



**Examining Social Media Activism by Journalists and its Influence on Media Credibility: In Case of Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation.**

**By: Engida Melaku**

**A Thesis Submitted to School of Journalism and Communication Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfilment of MA Degree in Public Relations and Strategic Communications.**

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**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**

**SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION**

**Examining Social Media Activism by Journalists and its Influence  
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**School of Journalism and Communications**

This thesis, titled "Examining Social Media Activism by Journalists and its Influence on Media Credibility: In Case of Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation," by Engida Melaku, is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Public Relations and Strategic Communications. This research delves into the critical relationship between journalists' social media advocacy and the perception of credibility within the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, particularly focusing on its News and Current Affairs department. The work adheres to the established regulations of the University and demonstrates originality and excellence in both content and presentation.

**Signed by the Examining Committee:**

**Examiner** -----sig. ----- Date-----

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**Chair of Department of Graduate Program Coordinator**

## Declaration

I, Engida Melaku Engida, hereby declare that the following thesis, entitled 'Examining Social Media Activism by Journalists and its Influence on Media Credibility: In Case of Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation,' is my original work. This thesis has not been previously submitted for the award of a degree or diploma at any university or other tertiary institution.

I further declare that all materials used in this study have been duly acknowledged and referenced according to the appropriate academic style guide.

Declared by: Engida Melaku

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Date: March, 2024

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Advisor Name: Agaredech Jemaneh

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Date: -----

## **Disclaimer:**

This thesis, conducted for the Master of Arts in Public Relations and Strategic Communication program at Addis Ababa University, is solely the author's work and independent of his employment at the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC).

To ensure confidentiality, the research utilizes anonymized data, protecting the privacy of participants and the organization.

The views and conclusions presented solely reflect the author's analysis and do not necessarily represent the official position of EBC.

## **Transparency Note:**

The author acknowledges current employment at EBC. To mitigate potential bias, the research design and methodology were developed in close consultation with the thesis advisor, ensuring objective investigation.

## **Abstract**

*This Master's thesis investigates how journalists employed by the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) navigate the complex relationship between social media activism and journalistic credibility within a restricted media landscape. Utilizing qualitative research methods, the study explores how EBC journalists leverage social media for self-expression while acknowledging the potential risks of compromising objectivity and damaging EBC's reputation. The findings illuminate the increasingly blurred lines between activism and journalism, raising concerns about media credibility. Experts propose a multifaceted approach to address this issue, encompassing the cultivation of strong ethical practices within EBC, the enhancement of media literacy among journalists, and the advocacy for press freedom. This thesis recommends revising existing social media guidelines, implementing targeted training programs, and pursuing press freedom initiatives. These strategies all emphasize collaborative efforts to ensure responsible social media engagement by journalists, ultimately safeguarding journalistic ethics and public trust in EBC.*

**Key Words:** Journalist activism, Media credibility, Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), Social media, Ethical standards.

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# Table of Contents

| Contents  | pages |
|---|-------|
| Disclaimer:.....  | i     |
| Abstract.....   | ii    |
| Acknowledgements.....   | iii   |
| Table of Contents.....  | iv    |
| CHAPTER ONE.....  | 1     |
| 1.    BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY.....  | 1     |
| 1.1.    Statement of the Problem.....                                       | 3     |
| 1.2.    Objective of the Study.....   | 6     |
| 1.2.1.    Specific Objectives of the Study.....                             | 6     |
| 1.3.    Research Questions/Hypothesis.....                                  | 7     |
| 1.4.    Significance of the Study.....                                      | 7     |
| 1.5.    Scope of the Study.....   | 8     |
| 1.6.    Limitations of the Study.....                                       | 9     |
| 1.7.    Organization of the Research.....                                   | 9     |
| CHAPTER TWO.....  | 11    |
| 2.    RELATED LITRATURE REVIEW.....   | 11    |
| 2.1.    Theoretical Frame Work.....   | 11    |
| 2.1.1.    Relativism Theory.....  | 11    |
| 2.1.2.    Agenda Setting Theory.....  | 13    |
| 2.2.    Empirical Review.....   | 15    |
| 2.2.1.    Conceptualising Journalism and Activism.....                      | 15    |
| 2.2.2.    Overlapping and Divergent Aspects of Journalism and Activism..... | 20    |
| 2.2.3.    Digital Activism Matters.....                                     | 23    |
| 2.2.4.    Journalism Ethics and Credibility in a Digital Age.....           | 24    |
| 2.2.5.    Misinformation vs. Disinformation: Understanding the Nuance.....  | 26    |
| 2.2.6.    Credibility: A Core Pillar of Journalism.....                     | 27    |
| 2.2.7.    Conflict of Interest (COI).....                                   | 28    |
| 2.2.8.    Factors for Conflict of Interest.....                             | 29    |
| 2.3.    Overview of Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC).....           | 30    |
| CHAPTER THREE.....  | 34    |



|          |   |    |
|----------|---|----|
| 3.       | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....   | 34 |
| 3.1.     | Introduction.....   | 34 |
| 3.2.     | Research Design.....  | 35 |
| 3.2.1.   | Rationale for Qualitative Methods.....                                | 35 |
| 3.3.     | Sampling Strategy.....  | 36 |
| 3.3.1.   | In-depth Interview.....   | 36 |
| 3.3.2.   | Leveraging Insider Experience.....                                    | 38 |
| 3.3.3.   | Document Review.....  | 39 |
| 3.4.     | Data Analysis.....  | 40 |
| 3.5.     | Ethical Considerations.....   | 41 |
| 3.6.     | Reliability and Validity.....   | 42 |
|          | CHAPTER FOUR.....   | 44 |
| 4.       | DATA PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS.....                                   | 44 |
| 4.1.     | Data Presentation.....  | 44 |
| 4.1.1.   | General Information of the Respondents.....                           | 46 |
| 4.1.2.   | Balancing Journalism and Activism.....                                | 47 |
| 4.1.3.   | EBC's Social Media Guidelines: Insights from Editorial Staff.....     | 51 |
| 4.1.4.   | Balancing Journalism and Activism: Insights from Experts.....         | 52 |
| 4.1.5.   | Impact of Social Media Activism on Credibility.....                   | 54 |
| 4.1.6.   | EBC Journalists' Activism: Impact on Credibility.....                 | 56 |
| 4.1.7.   | Ethical Considerations and Best Practices.....                        | 58 |
| 4.1.7.1. | Ethical Tightrope: Balancing Journalism and Activism.....             | 58 |
| 4.1.8.   | Perceptions of the Editorial Staff on Journalist Activism in EBC..... | 60 |
| 4.1.9.   | Social Media: Friend or Foe for Ethiopian Journalists?.....           | 62 |
| 4.1.10.  | EBC Social Media Usage Guidelines Reviewed.....                       | 64 |
| 4.1.11.  | A Researcher's Perspective at EBC.....                                | 66 |
| 4.2.     | Summary of Findings.....  | 68 |
|          | CHAPTER FIVE.....   | 71 |
| 5.       | CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....                                   | 71 |
| 5.1.     | Conclusion.....   | 71 |
| 5.2.     | Recommendations.....  | 73 |
|          | REFERENCE.....  | 76 |
|          | APPENDICIS.....   | 87 |

English Version of Interview Questions ..... 87  
Amharic Version of Interview Questions ..... 90  
In-Depth Interview Participants ..... 93

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In Ethiopia, as in many other parts of the world, the news industry has morphed in to a big business. As early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dicken-Garcia (1989 as cited in Borden, 2007) observed that news had become commercialized, a trend that continues today. While advertising once fueled media profitability the American Civil War demonstrated the tension between news demand and objectivity. Unable to maintain neutrality, the media faced criticism and condemnation, leading to calls for prioritizing the public good (Borden, 2007).

Unfortunately, concerns about media credibility and objectivity persist. Both public and private institutions often operate at the fringes of acceptable practice. Public media, controlled by the government, frequently focus on promoting government actions with minimal attention to public needs and concerns. Conversely, opposition groups and private media outlets tend to heavily criticize the government's performance. This polarized narrative leaves little room for balanced reporting and informing public discourse.

These days, it is common for businesses like hotels, restaurants, cafes and others to offer free Wi-Fi. They understand that it attracts new customers and keeps existing ones coming back for longer visits. However, it is important to remember that the internet landscape has changed dramatically in recent decades. People are constantly connected, exploring the web, checking social media, sharing thoughts and ideas, commenting on others' posts, and engaging in the online world.

The internet today puts the world at our fingertips. We no longer need to be glued to televisions or desktops- smartphones offer convenient, portable access anytime, anywhere. This explains why we find ourselves constantly scrolling through our mobile screens, consuming information and interacting online. However, this instant connectivity can sometimes lead to hasty actions, with people quickly posting their thoughts, observations, and opinions without careful consideration.

In conventional media, where the activities are structured and regulated, practitioners or journalists are required to play within the field of ethical codes of conduct that are already set by the discipline and the media institutions (Banda,2010, p. 23). It is also clear that in Ethiopia and elsewhere in the world, a journalist is required to get trainings or formally attain university courses. Contrarily with no or little training there are a number of news or program hosts who earn their living from the media industry in Ethiopia and elsewhere in the world.

Among the courses given in universities and/or training institutions, due emphasis is given to ethical code of conduct. When a journalist escapes such codes of conduct intentionally or negligently a legal liability may follow up. Media institutions also set their own editorial policies that journalists are required to follow while they are assigned to collect, process, and transmit news and/or programs.

The advent of the internet has changed the face of communication all over the world. Journalists are in a hurry to formulate and get familiarized with new ways of gathering, processing and dissemination of information and news contents (Ibrahim, Gusau, Uba & Nasir, 2021). They also stated that it is the internet that made the wider world smaller for journalists and the wider public as well. It is also the era of the internet that has created a new form of specialization and working space (online journalism) where journalists get specialized as online journalists, editors and the likes.

Journalists working for the mainstream media, responsible and accountable for what they are reporting, are bound by editorials and other rules and regulations of the nations they are working in. Like others, journalists sense and perceive sensitive issues, but the editorial policies including other rules and regulations set for the regulation of the media never allow them to report what they saw and comment on what it should be. Could such rules and regulations stop journalists telling what they believe is right? The era of the World Wide Web and/or the social media platforms is also suitable to communicate ideas, thoughts, and opinions, with anonymity.

Nowadays, journalists working in the mainstream media are playing a dual role. For their earnings they regularly report for their media institutions within the set rules and regulations on the other hand they devote much of their time to advocating ideas they support; criticizing ideas, institutions, individuals, and groups; and encouraging and/or discouraging activities of government and non-government institutions.

Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, the oldest public media institution in Ethiopia, in its Guidelines for the use of social media (2018) admitted that its employees are busy of exploring the social media platforms while ignoring their day to day activities. It is undeniable that such activities disturb the working culture of the media under discussion. As the journalists are perceived representatives and brands of the media institution they are working for, their involvement in the opened and free environment of the social media may pose issues of credibility and objectivity.

The guidelines in its article 5(1) (a) states that journalists must maintain their independence from any political opinion while using social media platforms. However, some journalists reflect their political partisanship in their social media posts, and some employees have publicly criticized the media. The researcher, who has been a member of the news and current affairs department for the past six years, has observed that some journalists working for EBC often advocate for their own beliefs. Journalists in this category gather, process, and distribute information using a variety of internet-compatible technologies (Ross & Curmier, 2010, cited in Banda, 2010).

This study investigates whether the tendency of mainstream media journalists towards activism compromises the objectivity and credibility of mainstream media, with a specific focus on Ethiopia's national broadcaster, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC). While there is extensive research on the interplay between social media and mainstream media, to my knowledge, no prior study has explicitly examined the involvement of journalists in activism and its key challenges for mainstream media, particularly with in the context of EBC's News and Current Affairs department.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

Despite cultural variations, differing national interests, and economic variations, Article 19 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrines the universal right to “freedom of opinion.” This right encompasses both the freedom to hold opinions without interference and the freedom to seek, receive, and share information and ideas through any media, regardless of national borders.

The right to freedom of opinion, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, guarantees the freedom to hold and express opinions without interference, as well as the

ability to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of borders (Karlekar & Cook, 2009). This fundamental right applies to all member countries, including Ethiopia, where Article 29 of the 1995 constitution affirms the right to "thought, opinion and expression" (mirroring the Universal Declaration).

However, despite constitutional guarantees, the working environment for journalists in public media institutions like the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) falls short of the ideal. This research, informed by the author's six-year experience in EBC's News and Current Affairs department, reveals that journalists face unwritten redlines, effectively restricting them from raising critical ideas about the government. Sensitive issues often go unreported, and journalists may be pressured to deny government wrongdoings or avoid discussing them publicly. This hierarchical control dictates what journalists can and cannot report.

In response to these limitations, some journalists turn to social media as a platform to share their uncensored opinions. Yet, even this space is not entirely free. Public media institutions may have regulations prohibiting journalists from expressing personal opinions or sharing information deemed important by others. While inconvenient, these restrictions are acknowledged. However, the virtual age empowers journalists and the public to express views on social, cultural, and economic events, even anonymously (Khan, Soroya & Mohamood, 2022).

The rise of social media as a news source during events like the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the challenge of information verification (Li et al., 2021). The burden of discerning truth often falls on the receiver, raising concerns for decision-makers regarding the credibility of information circulating on various platforms (Halawi and McCarthy, 2008). Unverified information, especially when shared by prominent figures, can be misinterpreted and have negative consequences. For instance, a mainstream media journalist actively promoting extremism, hatred, or ethnic superiority could damage the reputation of the media outlet they work for (Damodaran and Olphert, 2000).

As Karlekar and Cook (2008) aptly describe, media freedom can be stifled by existing laws restricting criticism and commentary on sensitive topics like religion, ethnicity, or national security. In such restricted environments, internet-based social media platforms, including e-

newspapers and blogs, have emerged as attractive alternatives due to their perceived openness. This trend has led some mainstream media journalists to engage in online activism, either supporting or opposing the government's actions. Others may use social media platforms like YouTube and Facebook to promote their views on ethnic or religious issues.

The increasing use of social media by journalists to express personal views on sensitive topics like ethnicity, religion, and politics raises ethical concerns, particularly considering the researcher's affiliation with EBC's News and Current Affairs department, where colleagues connect on platforms like Facebook. This behavior highlights a potential disconnect between a journalist's on-screen portrayal and their off-screen actions. Instances have been observed where journalists denigrate the government, their own organization, or even incite hatred or promote ethnic supremacy.

These off-camera tensions raise critical questions. When journalists engage in passionate debates on sensitive issues beyond public scrutiny, it can blur the lines between objective reporting and personal activism. This behavior can erode public trust in the ability of traditional media to deliver unbiased and objective information. The concept of objectivity remains the cornerstone of ethical journalism, guiding responsible news reporting (Yat, 2007). Glasser (2019) emphasizes investigative journalism's core principle of presenting diverse perspectives in a balanced manner. However, achieving objectivity becomes particularly challenging when dealing with highly influential news sources.

Ethiopia's state-owned media, exemplified by EBC, operates within a paradox. While journalists enjoy the constitutional right to free speech, their ability to exercise it is limited by unwritten redlines on sensitive topics. This environment can push journalists towards social media activism, a strategy fraught with challenges. Social media offers a platform for unfiltered expression, but it risks blurring the lines between objective reporting and personal advocacy, potentially undermining EBC's credibility as a neutral source of information. This thesis delves into this critical tension, exploring how journalist activism, particularly on social media, impacts the perceived credibility of state-owned media in Ethiopia.

This investigation builds upon valuable insights from recent studies on the Ethiopian media landscape. Bitima Milkessa (2019) examined the impact of social media on traditional media outlets in Ethiopia. Elham Ali (2019) further explored the intersection of political activism and social media responsibility within the same context. By leveraging these existing studies, this research delves deeper into the multifaceted nature of journalistic objectivity within the specific context of Ethiopian state-owned media and the challenges posed by social media activism.

The researcher hopes this exploration serves as a catalyst for further research in this under-explored area, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between journalists, social media activism, and the credibility of EBC.

## **1.2. Objective of the Study**

This research aims to examine how the journalistic practices and activism of journalists with in stat-owned media, particularly those engaging in Social media activism, impact the credibility of EBC News and Current Affairs.

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

The specific objectives of this research are set to:

- i. Investigate how journalist activism impacts media credibility and objectivity;
- ii. Define the distinguishing characteristics of journalism and activism;
- iii. Explore the motivations that drive journalists to engage in activism; and
- iv. Analyse the ethical and professional consequences of journalist activism.



### 1.3. Research Questions/Hypothesis

Recognizing the importance of focused research questions, the researcher has crafted inquires aimed at elucidating the complexities of interviewing activism and journalism. These central questions need to address:

- i. What are the effects of practicing activism on a journalist's credibility in the Ethiopian media landscape?
- ii. How do the approaches of journalism and activism differ or align in advocating for or against specific issues?
- iii. How do factors like personal beliefs, professional ethics, and the socio-political context motivate conventional media journalists in Ethiopia to engage in activism?
- iv. What are the challenges and opportunities presented by EBC guidelines and the broader Ethiopian media landscape for journalists who want to engage in activism while maintaining ethical practices?

