

# Factors that Affect Journalists' Independence

## The Case of Oromia Radio and Television Organization

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to assess the degree of journalists' independence and to what extent journalists' independence exists in the ORTO. Factors that affect journalists' independence of the Oromia Radio and Television Organization were examined under gate-keeping and social responsibility theories. The study was guided by descriptive survey design involving both quantitative and qualitative methods.*

*Questionnaire was the main instruments to collect the data. Besides, random sampling methods were employed to select the respondents of the study. Interviews of reporters and editors used purposive sampling. Document analysis was conducted on press proclamation, editorial policy of the ORTO and code of ethics. The responses of the participants were described in the form of table and percentage. The data obtained from interviews were analyzed qualitatively while the data from questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively.*

*The findings of the study showed there is little journalists' independence in the institutions studied. Journalists also practice self-censorship. In the ORTO, journalists commonly used the propaganda news value as the main criteria. Besides, most journalists favor certain individuals, relatives and groups or party. Also, most journalists in ORTO were members of political party that affects journalists' independence. Furthermore, majority of the journalists sought money and gifts from organizations or individuals because their salaries were low.*

**KEYWORDS:** Oromia, Radio, Television, Republic, Ethiopia

### INTRODUCTION

#### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The history of Ethiopian media has witnessed that very limited journalists' independence under the authoritarian leadership of the Emperor Haile Selassie I and Derge Regime (Wudineh, 2008). Moreover, they used the media as their mouthpieces and instruments of their propaganda. Due to this, journalists' independence was not assumed as a practical instrument for journalists, or the media did not enjoy its freedom of expression. In this regard, Wudineh (2008) and Birhanu (2006) argue that dictators have been common throughout Ethiopian history.

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Whatever press existed during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930-74) and the following dictatorship behaved, with a few exceptions, like willing mouthpieces for the rulers. Only during the 1990s, signs of a free and independent press emerged. During that decade, an overabundance of news magazines and newspapers appeared in Ethiopia.

After the downfall of the Derg regime, the Press Freedom was declared in October 1992 by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. This bill introduced freedom of the press, censorship was prohibited, and the right of access to information was guaranteed. The media also have the right to seek, obtain and report news and information from any government source of news and information. As a result of this proclamation, a great number of newspapers and magazines were published in the country, especially in Addis Ababa. It was a good start on the part of the government to address freedom of expression and to build an independent media. Yet, there have been problems that hinder the media from playing its role properly (wudineh, 2008 and Birhanu, 2006).

Birhanu (2006) asserts that the state media in Ethiopia remains under the government control, though unlike the earlier governments, the private newspapers have grown remarkably. In addition, although it is claimed that the media have been used to promote democratic governance and freedom of speech, the series of Ethiopian governments have ‘muzzled’ the media. The history of mass media in Ethiopia has revealed that the role of journalism has been greatly shaped by the needs and interests of the government in power, which used the mass media to impose its ideology.

Thus, Kruger (2004) argued that journalists and media should be free from the government and any other pressure otherwise the media would lack trust from the people. So, this study tries to examine, the major factor of journalists’ independence in Ethiopia with specific reference to the Oromia Radio and Television Organization. The study looks into the case of the factors that affect journalists’ independence when carrying out their duties in Oromia Radio and Television Organization.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Journalists’ independence is an underlining requirement of journalism and cornerstone for its reliability, credibility and integrity. But, Kruger (2004) note that certain conditions constrain journalists from practicing as independent professionals. These conditions often amount to a conflict of interest that includes accepting gifts, family relationships, the influence of friends, self-interest, personal beliefs, financial interests, political interferences. These create impacts on journalists’ independence and credibility.

On the other hand, Solomon (2005) stated that in Ethiopia, despite any form of restriction prohibited by law, the Ministry of Information and other government officials and politicians still directly control what journalists in the government media broadcast to the audience. Additionally, he emphasized the above idea in Ethiopia disappointing the politicians often ends up in harsh punishment, in coordination with the party members assigned to the media. Solomon (2005) point out, challenges of journalists in Ethiopia: “Warning, suspending and dismissing from their jobs, denying training opportunities and promotion are some forms of punishment. Furthermore, fining, harassing the journalists by criticisms made in the meeting, which is often known as censure, are also forms of punishment (Solomon, p. 14).”

