An Investigation of News Framing at the 6th General Election of Ethiopia: The Case of Bonga FM 97.4

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Abstract

This study is an investigation of the news framing of the 6th general election in Ethiopia by Bonga FM 97.4. The main goal of the study was to examine how the station framed and reported its news stories during the 2021 general election in Ethiopia, focusing on source and tone distribution among the parties. The principle of Creswell et al. (2003)'s explanatory sequential mixed method approach was used to come up with the data presented in the study in the road of cross sectional design. The study utilized framing and agenda setting theories as the bases for the analysis of the news stories. Samples were selected after identifying election related news from March 2021 to May 2021 proportionally. Using stratified sampling, a total of 82 samples news were taken from each month (26, 31, and 25). The contents from these months were analyzed using structured code sheets under 6 analytical categories by which the media passed through to frame the news. Three reporters and two editors were selected purposively to have deep understanding of how they framed the news, and how they were challenged when covering the 2021 campaign. The finding indicated that in spite of its valuable role of informing the public with its informative frame, the station dominantly used the issue frame over others, and used the ruling party as a source that mostly echoed a positive tone to it. The reporters have been challenged differently from internal and external bodies; after all the study forwarded recommendation that the media station has to be reformed practically in terms of its independence, should work on political reporting routinely, should minimize implicit interference and restrictions. We recommend that an extended study has to be done on this issue.

Keywords: News framing, campaign reporting, political communication, local media, political parties

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Background of the Study

The role of media in providing information and changing awareness of the public could be seen as the reflection of media as a fourth state. It has an essential watchdog function, and its messages can shape public opinion and set agendas (Maswanganyi, 2016). A media that responsibly serve the public can strengthen the democratic process and contribute to a more credible and inclusive election; this position though can make the media a target (Arthur, 2010). This institution can be co-opted by a particular interest or party and be used to sway public opinion for or against issues, groups or candidates (Howard, Woolley & Calo, 2018). In some contexts, this has fueled election-related conflict and violence. In these circumstances independent journalists and media houses can suffer from intimidation and harm (UNDP, 2014). Certain parts of the process can be particularly susceptible to these problems, including the electoral campaign and election result reporting, but biased or partisan reporting could affect the entire electoral process starting with the conception of the electoral system and elaboration of its legal framework (King, 1990).

Freedom of speech and, by extension, freedom of the media, is a cornerstone of democracy. This vital right consists of the right to impart and receive information freely. Freedom of speech is also an 'enabling right' that supports a wide range of other rights, such as those of assembly and association. These are central components of a free and fair electoral environment and pluralistic democratic process. But these crucial and the most important aspects of democratic structure, which are supported by media were being blurred in developing nations especially in lower structure of the state. Basically, Ethiopia was being challenged by the interests of autocrat leaders in the past electoral histories except third round election (2005) even its post-election stage was complicated (Abbink, 2006).

The EPRDF government continued with a similar practice of past regimes in adopting proclamations and laws which systematically restricted the exercise of freedom of expression and press freedom until April 2018 when the reformist leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) ushered in a new era of hope for freedom of expression and democracy in Ethiopia. But, it is challenging to conclude at this change because the previous governments of Ethiopia used to make the media environment free when they came to power, and later on they dramatically have returned back (Gagliardone, 2014).

Although transnational and national media are doing this job, the public in the rural area expects more from local media. This time, the audience in urban area are somehow educated enough, can access any information via multi media outlets (Klinenberg, 2005; Pavlik, 2001). They have the chance to get information which they lost and want further in different options. But the public in rural area have to wait for such few media around their community or national level as they may be the only media they could get media contents that are transmitted via their own languages. When we state this concern, precisely, the public at local level needs an issue which directly concerns their lives (Parry, Moyser & Day, 1992; Miller, 2002); at the same time, news source matters more and selection of issue (agenda) as well (Reese et al., 2001). If we say so, an association of individual party and raised issue with it can determine the framing. After all, the framing type and tone of the framing could be constructed based on its nature of issue, source and regulations (editorial policy) of the medium.

