifested unprofessional journalism practice in ENA.

Editor 4 said that the problem of un-professionalism is also witnessed in their subscribers, for instance the media outlets.

Editor 4: “We are a news agency. Our duty is to provide news to the other media. They might not use some of the crosschecked information. There were some colleagues that prefer to use the public and their complaints as source. They eventually cease to source the public. Because the media prefer to transmit news saying ‘Authority to build road at a cost of eighty million birr,’ stories. In most cases our subscribers’ refrain using ‘Residents in X woreda [smaller administration units] complain about...’ And the journalist needs to see his story to be broadcasted and published. And there are several telephone calls that requested why we don’t cover the news after interviewing them about their problem.”

(Interview with editor 4, May 2006)

Ethiopian Television, Ethiopian Radio, Ethiopian Press Agency (four different language newspapers), Radio Fana and FM 97.1) – are among others subscribers of news from ENA.

Even though editor 3 believes that news can be balanced by other news items, he contends that the Ethiopian News Agency does not bring some balance to the first story. Therefore, he says the news are neither balanced in one story or another story.

Ato Hadush, the head of ENA, said the problem of crosschecking emanates from lack of capacity. “Some people might think that journalists do not crosscheck public relations information only because they are pro-government. But it is not like that. The profession needs skill and education,” he said. Hadush said his journalists like many professionals in the country, lacks professionalism. He said most of the working journalists have no formal journalism education.

Hadush said ENA understands this difficulty and that the organization tries to address journalists face and his organization try to address the problem by sending its journalists for training and formal education.

“We give short-term in service trainings for our journalists. We send several journalists to formal journalism schools in diploma program. In addition to the formal journalism educations, we are giving investigative and development journalism trainings. Still it is not adequate as the profession is multi-disciplinary. And we also try to foster beat system,” he says.

4.3.1.2 Trust in public relations

Some of the journalists said that they trust government public relations because they are big bodies of the government, exemplified by this quote:

Editor 5: “Basically we are covering developmental issues. Because they are developmental, public relations are reliable sources. They represent governmental organizations and are trust worthy. The information that we receive from them is not cross checkable. In most cases, they tell you what was achieved, the amount of produce that farmers get, how much fertilizer has been apportioned etc. [...] and what you have to do is report that information. [...] In most cases they don’t tell you lie.”

(Personal interview with editor 5, May 2006)

Reporter 4 (regional reporter) shared this thinking. “Public relations are institutions and they are considered to be trustworthy. Most of the time we cover government activities. There is no choice. Even if we have to crosscheck, we don’t go to anywhere. We go to them,” he said.

On the contrary, editor 4 says despite their (ENA journalists) practice crosschecking public relations information is help for the government rather than a threat.

Editor 4: “Crosschecking information does not mean that you ignore the government. You could show where the policy is unimplemented, where they are transgressed. Media is the bridge between the government and the public. It is not helpful to report an organization is implementing the government policy while the reality is not. It is rather important to report the complaints in line with achievements.”

(Personal interview with editor 4, May 2006)

She said it is important to crosscheck the public relations information to identify the difficulties that impede the policy implementation.

4.3.1.3 Deadline, competition and amount of news expected

Almost all journalists attributed the difficulty of counterchecking public relations to deadline pressure. They said in addition to the deadline, competition with other news agencies and media forced them to use the information at hand not to risk their story to be dead.

Editor 3 informed that the city desk is expected to produce at least 15-20 news items while the regional desk is supposed to produce at least 30 news items per day with limited human resources.

Reporter 2 said the deadline which is every day coupled with the routine makes one say, 'I quote one source. After all it is not my data-'

As we have seen previously public relations is many times the only way to get information from several governmental organizations in Ethiopia. The public relations offices also know that the media need their information to meet the daily news quota. This gives authority to public relations officers to direction to journalists in the news production. And as in a symbiotic relationship, journalists said they are afraid to loose their crucial information provider.

Several of the interviewed journalists said that the public relations offices of different governmental organizations do not want to be asked critical questions concerning difficulties in their organization. Many of the journalists informed that public relations officers instruct order them to leave a critical story if a journalist is tries to make news out of it.