Similarly, according to Gudeta (2008), the contradiction of the press law has posed a threat to the journalists than promoting their independence. Pausewang and Tronvoll (2002) pointed critically, independent journalists in Ethiopia are forced to live under constant threat of arrest as a result of which critical journalism and democratic press that keeps the politicians accountable is undermined.

Thus, even though both researchers have tried to list out factor that affect journalists' independence in Ethiopia but they did not show how these factors that affect journalists' independence in Ethiopia with specific reference to ORT organization. Therefore, this research tries to examine the main factors that affect journalists' independence in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

#### **GENERAL OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The general objective of the study was to examine factors that affect journalists' independence in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization.

#### **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To point out the perception of journalists' towards to journalists' independence in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization.
- To show the extent of journalists' independence in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization.
- To identify the major factors that affect journalist' independence in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY**

Based on the objectives, the study seeks to provide answers for the following research questions:

1. How do journalists in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization perceive journalists' independence?
2. To what extent journalists' independence is practiced in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization?
3. What are the major factors that affect journalists' independence in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization?

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The researcher hopes that this study has the following benefits:

- It gives awareness for those who want to understand importance of journalists' independence and its necessity for enhancing freedom of expression.
- This study may also provide information for Oromia Radio and Television Organization, the Oromia Regional Government, the Federal government and for others which are concerned about journalists' independence in the form of a professional code of ethics.
- The study may help in give awareness about the factors that compromise the independence, integrity and credibility of the Oromia Radio and Television Organization, the Oromia Regional Government and the Federal Government.

## **THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The study focuses on factors that affect journalists' independence in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization. The target population of the study was only editors and reporters who are working in the ORTO.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Most of the editors and journalists were too reluctant to cooperate for the study because of they were busy. The lack of well documented and standardized data about journalists and the media, in general, would be another limitation. For instance, interviewees' refusal to give an interview has limited the researcher's ability to gather data from a larger pool. The busy schedules of the journalists have also been another factor that discouraged some journalists from participating in the study. However, as the result of the researcher tried to convince the head of the three departments and by negotiating journalists, constraints were resolved.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This chapter is dedicated to the presentation of literature review that relates to the concept of journalists' independence and constraints of journalists' independence. It also attempts to assess the prominent theoretical foundations of journalistic independence with particular reference.

Most of the journalists take the role of correspondent in the process of journalists' communication. The empirical research on journalists is going to be addressed based on various theories. Among them, two theories are particularly related to the issue of journalists' independence: gate keeping theory and social responsibility theory.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

The study employed mixed method approach. As Miller (2003) cited in Dagem(2013) point out that the proponents of triangulated approach to research asserts that the results of combining varied approach is a net gain – the strength of each contrasting approach more than conceal the weakness of their counterpart.

As the approach, mixed methods focuses on collecting, analyzing and mixing both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies. Taddesse (2013) point out that the central premises of mixed design is the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination to provide a better understanding of research problems than either approaches can do alone. In mixed design it is enough to analyze qualitative and quantitative data. The data need to be mixed in some way so that together they form a more complete picture of the problem than they do when they are implemented alone.

### **QUANTITATIVE APPROACH**

The first approach that was used to conduct this research is quantitative method. Under this method survey method was implemented. It helps to gather information from large number of population quickly.

It also facilitates the study of human features. This method used to respond that was raised in the research questions to what extent journalists' independence in the ORTO? And, what are the major factors that affect journalists' independence in the ORTO?

### QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The qualitative research method is one of the methods used to conduct this research. It has own features that differentiate it from quantitative research. In qualitative research, the research is conducted in the natural setting of social actors and this helps to understand peoples' motivations, attitudes and behavior. Qualitative research was implemented for its advantages as stated on Stone et al. (1999), it is more appropriate for examining words and ideas rather than counting numbers. This method used to respond the three questions that were raised in the research questions: how do journalists in the ORTO perceive journalists' independence? To what extent journalists' independence is practiced in the ORTO? And, what are the major factors that affect journalists' independence in the ORTO?

### SAMPLES AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The participants of this study were 154 journalists of Oromia Radio and Television Organization. Among 154 journalists the researcher selected 50 journalists using simple random sampling technique. The reason for employing only 50 participants for the questionnaires, the nature of their work were not allowed (they were busy on their work). These participants were selected using lottery system for the questionnaire. The researcher employed this sampling technique to give equal chance for all participants. These 50 journalists were selected to fill questionnaire whereas to conduct interview 6 journalists were chosen using purposive sampling technique. This was done because the researcher believed that these 6 journalists the more they have experienced the more they can give genuine and ample data for the study.

### DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

To gather the necessary data semi-structured questionnaire, semi-structured interview and document were conducted.

### QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to gather the required data questionnaire were employed. In this research, the need to conduct questionnaire were intended to collect data from large group of respondent. In view of that, 50 copies of the questionnaires were distributed to journalists and forty five were appropriately filled and while three were incomplete and 2 were completely unfilled. The questionnaires were distributed 50(14 editors and 31 reporters) journalists of ORTO.

The items provided in the questionnaire were categorized in-to two parts. The first part is the demographic information of respondents (journalists). The second part is on the questions that discuss the overall evaluation of factors that affect journalists' independence in the OTV. The questionnaires were developed in English language. Pilot study was employed to increase the reliability of the questionnaire before the actual study was conducted. At the pilot stage, the researcher selected 20 participants from ORTO those were out of the sample actual study. Based on the findings of the pilot study necessary amendments and corrections were done. After certain amendments were done, the questionnaires were administered for 50 journalists then the researcher collected.

## **SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**

The interview was conducted with the key informants through Afan Oromo and Amharic language. Interview data also make possible to gather historical data under the study (Ibid). The data were basically collected from respondents through Oromiffa and Amharic languages. Then the researcher translated their speech in to English language in order to made analysis.

These key informants were selected purposively based on their experience. The informants were selected with experience above 2 year within the organization. The need to conduct in-depth interviews as explained above was to get a deeper view of the interviewee regarding the factors that affect journalists' independence in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization (ORTO).

All the questions were open-ended for such questions, according to Miller and Brewer (2003), have an advantage in that they help the researcher elicit explained responses. The researcher conducted the interview on 15-16/8/2014.

## **METHOD OF DOCUMENT ANALYSIS**

In addition to questioner and semi structured interview, the researcher employed document analysis. According to Prior(2004), documents are put forward for consideration in schemes of social research and are approached in terms of what they contain and the focus is primarily on the language embodied in the document.

He also puts it as the content of a document is flexible not least because documents have always to be read and reading implies that the content of the document will be situated rather than fixed. Documents are source of data and are used in relation to the subject under the study. The document can be put within a context and hence were support the main tool of data collection. Besides, the document itself can be analyzed depending on the objective and perspective of a study. And, within the context of this research, documents like press proclamation and editorial policy of OTV were used. However, the researcher tried to review articles of editorial policy of the OTV documents; it was not ratified in the form of article by article.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

After the data has been gathered, the researcher has analyzed the data according to the nature of the method in which they are gathered. The researcher analyzed quantitative data for most of the topics using descriptive statistics and percentages. With respect to the qualitative data which were collected using interviews were analyzed by interpreting the responses of the participants in relation to theories about factors which shape the independence of journalists. In addition, document were analyzed through interpreting the articles in relation with journalists' independency theory

## **DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The study was mainly intended to identify the major factors that affect journalists' independence in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization. Besides, the assessing the perceptions of journalists about journalists' independence and examining the extent of journalistic independence were additional concerns. To find out the perception of journalists Questionnaire was distributed to fifty radio and television journalists.

From these journalists, 14 of them are editors, and 36 are reporters. Of the total 50 questionnaires, 45(14 editors and 31 reporters ) were filled properly and returned with a response rate of 90 %. Three questionnaires were given back completely unfilled and two questionnaires were incomplete. Hence, only 45(14 of editors and 31 for reporters) questionnaires were considered for the study. In addition, interviews were conducted in depth with 6 key informants (journalists) purposively selected from three different main departments (news, entertainment and educational) of the OTV organization. Therefore, the presentation and analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data has been analyzed consecutively. The first section discusses the quantitative analysis and second section is to give more discussion dealing with the qualitative analysis.

### SUMMARY

This research attempted to examine the perception of journalists' independence, to show the extent of journalists' independence and to identify the major factors that affect journalists' independence in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization (ORTO). The study has employed mixed(quantitative and qualitative) methods. Accordingly, a survey of 45 Oromia Radio and Television Organization journalists and six interviewed informants were used as sources of data. Moreover, documents such as; FDRE constitution and Press proclamation and the editorial policy of ORTO were analyzed. The researcher used get keeping and social responsibility theory as a theoretical frame work. Accordingly, the main findings of the study were summarized and concluded as follows.