### 1.4. Significance of the Study

This research investigates the increasingly recognized phenomenon of journalists shifting between traditional journalistic practices and actively advocating for a cause. By examining this critical juncture, the study seeks to make the following noteworthy contributions:

- **Conceptual Clarity:** By addressing the research questions, the study aims to establish clear distinctions between journalistic practice and activism. This distinction will prove crucial in understanding the motivations behind journalists engaging in both spheres.
- **Foundation for Future Research:** The study's findings can serve as a springboard for further research in this domain, fostering a deeper exploration of the intricate relationship between journalism and activism.
- **Actionable Insights for Media Institutions:** The research outcomes can equip media institutions with valuable insights to effectively monitor journalistic practices within their organizations. This information can be instrumental in implementing corrective measures if necessary, ensuring adherence to ethical journalistic standards.
- **Potential for Policy Development:** The research may prompt media institutions and relevant authorities to re-evaluate and potentially amend existing editorial policies or regulations. By

identifying potential gaps in existing frameworks, the study can inform the development of more robust guidelines that address the evolving landscape of media and activism.

- **Learning Opportunities for Journalists:** The study's findings can provide valuable guidance for journalists navigating the complex interplay between journalism and activism. This newfound knowledge can empower them to uphold journalistic integrity while ensuring responsible engagement with social causes.

Overall, this study presents a compelling opportunity to bridge the knowledge gap in this critical area, offering valuable insights for both media professionals and policymakers.

### 1.5. Scope of the Study

This research delves into the intricate relationship between journalism and activism within the realm of traditional media. The research specifically centres on journalists working in the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation's (EBC) News and Current Affairs department. It is crucial to acknowledge that the scope of this study is intentionally confined to this singular media institution, excluding a broader investigation of the phenomenon across diverse media entities.

This targeted approach allows for an in-depth examination of how EBC journalists navigate the potential convergence of journalistic practices and activism within a specific organizational context. By focusing on a single institution, the research aims to gain a nuanced understanding of the interplay between these forces within the unique cultural and professional landscape of EBC.

To gather robust evidence and paint a comprehensive picture, the study employs a multifaceted approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a strategically selected sample of up to 18 individuals. This group encompasses journalists, editors working within the EBC News and Current Affairs department, and relevant experts from external institutions. This triangulation of perspectives ensures a well-rounded understanding of the research topic.

Furthermore, the researcher was engaged in first-hand observations of the journalistic practices within EBC. This is complemented by a meticulous review of relevant documents, such as internal policies, ethical guidelines, and news coverage related to the chosen theme.

By employing this comprehensive methodological approach, the research strives to illuminate the complexities surrounding the convergence of journalism and activism within the specific context of EBC News. The findings aim to contribute valuable knowledge to the on-going discourse on the evolving nature of journalism practice and its potential entanglement with activism in the contemporary media landscape.

## **1.6. Limitations of the Study**

This research encountered limitations inherent to the scope and resources available. Firstly, a dearth of local studies on journalists' involvement in activism necessitated focusing solely on EBC's Amharic News and Current Affairs department. While this approach offers valuable insights, a more comprehensive understanding could be achieved by including journalists from various media outlets.

Secondly, the study design prioritized depth over breadth. Encompassing a wider range of media institutions, both local and international (print and online), would strengthen the generalizability of the findings. However, such an endeavour would necessitate significantly greater resources and time, exceeding the constraints of this particular study.

Therefore, the decision to focus on EBC's Amharic News and Current Affairs department acknowledges the limitations in scope and resources. This focused approach ensures a thorough investigation within the defined parameters while acknowledging the potential for further exploration in future research.

## **1.7. Organization of the Research**

The thesis is comprised of five chapters. The first chapter lays the groundwork by introducing the background, statement of the problem, objectives, hypotheses, significance of the study, and its scope and limitations.

Chapter two focuses on the review of related literature. Here, the central concept of the study is demonstrably linked to relevant academic sources. Unlike a report, the literature review critically

evaluates these materials. The chapter systematically presents the theoretical framework of the study and addresses issues related to activism, journalism, media objectivity, and credibility.

Chapter three delves into the methodology employed for the research, with a particular focus on the rationale for using qualitative methods. This chapter discusses the research design and paradigm, target population, sampling method, and data collection and analysis methods.

Chapter four presents, discusses, and analyzes the collected data. The final chapter integrates the research by presenting the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2. RELATED LITRATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Theoretical Frame Work**

A robust theoretical framework is fundamental to any compelling research endeavour. It grounds the study in established knowledge, guides data analysis, and strengthens the interpretation of findings (Swanson, 2013). This study delves into the complexities of journalist activism in Ethiopia, specifically its impact on media credibility and agenda-setting. To effectively address these issues, two pertinent theories are employed: Relativism and Agenda-setting. These theories directly address the research objectives outlined in Chapter One.

##### **2.1.1. Relativism Theory**

Understanding the contrasting perspectives of relativism and absolutism in moral philosophy is particularly relevant in contexts characterized by diverse cultures and ethnicities, such as Ethiopia. Here, media credibility and audience perception hinge on how individuals define "truth" and perceive "bias."

Relativism posits that truth and morality are not absolute but rather shaped by individual and cultural experiences (objectives i & iii). Scholars like Gergen (1973) and Geertz (1973) emphasize that knowledge and values are products of the social contexts in which they arise. For example, an activist journalist advocating for a specific cause might be seen as biased by some viewers, while others might see them as courageous. This perspective is crucial for comprehending how audiences, EBC officials, and journalists themselves perceive journalistic credibility and activism differently (objectives i & iii). Examining these varying viewpoints can illuminate the motivations behind journalist activism and its impact on perceived credibility.

Moral relativism, as championed by Rachels (2019), argues that moral judgments are relative to historical, cultural, religious, or social contexts (Moser & Carson, 2000). For instance, two individuals from different backgrounds might disagree on the morality of an action. Neither

perspective is definitively wrong, as their judgments stem from their unique experiences. This approach provides a framework for understanding how audience background shapes their perception of a journalist's credibility when engaging in activism.

Moral absolutism offers a contrasting viewpoint. It posits that some actions are universally right or wrong, regardless of context (Pojman, 1992). For example, Kant (2002) emphasized respecting others' autonomy as a core principle. However, critics argue that absolutist principles can have unintended consequences and potentially harm others. Philosophers like Bertrand Russell and John Dewey challenged absolutism, arguing that morality can be situational (Day, 2006).

Identifying universally valid principles remains a key critique of absolutism. While absolutism provides a clear framework, it struggles to account for cultural nuances. For instance, absolute truth-telling might have unintended consequences in certain situations.

Relativists further argue that good and bad are subjective and depend on the observer's perspective. Moral truths, like other truths, are relative and interconnected, not universally valid (Fisseha, 2021). Rachels (2019) highlights five key arguments for cultural relativism:

1. **Diverse Moral Codes:** Different societies have distinct moral codes.
2. **Internal Coherence:** A society's moral code dictates what's right within that society.
3. **Lack of Objective Standards:** There's no objective measure to judge one society's code as superior to another's.
4. **Equal Moral Standing:** No society's code holds a special status.
5. **Tolerance over Judgment:** Judging other cultures is arrogant; tolerance is key.

Cultural relativists acknowledge the inherent diversity of human experience. What's considered normal in one culture might be strange or offensive in another. For example, bowing is a respectful greeting in Ethiopia and Japan, while handshakes are more common elsewhere.

In conclusion, the debate between relativism and absolutism remains central to moral philosophy. While absolutism provides a clear framework, it struggles to account for cultural nuances. Conversely, relativism promotes tolerance but risks creating a moral free-for-all.

Finding the middle ground, where respect for diverse viewpoints coexists with a core set of universal moral principles, remains an on-going philosophical challenge.

### 2.1.2. Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory occupies a central role in communication research, as recognized by Carroll (2011). This theory posits that the media shapes public perception by prioritizing certain issues and influencing what people think about them (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This influence extends beyond mere information dissemination; it encompasses how information is presented (framing) and its subsequent impact on public discourse and policymaking.

This study explores how agenda-setting theory applies to the social media activism of journalists working for the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) (Objective IV). By analyzing their online activities and their reception by the public, the research investigates how these journalists influence the public agenda in Ethiopia. Their activism has the potential to bring under-reported issues to light, thereby shaping public conversation and potentially impacting policy decisions.

Agenda-setting theory rests on the premise that media outlets wield significant power in shaping public opinion (Cohen, 1963). EBC's editorial decisions, for instance, determine which stories receive coverage and prominence. This, in turn, shapes the public's perception of what issues are most important. While the media may not dictate what people think, it undeniably sets the agenda for public thought (Cohen, 1963).

A compelling illustration of this influence is evident in the research of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972). Their study of the 1968 US presidential election demonstrated a strong correlation between the issues receiving the most media coverage and those that voters perceived as most important. This finding underscores the media's ability to shape public perception of what truly matters.

Agenda setting's influence extends beyond story selection. Media framing, as described by Fiske and Taylor (1991) and cited in Entman (1993), refers to the way information is presented to influence the audience's interpretation, salience, and memorability (Entman, 1993). While journalists strive for objectivity, scholars like Entman (1993) cast doubt on the possibility of

complete neutrality. Even skilled media professionals can unintentionally impose dominant narratives on the news through their expertise or opinions (Entman, 1993). Inattentiveness to framing during story construction can hinder the audience's ability to form a balanced perspective on the information presented (Entman, 1993).

McCombs & Shaw (1972) and Entman (2004) propose that agenda setting is a two-way street. The public agenda is shaped by both the issues the public finds important and how the media frames those issues. Media outlets shape the public agenda by selecting stories and determining their prominence. The frequency and emphasis placed on specific issues can significantly influence the public's perception of their importance. This underscores the critical interplay between media prominence and public perception in shaping news narratives. The media's focus on particular attributes of an issue also plays a crucial role in shaping public perception (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Entman, 2004).

Understanding agenda-setting dynamics is instrumental in unpacking the intricate relationship between the media, public opinion, and policy formation. This becomes especially pertinent when examining the use of social media by EBC journalists in Ethiopia. By investigating how their online activities frame public discourse, the research can shed light on both the potential benefits and drawbacks of such activism for Ethiopian society. Furthermore, this analysis has the potential to yield valuable insights into the unique media landscape of Ethiopia and its evolving role in shaping the national conversation.

In conclusion, this study leverages the complementary strengths of relativism and agenda-setting theories to create a robust framework for analyzing journalist activism in Ethiopia's evolving media landscape. By acknowledging the subjective nature of social reality (Gergen, 1973), relativism allows us to explore how journalists on social media, particularly Facebook, contribute to the construction of meaning for audiences. This analysis can be contrasted with the framing of issues within established media outlets like EBC. Agenda-setting theory, in turn, equips us to examine how EBC journalists strategically utilize their social media presence to prioritize specific issues and influence public discourse.



Through a multi-pronged approach of in-depth interviews, document reviews, and personal observations, this research delves into the multifaceted impact of journalists' social media activity. A key focus is given on how these online actions influence both the individual credibility of the journalists themselves and the overall perception of the media institutions they represent. This comprehensive analysis sheds light on the complex interplay between journalist activism, media credibility, audience perception, and agenda-setting in the Ethiopian context.

## **2.2. Empirical Review**

A thorough review of relevant literature is crucial for establishing a strong research foundation. It serves several key purposes. First, it introduces readers to the research topic, providing essential background information and core concepts. Second, it demonstrates the researcher's familiarity with existing scholarship and how the current study contributes to the broader field. Finally, it helps identify knowledge gaps or unanswered questions that the research aims to address. By critically evaluating previous works, researchers can leverage the strengths of existing knowledge while highlighting areas where further investigation is needed. Additionally, the work of established scholars can be used to support the researcher's arguments and conclusions.

### **2.2.1. Conceptualising Journalism and Activism**

The core purpose of journalism has long been a topic of debate. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) argue that it goes beyond simply reporting the news. Journalism, they posit, serves a vital role in fostering strong communities, engaged citizens, and a healthy democracy. By providing the public with accurate and timely information, journalism empowers individuals to participate actively in shaping their governments and advocating for positive political, social, and economic change.

The rise of new communication technologies has undoubtedly transformed the journalistic landscape. However, Kovach and Rosenstiel emphasize that these advancements, whether in technology itself or the techniques journalists employ, are secondary considerations. What truly defines journalism is its core function: informing the citizenry. A free and self-governing society relies on a well-informed populace, and journalism serves the critical purpose of delivering news

and information in a timely manner. This empowers citizens to make informed decisions about their communities and the world around them (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001).

Since the 18th century, the primary vessel for information has transformed from newspapers to radio and television, culminating in the internet's dominance in the 21st century (Martin & Copeland, 2003). Throughout this metamorphosis, the concept of journalism has mirrored these changes, with scholars offering various definitions that reflect its multifaceted nature.

Some scholars have tied journalism to professional or institutional frameworks. Others have focused on the journalist themselves, while some emphasize the practices inherent to the field (Zelizer, 2005). However, this lack of a singular, universally accepted definition has sparked debate. Unlike doctors or lawyers, journalists aren't bound by licensing requirements. Some argue that defining journalism might stifle its ability to adapt to a constantly evolving landscape (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001).

Despite the absence of a single definition, scholars like Shoemaker, Reese, and Allan have proposed frameworks to understand the essence of journalism. Shoemaker and Reese (2019) define journalism as "the activity of gathering, assessing, creating and distributing reports of current events." Their definition highlights the core functions: collecting information, verifying its accuracy, and presenting it to the public with clarity, conciseness, and, ideally, objectivity. However, this concept of objectivity remains a point of contention, with arguments surrounding potential biases influencing the presentation of information.

Allan (2013) offers a broader perspective, defining journalism as "a social practice of gathering, processing and disseminating news and information." This definition acknowledges the social and cultural context in which journalism operates. However, it doesn't delve into the specific goals and values that guide journalistic practices.

Curran (2012) suggests that a universally agreed-upon definition for journalism might be a "Chimera," a mythical creature. He argues that the term "journalism" carries different meanings across cultures and throughout history, leading to on-going debates about its true essence. This inherent ambiguity and dynamism can be viewed as a positive aspect. Journalism's ability to

adapt to social changes, technological advancements, and evolving audience demands ensures its continued relevance.

Inextricably linked to journalism is the concept of news. Zelizer (2005) traces the term "news" back to the 16th century, derived from the word "new." News plays a complex and multifaceted role in our lives, shaping everything from our personal decisions to the trajectory of society as a whole. Zelizer further highlights the "commercial aura" surrounding the provision of news, emphasizing the intricate relationship between news, information, and commerce. While staying informed is crucial, it's equally important to be a discerning consumer of news, remaining aware of potential biases and commercial influences that might shape the information we receive.

The way we perceive and interact with the world is significantly influenced by the news we consume. Recognizing this impact, media institutions prioritize the content they disseminate. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) define news as "visual and verbal information processed and disseminated by the mass media or smaller and targeted information channels." Gans (1979) and Gitlin (1980) further explore the factors that directly or indirectly influence newsroom content. These factors include:

- **Media Workers' Socialization and Attitudes:** This psychological factor highlights how journalists' backgrounds and perspectives can shape their approach to news gathering and reporting.
- **Media Organizations and Routines:** The way media organizations are structured and the routines they follow determine how content is obtained and presented.
- **Social Institutions and Forces:** External and internal social forces can exert a powerful influence on news content. This includes audience pressure, political agendas, and economic considerations.

The rise of the internet since the year 2000 has empowered users to personalize their news feeds and actively seek out specific information. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) point out how this trend has raised concerns among politicians. When individuals are exposed to unbalanced media content that caters to a specific viewpoint, it can lead to political extremism and a decline in well-informed discourse.

The lack of a single definition for journalism underscores its complexity and multifaceted nature. This ambiguity can be viewed as strength, allowing journalism to adapt and evolve in a dynamic world. However, it also presents challenges in clearly defining the role and responsibilities of journalists in society (Curran, 2011). The absence of a universally agreed-upon definition reflects the profession's dynamism, the diverse priorities of scholars, and the global variations in journalistic practices. It's this very ambiguity, coupled with ongoing discussions and critical reflection on journalism's evolving role that ensures this vital discipline remains relevant and impactful.

The term "activism" emerged in the mid-1970s, marking a pivotal shift towards deliberate actions aimed at social and political change (Cammaerts, 2015a). Initially, activism manifested as a more unified front targeting these core issues. However, the concept has since undergone a significant transformation.