Excerpts from the interview editor 3 will give us some highlights:

Editor 3: "Sometimes there is a conflict between what the journalist needs and [what] public relations want to say. Normally they are not ready to give you answer other than what they want to say. For instance I was in Jijjiga and the education bureau head informed me their unhappiness for the delay of a university construction after the cornerstone was laid and his office offered a large amount of plots of land. I don't want to release it without balancing the story. There is a responsible body in the Ministry of Education. I came here and called the Ministry of Information.

The first thing the public relations officer told me is 'to leave the story. I asked him why. After all there is dissatisfaction and they are responsible. Rather than explaining why things are not in the right direction, different organizations ask you to avoid the story. They believe avoiding a story is a safety."

(Personal interview with editor 3, May 2006)

Journalists who work under such circumstances said they find it difficult to cause anger to public relations by the news they made. They said losing the contact of public relations

is intolerable in the current objective reality. There for cross checking the public relations information or including other viewpoint other than public relations is risky.

Reporter 2 explains this when he said: “We use public relations information without cross checking not to lose the source. Journalists do not want to make public relations practitioners unhappy.”

Journalists like reporter 1 also agree that upsetting public relations practitioners is also causing trouble in their daily journalism practice.

Reporter 1: “Sometimes public relations officers are not willing to give us information. When we say the public relations is not willing to give answer in our news story, this doesn’t make them happy. It will also cause anger for them.”
(Personal interview with reporter 1, May 2006)

Asked what kind of problem it caused, she said:

Reporter 1: “It creates problem in our relationship. They recall and said to us ‘you said last time such and such things that give bad image to our organization. Some times they don’t know to be informed is your right. Your relation will be destroyed.’”
(Personal interview with reporter 1, May 2006)

4.3.2 External explanations

The failure to crosscheck public relations information has not only got to do with internal factors in the news business. Journalists said they also face external problems that make crosschecking difficult.

4.3.2.1 Journalists being powerless

Many of the interviewed journalists claimed that journalists are powerless and are undermined by sources. They claimed there is nothing that journalists can do when an office is reluctant to give information.

On the contrary, they said the information delivery is the goodwill of the public relations.

Editor 5: “The journalist is powerless even a single kebele [very smallest unit of the city administration] head would not give him/her information. Journalists should be powerful. The hands of officials should be shortening in the news

making process. *Let al.* one giving/not giving information, some sources and officials threaten the job security of the journalists. Journalist's right to gather information should be respected".

(Personal interview with editor 5, May 2006)

Editor 4 supported this thought:

Editor 4: "Our press law is very lenient. One source can say 'I don't give you information,' But there is nothing- in black and white that states what will follow if a source don't give information. They give information based on their goodwill. The journalist is afraid not to lose his source and afraid to unhappy the public relations."

(Personal interview with editor 4, May 2006)

According to editor 4, there are some organizations where the public relations office is the only way to get information, and unfortunately, the offices are not responding. "Sometimes ENA tries to settle the problem by talking to the managers, and in some cases it works out while in many occasions it is not helping. That why we are beggars for information," she said.

Reporter 1 also indicated that there is no protection for the source and the journalist:

Reporter 1: "There is no guarantee to protect a law ranking workers who gave information to the media with out the knowledge of their bosses. Some of them face penalty and administrative measures by their bosses. Protection of the media for the journalist is almost non-existent. Your organization's protection is very minimal if you are put behind bars. That's why there are several unethical things."

(Personal interview with reporter 1, May 2006)

Another challenge that some journalists mentioned, as impediments to crosscheck public relations information, is the red tape that exists to get access to information. As previously indicated news and time are highly intertwined. Timeliness is one the tenets of news values. Audiences need to know some things new.

ENA journalists say public relations; offices, which are the major information source and link to experts, use several techniques to slow down the information delivery. A frequent problem is that reporters are asked by the public relations officers to provide their questions by fax, which usually calls a delay.