As politicians and voters increasingly communicate via mass media, the interdependence between media and political institutions raises concerns about the ability of media to inform and foster a forum for deliberation (D'Alessio & Allen 2000; Strömbäck 2008; Tresch 2009 cited in Çarkoglu, Baruh & Yildirim, 2014). Debates regarding this interdependence between media and political institutions focus on issues related to media bias and, particularly, press-party parallelism, defined as the degree of alignment between a group of media and a political party. To interlink the relationships among media and political institutions, we have to be clear enough to identify the practice of framing election related news even it depends on the news source and media landscape of the country. When we brought the scenario to investigate in Ethiopian context, it was attainable for the study in local structure/local media hence the implementation level of institutions at the higher and local levels was not one and the same.

Statement of the Problem

A good media routinely serves its audience, but the best media lets its audience to think and select within out of any interference. One of the functions of the media is to cover political issues in a professional sense (Said, 1982; Dupagne & Garrison, 2006). The media should also have the freedom to cover all relevant election-related issues, including the work of the election administration, alternative policies and platforms (Wiesehomeier & Benoit, 2009); it is also the responsibility of the media to cover the activities of candidates and parties, problems and incidents

that occur during the election campaign, election-day procedures and the announcement of election results. (ODIHR, 2012)

In addition, the media need to have the freedom to take an active role in the process of informing voters Helberger, (2019) by offering them a diverse range of views, including those of journalists and political analysts. According to Ojo (2003) cited in Ihechu (2019) the role of the mass media in any developing society is to keep the citizens well informed. Unless citizens have adequate and accurate information on all the issues and problems confronting them, they will be unable to take enlightened decisions on their living (Ekeli, 2005). When we think about informing the public, fairness and being free from any fear or favor should be the primary concern to the media in framing and delivering timely and current issue. Above all, media managers and owners should accept the principles of journalistic independence and objectivity (Hackett, & Zhao, 2019). They should demand that their employees act in strict conformity with these principles and that they do not favor a particular candidate or party while framing the news/program stories.

The role of mainstream media in developing countries is highly promoted and practical, especially in rural areas. Relatively, in developing nations, people who live in rural area couldn't afford the technologies, and as a result they lack information. This is why the local media are vital and necessary to share current, local and national issue which directly affects the public. Regarding to this, the study area is found in south west Ethiopia which was recently established and being served by only this station even the radio station is the branch of South Radio and Television Agency. In the context of rural based contents, the public around the study area especially Kafa and Sheka Zones need highly demanded media services in such ocasions (campaign time news), however there was no research conducted in this setting. That is why assessing the practice of framing campaign time news on Bonga FM 97.4 was timely issue to be studied for the benefits of the public who have to get meaningful information that helps them decide on their own living and national democratic improvement.

The fundamental importance of local media to local democracy remains integral (Huntsberger, 2020). The study of Bello & Wilkinson (2017) on Tanzanian community radio reveals that the community radio sector is strategically helping to unfold a democratic society by giving citizens the opportunity to communicate their opinions and actions to others around them. On the other hand, Jinmi-Ahisu (2021) adds an analysis on electoral conflict pre- and post-2015 and 2019 elections of Nigeria as

electoral violence reporting is particularly sensitive to political biases in the news media. Also, Abdollahyan & Machika (2017) concluded that political campaign messages aired by local radio stations were an essential factor in the political decisions of the electorates in Kano-Nigeria. These analyses show that Some African news media reported on electoral violence relatively independently from political pressures. In Ethiopia, the experiences show that there were no clear boundaries between media and the ruling party ideology during elections yet (Stremlau, 2011). This study intended to review the existing reality of campaign reporting at local setting in Ethiopian media.

Ethiopian media are highly dependent on official sources while covering election related issues, (Ashenafi Abate, 2013). However, his study was on privately owned print media, it revealed the dominance of issue frames over game frames in the Ethiopian media landscape during the 2005 general election. Also, Ashenafi Gudeta, (2012) examined mainly three newspapers (Addis Zemen, Reporter & Awramba Times) framing status of 2010 general election; Addis Zemen portrayed EPRDF positively but Medrek negatively, and Reporter (with some exceptions) and Awramba Times portrayed EPRDF negatively but Medrek positively. Yared Mekonen (2016), in his conclusion on Fana's coverage of election 2015, news and program of political messages that inform and educate voters were transmitted with special debate and discussion programs on the weekly 'Mogach' talk show; still the study was limited from touching framing fairness.