This transformation is characterized by the expansion of activism's scope. Once primarily focused on broad goals like political reform and social justice (Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Seeling et al., 2019), activism has become an umbrella term encompassing a diverse range of issues. Today, activists are tackling challenges like environmental protection, cultural transformation, economic equity, and even media representation (Khan & Kellner, 2004; Ishkanian, 2015; O'Neill et al., 2013). This broadened spectrum highlights the multifaceted nature of contemporary activism.

The methods activists employ span from writing letters to legislators to participating in street protests. From advocating for animal rights and environmental protection to fighting for racial equality and social justice, activism tackles a vast array of issues. This very breadth makes it challenging to arrive at a universally accepted definition, and the meaning of activism itself can vary depending on the context. Moreover, as social and political landscapes evolve, so too does the understanding of activism. Saul Alinsky (1946) reminds us that actions once considered radical can become mainstream over time, highlighting the ever-changing nature of activism and the difficulty in pinning it down with a single definition.

While some scholars like Brenman and Samches (2014) define activism as individual actions undertaken to achieve political or social change, either in support of or against a particular issue,

Alinsky (2014) argues that this definition fails to capture the full scope of activism. He emphasizes that context, time, and even language all play a role in shaping how activism is practiced. Tarrow (1994) and McAdam and Zald (1996) offer a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that activism is inherently collective action geared towards social transformation. In other words, it's not simply about voicing individual dissent or opinions, but rather a concerted effort to bring about lasting change.

Despite the lack of a single definition, some core concepts unify most understandings of activism. At its heart, activism involves deliberate efforts to challenge the status quo and push for positive change (Gaventa, 1980). It's about confronting existing power structures and inequalities, empowering marginalized groups, and addressing injustice. The ultimate goal is typically to influence social, political, economic, or environmental issues. By raising awareness of injustices and fostering a sense of agency and collective responsibility, activism empowers individuals to work towards a better future (Freire, 1970). This unwavering belief in the possibility of positive change and the commitment to making it happen is the driving force behind activism (Sen, 1999).

The methods activists use to achieve their goals have continuously evolved over time. Traditional forms of activism include protests, rallies, petitions, and boycotts (Tilly, 1978). Today, activists leverage technology and social media for online campaigns, fundraising, and awareness creation (Diani, 2003). The rise of new media has further transformed activist methods, giving rise to practices like cyber activism, network activism, digital activism, and online activism, all of which harness the power of the internet to enact social change (Greijdamu et al., 2020; Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017).

Throughout history, activism has played a pivotal role in securing fundamental rights, enacting social reforms, and shaping public discourse. From the fight for women's suffrage led by figures like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the Civil Rights Movement spearheaded by Martin Luther King Jr., countless examples showcase the power of collective action to bring about positive change. The tireless efforts of activists like King and countless others ultimately led to the dismantling of racial segregation and legalized discrimination through the Civil and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, respectively (Allison, 2010).

The reach of activism extends beyond human rights and environmental concerns, encompassing issues of libertarian and religious rights as well (Keckler & Rozell, 2001). As Jeffrey Roger Goodwin (2001) highlights, social movement activism, often spearheaded by civil activists and social revolutionaries, has been a driving force for national self-reliance in continents like Asia, Africa, and South America. In some developing countries, social movement activism has also fuelled interest in collectivist communist or socialist ideologies.

In conclusion, activism remains a powerful force for positive change. Its ability to challenge the status quo, empower marginalized voices, and influence social, political, economic, and environmental issues is undeniable. As technology and social landscapes continue to evolve, so too will the methods activists employ. Yet, the core principles of activism – a commitment to justice, collective action, and unwavering belief in the possibility of positive change – will undoubtedly continue to drive social progress for generations to come.

### **2.2.2. Overlapping and Divergent Aspects of Journalism and Activism**

The paths of journalism and activism, though distinct, intertwine in a passionate pursuit of truth, justice, and social transformation. Both disciplines expose injustices and rely on investigative methods. However, a crucial difference lies in their core principles. Journalism aspires to neutrality and objectivity, presenting all sides of an issue to empower informed public opinion. Activism, on the other hand, champions a specific cause, advocating for change and mobilizing action.

Gauri Lankesh exemplifies this intersection. A fearless critic of right-wing Hindu nationalism, Lankesh used her platform as editor of a Kannada publication to relentlessly pursue truth. This pursuit extended beyond the newsroom, transforming her into an activist against caste discrimination, religious intolerance, and extremism. Her unwavering commitment blurred the lines between journalist and activist, a life tragically cut short by murder in 2017 (case on-going). Lankesh's story raises a critical question: Can one truly embody both roles simultaneously?

The debate surrounding the relationship between journalism and activism is on-going. Some, like Amditis (2016), Assistant Director for Products and Events at the Center for Cooperative Media

at Montclair State University, argue that the distinction isn't so stark. Both professions, in Amditis' view, ultimately strive for a better world. However, their methods diverge. In pursuit of fairness, journalists strive to report facts accurately and present all sides of an issue. (Tilly, 1978; Diani, 2003). Activists, on the other hand, freely choose strategies to achieve their goals, even if those methods stray from neutrality. This distinction highlights the core difference: journalists strive for unbiased truth, while activists leverage their platform to advocate for change.

Journalism operates within a well-defined framework, governed by editorial policies, national/international laws, and a strict ethical code. Deviating from these standards can have serious legal consequences. Objectivity remains a cornerstone of mainstream media, serving a dual purpose: protecting the longevity and reputation of both the media institution and the journalist themselves (Tuchman, 1972). However, Amditis (2016) challenges this notion of complete objectivity. He argues that bias is inevitably woven into the fabric of news reporting, evident in story selection and presentation.

The relationship between media and activism is not neutral. As Todd Gitlin argues in his 1980 book "The Whole World is Watching," activists must navigate "implicit rules of news making" to gain media attention (Gitlin, 1980). These unwritten guidelines, evident in story selection, event framing, and activist portrayal, reveal a media bias. News outlets, according to Gitlin, prioritize simplified messages, dramatic tactics, and conflict – elements that activists must strategically employ to be seen and heard. Furthermore, cooperation with the media becomes crucial to prevent message distortion or sensationalization in favour of pre-determined narratives. In essence, Gitlin suggests that successful activism requires understanding and adapting to the media's unspoken rules.

Gregory Benford, in his 1997 critique titled "An Insider's Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective," challenges the notion of a unified social movement "frame." He argues that framing is an active process driven by individual efforts within the movement (Benford, 1997). It's not simply a product of the movement as a whole, but rather the result of ongoing work by activists, participants, and even external actors. These individuals, with their own viewpoints and motivations, actively define the situation, interpret events, and assign blame. This dynamic interplay, as Benford suggests, can lead to competing frames within the movement,

with internal debates and negotiations arising as different actors push their preferred interpretations. Furthermore, those with greater resources and influence, such as experienced activists and media outlets, have a stronger hand in shaping the public's understanding of the issue – the dominant frame. This creates a potential challenge for movement leaders, who may struggle to manage internal dissent while effectively communicating their chosen frame to the public.

Journalistic framing acts as a powerful lens, shaping public perception of issues. Journalists, by selectively highlighting certain aspects of a story, can subtly influence how audiences interpret and react to events. Entman (1993) defines framing as the presentation of information that prioritizes specific elements while downplaying others, ultimately impacting our understanding and evaluation of the topic (Entman, 1993). Since a message cannot be all-encompassing, journalists make choices about what to emphasize and what to omit. These selections are strategically presented to capture the audience's attention and shape their initial impressions. Entman (1993) emphasizes that these choices are not neutral; they aim to guide the audience's comprehension and judgment of the issue in a particular direction.

The relationship between activism and journalism is a complex interplay that fuels social change. Scholars like McChesney (2008) highlight their synergistic roles. Investigative journalism, for example, exposes systemic issues, informing public opinion and potentially mobilizing communities. This aligns with activist movements that push for legislative reforms and cultural shifts, often based on the issues journalism brings to light. However, Tuchman (2008) introduces a key distinction: journalism strives for neutrality and objectivity, presenting diverse perspectives. Activism, on the other hand, inherently advocates for specific causes, promoting particular viewpoints. This aligns with Croteau & Hoynes' (2003) observation – journalists maintain a critical distance from power structures, holding them accountable. Activists, on the other hand, may engage directly with institutions, lobbying for policy changes or collaborating with sympathetic officials to achieve their goals. In essence, journalism shines a light, while activism uses that light to ignite change.

In conclusion, while journalism and activism serve distinct purposes – one illuminating the truth, the other urging action – their co-dependency fuels social progress. Journalists bring injustices to



light, empowering activists who fight for change. This complex interplay, however, necessitates an on-going negotiation between neutrality and advocacy, ensuring the public receives both unbiased information and calls to action. Ultimately, the delicate dance between journalism and activism strengthens democracy and paves the way for a more just and equitable world.

### 2.2.3. Digital Activism Matters

As a form of activism, the relationship between the news media and changes in the political atmosphere can be shaped and restructured by digital activism (Carragee, 2019). Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) also stated that social movements of any type used social media platforms as a means to strengthen collaborations and raise hands with diverse stake holders. Organizations of activism boldly use social media platforms of various types to recruit activists, encourage public engagements and undertake organizational campaigns (Murthy, 2018). The platforms are also commercially important to promote products, receive feedbacks and orders, and also to exchange dealing messages (Kaplane and Haenlein, 2010).

Social media played an important role in democratization, story-telling and amplifying voices. Chadwick and Howard (2017) in their book “Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics”, stated that social media empower individuals to bypass traditional gatekeepers and become citizen journalists, documenting events and sharing first-hand information. In this regard writers such as Howard & Chadwick (2009) magnified the 2011 Arab spring as potent example where social media platforms such as, Twitter and Facebook served as important tools for activists to disseminate information and organize protests, bypassing government censorship and amplifying their voices to the global audience.

Social Networking platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have empowered social movements like #Me Too and Black Lives Matter, amplifying voices, speaking global conversations and challenging existing power structures (Cox, 2017). Such movements through the social media, even, have influenced the news media coverage which in turn blurred the differences between digital activism and traditional journalism (Carragee, 2019). The author also stressed that selecting and using either the digital activism or traditional activism creates problems. The best example, Carragee suggested, is that the overthrow of the regime of Mubarak by Egyptian

activists. The wisely used the digital landscape and physically occupy spaces to over through the regime. Social movements that are designed to bring about changes of public concern would be effective when online and offline forms of activism are used in a combined manner (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

The easiness, user-friendliness, cheapness, endless opportunities and unprecedentedness of online interactions, catch the attention of non-profit organizations to gather the people in seeking solutions for common problems (Effing, can Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011 as cited in Seeling et al., 2019). To address public issues the internet has paved the way for activism to be more important that it was before the internet. Recent research outcomes suggest that advocacy is beyond a face-to-face activity. It is diffused on the web and the social media platforms of various types (Seeling et al., 2019). In order to achieve the desired goal, activists are required to use social media platforms skilfully and in a creative way, Bennett & Segerberg advised digital activists, so that they catch the attention of the mainstream media.

It is also worthy to note that the era of digital activism is not only a fast, easy, cheap way of undertaking social movements of public concerns, but also with numerous challenges. Zimdars & McLeod (2020) raise concerns over misinformation, echo chambers and online harassments that threaten to undermine potentials of positive changes. Journalists are required to navigate the complexities of verifying information in a fast paced online environment, while audiences are also required to develop critical thinking skills to extract the fact from fiction.

#### **2.2.4. Journalism Ethics and Credibility in a Digital Age**

Lee (2015) written that media institutions including journalists are trying their best to understand, adapt with and intensively use the potentials of social media platforms and thereby build and maintain the audience as the social media transformed itself as a prominent news platform. Journalism has undeniably been transformed by the rapid growth and widespread application of digital technologies (Kaul, 2013). The author stated that with the advent of the internet and the associated social media platforms, the process and dissemination of information, nowadays, becomes faster than ever.

It is the digital platform that allows journalists reach wider audience and establish a more interactive and dynamic news experience (Batsell, 2015). The digital era also has brought opportunities for media houses and their journalists analyse vast datasets. It is this opportunity that enables them uncover hidden patterns and insights, produce more in-depth and organize impactful reporting (Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier, 2013).

The digital era is not only an opportunity for journalism, but also poses numerous challenges. The more the consumption of social media platforms increased, the more the use of negative aspects of increased social media exacerbated (Sheth, 2020). Scholars of various thoughts explained that social media platforms challenge the well-being of consumers (Dhir et al., 2018). Bermes (2021) citing different sources put forward that Problems such as social media fatigue, stalking, the fearing of missing out, problematic sleep, perceived overloads, cyber-slacking, compulsive social media use and the dissemination of fake news are associated with excessive use of internet and social media platforms.

It is not hidden that the landscape of journalism has been transformed in the digital age. The digital age also poses numerous challenges of which misinformation and disinformation come in the first-place. Vosoughi et al. (2018) dictated that nowadays, social media platforms ease the way to share information online, but fuelled the spread of false or misleading information. That is why journalists are advised to check facts and verify their sources (Tandoc Jr. et al., 2020). Similarly compromising speed and accuracy may not go hand-in-hand. When we are in a hurry to publish news, there might be errors and our report might not be complete (Bruns, 2005). So as to minimize errors more priority is given for accuracy than speed.

On the other hand, the social media is obscuring the gap between professional and citizen journalism so that the objectivity and neutrality of journalists is being questioned (Chadwick, 2017). The scholar suggested that journalists and media institutions should stick to their ethical guidelines and ensure transparency to avert potential bias. It is also factual that journalists covering sensitive issues are exposed for online harassments and, even, threats (Rodriguez-Vazquez et al., 2023). So as to escape such harassments and threats media institutions are required to establish safety mechanisms for their staffs (Ibid).

### 2.2.5. Misinformation vs. Disinformation: Understanding the Nuance

In the era of online community, the audience is looking for news from varieties of social media platforms rather than credible news sources (Weidner et al., 2020). Pew research Centre conducted a research in 2017 about American social media users and the study revealed that about 70 per cent of them obtain news from social media platforms such as Facebook, You Tube and Twitter (currently, X) (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Silverman and Singer-Vine (2016) shared similar idea with findings of the Pew Research Center. A new survey of the time which they cited more appropriate revealed that 75 per cent of adults, who are more familiar with fake news, believe what they see, hear and read through their social media platforms.

Both disinformation and misinformation deal with false or inaccurate information. They are also different in intent and impact (Lanoszka, 2019). The Oxford English Dictionary denotes that misinformation is wrong or misleading. From the meaning given to misinformation, we can understand that the information is shared without an intention to deceive. Genuine mistakes, misunderstandings, or lack of knowledge can be the main causes for misinformation. Though it is unintentional it might be harmful and lead to confusion or wrong decisions can be viral and even disinformation may be widespread. On the other hand, the dictionary defines disinformation as “the dissemination of deliberately false information”.

Similarly, Stahl (2006) associated the term disinformation with deliberate falsehood and misinformation with accidental falsehood. Based on his explanation disinformation is false or misleading information intentionally created and spread to deceive and manipulate individuals or groups. As disinformation is a deliberate spread of false or misleading information, it can cause severe consequences that ripple across individuals, communities, and society at large (Lanoszka, 2019). It also often serves as a specific agenda, like influencing political opinions, undermining trust in institutions, or causing social unrest (Lewandowsky et al., 2013). Fabricated news stories, propaganda, deep fakes, social media bots spreading false narrative can be mentioned as examples of disinformation.

The evolution and rapid transformation of social media platforms paved the way for misinformation to be widespread globally (Vosoughi et al., 2018). We use social media platforms of various types, but we do not give due attention for online spread of falsity (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). We are in a time when unconfirmed information circulates faster than ever

before and that is why some scholars such as Weidner et al. (2020) insisted to apply safeguarding mechanisms of addressing the issue of misinformation and/or disinformation.

Indeed, social media platforms have been equipped with fake news combatants. Their users have means to report fake news; however, there are some concerns regarding the ability of users to detect the post as fake news, users' willingness to report the post as a fake post and users' engagement with the fake news (Wang et al., 2021).

### 2.2.6. Credibility: A Core Pillar of Journalism

When we talk about journalism Credibility of public information and trust worthiness of the press are the main concerning issues. The media, so as to play its watch dog role, it has to be legitimate and for its information function the press is required to provide the public credible information concerning political and societal issues (van Dalen, 2019).

In an ever-changing environment, where information overload and the proliferation of “fake news” circulate fast, journalism's core principle of credibility is found more important than ever. Journalism is required to fulfil its vital role of informing the audience and holding power to account. So as to discharge its responsibility trust has to be established and the cornerstone of trust is credibility. If so, what is credibility?