Reporter 2 recommended a legal support for the media:

Reporter 2: “We need to have an act [law] that orders organizations to give information. Information is power. Television and radio are not pastimes. We need reformation in relation to provision and access to information; journalist’s right to work independently should be respected. How do we do it? I don’t know.”
(Personal interview with reporter 2, May 2006)

4.3.2.2 Distance and poor infrastructure

One of the external difficulties mentioned by a regional reporter that is quite different from the Addis Ababa situation is distance and poor infrastructure in regional states. Reporter 4, a regional reporter, said the regional public relations offices provided the media with different information about regional activities. In order to balance the story from another source, the poor infrastructure and the long distance makes it difficult, he said:

Reporter 4: “To send me to places four days roundtrip journey there is a time and financial limitation that my organization cannot afford. This is one of our poverty’s manifestations. Due to this, we might not balance stories that public relations provide us.”
(Personal interview with editor 4, May 2006)

Editor 5, a regional desk editor shared this opinion:

Editor 5: “Transportation, inaccessibility, far distance and low infrastructure are the major impediments to crosscheck regional public relations information. There were projects that were covered by the media as executed but never been constructed? This is because sources inform journalists and cross checking the information needs to be there.”
(Personal interview with editor 5, May 2006)

4.3.2.3 Public relations dictatorship and gender issues

One of the problems journalists raised that affect their news making process is the dictatorship of public relations practitioners. They said if you have problem with the public relations of an organization, then it will close every possible ways of getting information from that organization. In addition to planting stories in the press, PR agencies may also need to prevent stories from getting published. Naturally the PR industry has developed a number of ways of doing this. (Hearst, 2003)

This is because they are the gatekeepers of every organization they represent. Journalists said the public relations consider the information of their organization as their own wealth that they can give to some favourite ones while denying access to another.

Here is the interview excerpt of reporter 1 about the issue:

Reporter 1: “If our (media and public relations) relationship suffers with difficulty, they told you ‘you say or do this and we don’t give you information’. Sometimes they don’t know that it is our and public’s right to access information. You are supposed to put pressure on them to give you information. Once you say something that they don’t like, they will give you hard time.”

Researcher: “Do you face problems in getting information because you do something that they don’t like?”

Reporter 1: “Yes. The Ethiopia Road Authority public relations still says ‘I don’t want to see her’. This is because I made news about the road that several people complained about it. The story is about a bridge that was cracked in Gohatsion road one year after its inauguration. When I tried to balance the story and asked him about it, he said ‘leave the story’. He said vehicles that used the bridge before its inauguration cause the problem and added that it shouldn’t be put in to the media caused the crack. He insisted to kill the story, which I didn’t. I included his unwillingness to explain the issue and done the story. Right after that, he made himself unreachable to me. Thus, whenever there is new story or information from that organization, other journalists go and cover.”

(Personal interview with reporter 1, May 2006)

The two woman respondents (an editor and reporter) said that there is sexual harassment among public relations practitioners. They said the public relations practitioners in different organization consider giving information as a favour. By doing so, the woman journalist said they need to have a date with these female journalists.

Reporter 1: “When we women journalists go to get information from public relations, they change the communication differently. They want us to start another relationship that is not based on our professional relation. I worked at ENA for the last seven years. I have seen several public relations that represent different organisations. Several of them want additional relation with me as they give me information. They want to invite me at non-office hours. Even though I tell them that I am married and have children they insist for date. That will create problem in our professional relation. Then you would be forced to break your relations with them.”

(Personal interview with reporter 1, May 2006)

I asked her what it means to break her relationship with public relations that are becoming the main gate for information. She said editors mock them, saying “It is fruitful

to send women to PR practitioners” rather than giving a solution to the problem. She claimed other female journalists face the same problem.

Reporter 1: “We share our experiences and almost every female journalists passed the same problem. One when we were talking each other, we learnt that one public relations asked for date all of the female journalists in ENA. Now there are fresh women journalists and we jokingly asked them whether different public relations officers asked their mobile and home phone number as usual or not.”
(Personal interview with reporter 1, May 2006)

4.4 How do ENA journalist process press releases?

The other way that journalists get information from public relations is press releases. Several press releases come to the ENA on a daily basis. But not all of them turn out to be news in the journalistic sense. Journalists (editor 3, reporter 5) believe that press releases should be crosschecked to get the whole truth.