At the national level, some political experts confirm that there is improvement in the 6th round of campaign in terms of fair mediation of parties compared to the earlier, however, this study assessed as there were limitations at this setting in applying this reform appropriately. The researchers have not found empirical research on 6th round election except the report of IRI & NDI, 2021. Beyond the experiences and observations of the researcher, opposition parties especially Mocha Democratic Party in the study area was complaining as the ruling party was misleading the process of campaign up to disrupting constituent parties (IRI & NDI, 2021). Moreover, the problem was not studied on broadcast media, but Yared Mekonen (2016) studied on Fana's coverage; this round of election was not empirically studied, particularly in the context of a local media covering issues at a local level.

Objectives of the Study

The general aim of this study was therefore to investigate how Bonga FM 97.4 reported its news stories during the 2021 general election of Ethiopia. More specifically, it tried to answer the following questions:

1. How did Bonga FM 97.4 frame the 2021 election related news stories?

2. What were the dominant sources used while covering election related stories?

3. How was the tone of the station's news when election-related issues were framed?

4. What were the challenges for reporters when framing news stories on election issues?

Literature Review

Framing Campaign News Reports

The origins of the term framing within the context of communication are in photography and cinematography, wherever framing refers to such variables as point of view/camera angle and perspective in the styling of a visible message (Reese et al., 2008). Framing is deciding where an images begins and ends – is as vital to the meaning of an image as composition.

News has been defined differently by different experts. News is what is new; it is what is happening (Potter, 2006). It comprises all current activities which are of general human interest and the best news is that which interests most of the reader (Hughes, 2017). News is information that is published in newspapers and broadcast on radio and television about recent events in the country or world or in a particular area of activity. Anything that enough people want to read is news provided it does not violate the canons of good taste and the law of libel.

News exists in the minds of humans, and it is not an event; it is something perceived after the event. It is not identical with the event. But it is an attempt to reconstruct the essential framework of the event. Essential event is defined as a frame of reference which is calculated to make the event meaningful to the audience (Schramm, 1949). News report is coded for transmission, usually by persons who have had no connection with the actual event. The main things objectivity and fairness come here, however objectivity stands for journalistic methods. Journalists also strive to be fair in their reporting by not telling one-sided

stories. They look for contrasting views and report on them without favoring one side or another (Potter, 2006).

Sources in journalism/media are defined as any person, publication, or other record or document which can help the journalist to get credible information to develop story. A story told without sources is a fictitious story which lacks credibility, Ashenafi (2013). Sources add human interest, credibility, color etc. which are very crucial to attract audience attention. The use of sources become more important among journalists while they deal with issues related with high sensitive areas like that of politics. This happens because any word which is being said or told by top officials can affect the livelihood of the general public in one way or another (Miller & Krosnick, 2000). Official sources as Manning (2001) contend includes various departments of states, leaders and senior figures within political parties, the institutions of law and security, interest groups among others.

A central point of concern for the relationship between reporters and sources is that if the journalistic paradigm calls for turning to authoritative news sources, then those believed to possess authority will have a better chance of getting a voice in the news (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009 pp. 109). However, there is no cross cut standard of leveling political news as positive, negative and neutral; the scholars of the field use their own operationalized meaning with associating literature. Most of them depend on the news sources and operationalize the news stories based on the sources (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010), while others start from identifying news stories as good and bad (Patterson, 2000: 25 in Lengauer et al. 2011). Still frame analysis could be extended into other various lenses like economic, conflict, gender and like; hence it depends on the analyzer purpose.

According to Lengauer et al. (2011), tones of the stories mainly determine as frame related and actor relate; thus frame related tones are integrated with their sources. "A political report can be classified as being predominantly positive or negative in tone, irrespective of specific topics or actors discussed and involved. Individual evaluations of candidates and parties may be diverse within one report, but the overall tone abstracts from these actor-related details and reflects the summary picture." (pp. 183). For them, retrospective, concurrent, or prospective accounts on disastrous, threatening, disputing, criticizing, fiasco-centered discussions or references to defeatism are negative tone, and depictions of political success, achievement or prosperity may serve as indicators of a predominantly positive portrayal of politics.

In a frequently cited definition, Tankard et al., (1991) represented a media frame as a "central organizing plan for news content that provides a context and suggests what the problem is through the utilization of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration" (p. 3). Specifically in terms of salience, Entman (1993) in Reese et al. (2008) explained a frame as:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described, (p. 52).