Finberg (2002) stated the difficulty not only to define credibility but also the challenges to attain it and the real dares to reclaim it if once lost. However, some scholars such as Sabigan (1996) defined credibility as “Believability, trust, perceived reality” and combinations of other concepts. On the other hand Tseng and Fog (1999) divided the concept of credibility in to four types: **Reputed, presumed, surface and earned.**

Reputed credibility, according to Fogg and Tseng, comes from external image and reputation. This concept indicates that those with prestigious titles, awards or affiliations with reputable organizations may own reputed credibility. It establishes initial trust, but can easily be damaged by negative publicity or conflicting information. Presumed credibility also associates inherent characteristics or expectations with one's role or identity. Social conventions and stereotypes might help establish instant trust, but can be misleading if the person doesn't actually possess the

expected knowledge or skill. The way a person presents himself and his information is judged by Surface credibility. It is preferable to create first impression and demonstrate one's effort and care. However, since due attention is given for looks and presentation alone underlying weaknesses might be hidden. Earned or experienced credibility, on the other hand, is built through consistent actions results and demonstrating one's expertise over time. It is considered the most powerful and lasting form of credibility, but it consumes time and effort to be built and might be eroded dishonesty and inconsistent performance.

Day (2006) associated the term credibility with a "fragile commodity", but also is like precious gemstone-rare, valuable and capable of lighting up any situation. In a world saturated with Competition and materialism credibility stand out as a potent force, attracting trust and fostering success. The author also stated that those who give a space for credibility unlock opportunities and build lasting relationships.

#### **2.2.7. Conflict of Interest (COI)**

Judgements, decisions, or actions could be compromised by individual's personal interests in the work place. Conflict of interest is considered as a clatter that occurs between what is required and what is interested (Davis and Stark, 2001). A person or an organization may be involved in multiple interests. When the person or organization serves one interest, the other one would be impacted. This situation is termed as conflict of interest. Serving Personal interest of an individual or organization might unsympathetically affect the duty to make decisions for the benefit of others. Komesaroff, Kerridge and Lipworth (2019) defined that an interest by itself is "a commitment, duty, obligation or goal associated with a particular role or practice". The authors noted that Conflict of interest can be reflected in their day to day activities of physicians, academicians, journalists, politicians, social advocators and, even, religious leaders.

A conflict of interest arises in relationships when someone (an individual or a corporation) is involved with another party and has two competing interests that could cloud their judgment (Davis & Stark, 2001, p.8). This, according to Davis & Stark, can happen in two main ways:

- **Putting the Other Party First:** They might prioritize the other party's benefit, even if it's unfair or wrong. In other words, their judgment is swayed by a desire to help the other party, even if it goes against what's right.
- **Personal Stake Affecting Decisions:** They might have a personal connection or benefit involved in the situation. This "special interest" can make it difficult to be objective and could lead to biased decisions.

A conflict of interest in journalism arises when a journalist's personal or professional interests potentially compromise his/her ability to report fairly and accurately. A journalist might own a stock in a company he/she is covering or the journalist might have received a payment or gift from someone involved in the story. Such financial ties could influence journalists to slant their reporting in a way that benefits their personal interests. Not only financial ties, personal relationships and political or ideological beliefs also can be sources for conflict of interest (Frost, 2000).

There are some journalists, who owned private promotion enterprises, hired in public media institutions. Others also accept bribes from investors in an exchange for broadcasting some sort of advertisement in their reporting (Muluken, 2018) as cited in Fisseha, 2021). However a number of media institutions including EBC have established rules and regulations to control and regulate issues of COI. The editorial policy of EBC (2014) bans accepting bribes and freebies from news sources. Any attachment with political parties and companies is prohibited for journalists working for EBC, but the implementation of the policy needs to be investigated.

Unless conflict of interests properly managed, it might seriously affect the credibility and trustworthiness of journalism. It might be seen as a mischief to the public, lying to the audience in exchange for some favours (Gorden and Kittross, 1998).

### **2.2.8. Factors for Conflict of Interest**

It is not as such difficult to enlist a number of factors that can contribute to conflict of interests. The factors can be categorised in terms of personal interests, organisational structures and professional obligations, as well. When we have a quick glance at personal interests, one might have financial interests where an action or a decision may result in financial gain or loss. Family and personal relationships are also considered factors for conflict of interests. Gifts and

hospitality by themselves could be the main factors for conflict of interests. Receiving gifts or favours from others who could be affected by a decision, such as a meal or a trip from a potential hawker raise a question of objectivity up on the receiver (Retief, 2002).

Regarding professional obligations, fiduciary duties - where legal or ethical obligations to act in the best interests of another person- can be mentioned as a factor for conflict of interests. A conflict of interest could also be raised if someone is required to share confidential information with somebody else who could benefit from it (American Bar Association, 2009).

When we examine organizational structures as factors for conflict of interests, dual roles are found the main issues. An individual, for instance, may be a board member of a company and also supplies some inputs for that company. Such dual roles may create conflict of interests. In a nutshell, including religion, nationality and age morale values attachment to money, professionalism and level of needs satisfaction can be considered as factors for COI at an individual level (Carlo, 2021).

While conflicts of interest can be concerning, not all situations are automatically problematic. Many conflicts can be effectively addressed through disclosure, recusal (stepping aside from involvement), or other mitigation strategies. However, it's still crucial to identify and manage potential conflicts to avoid any perception or instance of wrongdoing (Davis & Stark, 2001).

### **2.3. Overview of Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC)**

The Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) stands as a titan in the nation's media landscape. Its rich heritage stretches back to the 1930s for radio and 1960s for television (Leykun, 1997). Throughout its remarkable journey, EBC has consistently adapted and remained steadfast in its commitment to public service. This essay explores EBC's unwavering dedication to excellence, technological innovation, and its enduring role in shaping Ethiopian media.

EBC's foray into television in 1964 reflected a multifaceted vision. As Nigussie (2006) underscores, the perceived power of television as a tool for education and national identity building under Emperor Haile Selassie was undeniable. Additionally, the establishment of the African Union played a part in the decision, solidifying Ethiopia's position as a continental leader (Nigussie, 2006).



Founded in 1935 for radio and 1964 for television, EBC has transcended its role as a mere broadcaster. It has become a custodian of Ethiopian history and culture, as evidenced by the corporation's extensive report published in the EBC magazine for the 13th Radio Day in 2022. This report serves as a testament to EBC's enduring legacy, far-reaching influence, and unwavering commitment to public service.

EBC's position as Ethiopia's longest-running radio broadcaster, established in 1935, is undeniable (EBC Magazine, 2022). Over its illustrious tenure, EBC has become a trusted source of news and information, while simultaneously shaping the Ethiopian media ecology. The corporation fosters a culture of media excellence, nurturing professionals who leave a lasting impact on the industry. Notably, EBC's commitment extends to supporting the growth of private and regional media, fostering a robust and diverse media ecosystem within Ethiopia.

EBC's dedication to technological advancements is evident on its website. The corporation houses a historical archive of broadcast technologies, amassing a vast collection of visual and audio resources that serve as a valuable repository of Ethiopian history and culture. The corporation continuously refines its approach, identifying new channels and optimizing existing ones to cater to the evolving needs of its audience. This commitment manifests in a diversified broadcast network, ensuring Ethiopians across the nation have access to informative and engaging content.

Based on the information obtained from its official webpage, EBC's diversified broadcast network encompasses the following:

- **ETV News Channel:** This 24-hour channel leverages EBC's extensive network to deliver comprehensive news coverage, documentaries, and insightful programs.
- **ETV Entertainment Channel:** Dedicated to entertainment, this channel caters to enthusiasts with a variety of engaging content.
- **ETV Languages Channel:** Recognizing Ethiopia's linguistic diversity, this channel broadcasts news and programs in a multitude of languages, including Amharic, Afan Oromo, Tigrigna, Afarigna, Somaligna, English, French, Arabic, and sign language news.

- **ETV Ylijoch Alem Channel:** This channel caters specifically to children with a wide range of programs.
- **Radio Ethiopia:** This iconic radio station broadcasts in Amharic and various local languages, ensuring information reaches all corners of Ethiopia.
- **FM 97.1:** Holding a special place in Ethiopian history, FM 97.1 offers a unique 24-hour live service catering to listeners in Addis Ababa and its surroundings.
- **FM 104.7:** Recognizing the importance of the international community in Addis Ababa, FM 104.7 caters specifically to the African Union, diplomatic corps, and international organizations.
- **New Media:** Embracing the digital age, EBC offers a robust new media presence through its website, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube pages.

To strengthen the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation's (EBC) role in fostering the nation's holistic development and democratic progress, the House of Peoples' Representatives (2023) endorsed a revision to the EBC's founding proclamation (Proclamation No. 1278/2023). This strategic revision pursues several key objectives:

- **Consolidated Authority and Streamlined Operations:** Previously, the EBC's powers and responsibilities were scattered across two separate proclamations, leading to inconsistencies. The revised proclamation merges these directives into a single, unified document, promoting clarity and streamlining operational efficiency.
- **Enhanced Board Governance:** The revision strengthens the framework for the EBC's Board of Directors. This empowers the board to provide more effective guidance and support to the organization in achieving its strategic goals.
- **Clear Objectives, Enhanced Accountability:** The revised proclamation clearly articulates the EBC's objectives, powers, and responsibilities. This heightened transparency fosters accountability, ensuring the organization operates in strict alignment with its mandate.
- **Modernized Fee Collection System:** The revision implements improvements to the television service fee structure and payment system. This aims to simplify the process for viewers, improve compliance, and encourage viewers to fulfil their obligations. Additionally, the revision addresses legal accountability for television set owners who neglect their fee payment.

In a bid to retain its position as Ethiopia's oldest national media outlet and cater to the evolving needs of its audience, EBC has embarked on a comprehensive reform program. This initiative encompasses not only content transformation but also strategic investments in technology and human resources.

Recognizing the importance of keeping pace with the ever-changing media landscape, EBC has established a state-of-the-art media complex spanning 10,000 square meters at the foot of the Gulele Botanical Garden. This impressive facility boasts two buildings housing nine radio and television studios, fostering a dynamic production environment.

Beyond the physical infrastructure, the complex features an artificial lake, dedicated spaces for sports activities and urban agriculture, reflecting EBC's commitment to fostering a vibrant and sustainable work environment. Notably, the complex incorporates three convergence radio studios and two hybrid television studios, further solidifying EBC's position at the forefront of media innovation.

In conclusion, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) has established itself as a cornerstone of Ethiopian media, fostering national identity and shaping the media landscape for over eight decades. EBC's unwavering commitment to public service is evident in its dedication to technological advancements, ensuring Ethiopians across the nation have access to informative and engaging content. By embracing new media platforms and embarking on a comprehensive reform program, EBC is well-positioned to retain its leadership role while catering to the evolving needs of its audience in the digital age. The strategic revision of the EBC's founding proclamation further strengthens its position by consolidating authority, enhancing governance, and ensuring accountability. With its commitment to excellence, innovation, and public service, EBC is certain to remain a vital force in shaping Ethiopia's media landscape for generations to come.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed to investigate the complex relationship between journalism and activism in the contemporary media landscape. A qualitative approach was deemed most suitable to address the research questions, aiming to gain a nuanced understanding of subjective experiences and perspectives (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). This methodology is particularly valuable when quantitative data is scarce or the phenomenon under study is intricate and multifaceted, providing rich insights that can guide further research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, enable researchers to delve into the subjective experiences of individuals and groups, capturing detailed narratives and uncovering hidden meanings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This research adopts a multifaceted approach to analyse journalistic practices at the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC). This includes reviewing publicly available social media content of selected journalists, examining their formal reports and programs, and analysing publicly accessible archival and documentary evidence related to EBC's operations. While the researcher's prior experience at EBC grants access to internal documents, the potential for subjectivity in data interpretation is acknowledged. To mitigate this, the focus remains on publicly available information, ensuring transparency and replicability. Furthermore, in-depth interviews with journalists, editors, and external experts are conducted to strengthen the research. This triangulation of data sources – social media, formal reports, interviews – fosters a more comprehensive and objective understanding of journalistic practices at EBC.

## 3.2. Research Design

This research employs a qualitative approach to investigate the impact of journalists' social media activism on news credibility at EBC. In-depth interviews are conducted with veteran journalists, editors from EBC, and relevant experts from external institutions. By gathering these diverse perspectives, the study aims to gain a nuanced understanding of this complex issue. Document review and observational methods are further utilized to enrich the analysis, providing a comprehensive and well-rounded examination of the topic.

Scientific methodology is a cornerstone of rigorous research, guiding researchers in problem-solving endeavors across various disciplines (Şahin & Öztürk, 2019). The research design serves as the foundation for this study, shaping the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes (Creswell, 2007).

### 3.2.1. Rationale for Qualitative Methods

A qualitative approach utilizing data collection methods like in-depth interviews, document review, and observation is particularly well-suited for this research. Unlike quantitative methods that focus on measuring numerical data, qualitative approaches delve deeper into the "why" and "how" behind human behaviour and experiences (Stone et al., 1999). This is particularly relevant when exploring the complex and subjective nature of social phenomena, such as the relationship between journalism and activism.

Creswell (2007) emphasizes the potency of qualitative research, particularly in-depth interviews conducted within participants' natural environments. This method allows participants to share unfiltered narratives, minimizing potential biases introduced by researchers or established literature. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations, can reveal the nuanced experiences of participants in a way that quantitative surveys might not capture (Dodgson, 2017). This detailed understanding of individual stories and contexts is crucial for comprehending complex social phenomena.

### **3.3. Sampling Strategy**

Sampling techniques are broadly categorized as probability and non-probability. Probability sampling ensures every member of the population has a known chance of being selected, allowing researchers to draw statistically generalizable conclusions (Creswell, 2007). However, for studies with diverse or large populations, this method might be impractical (Creswell, 2007).

Non-probability sampling methods, while not suitable for generalizability, are valuable for exploratory research and qualitative studies where obtaining a probability sample is infeasible (Creswell, 2007). Purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was chosen for this study. As defined by McQuail et al. (2005), purposive sampling involves the strategic selection of a sample based on predetermined criteria. This method aligns perfectly with the research goals of in-depth exploration with a relatively small sample. The objective is to gain insights from a specific subset of journalists who exhibit particular behaviours. In this case, the focus is on journalists from EBC-News and Current Affairs known for their active social media presence and coverage of politically, religiously, and socially significant news stories. Journalists reporting for prime news hours were chosen due to their potential for wider audience reach, making their social media activity particularly relevant to the study of news credibility.

#### **3.3.1. In-depth Interview**

This study employed in-depth interviews to explore the perceived influence of journalists' social media activism on the news credibility of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC). The aim was to gather rich narratives regarding participant experiences and perspectives on current journalistic practices at EBC, ultimately identifying areas for improvement.

Qualitative research interviews, as highlighted by Lave & Kvale (1995), offer a powerful tool for comprehending the world through the lens of participants. These interviews delve deeper than scientific explanations, enabling us to unearth the intricate tapestry of individual experiences and the unique meanings they hold within their lived realities. This method fosters a dialogue between the researcher and interviewees, who essentially act as instruments for gathering nuanced data. Open-ended questions are fundamental to this approach, as they encourage detailed responses and exploration of complex issues.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed, recruiting 18 participants. This group comprised journalists, editors, and experts with extensive experience navigating the gatekeeping challenges inherent to professional journalism. Their expertise made them ideal candidates to illuminate their strategies and experiences. Interviews continued until thematic saturation was achieved, a point where no significant new themes emerged from the data. This approach ensured in-depth exploration of participant experiences and perspectives, while the focused sample size, as opposed to a large, generalizable sample, facilitated a more thorough understanding of the specific population of interest (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Qualitative research offers a multitude of advantages, as outlined by Lindolf (1995). These include:

- **Gaining Insights:** Acquiring diverse perspectives on a situation, retrieving past experiences, or accessing expert knowledge.
- **Exploring Hidden Phenomena:** Obtaining descriptions of events or situations that cannot be directly observed.
- **Building Trust:** Establishing rapport with participants, particularly when dealing with sensitive or intimate topics.
- **Analyzing Discourses:** Examining specific communication patterns and their embedded meanings.

To explore the impact of journalists' social media activism on EBC's news credibility, in-depth interviews were used to solicit candid opinions and feelings. Additionally, semi-structured prompts further delved into participants' roles, daily activities, and departmental responsibilities. This approach facilitated the development of a nuanced understanding of their perspectives on this intricate issue.

Building upon Seidman's (1998) observation that qualitative interviews are invaluable for exploring individuals' understandings of their world, experiences, and perspectives, this research investigates how journalists' participation in social media activism influences their perceived credibility as formal news sources. Throughout data collection, the researcher meticulously

examined all gathered information to determine whether journalists' social media activism raises questions about the credibility of the media outlet they represent.