They said press releases create a distance between the journalists and the information provider. They also said the public relations send journalists information that he/she rather wants to have as an interview. Journalists must therefore call public relations and other stakeholders to crosscheck the press release information. But ENA journalists agree that public relations news is not crosschecked in most cases.

Editor 3 “The press release might tell generalized things to hide other information. It is safe for him when he didn’t specify information. Therefore the journalist should ask for elaboration. The public relations might say activities are underway. The journalist should call and ask the public relations where? When it is started? With how many outlay? Etc... one event has several stakeholders. They might be beneficiaries, subcontractors etc. that has different viewpoints.”
(Personal interview with Editor 3, May 2006)

According to him, they should not be trusted because of their professional behaviour. The next interview excerpt illustrates how ENA processes press releases:

Researcher: “I have seen three-month public relations sourced ENA news. I could say ENA uses public relations information with out balancing it from another source. How do you explain this?”

Editor 3: “When you come to our organization challenging press release is not strong. There is this tendency to use press release and the only source in our news. May be you didn’t see what we left out from the press releases.

We might cut out some of it but we could say we didn't add another information. We didn't copy and past with the order that public relations sent us. If you ask me how far we went to crosscheck factual information, to use background archives so that to give a balanced version. I say it is not developed yet. You can use ENA software to get related stories of one year. ENA soft is helpful to ask questions like 'last time you said this, but now you said differently why?' But if you ask whether journalist use it or not the answer is no.”
(Personal interview with editor 3, May 2006)

On the other hand, editor 4 said there are organizations that their press releases should be treated like Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Information without crosschecking it. ‘You don't question their credibility while working for government media,’ she said.

Editor 5 supported this issue saying “we believe press releases from government bodies are legitimate. Because we are different organs of the same body. We don't crosscheck.”

Chapter 5

Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study has tried to examine whether ENA crosschecks the information it receives from public relations. The three-months period that was examined indicates that the news agency hardly checks any information it receives through public relations. The conclusion is based on qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews of reporters and editors.

In-depth interviews with the head of ENA, reporters and editors, found that there are internal and external problems that make crosschecking public relations information difficult.

Lack of professionalism, trust on public relations, ownership, deadline pressure, competition and amount of news expected are the internal problems that journalists cited as impediment to crosscheck public relations information.

Journalists being defenceless and powerless, geographical distance and poor infrastructure, public relations 'editorialship' and harassment of women journalists are external factors that make crosschecking difficult.

The relationship between the major news agency in the country and the government is not one of tension, like it would be many other places in the world. The relationship could rather be described as a tender symbiosis. Public relations is becoming the only way to access information from government offices and its impact on news production is bigger than it used to be. The research found they would offend their only access in government offices if they do critical stories to the dismay of public relations departments.

5.2 Recommendations

As indicated previously, lack of professionalism is one of the problems that ENA journalists and leadership mentioned as the reason for the uncritical handling of public relations information. The head of the organization, Hadush Kassu, says ENA journalists are engaged in short and long-term training to curb this problem. But the news agency

should strive to send more working journalists to journalism schools in different programs. It must also plan to attract fresh journalism graduate of both the under graduate and graduates programs of Addis Ababa University.

The role of public relations to access government information should be downplayed. Journalists should be creative and find other ways to retrieve information in order to reduce the dependency on public relations

ENA must convince government bodies that the public has a right to know. It should insist that the government take measures on government public relations that are not willing to give information to journalists. The responsibility of government public relations to provide information should be enforced by law, for instance through an open democracy bill.

ENA should protect its journalists when public relations officers threaten-to withhold information. The media vs. Public relations meetings that are organized by ENA and the Ministry of Information should be used as instrument to this end. The meeting should create mutual understanding between these two different professions in such a way that accessing information from government offices is not seen as a good-will of the public relations.

5.3 Scope for further research

While this research was exploratory in many ways, it leads to some important areas for further inquiry on how public relations' response to the coverage of journalists while using them as source. Public relations might give a different response to their relationship with the media.

The assertion by ENA women journalists gave that there is sexual harassment by public relations practitioners needs further enquiry. How ENA journalists process press releases is another areas of great importance that could cater for another study..