After all, the following are the major findings of the study.

- With regard to the perception of journalists to wards to journalists' independence in ORTO, the study has revealed that the journalists in the ORTO beliefs that there are no journalists' independence.
- Journalists do not have the right to broadcast all kinds of news stories even though their news stories are professionally accepted.
- In the ORTO there were editorial meetings but the journalists did not involve or they were not allowed to participate. The editorial meeting most of the time included chief editors, the heads of departments (entertainment, educational and news), and managers in the organization.
- Journalists practice self-censorship in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization.
- The journalists' work (like prepared news stories, programs) were corrected and censured by editors and chief editors. In other words, the chief editors and editors had mandate to select and decide the kind of news that will be provided by journalists.
- Journalists in ORTO were members of political party. Which seems another factor that affects journalists' independence
- There are financial constraints (like seeking additional payments, gifts, and dissatisfactions with their salary) from journalists in the ORTO.
- Journalists did not have the right to prepare programs by themselves. However, the editorial board, editors and chief editors' determined the works of the journalists.
- Reporters in the ORTO have favored certain individuals, relatives and groups or party. Unlike reporters, editors did not involve in the phase of favoring relatives, individuals, party or the other.
- The editorial policy of the ORTO, most parts of the contents(articles) are stated in general form.

### CONCLUSIONS

The journalists in the ORTO believe that there is no journalists' independence and journalists' independence in the ORTO is in problematic situation. With regard to this, Temesgen (2013) suggested that independence is a

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major journalists' ethical foundation that should be given emphasis.

This is due to the fact that credibility is very crucial for building the image of a given media house on behalf of the public. Kruger (2004) argue, the journalists' independence is substantial because the credibility of journalists which is the basis of their role in a democratic country. So the public trust on journalists is achieved by being independent of any influence that can hurt the profession.

The journalists in the ORTO are not independent. In other words there is no journalists' independence in the ORTO. There is an editorial meeting but the journalists are not allowed to participated rather the editorial meeting had included chief editors, the heads of three departments (entertainment, educational and news), and managers in the organization. Therefore, they had mandates to select and decide the kinds of news that were prepared by journalists. However, the Ethiopian constitution of article 29 sub articles 1-3 point out "everybody has the right to seek, to receive and impart information without any intervention."

Thirdly, the study has found that there are factors that affect journalists' independence in the ORT like: journalists practice self-censorship in the ORTO that means, even if the news stories had social values and if they contradict with the federal and regional constitution, the news stories would be discarded. Moreover, journalists are guided how, where and when to prepare news stories. Additionally, in the Oromia Radio and Television Organization journalists are commonly used the propaganda model as the main criteria.

Moreover, journalists in ORT were members of political party which seems another factor that affects journalists' independence.

Besides, the study found that, most journalists have favored certain individuals, relatives and groups or party. On the other hand, unlike reporters, editors did not involve in the phase of favoring the other. Kruger (2004) and Retief (2002) pointed that journalists should strive not to be any political party because it will affect their independence and credibility. Moreover, Wudineh (2008) suggests that if journalists would be free, they can work the news story in a balanced way.

Furthermore, journalists' sought money and gift from organizations or individuals because, they were dissatisfied with their salary. On the contrary, Kruger (2004) and Retief (2001) argue, journalists should not receive any other gifts from any organization; otherwise, they lose their independence to work freely. Retief (2001) suggest that journalists should not accept any gift, free travel, favor and special treatment which compromise their integrity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are forwarded in order to improve factors that affect journalists' independence in the ORTO.

- The ruling party should not impart on the journalists work since journalists' ethics would not allowed it. Since media is one of the instrument that serve between the people and government as a bridge. As a result of this, media and journalists should not be compromise their independence in order to enhance their credibility in the eyes of the public as well as the government. According to Kruger (2004), unless the media act independently from any interference, it may lack credibility from the people. Credibility and integrity is one of the most significant for any media institution.
- Journalists in the ORTO to solve their problems/factors that affect their work of their independence, they should resolve their problem through discussion with their staff members as well as with their management.
- The government should adjust their salary in a well condition for the journalists. Financial constraints may threaten journalists to ensure their work efficiently in the Organization.



- Managers and editors and reporters should do collaboratively, to satisfy the public interest at large. Therefore, journalists should focus not only on developmental issues but also they should focus on different news stories or issues (politics, cultural, social or any other).

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