To ensure open and honest dialogue, interviews with journalists and editors were conducted in a secure and confidential environment at the company's headquarters. While the specific location cannot be disclosed to protect participant anonymity, several rigorous measures were implemented to safeguard their identities. These safeguards included assigning non-identifiable aliases (pseudonyms) during interviews and throughout transcripts. Furthermore, any details that could potentially reveal participant identities, such as specific job titles, department names, or even locations mentioned in passing, were meticulously redacted from the data. Finally, all recordings and transcripts are stored on secure password-protected systems with restricted access, ensuring the utmost confidentiality.

### 3.3.2. Leveraging Insider Experience

This research draws upon my twelve years of experience with in different media institutions, including the past five as a senior editor and news producer at EBC News and Current Affairs. This unique position offers invaluable first-hand knowledge of EBC's daily operations and decision-making processes. Qualitative research often benefits from the researcher's embeddedness within the studied group (Tom-Orme, 1991), providing a nuanced understanding of the organizational culture. However, I acknowledge the potential for confirmation bias stemming from this prior role.

To ensure the research's rigor and objectivity, I have adopted a multi-pronged approach aligned with Lincoln & Guba's (1985) trustworthiness strategies:

- **Detached and Critical Self-Reflection:** I am keenly aware of potential biases and actively strive for impartiality throughout data collection and analysis. Techniques like member checking and triangulation are employed to strengthen the credibility of the findings.
- **Transparent Disclosure:** My previous position at EBC is clearly disclosed in a dedicated research transparency note. This transparency allows readers to assess any potential bias and make informed judgments about the research's trustworthiness.



- **Confidentiality Measures:** All participant identities are anonymized to protect them from any potential repercussions.
- **Triangulation:** A triangulation approach is employed by conducting in-depth interviews with a diverse range of participants. This includes journalists, editors from EBC, and experts from external institutions with contrasting viewpoints on media and social media. By incorporating these varied perspectives, the research presents a more balanced and nuanced picture.

As Adler & Adler (1994) explain, insider researchers are members of the group they study, driven by a passion for the topic. This passion, they argue, fuels their dedication despite research challenges. Participant observation, a common qualitative data collection method, immerses the researcher in the community for natural phenomenon observation. Importantly, the study avoids conflating observation with personal experience, ensuring objectivity in the analysis.

This study employs participant observation to explore the informal activities of journalists, focusing on news flows and Facebook activity (posts, shares, and reactions) within a randomly selected sample of journalists from the EBC News and Current Affairs department. Stone et al. (1999) note that prolonged observation can reveal unexpected behavioral patterns, even in familiar settings. This approach allows for such in-depth exploration within the chosen sample.

### **3.3.3. Document Review**

Through systematic analysis and interpretation, document review extracts pertinent information related to the research question. Documents can encompass diverse forms, from organizational policies to media articles. Document review, according to Saldana (2016), is crucial for accessing rich data. Documents preserve valuable information about past events, cultural norms, individual experiences, and organizational practices. This unique data would not be readily accessible through other means, enabling researchers to explore historical trends, reconstruct narratives, and gain insights into hidden aspects of reality (Saldana, 2016).

Document review is also efficient and cost-effective. Compared to other qualitative methods like interviews, it requires less time and financial resources. Pre-existing documents eliminate the

need for recruitment and participant scheduling, reducing costs and allowing researchers to cover geographically dispersed data sources (Bowen, 2009).

Furthermore, document review plays a vital role in triangulation and corroboration. According to Tracy (2013), documents can serve as valuable tools for verifying and enriching findings obtained through other qualitative methods like interviews and observations. They help researchers assess the consistency and credibility of their overall data (Tracy, 2013).

Document review is particularly valuable in unlocking hidden voices (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2001). In sensitive research areas, documents can offer perspectives that might otherwise be unavailable. Studying organizational policies, for example, can expose implicit expectations or hidden agendas, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2001).

Building on these benefits, a focused review of EBC journalists' social media usage guidance was conducted to investigate how it addresses journalists' informal activities on social media. This document analysis provided crucial insights into the organization's official stance on this issue.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

Data analysis in this research served to extract meaningful insights and answer the research questions. Consistent with established qualitative research practices (Miller & Brewer, 2003), a narrative approach was adopted to interpret data gathered through in-depth interviews, observations, and document reviews. This method is particularly well-suited for qualitative data analysis, allowing for the exploration and understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives (Bryman, 2004).

The research employed a multi-method approach, utilizing interviews with experts, reporters, and editors alongside observations and document reviews. This triangulation strategy strengthens the research by providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and fostering the creation of a richer narrative (Flick, 2014). Data from interviews were collected in either Amharic or English, prioritizing participant comfort and ensuring clear

comprehension (Morrow, 2000). This approach fostered a relaxed and open environment, where participants felt empowered to express themselves fully.

Thematic analysis, a rigorous qualitative data analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was then employed to systematically categorize, analyse, and interpret the rich qualitative data gleaned from the interviews. To facilitate a comprehensive analysis, transcripts from Amharic interviews underwent a meticulous translation process, ensuring all data contributed meaningfully to the narrative development. The rationale behind the researcher's choices includes:

- **Narrative Approach:** The chosen narrative approach aligns with the qualitative nature of the research, allowing for a nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2007).
- **Multi-Method Approach:** Triangulation through interviews, observations, and document reviews enhances the research's credibility and validity (Denzin, 2007).  
**Thematic Analysis:** This established qualitative analysis method provides a systematic and transparent framework for interpreting the data and identifying key themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- **Language Accommodation:** Prioritizing participant comfort through language accommodation reduces potential bias and ensures participants can fully express their views (Morrow, 2000).

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in research, as their absence can lead to primarily psychological or physical harm. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) aptly demonstrate this by taking all necessary precautions to avoid harming respondents. The researcher ensured protection by:

- ➡ **Obtaining informed consent:** Participants freely agreed to participate without coercion or pressure.
- ➡ **Avoiding intimidation:** The research environment was non-threatening and respectful.
- ➡ **Honesty about the research:** Participants were accurately informed about the study's nature and objectives.

- ➡ **Maintaining self-respect:** The research design and interview questions upheld participants' dignity.
- ➡ **Minimizing stress:** Precautions were taken to avoid causing mental or physical discomfort.
- ➡ **Preserving privacy:** Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed.
- ➡ **Ensuring fairness:** All participants were treated with respect and objectivity.

To achieve these goals, the researcher:

- ➡ **Carefully designed interview questions:** The questions avoided sensitive topics or phrasing that could cause harm.
- ➡ **Limited data usage:** Information was used solely for the specific research purpose.

### 3.6. Reliability and Validity

This study prioritized the rigor and objectivity of the data collected through a multi-pronged approach. As Weimmer and Dominick (2006) emphasize, validity is paramount, ensuring the research instrument accurately measures the intended construct. To mitigate potential biases arising from my position as a staff member of EBC and prior engagement with the subject, several strategies were employed:

- **Multi-reviewer analysis:** In-depth interview data underwent rigorous checks for accuracy, appropriateness, and credibility by reviewers, including myself, the study advisor, and postgraduate colleagues. This collaborative approach helped to identify and minimize any subjective interpretations.
- **Predetermined coding scheme:** A pre-established coding scheme guided the analysis of journalists' Facebook accounts and observational data. This framework ensured consistency and objectivity throughout the analysis process.
- **Transcript verification:** Transcripts were meticulously verified against recordings for accuracy, and translated versions were double-checked by other reviewers to minimize bias and ensure faithful representation of the original content.

To mitigate potential bias and enhance the credibility of my findings at EBC, I adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria outlined in the "observation" section (page

39). This rigorous approach incorporated techniques like member checking and peer debriefing. Member checking ensured the research accurately reflected participants' perspectives, while peer debriefing provided valuable insights from external researchers, fostering confidence in the research's overall resonance.

Furthermore, to strengthen the objectivity of the research, in-depth interviews were conducted with experts from institutions outside of EBC. This process, known as triangulation, allowed for corroboration of findings from diverse perspectives and further minimized the potential for bias.

By implementing these rigorous measures, the study sought to produce credible and trustworthy research findings that accurately reflect the lived experiences of the participants.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **4. DATA PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS**

#### **4.1. Data Presentation**

This section delves into the qualitative data collected to explore the influence of journalists' social media activity on the credibility of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC). Purposive sampling strategy was employed to gather insights from key stakeholders.

For this study nine journalists were purposely selected based on their active social media engagement. This ensured a focus on individuals whose online presence could potentially impact the perception of EBC's neutrality. Similarly four editors-in-chief and deputy editors-in-chief were interviewed. Their inclusion stemmed from reported concerns regarding the potential for journalists' social media activity to compromise the organization's objectivity. Three academics with relevant specializations from Bahir Dar and Debre Markos Universities were also included. Their participation provided a broader perspective on the issue by incorporating established knowledge in the field. Saturation, a point where no new information emerges from further interviews, guided the selection process.

The selection of participants not only ensures a focus on the targeted phenomenon but also strengthens the study's credibility in several ways. Firstly, the inclusion of journalists with active social media profiles provides a direct perspective on the practices under investigation. Secondly, interviewing editorial leaders allows for the exploration of potential management concerns regarding online journalist behaviour. Finally, the participation of media experts adds a layer of academic rigor by incorporating established knowledge within the field. The universities from which these experts hail further bolster the study's credibility by demonstrating the diversity of perspectives considered. Thematic analysis was conducted on the data to address the following research questions:

1. **Concerns regarding media and journalist credibility:** This section examines how engaging in activism might affect public perception of media and journalist credibility, and how journalists navigate potential conflicts arising from playing dual roles.
2. **Similarities and distinctions between journalism and activism:** This part analyses how journalists and experts perceive the inherent similarities and differences in the advocacy approaches used by journalists and activists.
3. **Drivers of journalist activism:** This section investigates the factors that motivate journalists to engage in social media activism, drawing on insights from their personal experiences and expert perspectives.
4. **EBC guidelines and code of conduct:** This section analyses how EBC's internal guidelines and the broader Ethiopian media landscape define the code of conduct for journalists engaging in activism.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of social media activism among journalists and its impact on media credibility at the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), this study employed a multifaceted qualitative approach. In addition to in-depth interview, this approach included document review, and personal observation as an insider within the EBC news and current affairs department.

Analyzing EBC's social media usage guidelines provided valuable insights into the organization's official stance on journalist activism online. This helped establish a baseline for how individual actions might deviate from or align with organizational policies. Being a member of the EBC news team also offered a unique perspective on the daily practices and informal norms surrounding social media use amongst journalists. This insider view allowed for the identification of potential discrepancies between stated policies and actual behavior, enriching the interview data.

### 4.1.1. General Information of the Respondents

To strengthen the credibility and applicability (generalizability) of the study's findings, this section delves into the detailed backgrounds of the interviewees. By examining characteristics like gender, age range, educational attainment, and experience within the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), the research establishes a rich context for understanding the participants' perspectives. The following table shows the demographic characteristics of the Interviewees:

|                           |                                 | Freq | %     |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|------|-------|
| Categories                | Experts from other Institutions | 3    | 16.67 |
|                           | Editors                         | 4    | 22.22 |
|                           | Journalists                     | 11   | 61.11 |
| Gender                    | Male                            | 16   | 88.89 |
|                           | Female                          | 2    | 11.11 |
| Level of Education        | Diploma                         | 0    | 0     |
|                           | BA Degree                       | 12   | 66.67 |
|                           | MA Degree                       | 3    | 16.67 |
|                           | PHD/candidates                  | 3    | 16.67 |
| Year of Experience in EBC | 1-5                             | 7    | 38.89 |
|                           | 6-10                            | 4    | 22.22 |
|                           | 11-15                           | 4    | 22.22 |
|                           | Contract                        | 0    | 0     |
|                           | Permanent                       | 18   | 100   |

Table 1: General Information of the Interviewees



### **Sample Characteristics:**

The table includes data from 18 interviewees, primarily (61.11%) journalists. Editors (22.22%) and experts from other institutions (16.67%) make up the remaining participants.

The table also illustrates that the sample composition is predominantly male (88.89%) with a smaller female (11.11%) representation. The majority of interviewees (72.22%) hold Bachelor's degrees, followed by those with Master's degrees (16.67%) and individuals pursuing or holding PhDs (16.67%). Notably, no participants reported having diplomas.

### **Research Potential:**

The high proportion of journalists (61.11%) presents an opportunity to explore how their self-perception as activists might influence their news reporting approach and potentially affect their credibility. Additionally, the study could analyze whether the predominantly undergraduate educational background of the participants plays a role in their understanding of the potential conflict between journalistic practice and activism.

Furthermore, the distribution of years of experience at EBC (38.89% with 1-5 years, 22.22% with 6-10 years, and 22.22% with 11-15 years) could be used to investigate whether journalists with greater tenure feel more comfortable engaging in activism compared to those newer to the organization. Finally, the fact that all journalist and editor participants are permanently employed by EBC might be relevant when exploring whether job security influences their decision to openly engage in activism.

#### **4.1.2. Balancing Journalism and Activism**

In interviews conducted for the study, all journalists acknowledged the ethical obligation of journalistic objectivity and the importance of avoiding activism in their professional capacity. This adherence to neutrality is essential as it ensures the presentation of unbiased information to the public. However, the research also revealed that these same journalists utilize social media platforms, primarily Facebook in this case, to express their personal views and beliefs. This distinction between professional objectivity and personal expression on social media highlights the complexities of navigating the digital age for journalists.

In countries with restricted media landscapes, where journalists face limitations in delivering balanced information, social media platforms emerge as alternative avenues for expressing personal opinions, beliefs, and sentiments. However, when engaging on these platforms, journalists interviewed did not consistently consider the editorial policies or guidelines of their mainstream media employers. This potential conflict arises when they post their own opinions, share content deemed appropriate by others, and react to others' posts, potentially deviating from the principles of balanced reporting expected from their primary role.

The tension between objectivity and advocacy is exemplified by Interviewee 14 (2024), who stated: *"In instances where I believe something is unjust or violates human rights, I may express my views, even if it deviates from the journalistic principle of presenting balanced perspectives."* This quote highlights the interviewee's awareness of the journalist's responsibility to present all sides of an issue. However, it also reveals a prioritization of ethical principles over absolute neutrality. Notably, the interviewee emphasizes the importance of speaking out for those who cannot speak for themselves, suggesting that the lack of concrete evidence to support his stance might not be a primary concern (Interviewee 14, March 1, 2024).

The interview data reveals a clear distinction between activism in Ethiopia and other countries. Unlike in nations where activism focuses on environmental conservation, animal and plant protection, and pollution reduction, with support from diverse institutions, Ethiopian activism primarily revolves around promoting or demoting specific political, cultural, or ethnic agendas, often at the expense of others. This tendency fuels conflict and undermines the perceived objectivity of activists, who are viewed as prioritizing their own groups over the broader society.

One interviewee highlights the concerning trend of conflating journalism and activism. He points out instances where government officials leaked information to activists instead of journalists during the TPLF conflict, suggesting potential manipulation. While acknowledging the potential for journalists to engage in activism under ethical management, the interviewee emphasizes the fundamental difference in their roles: journalists gather and transmit balanced information, allowing the public to form their own opinions, while activists actively promote specific causes. The interviewee further suggests that prominent mainstream media journalists engaging in activism might be better received by the public (Interviewee 11, Feb 29, 2024).

The text explores the challenges faced by government media employees in covering sensitive topics. The interviewee highlights the pressure and potential consequences of working within this environment, where even personal social media activity can be misconstrued due to the charged political atmosphere. While acknowledging these limitations, the interviewee argues for the right of journalists to express personal views and beliefs on their own social media platforms, emphasizing the distinction between personal expression and their official reporting for the mainstream media.

Interviewee 8 (2024) recounts her own experience of facing warnings from editors for expressing personal views on social media, particularly during the Ethiopian Orthodox Church division. This incident highlights the management's attempt to restrict social media use through guidelines, effectively limiting journalists' ability to express their personal views, even when motivated by a desire to contribute to the public good. As the interviewee notes, such a restrictive environment can discourage journalists from raising challenging issues, potentially hindering the flow of information and public discourse.

While some individuals readily transition between journalism and activism, others express concerns about the potential difficulties involved. Interviewee 9 highlights the differing ethical standards between the two professions. He argues that activists, focused on promoting specific causes, may not be obligated to uphold the same level of journalistic objectivity. This, he believes, can lead to biased reporting that promotes hatred and fuels conflict, which stands in stark contrast to the core principles of journalism that advocate for social well-being and a better future.

Furthermore, Interviewee 9 (2024) acknowledges the challenges journalists face in maintaining objectivity when reporting on activist pronouncements. He observes that activists often receive significant media attention, placing an additional burden on journalists to remain impartial. This, he perceives, is a prominent challenge for mainstream media in the contemporary landscape. However, he also recognizes that activists can play a role in bringing underreported issues to the forefront. Nonetheless, navigating the dual role of journalist and activist is acknowledged to be demanding and necessitates careful consideration. Such a practice, according to the interviewee,

could potentially damage the journalist's reputation, the media institution they represent, and the public at large (Interviewee 9, Feb 27, 2024).