References

- Allan, Stuart. 2005. *Journalism: critical issues*. Open university Press. USA.
- Annual report on American journalism 2005. *The state of the mass media*. <http://www.Journalism.org>. Accessed on April 7.
- Aysen, Barbara, Sedorkin, Gail and Oakham, Mandy with Roger Patching. 2003. *Reporting in a Multi-Media in World*. Allen and UNWIN. Australia.
- Bates, Don. 2002. *Mini-me History to inform and persuade public relations from the Dawn of Civilization*, [Http://www.instituteforpr.com/history.phtml;article](http://www.instituteforpr.com/history.phtml;article). Retrieved on March 26,2006.
- Campbell, Vincent. 2004. *Information Age Journalism*. Arnold. Great Britain.
- Cutlip, M. Scott. 1994. *The Unseen Power: A History of public relations*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates New Jersey.
- Cutlip, M. Scott and Center H. Allen. Glen M. Broom. 2006. *Effective public relations*. Pearson Education International. New Jersey.
- Dennis E, Everette and Merrill C. John *Media Debates: 2002. Great issues for the Digital Age*. 3rd ed. Thomson Learning, Enc, Canada
- Grunig E. James and Hunt, Todd. 1984. *Managing public relations*. Wadsworth Thomson. USA
- Hargreaves, Ian. 2003. *Journalism Truth or Dare?* Oxford University Press. New York.
- Hearst, Randolph. 2003. *Public relations and lobbying industry*. Corporate Watch UK. <http://corporatewatch.org.uk/>? Retrieved on March 28, 2006.
- Horton L. James. 2004. *Media Relations: The Basics*. [Http://WWW.online-pr.com/holding/a040916_media_Relaitons_the_basics.pdf](http://WWW.online-pr.com/holding/a040916_media_Relaitons_the_basics.pdf), Retrieved on April 15.
- Jefkins, Frank. 1992. *Public relations*. 4th edition. Pitman publishing. London.
- Jenkins, Simon. 2006. *PR and the press: two big guns*. <http://bjr.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/17/1/45> British Journalism Review vol.17 no.1 march, 2006 Retrieved on April 15, 2006
- Kitchen, J. Phillip. 2004. *Public relations Principles and Practice*. Thomson Business Press. Croatia.

Leiter, Kelly; Harris, Julian and Johnson, Stanley. 2000. *The complete Reporter: fundamentals of news gathering, writing and editing*. Allyn and Bacon. 7th ed. USA.

Mencher, Melvin. 1996. *Basic News Writing*. 3rd edition. Universal Book Stall. New Delhi.

Missouri Group, The: Brains S. Brooks, George Kennedy, Daryl R. Moen and Don Ranly. 1992. *News Reporting and Writing*. 4th edition. St. Martin's Press. New York.

Newsom, Doug and Wollert A. James. 1985. *Media writing: news for the media*. Wadsworth Publishing Company. California.

Newsom, Doug; Judy Vanslyke Turk, Kruckeberg, Dean. 2004. *This is PR*. 8th ed. Wadsworth. Canada.

Onabajo, Olufemi. 2006. *Proactive Corporate Management and the Dynamics of public relations*. J. Soc. Sci. 12(2): 119-124 (2006). [Http: //www.krepublishers.com](http://www.krepublishers.com). Retrieved on April 5, 2006.

Orcher, T. Lawrence. 2005. *Conducting research: social and behavioural science methods*. Pyrczak publishing. USA.

Peake, Jacquelyn, 1980. *Public relations in business*: Harper &Row. New York.

Salter, Lee. 2005. *The communicative structures of journalism and public relations*. SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi) <http://jou.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/6/1/90>, Retrieved on May 13,2006

Tumber, Howard. 1999. *NEWS a reader*. Oxford University Press. New York.

Wilcox L. Dennis. 2005. *Public relations writing and Media Techniques*. 5th International edition. Pearson Education. USA.

Wimmer, D. Roger and Dominick, R. Joseph. 2003. *Mass media research: and introduction*. 7th edition. Thomson Wadsworth. USA.