Interviewee 10, sharing a personal experience, highlighted political activism, particularly prevalent in Ethiopia, as a major challenge for journalists. He recounted his own experience of engaging in activism while working for a mainstream media outlet. He expressed a tendency to share his personal opinions, advocate for specific ideas, and challenge opposing viewpoints. This stemmed from a deeply personal experience of witnessing innocent individuals being targeted in his community. The interviewee, motivated by a desire for peaceful resolution, decided to use social media platforms to advocate for the issue.

However, he acknowledged the inherent difficulty and, at times, the impossibility of maintaining neutrality while advocating for a cause within the community. As the interviewee stated, "My activism inevitably influenced my journalistic activities." He described instances where friends and community members proudly referred to him as "our activist!" This experience served as a testament to the potential for activism to overshadow journalism and, consequently, impact the daily responsibilities expected of journalists. The interviewee raised questions about the standards of neutrality expected from journalists but ultimately acknowledged the importance of maintaining at least a minimum level of objectivity when transitioning between or engaging in both journalism and activism. He further explained, "I faced the challenge of upholding neutrality while advocating for a specific cause" (Interviewee 10, March 2, 2024).

While he acknowledged the potential for his social media views to influence his followers, he reported not encountering any questions regarding his credibility. This, he speculate, might be attributed to the nature of his social media advocacy, which focused on promoting peace and harmony (Interviewee 10, March 8, 2024).

In conclusion, Journalists in restricted media environments face difficulties navigating the blurring lines between journalism and activism. Maintaining journalistic objectivity while engaging in personal expression and navigating the complexities of activism necessitates careful consideration of ethical boundaries.

#### 4.1.3. EBC's Social Media Guidelines: Insights from Editorial Staff

My editorial-level interviewees unanimously emphasized the significance of EBC's social media usage guidelines. In their view, the guidelines do not compromise the neutrality expected of both journalists and the media organization itself. These guidelines are meant to ensure the objectivity of journalists and the institution they represent. Additionally, they stipulate that journalists must refrain from actions that could damage the reputation and credibility of their media outlet. Interviewees further highlighted that journalists are prohibited from sharing information obtained from sources before it is officially released by the institution. Overall, Interviewee 1 expressed the view that the guidelines serve a valuable purpose in upholding journalistic standards and maintaining the trust EBC has built with its audience over the years.

However, Interviewee 1 acknowledged a gap in the implementation of these social media guidelines. He stated, "There have been instances where journalists have posted on sensitive issues, shared others' opinions, and reacted to situations in violation of the guidelines. Yet, there have been no repercussions." The interviewee identified two key reasons for this lack of consistent enforcement:

- ▶ **Limited Awareness:** Journalists may not be fully aware of the specific content and implications of the guidelines.
- ▶ **Inadequate Training:** Journalists may not have received sufficient on-the-job training regarding these guidelines.

Interviewee 1 confirmed instances where journalists advocating for specific issues have negatively impacted their own credibility and the reputation of EBC. The interviewee cited a situation involving a division within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which led to tensions between opposing factions. Some journalists were observed taking sides on social media, either supporting or opposing the division. "Their neutrality was called into question," stated the interviewee. Another example involved the war between the Federal government of Ethiopia and the Tigray regional forces known as TDF. According to Interviewee 1, the content posted by journalists on their social media platforms before, during, and after the conflict contradicted the principles of journalistic neutrality.

According to interviewee 3 at the editorial level, journalists at EBC are perceived as symbols of the institution they represent. This implies that their social media activities, including posts, shares, and reactions, should not contradict the interests of the media outlet. To ensure balanced coverage and cater to diverse political viewpoints, the interviewee emphasized that journalists should minimize their personal political involvement and affiliations on social media.

Furthermore, the interviewee stressed the importance of maintaining confidentiality. Journalists should avoid disclosing internal information or sharing unverified speculations on social media platforms. As EBC holds the position of the oldest and largest national media outlet, the interviewee highlighted a crucial concern. When journalists deviate from editorial policies and guidelines on their personal social media channels, their individual stances might be misconstrued as the official position of EBC. Therefore, editorial staff advises journalists to refrain from expressing personal views that contradict the established policies and guidelines of the media organization they work for. This approach aims to maintain the credibility and impartiality of EBC's journalistic content (Interviewee 3, Feb 28, 2024).

#### **4.1.4. Balancing Journalism and Activism: Insights from Experts**

Seeking to build upon the perspectives of journalists and editors regarding their experiences navigating the intersection of activism and journalism, a researcher conducted interviews with external experts in the field. The experts offered valuable insights from their academic backgrounds, shedding light on the feasibility and potential challenges associated with balancing these dual roles.

One expert, interviewee 16, identified various factors motivating journalists towards activism, including personal, national, institutional, and professional influences. He highlighted the complexities of achieving journalistic objectivity, stating: *"It is all about the method."* However, he argued that inherent human biases and the need to advocate for specific issues make simultaneously practicing both journalism and activism professionally problematic: *"Advocating for a specific issue means it is very difficult to accommodate dissent voices...independence makes journalism to view things out of a certain box."*(Interviewee 16, Feb 27, 2024)

Interviewee 16 (2024) expressed concerns about the challenges facing traditional media in the digital age, particularly the rise of citizen journalism, which he believes "darkens the fate of the ordinary profession". He argued that both activism and journalism are victims of the current political economy, characterized by extremism, political influence, and sensationalism, leading to *"[both] activists and journalists achieve[ing] their ill-goals at the expense of others."*

Interviewee 18 offered a contrasting perspective, acknowledging the complex and evolving relationship between journalism and activism in Ethiopia, shaped by historical context, the political climate, and the rise of new media. He highlighted the long history of Ethiopian media as a platform for social change: *"Ethiopian media has a long history of activism, often serving as a platform for challenging authority and advocating for social change."* However, he also acknowledged the challenges of media control and political repression, noting that journalists often face pressure to toe the government line.

He also argued that recent political reforms, while sparking hope for increased media freedom, have not fully addressed existing issues. This fosters *"[a] deep distrust of media impartiality and a sense that objectivity is often used to mask bias."* He also highlighted the challenges of navigating a polarized political landscape and the blurring lines between journalism and activism due to the rise of social media and online platforms.

Interviewee 18 (2024), like others, questioned the traditional ideal of journalistic objectivity, suggesting that some journalists advocate for a more activist approach to address pressing social issues. However, he acknowledges the need for journalists to balance reporting and avoid fuelling ethnic tension or instability. He also points to funding sources and ownership structures influencing the independence and agenda of media outlets.

The interviewee, interviewee 18, acknowledged the risks journalists face when engaging in activism, including harassment, intimidation, and even violence. Despite these challenges, he noted that some journalists continue to blur the lines, driven by first-hand exposure to human rights abuses and a sense of moral responsibility to advocate for change beyond simply reporting the facts. Additionally, the restricted media landscape can push journalists towards activism as a means to bridge the information gap and hold power accountable. Finally, interviewee 18

acknowledged that activism offers journalists a sense of solidarity and community when facing common challenges.

Interviewee 17(2024) argued for clear distinctions between journalism and activism, emphasizing his differing principles and codes of conduct: "*Journalism is based on set-standards and principles... [While] activism is based on personal initiations.*" he acknowledged the proximity of both fields in terms of the issues they cover, stating that journalists may be personally sensitive to these issues, bringing them closer to activism. However, he reiterated his belief that both professions are fundamentally different.

The interviewee concurred with other experts regarding the factors pushing journalists towards activism, including the poor implementation of journalistic principles in mainstream media and limited journalistic freedom. He highlighted the pressures journalists face from both the government and their employers when attempting to uphold journalistic principles and freedom in their reporting. However, he concluded that practicing both roles simultaneously is challenging due to the potential for undesirable consequences (Interviewee 17, Feb. 25, 2024).

In conclusion, the experts offer diverse perspectives on the complex relationship between journalists and activism in the Ethiopian media landscape. While Interviewee 16 emphasizes the incompatibility of the two roles due to challenges in maintaining objectivity and avoiding professional repercussions, Interviewee 18 acknowledges the historical context and contemporary challenges facing Ethiopian journalists, suggesting a potential role for activism alongside journalism under certain conditions. Interviewee 17 emphasizes the fundamental differences between the two professions but acknowledges the factors pushing journalists towards activism, highlighting the complexities and potential tensions within the Ethiopian media landscape.

#### **4.1.5. Impact of Social Media Activism on Credibility**

To address the research questions raised in Chapter 1, the researcher employed a multi-pronged approach. The researcher gathered insights from various stakeholders: journalists shared perspectives on audience perception of their work and the potential impact of activism on credibility; editorial staff provided assessments of how journalists' activism affects EBC's overall



credibility; and finally, experts offered their views on the potential impact of activism on journalists' objectivity and audience trust.

#### *4.1.5.1. Journalists' Views on Audience Perception of their Activism*

This section explores the perspectives of several journalists on the complex relationship between activism and journalistic objectivity in the Ethiopian media landscape. The interviews reveal a spectrum of opinions, highlighting the potential pitfalls and complexities of journalists engaging in activism.

Interviewee 14: Expresses concern that journalists actively involved in activism, particularly concerning politics, risk jeopardizing his journalistic integrity. The interviewee uses the example of a journalist supporting the "Fano", a militia fighting government troops in the Amhara regional state, on social media, then appearing on television anchoring government peace efforts. Such scenarios, according to the interviewee, raise questions about the journalist's credibility and impartiality (interviewee 14, March 1, 2024).

Interviewee 7 shares the view that the line between journalism and activism has blurred in Ethiopia. He explains that social media activists advocating for specific political causes may be hailed as "heroes" by their supporters, while those maintaining objectivity and avoiding political alignment might be ostracized. This, according to the interviewee, creates difficulty for audiences to discern the true role of journalists.

The interviewee contends that, given the complex and frequently interwoven nature of Ethiopian political conflicts, activism in the country inevitably becomes entangled with them. This, the interviewee believes, makes it challenging for journalists advocating for specific political issues to remain truly neutral, as their activism can influence their journalistic approach to sensitive topics. Consequently, the interviewee concludes that simultaneous participation in both activism and journalism inevitably raises questions about a journalist's credibility (interviewee 7, Feb Feb 28, 2024).

Interviewee 13 distinguishes between journalism and activism, highlighting the absence of editorial policies that govern activism. He notes that activists have the freedom to promote their

chosen ideas without facing consequences, raising concerns about the credibility of both the journalists themselves and the media institution they are affiliated with.

Interviewee 13: Further emphasizes the potential impact of social media activism on journalism as a profession. They express concern about the spread of unverified information by activists seeking to attract followers, which can overshadow information presented by traditional media outlets and ultimately erode the credibility of both the journalist and the media institution (interviewee 13, Feb. 25, 2024).

Interviewee 5 presents a counterpoint by sharing her experience of advocating for what she believes is right or wrong on social media. Despite potential audience perceptions about her objectivity, the interviewee views activism as a form of expressing ideas of public concern.

She also acknowledges the potential difficulties of navigating activism and mainstream media. She points out legal limitations faced by journalists and the potential clash between personal beliefs and the demands of their media outlet. The interviewee highlights the potential legal consequences faced by journalists who prioritize their own views over editorial policies or guidelines when reporting on sensitive matters (Interviewee 5, Feb. 29, 2016).

In conclusion, these interviews offer valuable insights into the diverse perspectives within the Ethiopian journalism community regarding activism and its potential influence on journalistic objectivity. While some interviewees express concerns about the blurring lines between activism and journalism, others acknowledge the complexities of the situation and the potential benefits of activism in fostering public discourse. Ultimately, navigating the intersection of activism and journalism requires careful consideration of ethical principles, legal regulations, and the potential impact on both individual credibility and the reputation of the media institution.

#### **4.1.6. EBC Journalists' Activism: Impact on Credibility**

According to several editorial staff members, journalists' social media activity could potentially affect EBC's credibility. Interviewee 4 acknowledged that what journalists post, share, and react to online reflects on the media outlet they represent. The interviewee provided an example: "Some journalists post their own ideas concerning religious and ethnic affiliations they belong

to," raising concerns about maintaining objectivity when representing diverse viewpoints (interviewee 4, March 1, 2024).

Additionally, the interviewee raised concerns about journalists engaging in unprofessional conduct that could damage EBC's reputation. Specifically, he mentioned instances where journalists allegedly "disclosed secret or confidential information through social media platforms, either anonymously or by handing it over to third parties." (Interviewee 4, March 1, 2024)

Sharing similar concerns, Interviewee 2 addressed the potential conflict between journalists expressing personal opinions on social media and maintaining objectivity. He stated, "When a journalist consistently expresses their own beliefs about political, social, or economic issues primarily on social media, it raises concerns about their ability to uphold journalistic objectivity." This practice, as Interviewee 2 suggests, could lead to biased reporting, potentially alienating certain audience segments and compromising the public's perception of fairness and impartiality (interviewee 2, Feb, 28, 2024).

Interviewee 1 offered a broader perspective, suggesting that the issue of credibility is multifaceted. They argued that journalists' social media activity could impact EBC's credibility if it violates principles of neutrality and journalistic ethics. Interviewee 1 elaborated, "If the journalists' posts violate the principles of neutrality... and journalistic principles are ignored, not only the credibility of the journalist, but also the credibility and neutrality of the media would be damaged." (Interviewee 1, Feb 28, 2024)

The interviewee further substantiated this claim with specific examples. He mentioned internal divisions within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and how some journalists belonging to that faith struggled to maintain neutrality on the issue, expressing strong opinions through social media. Additionally, Interviewee 1 pointed out instances of "clear violations of journalistic principles during the war" between the Ethiopian Federal forces and Tigray regional forces, highlighting the potential for biased reporting during sensitive events.

While some editorial staff members expressed concerns about the potential negative impact of journalists' activism, others highlighted the need for further investigation. Some interviewees, as

the text mentions, do not have any knowhow regarding the impact of social media activism by journalists up on their credibility and the organization's public trust. They called for a dedicated study to "logically understand" the potential consequences of journalists' online activity.

In conclusion, editorial staff members at EBC expressed concerns about the potential impact of journalists' social media activity on the organization's credibility. While some interviewees highlighted specific examples of online behaviour undermining objectivity and neutrality, others emphasized the need for further research to definitively assess the effect of social media activism on media trust and public perception.

#### **4.1.7. Ethical Considerations and Best Practices**

This section explores journalists' perspectives on ethical considerations when engaging in activism. The researcher examines these viewpoints to understand how journalists perceive the impact of activism on their commitment to journalistic ethics and principles, particularly in their daily reporting for traditional media outlets.

##### **4.1.7.1. Ethical Tightrope: Balancing Journalism and Activism**

One interviewee, referred to as Interviewee 5, emphasized the importance of ethical standards not only for journalists' credibility but also for their well-being. She highlighted the potential legal repercussions faced by those who contradict the editorial policies or guidelines of their media outlet:

*"Journalists who take on a dual role of activism and journalism must prioritize ethical standards. Not only does it impact credibility, but it can also lead to legal challenges if they contradict their employer's editorial policies."* (Interviewee 5, Feb 29, 2024).

Another interviewee, Interviewee 7 (2024), focused on the importance of prioritizing national issues over those promoted by external parties. They also expressed concern about the lack of balance in social media activism practiced by some journalists in Ethiopia, particularly considering the country's existing political climate:

*"Journalists reporting for traditional media, like EBC, should prioritize national issues and avoid compromising national interests while engaging in activism. Additionally, the prevalence of unverified information and unsubstantiated claims on social media needs to be addressed."* (Interviewee 7, Feb 28, 2024)

Similar concerns regarding social media activism were shared by Interviewee 10. He expressed apprehension that social media participation could compromise a journalist's neutrality and adherence to ethical standards:

*"Social media activism is not governed by the same ethical standards as journalism. It can potentially influence a journalist's professional ethics and impact their credibility, especially when reporting on issues of public concern. If activism is unavoidable, journalists must make a conscious effort to maintain neutrality in their mainstream media reports."* (Interviewee 10, March 8, 2024)

Interviewee 6 echoed these sentiments, stressing the clear distinction between journalism and activism:

*"Journalism is a profession governed by ethical principles and standards. Unlike activism, it prioritizes objectivity. Maintaining credibility becomes difficult when advocating for a specific cause. Therefore, journalists should avoid social activism."* (Interviewee 6, Feb 26, 2024)

However, Interviewee 11 offered a contrasting perspective. He acknowledged the importance of journalists understanding their country's cultural, political, and economic context, particularly regarding Ethiopia's strong sense of nationalism:

*"Ethiopia is a nation that unites when its sovereignty or integrity is threatened. A problem within the country affects everyone directly or indirectly."* (Interviewee 11, Feb 29, 2024)

This interviewee further argued that journalists could engage in activism for specific issues, but with a balanced approach:

*"While journalists can advocate for specific issues, their views must be presented in a balanced manner."* (Interviewee 11, Feb 29, 2024)

Interviewee 11 also suggested alternative channels for journalists to address their concerns:

*"Limiting media freedom might push journalists towards activism. However, social media activism can significantly affect their credibility and neutrality. Instead, journalists can voice their concerns during editorial meetings and influence the editorial staff to investigate public issues."* (Interviewee 11, Feb 29, 2024)

The interviewee concluded by advocating against a dual role and suggesting journalists prioritize their profession:

*"Rather than playing a dual role, journalists can resign and fully commit to activism for their chosen cause. As the Amharic proverb says, 'ከአንድ ጳረስ ሁለት ምላስ' - two tongues in one head - creates complications."* (Interviewee 11, Feb, 29, 2024)

In conclusion, while the interviewed journalists differed in the extent to which they supported activist involvement, a common thread emerged – the importance of maintaining ethical standards. This highlights the need for a nuanced approach, where journalists can advocate for national well-being without compromising their credibility or violating media outlet policies. Further research could explore how media outlets in Ethiopia can create guidelines that navigate this complex terrain, allowing journalists to contribute to positive change while upholding journalistic principles.

#### **4.1.8. Perceptions of the Editorial Staff on Journalist Activism in EBC**

This section explores the perspectives of the EBC editorial staff regarding the benefits and drawbacks of journalists engaging in activism. The interviewees' insights shed light on the potential challenges this practice poses for EBC's ethical standards and public trust.

One editorial staff member (Interviewee 3) expressed concern that journalists devoting significant time to social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook could negatively impact their core journalistic duties for EBC. They highlighted this as the "first and most direct impact" on EBC (Interviewee 3, Feb, 28, 2024).

Another interviewee (Interviewee 4) offered a contrasting perspective. He saw potential benefits in journalist activism if conducted on social media platforms in a way that upholds EBC's reputation and builds public trust. He believed this could contribute to "enriching the wider public fast and timely"(Interviewee 4, March 1, 2024).

The potential conflict between journalist activism and ethical standards emerged as a key theme. Interviewees 1, 2, and 3 all emphasized the importance of maintaining a clear distinction between the two roles.

Interviewee 3 stressed that journalists who freely post information conflicting with editorial policies, national laws, and regulations could damage EBC's reputation and public trust. He stated, "Being an activist and a journalist at the same time does not match the ethical standards and principles of journalism" (Interviewee 3, Feb 28, 2024).

Interviewee 2 echoed this concern, suggesting that unverified information or promotion of personal agendas on social media could erode public trust in EBC. He noted the potential for such messages to be used as sources by other media outlets, further highlighting the need for responsible online conduct.

While acknowledging the risks, both Interviewee 1 and 2 identified potential benefits of journalist activism. Interviewee 2 saw value in journalists posting messages that enhance EBC's image. He noted that newsworthy information shared by journalists could become valuable sources for other media institutions.

Interviewee 1 identified a role for journalist activism in raising awareness and promoting positive social change. They suggested that journalists could leverage their social media presence to "fight against corruption, injustice and other social issues of public concern." They further emphasized the importance of promoting "common and balanced issues" to build trust with the audience (Interviewee 1, Feb, 28, 2024).

However, Interviewee 1 also cautioned against potential pitfalls. He expressed concern that journalist activism, if not managed effectively, could lead to a loss of public trust and compromised objectivity. He explained that advocating for a specific cause could make the

public perceive EBC as biased and erode its image as a neutral platform for diverse viewpoints. Additionally, he highlighted the risk of journalists being threatened or harassed due to their activism.

In conclusion, the editorial staffs at EBC acknowledge the potential benefits and drawbacks of journalists engaging in social media activism. The key lies in striking a balance: utilizing social media responsibly to enhance public engagement and awareness, while upholding journalistic ethics and maintaining objectivity. Clear guidelines and policies can help navigate this complex landscape, ensuring EBC's journalists can leverage social media effectively while safeguarding the organization's reputation and the public trust.

#### **4.1.9. Social Media: Friend or Foe for Ethiopian Journalists?**

Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), Ethiopia's state-funded media, faces a crossroads. University lecturers, experts in the field, offer contrasting views on how EBC can navigate the challenges and opportunities of the evolving media landscape, particularly regarding journalists' social media activism. This essay explores these viewpoints, highlighting the tension between rebuilding public trust and maintaining institutional identity.

One interviewee (Interviewee 16) expressed a critical view of EBC, suggesting it functions as a "mouthpiece of the ruling parties" and prioritizes political agendas over public interest. They argue that EBC's social construction serves a narrow purpose, and regaining public trust necessitates significant internal reform:

*"EBC itself is practicing public relations as an institution and the 'journalists' are activists towards a certain political group"* (Interviewee 16, Feb, 27, 2024).

This interviewee emphasizes the depth of the problem and recommends a comprehensive restructuring to rebuild public trust.

In contrast, Interviewee 17 presents a more optimistic outlook. While acknowledging the ongoing media transformation's complexities, he proposes practical solutions to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by journalists' social media activism:



- **Develop Clear Social Media Policies:** Establish guidelines addressing online activity, including neutrality, fact-checking and responsible platform usage.
- **Invest in Digital Literacy Training:** Train journalists on critical thinking, fact-checking, and online safety to combat misinformation and ensure their protection.
- **Build a Supportive Culture:** Foster an environment where journalists can freely express themselves online and receive support when facing harassment.
- **Engage with the Public:** Encourage active audience engagement on social media platforms, addressing questions and concerns for constructive dialogue.
- **Advocate for Press Freedom:** Work within legal frameworks and advocate for policies that safeguard freedom of expression and promote responsible journalism.

Interviewee 17 believes that "by thoughtfully navigating these challenges and opportunities, Ethiopian media institutions, including EBC, can leverage the power of social media to strengthen audience connections, promote responsible journalism, and contribute to a more informed and engaged society" (Interviewee 17, Feb 25, 2024).

The final interviewee (Interviewee 18) acknowledges the potential of social media for feedback and information dissemination. However, he advocates for balancing this with journalists' professional obligations and institutional identity:

*"EBC can use the opportunity to receive feedback from its audience, to impart its information so fast in an interactive way"* (Interviewee 18, Feb 26, 2024).

Interviewee 18 emphasizes the importance of established regulations, including editorial policies and relevant guidelines, to manage the challenges associated with social media activism. He recommends that EBC and other media institutions:

- Restrict journalists from sharing views contradicting the institution's stance.
- Discourage participation in activism that could compromise journalistic objectivity.
- Hold journalists accountable for violating editorial policies or legal frameworks.

In conclusion, the expert interviews highlight the complex relationship between state-funded media, social media activism, and public trust. While some see social media as an opportunity

for EBC to rebuild trust and engage with the public, others express concerns about potential bias and the need for clear boundaries. Moving forward, EBC will need to navigate these challenges by fostering responsible journalism, building trust with the public, and establishing clear guidelines for journalists' online engagement.

#### 4.1.10. EBC Social Media Usage Guidelines Reviewed

This review examines the social media usage guidelines issued by the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) in October 2018. It analyses the content of the guidelines, identifies potential areas of concern, and proposes avenues for further research. The EBC guidelines aim to regulate social media use by both the organization and its employees, particularly journalists.

The preamble emphasizes the potential downsides of social media misuse, highlighting potential harm to the institution, the nation, and its citizens. Additionally, the guidelines seek to ensure that employee social media activity aligns with EBC's editorial policies and protects the organization's reputation.

A key principle is the recognition of journalists as brand ambassadors for EBC. Consequently, responsible use of personal social media is expected. The guidelines acknowledge the time journalists dedicate to social media, potentially impacting EBC's daily operations.

Article 5 outlines several limitations on journalist behaviour:

- **Political Neutrality:** Journalists are prohibited from promoting or endorsing specific political viewpoints.
- **Confidentiality and Loyalty:** The guidelines restrict actions that could endanger EBC, harm its reputation, or criticize colleagues through social media. Additionally, disclosing confidential information is forbidden.
- **Responsible Content:** Journalists are prohibited from posting irresponsible or defamatory content, inciting disunity among employees, or sharing content that is racially, ethnically, or religiously insensitive.

- **Professional Conduct:** Disclosing internal information about current or former employees, leaders, or stakeholders is restricted. Journalists are also barred from using EBC's logo as a personal social media profile picture.

A crucial question remains: what are the consequences for violating these guidelines? The document outlines disciplinary measures based on EBC's personnel regulations. Additionally, violations potentially breaching national laws would be subject to legal investigations.

The review identifies potential challenges in implementing the guidelines. They restrict social media use during working hours, except for breaks. However, with the prevalence of smartphones, monitoring employee activity poses a significant hurdle.

The researcher expresses concern about the guidelines' potentially restrictive nature and unclear implementation mechanisms. For instance, journalists may dedicate time online to promoting specific religious, political, or ethnic agendas, potentially favoring certain groups. Additionally, the review suggests a lack of a defined enforcement system six years after the issuance of the guidelines.

Furthermore, the researcher suspects potential bias in enforcement. Journalists promoting the ruling party or government may not be considered in violation, while those promoting opposing viewpoints might face disciplinary action. The review highlights a perceived tendency to reward promotion of government activities while overlooking potential shortcomings.

This review suggests a more comprehensive approach is needed. While establishing boundaries for professional conduct is essential, solely focusing on restrictions might prove ineffective. Exploring the underlying reasons for journalists' social media activity is crucial. Examining the work environment and addressing factors that might push journalists towards online activism could be a more constructive strategy. Investigating the journalists' work environment could provide valuable insights into fostering neutrality and objectivity.

In conclusion, this review concludes that EBC's social media usage guidelines, while aiming for professionalism, have limitations. A more balanced approach that fosters a culture of responsible online conduct while respecting individual expression is recommended. This could involve

fostering open communication within EBC, creating a more supportive work environment for journalists, and exploring alternative solutions to address the concerns outlined in this review.

#### **Further Research:**

- **Develop Enforcement Strategies:** Exploring practical methods for monitoring employee social media usage, while respecting privacy concerns, would strengthen the implementation process.
- **Analyse Bias in Enforcement:** Investigating potential biases in enforcing the guidelines would provide valuable insights into their effectiveness and fairness.
- **Consider Alternative Approaches:** Researching alternative strategies, such as promoting media literacy workshops or fostering a culture of responsible social media engagement, could offer a more holistic approach.

#### **4.1.11. A Researcher's Perspective at EBC**

This section details the researcher's firsthand experience working within the News and Current Affairs department at EBC (Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation). Five years of experience within EBC's News and Current Affairs department grants direct observation of journalist behavior, surpassing insights gleaned from public interactions or document analysis alone. By examining journalists' social media activity, the study sheds light on potential discrepancies between their online expressions and professional conduct. This data offers valuable insights into the potential conflict between personal beliefs and journalistic objectivity.

The research situates its findings within the complex socio-political landscape of Ethiopia. Examining how journalists navigate sensitive issues like religion, ethnicity, and political reforms unveils the interplay between personal identities and professional obligations. Real-world examples, such as the Tigray conflict and the internal church division, illustrate the challenges of maintaining neutrality.

The high level of social media connectivity amongst EBC journalists, particularly on Facebook, presents a unique opportunity. The researcher employed a multi-method approach:

1. **Social media observation:** The researcher observed journalists' social media posts, shares, and reactions on personal profiles, focusing on sensitive topics like religion, politics, and ethnicity. This yielded detailed descriptions of online behaviours, interactions, and discussions surrounding social media activism.
2. **Thematic analysis:** After data collection, thematic analysis identified recurring patterns and themes within the observations.
3. **Triangulation:** The findings from social media observation were triangulated with interview data and document review to establish a comprehensive picture of EBC's social media behavior and its potential influence on media credibility.

### **Case Studies: Balancing Identity and Objectivity**

- **Government Reforms:** While journalists broadly supported Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's reforms, a concerning trend emerged. Alongside endorsements, journalists actively denigrated figures associated with the pre-reform era. This highlights the potential for personal beliefs to influence reporting, even on seemingly objective topics.
- **The Tigray Conflict:** During tensions between the Tigray region and the federal government, journalists largely aligned with one side. Staff at EBC's Mekelle branch actively supported the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) through their reporting and social media, while journalists at the central office resisted TPLF narratives. This exemplifies the significant influence of ethnicity on journalistic practice in sensitive situations.
- **Internal Church Division:** The internal division within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church further underscored the challenges to neutrality. Journalists readily took public stances on the issue, reflecting their own religious affiliations on social media. This case highlights the complex interplay between religious identity and journalistic objectivity.

These case studies illustrate the on-going struggle for journalists to maintain neutrality in a challenging environment. Government restrictions can impede objective reporting, prompting journalists to utilize social media for self-expression. However, social media itself presents limitations.

The study suggests that fostering journalistic neutrality within EBC requires significant reform. Achieving editorial autonomy, free from government influence, is paramount. By establishing a culture that upholds the fundamental principles of journalism, EBC can create an environment conducive to unbiased reporting, ultimately serving the public interest more effectively.

This research offers valuable insights into the challenges of journalistic neutrality in emerging democracies. The EBC case study demonstrates the utility of social media observation alongside traditional research methods for understanding journalist behavior. The findings underscore the need for reforms that prioritize editorial independence and a commitment to journalistic ethics.

## 4.2. Summary of Findings

This study explores the intricate relationship between journalism and activism in Ethiopia, focusing on journalists employed by the state-funded Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC). Interviews with journalists, editors, and media experts, alongside an analysis of EBC's social media guidelines and the researcher's experience, inform the analysis.

### ➤ **Key Challenges for Journalists:**

- Journalists grapple with maintaining journalistic objectivity within a restricted media environment while navigating their personal convictions. Social media platforms present a potential outlet for expressing these beliefs, but this can conflict with professional obligations.
- The distinction between journalism and activism is particularly unclear in Ethiopia, especially regarding social media use. Journalists advocating for specific causes struggle to remain impartial, raising concerns about their credibility.
- Pressure to conform to government narratives hinders journalists' ability to report objectively, particularly on sensitive topics.
- While social media offers a platform for journalists' voices, it can blur the lines between activism and journalism, jeopardizing their credibility. Engaging in activism can clash with journalistic ethics and editorial policies, potentially leading to legal consequences.

- Journalists navigate the challenge of balancing activism with reporting, raising concerns about audience trust and their perceived neutrality.
- **Impact of Journalist Activism on EBC:**
  - Journalists' social media activity can negatively impact EBC's reputation, particularly when posts contradict editorial policies or express personal agendas. This can alienate audiences and raise questions about the organization's neutrality.
  - Inconsistent enforcement of EBC's social media guidelines allows journalists to potentially violate regulations concerning neutrality and confidentiality.
  - Some journalists might not fully comprehend the content and implications of EBC's social media guidelines, leading to unintentional breaches.
  - Sharing confidential information or unverified reports on social media can be unprofessional and erode public trust in EBC.
  - Unbiased reporting is fundamental for maintaining public trust in EBC. Activism can create a perception of bias, jeopardizing this trust.
  - Engaging in activism on social media platforms could potentially divert journalists' attention from their core journalistic duties at EBC.
- **Experts' Perspectives:**
  - Experts emphasize the importance of journalists adhering to ethical standards to preserve credibility and avoid legal repercussions.
  - The role of activism in journalism remains a subject of debate. Some argue for prioritizing national issues, while others acknowledge the potential of activism to address pressing social concerns.
  - Experts advocate for journalists to strike a balance between expressing personal views and maintaining journalistic credibility. Alternative avenues for advocacy, such as editorial meetings, are suggested.
  - Experts propose alternative strategies for journalists, including raising concerns within editorial meetings or engaging in media literacy workshops to address social issues without compromising journalistic ethics.
  - Some experts acknowledge that social media activism can empower journalists to advocate for critical social issues and hold powerful institutions accountable, particularly in restricted media environments.

- ➡ The long-standing tradition of Ethiopian media as a platform for social change is acknowledged. The rise of citizen journalism and the intricate media landscape further complicate this issue.
- ➡ Personal beliefs, ethnicity, and religious identity can all influence journalistic practice, especially in sensitive situations, raising concerns about achieving objectivity.
- **EBC Social Media and Researcher Observations:**
  - ➡ EBC's social media guidelines, while aiming for professional conduct, are perceived as restrictive.
  - ➡ Focusing solely on restrictions might be ineffective. Journalists might exploit social media to promote personal agendas.
  - ➡ Unclear enforcement and potential bias are concerns. Journalists promoting the government might not face repercussions, while others could.
  - ➡ A more balanced approach is needed, fostering responsible online conduct while respecting individual expression.
  - ➡ Open communication, supportive work environment, alternative solutions (media literacy workshops), and examining journalists' work environment are all recommended to foster neutrality and objectivity.
  - ➡ Social media observation revealed discrepancies between journalists' online expressions and professional conduct.

Ethiopian journalists, particularly those in state media like EBC, navigate a challenging space. They grapple with the desire to be agents of change while adhering to objective reporting. Social media, a potential platform for their views, can also undermine their credibility. Recognizing this ethical tightrope walk, experts recommend a multifaceted solution. Clear social media policies, open communication within EBC, and alternative outlets for activism – like media literacy workshops – can empower journalists while safeguarding journalistic integrity. Ultimately, achieving a balance between journalists' self-expression and the public's trust in EBC is crucial for a robust Ethiopian media landscape.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1. Conclusion

Drawing upon the findings, this section offers well-supported conclusions based on the research questions and the overall data analysis. These conclusions shed light on the complex relationship between journalist activism and news credibility within the EBC and the Ethiopian media context.

This research investigated the intricate relationship between journalist activism and news credibility within the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) and the broader Ethiopian media landscape. By drawing upon in-depth interviews, document reviews, and the researcher's unique perspective as an insider, the study yielded valuable insights into the challenges journalists navigate in restricted media environments.

The findings reveal a complex interplay between journalistic objectivity, personal expression, and the ever-present pull of activism. EBC's social media guidelines, intended to ensure journalistic neutrality, face implementation gaps that could potentially damage both individual journalists' credibility and the organization's reputation.

Experts offered a range of perspectives on this multifaceted issue. While some maintain the inherent incompatibility of journalism and activism, others acknowledge the potential for activism to coexist with journalism under specific conditions. However, the research suggests that journalists engaging in social media activism risk compromising journalistic integrity and impartiality, potentially eroding public trust in both the individual and the media outlet.

The study further highlights how EBC journalists' social media activity can negatively impact the organization's credibility. Editorial staff expressed concerns about journalists violating principles of neutrality and journalistic ethics, as well as engaging in unprofessional conduct online. This underscores the critical role of ethical considerations for journalists engaging in activism.

Prioritizing national issues, maintaining journalistic neutrality, and adhering to media outlet policies are paramount.

However, the debate continues. Some experts believe that social media activism is fundamentally incompatible with journalism and should be avoided entirely. The editorial staff at EBC acknowledges both the potential benefits and drawbacks, emphasizing the need to strike a balance. Utilizing social media responsibly to enhance public engagement and awareness can be achieved while upholding journalistic ethics and objectivity. The development of clear guidelines and policies is crucial in navigating this complex landscape, ensuring EBC journalists can leverage social media effectively while safeguarding the organization's reputation and the public trust.

The expert interviews further illuminate the intricate relationship between state-funded media, social media activism, and public trust. This research suggests that EBC can leverage the power of social media to strengthen audience connections, promote responsible journalism, and contribute to a more informed and engaged society. This can be achieved by thoughtfully navigating the challenges and opportunities presented through:

- **Developing clear social media policies:** These policies should outline acceptable online behaviour, fostering responsible social media engagement by journalists.
- **Investing in digital literacy training:** Equipping journalists with the necessary skills to navigate the online landscape effectively is crucial.
- **Building a supportive culture:** Fostering a culture of open communication and support within EBC can help minimize the risks associated with social media activism.
- **Engaging with the public:** Active engagement with the public allows EBC to better understand audience needs and concerns.
- **Advocating for press freedom:** A strong commitment to press freedom is essential for fostering a media environment conducive to responsible journalism.

Finally, the review of EBC's social media usage guidelines highlights the need for a more balanced approach. While establishing boundaries for professional conduct is essential, a solely restriction-based approach might prove ineffective. Exploring the underlying reasons for

journalists' social media activity and fostering a culture of responsible online conduct while respecting individual expression are crucial. Open communication within EBC, a supportive work environment for journalists, and exploring alternative solutions to address concerns can contribute significantly to achieving this balance.

This research offers valuable insights into the challenges of journalistic neutrality in emerging democracies. The findings underscore the need for reforms that prioritize editorial independence and a commitment to journalistic ethics. To achieve editorial autonomy and foster journalistic neutrality within EBC, significant reforms are required. Establishing a culture that upholds the fundamental principles of journalism is essential for ultimately serving the public interest more effectively.

## 5.2. Recommendations

Informed by the conclusions, the chapter culminates with practical recommendations directed towards journalists, media organizations, and potentially relevant regulatory bodies. These recommendations aim to address the challenges faced while simultaneously harnessing the potential benefits associated with social media activism by journalists within the Ethiopian media landscape.

### **Recommendations for Journalists:**

- **Prioritizing Factual Reporting:** Journalists must uphold the tenets of journalistic ethics and objectivity. This entails meticulous fact-checking, prioritizing factual reporting over personal opinions or advocacy for specific causes.
- **Maintaining Online Professionalism:** Journalists should be cognizant of how their social media activity reflects on their credibility. Sharing unverified information, expressing personal opinions on sensitive topics, or engaging in activities that compromise neutrality should be avoided.
- **Championing Press Freedom:** Journalists have a collective responsibility to advocate for untrammelled press freedom. This includes resisting undue government influence or restrictions that hinder objective reporting.

- **Utilizing Established Channels:** If journalists have grievances or wish to advocate for specific issues, established channels within their media organization, such as editorial meetings or raising concerns with superiors, should be utilized.
- **Embracing Ethical Online Conduct:** Journalists must uphold the highest ethical standards in their online activity. This necessitates ensuring their social media presence adheres to principles of objectivity, fairness, and accuracy.

### **Recommendations for EBC:**

- **Developing Robust Social Media Guidelines:** EBC should establish comprehensive social media guidelines that explicitly outline acceptable online behaviour for journalists. These guidelines should address critical aspects such as political neutrality, confidentiality, responsible content creation, and adherence to professional conduct.
- **Implementing Effective Training Programs:** Equipping journalists with the necessary skills is paramount. EBC should provide regular training programs on social media best practices. This includes training on critical thinking, fact-checking methodologies, online safety measures, and responsible social media engagement.
- **Fostering Open Communication:** Creating a work environment that encourages open communication is crucial. Journalists should feel comfortable discussing concerns and openly expressing their opinions without fear of repercussions.
- **Engaging the Public:** EBC should leverage social media platforms to actively engage with the public. Addressing questions and concerns directly fosters trust and paves the way for constructive dialogue.
- **Addressing Underlying Issues:** Investigating the root causes that compel journalists towards social media activism is essential. Limited media freedom, lack of internal engagement mechanisms, or external pressure can be contributing factors. Addressing these issues can help minimize online activism driven by frustration or a lack of alternative avenues for addressing concerns.
- **Enhancing Enforcement Mechanisms:** Ensuring consistent and fair enforcement of the social media guidelines is critical. Potential biases in implementing the guidelines must be addressed, and all journalists should be held accountable for violations regardless of affiliation.

- **Advocacy for Press Freedom:** EBC should actively advocate for press freedom and collaborate within legal frameworks to promote policies that safeguard freedom of expression and responsible journalism.

#### **Recommendations for Policymakers:**

- **Safeguarding Press Freedom:** Policymakers have a critical role to play in enacting legislation that protects journalists from harassment, intimidation, or violence. This fosters an environment conducive to independent and investigative journalism.
- **Promoting Media Literacy:** Investing in initiatives that equip the public with media literacy skills is crucial. This empowers citizens to critically evaluate information sources, distinguish between factual reporting and biased content, and combat the spread of misinformation.
- **Addressing Public Distrust:** Investigating the reasons behind the public's lack of trust in state-owned media outlets is essential. Measures to rebuild trust include fostering transparency, addressing concerns regarding government influence, and actively promoting investigative journalism.

By acknowledging the complexities of the media landscape and implementing the recommendations outlined above, stakeholders can work collaboratively towards a future where journalists are empowered to fulfil their vital role in a responsible and ethical manner, while fostering a thriving environment for a free and informed citizenry.

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## APPENDICIS

### English Version of Interview Questions

#### Specific Interview Working Questions for Journalists:

**i. Experience:**

1. Can you describe your personal experience with balancing journalism and activism?
2. Have you ever faced challenges to your credibility due to your activism: how did you handle those situations?
3. How do you navigate editorial guidelines while simultaneously expressing personal opinions on social media?

**ii. Perception:**

4. How do you think audiences perceive the simultaneous practice of activism and journalism?
5. Do you believe social media activism impacts journalistic objectivity? Why or why not?
6. In your opinion, what are the ethical considerations for journalists engaging in activism?

Your time, insightful contributions and willingness to share your experiences are all sincerely appreciated.

### **Specific Questions for Editors:**

#### **i. Policy:**

1. What are the EBC's official guidelines regarding journalists' social media activity?
2. How do you enforce these guidelines and address potential conflicts between journalism and activism?
3. Do you think the current guidelines are sufficient in the current Ethiopian media landscape?

#### **ii. Impact:**

4. How do you assess the impact of journalists' social media activism on EBC's overall credibility?
5. Have there been instances where journalist's activism negatively affected their work or the organization's reputation?
6. What are your views on the potential benefits and drawbacks of journalists engaging in activism?

I sincerely appreciate your time, insights and willingness to share your experiences.

## **Specific Questions for Experts:**

### **i. Perspective:**

1. How do you see the relationship between journalism and activism evolving in the context of Ethiopian media?
2. Do you think there is an inherent conflict between advocating for specific issues and maintaining journalistic objectivity? Why or why not?
3. What factors do you believe drive journalists towards activism, considering potential career risks?

### **ii. Recommendations:**

4. What would you suggest as best practices for journalists engaging in activism while maintaining ethical standards and credibility?
5. Should there be further regulations or guidelines established to address this issue?
6. How can EBC and other media organizations navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by journalists' social media activism?

I am truly grateful for your time, insightful contributions and openness in sharing your experiences.

## Amharic Version of Interview Questions

### ለጋዜጠኞች የተዘጋጁ ጥያቄዎች

#### i. ከተሞክሮ አኳያ፡-

1. ጋዜጠኝነትንና የማህበረሰብ አንቁነትን/ አክቲቪዝምን አጣጥሞ ከማስኬድ አኳያ የግል ተሞክሮህ(ሽ)ን ብታጋራ(ሪ)ን?
2. ከአክቲቪዝም ጋር በተያያዘ የተጻግኒነት ጥያቄ አጋጥሞህ(ሽ) ያውቃል ችግሩን እንዴት አለፍክ(ሽ)ው?
3. በማህበራዊ የትስስር ገጾች የግል ምልክታህ(ሽ)ን በምታጋራ(ሪ)በት ወቅት የኤዲቶርያል ፖሊሲ መመሪያዎችን በምን መልኩ ታቻችላ(ያ)ቸዋለህ(ሽ)?

#### ii. ከአመለካከት አኳያ፡-

4. ጋዜጠኝነትንና አክቲቪዝምን አንድ ላይ ማስኬድ በህብረተሰቡ ዘንድ ምን አይነት አመለካከት ይፈጥራል ብለህ(ሽ) ታስባ(ቢያ)ለህ(ሽ)?
5. በማህበራዊ ሚዲያ የሚደረግ የማንቃት ስራ በጋዜጠኝነት ሙያ ላይ አሉታዊ ጫና ያሳድራል ብለህ(ሽ) ታስባ(ቢያ)ለህ(ሽ)? ለምን?
6. በአንተ አመለካከት በህብረተሰብ አንቁነት/አክቲቪዝም የተሰማሩ ጋዜጠኞች ግምት ውስጥ ሊያስገቧቸው የሚገቡ ጉዳዮች ምንድን ናቸው?

**ለአርታኢያን የተዘጋጁ ጥያቄዎች**

**i. ከፖሊሲያዊ አኳያ:-**

1. የጋዜጠኞችን የማህበራዊ ትስስር ገጾች ተሳትፎ በሚመለከት የኢ.ቢ.ሲ መመሪያዎች ምን ይላሉ?
2. በጋዜጠኝነትና በህብረተሰብ አንቀነት/አክቲቪዝም/ መካከል ሊፈጠር የሚችለውን ተቃርኖ ለማስታረቅ መመሪያዎቹ በምን አግባብ ተግባራዊ ይደረጋሉ?
3. ከወቅቱ የኢትዮጵያ ሚዲያ ነባራዊ ሁኔታ ጋር ሲነጻጸር አሁን በስራ ላይ ያሉ የኢ.ቢ.ሲ መመሪያዎች መሰል ችግሮችን ለማረም በቂ ናቸው?

**ii. ከተጽዕኖ አኳያ:-**

4. ጋዜጠኞች በማህበራዊ የትስስር ገጾቻቸው የሚለጥፏቸው የግል አመለካከቶች በተቋሙ ተአማኒነት ላይ ሊያሳድሩ የሚችለውን ተጽዕኖ እንዴት ይገልጹታል?
5. ጋዜጠኞች በማህበራዊ የትስስር ገጾቻቸው የሚያሰራጩባቸው መልዕክቶች በጋዜጠኞች መደበኛ ስራ አሊያም ደግሞ በተቋሙ መልካም ስምና ዝና ላይ አሉታዊ ጫና አሳድረው ያውቃሉ?
6. በማህበራዊ የትስስር ገጾች አማካኝነት ጋዜጠኞች የሚያሰራጩባቸው መረጃዎች ሊያስገኛቸው የሚችሉት ጥቅምና ሊያስከትሉ የሚችሉት ጉዳት ምንድን ነው?

**ለባለሙያዎች የተዘጋጁ ጥያቄዎች**

**i. ከአተያይ ጋር በተያያዘ፡-**

1. በኢትዮጵያ ሚዲያ እያቆጠቆጡ ያሉት ጋዜጠኝነትና ማህበረሰባዊ አንቁነት/አክቲቭስትነት/ መካከል ያለውን ግንኙነት እንዴት ይገልጹታል?
2. ለአንድ ጉዳይ በተለዩ ሁኔታ በመሟገት እና በጋዜጠኝነት ገለልተኝነት መካከል ተቃርኖ አለ ብለው ያስባሉ? ለምን?
3. ጋዜጠኞችን በስራ ላይ ሊያጋጥሟቸው ከሚችሉ ችግሮች ጋር በተያያዘ ጋዜጠኞችን ወደ ማህበረሰብ አንቁነት የሚገፏቸው ምክንያቶች ምንድን ናቸው? የግል ምልክታዎን ቢያጋሩን?

**ii. ከምክረ ኃላብ ጋር በተያያዘ፡-**

4. በማህበራዊ የትስስር ገጾችቻቸው የማህበረሰብ አንቁነት ስራ የሚሰሩ ጋዜጠኞች የጋዜጠኝነትን መርሆዎች እና ተአማኒነታቸውን ከማረጋገጥ ጋር በተያያዘ ምን መደረግ አለበት ይላሉ? ከዚህ አኳያ የሚያጋሩን ምርጫ ተሞክሮዎች ካሉ?
5. ጉዳዩን ይበልጥ ለማረቅ ተጨማሪ መመሪያዎችና አዋጆች ያስፈልጋሉ ብለው ያምናሉ?
6. ከጋዜጠኞች የማህበራዊ ትስስር ገጾች አጠቃቀም ጋር በተያያዘ ኢ.ቢ.ሲ.ም ሆነ ሌሎች መገናኛ ብዙኃን የሚያጋጥሟቸውን ተግዳሮቶችና መልካም አጋጣሚዎች በምን አግባብ መቃኘት ይችላሉ?

ስለተደረገልኝ መልካም ትብብር ከልብ አመሰግናለሁ፡፡

## In-Depth Interview Participants

| Name           | Gender | Education Background                         | Work Experience<br>in <b>EBC</b> | organization               |
|----------------|--------|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Interviewee 1  | M      | BA in Geography                              | 15                               | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 2  | M      | MA in Jou & Com                              | <b>5</b>                         | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 3  | M      | BA in Jou & Com                              | <b>13</b>                        | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 4  | M      | BA in Agriculture                            | <b>15</b>                        | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 5  | F      | BA in Foreign<br>Language & literature       | 5                                | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 6  | M      | MA in Jou & Com                              | 6                                | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 7  | M      | BA in Jou & Com                              | 3                                | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 8  | M      | BA in Jou & Com                              | 7                                | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 9  | F      | BA in Jou & Com                              | 7                                | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 10 | M      | BA in Jou & Com                              | 5                                | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 11 | M      | MA in African Studies                        | 7                                | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 12 | M      | BA in Jou & Com                              | 5                                | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 13 | M      | BA in Jou & Com                              | 5                                | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 14 | M      | BA in Jou & Com                              | 3                                | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 15 | M      | BA in BA in Foreign<br>Language & literature | 13                               | EBC News & Current Affairs |
| Interviewee 16 | M      | MA in Jou & com                              | 13                               | Debre Markos University    |
| Interviewee 17 | M      | M. Ed  | 12                               | Bahir Dar University       |
| Interviewee 18 | M      | MA in Global<br>journalism                   | 10                               | Bahir Dar University       |

**Note:** Jou & Cou = Journalism and Communication