While newsmakers may employ many different frames in their coverage of an issue, scholars agree that this abundance in choice in how to tell and construct stories can be captured in analyses as certain distinctive characteristics (De Vreese, 2005).

There are different literatures and viewpoints on the concept and typology of media framing. In a broad sense, there are two types of framing: episodic and thematic. Episodic framing depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances or specific events (Iyengar & Simon, 1993, p. 369 cited in Asenafi 2012), whereas thematic framing places public issues in some general or abstract context. In addition there is also conflict, game, economic, strategy/issue/policy attribute and so on; but if we conceptualize deeply, we can get these all specific types under these two categories.

A third type of framing is an attribute framing, also called "second-level agenda setting". It demonstrates that journalism's stress on specific characteristics of an issue or an individual will have an effect on attitudes. Once a fascinating attribute of an object is stressed, it will lead societies to think about the object positively/absolutely than when an undesirable feature is emphasized. This frame highlights one characteristic of an object or scenario in either a positive or a negative light. While the frame emphasizes a desirable attribute, the client is more doubtless to require action, and the frame emphasizes an undesirable attribute, the customer is a less amount likely to take action. The challenge with this kind of frame is to know what qualities the audience thinks are desirable (Boukes, 2021); he concludes that the way how episodic and thematic frame conveyed matters what attribute frame seems like.

According to Nord and Strömbäck (2006), Gans (1980) and Sigal (1973), the relationship between journalists and their political sources is a mutual relationship whereby both need each other to accomplish their duty. A journalist needs a politician to build their story and a politician needs a journalist to reach the wider public. Such relationships are well pronounced in times of hot political periods, like elections, in which the journalist strives to accomplish its social responsibility role by informing the citizenry about the election, polls, and the candidate, whereas the politician needs the journalist to deliver their political plans to the electorate (Gans, 1980; Sigal, 1973).

A central point of concern for the relationship between reporters and sources in frame analysis is that if the journalistic paradigm calls for turning to authoritative news sources, then those believed to possess authority will have a better chance of getting a voice in the news (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009). However, there is no cross-cut standard of leveling political news as positive, negative, and neutral; scholars of the field use their own operationalized meaning associating with pieces of literature. Most of them depend on the news sources and operationalize the news stories based on the source (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010), while others start by identifying news stories as good and bad (Patterson, 2000: 25 in Lengauer et al.2011). Still, frame analysis could be extended into other various lenses like economics, conflict, gender, and the like; hence, it depends on the analyzer's purpose.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting

Mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of issues on their news agenda to the public agenda. According to journalism professors Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, broadcast and print personnel make a deliberate attempt to influence listener, viewer, or reader opinion on the issues (Griffin, 2012). An "Original agenda of media is not about what to think, but what to think about.''

According to, It has been argued that the public sees the world, not as it is, but through the filter of the media (McCombs, 2005; Franklin, 1998). Media agenda can directly affect the public and save them from undesirable direction if it is settled in fair and professional manner. While this may hold good for the public's view of events occurring on the other side of the world, of which the ordinary person will have little or no knowledge, it is not so straightforward a proposition when applied to the local media.

Framing Theory

Framing, as a theory of mass communication, refers to how the media packages and presents information to the public. The media highlights certain events and then places them within a particular context to encourage or discourage certain interpretations. In this way, the media exercises a selective influence over how people view reality. Framing is sometimes referred to as second-level agenda setting because of its close relation to agenda setting theory (D'angelo, 2018).

Framing scholarship emphasizes the created nature of media messages, and sometimes examines media portrayals of problems as clues to journalists' framing decisions. These framing decisions, in turn, offer vital proof concerning the flow of power in society. Framing scholarship generally concentrates on the communicator's framing, that is, the journalist's framing. Hence, the game frame could be a 'journalistic' frame, created by the media instead of by their sources. By contrast, issue or 'strategic' frames are seen as introduced publically discourse by sources, particularly within the context of campaign (Hanggli and Kriesi, 2010, p. 154).

Agenda setting theory is the beginning in framing theory. As a result of the standard emphases of the framing and agenda-setting analysis traditions, they complement one another to a substantial degree. The convergence of those research traditions will yield a larger unity in our data. Precisely, the end results are often a unified theoretical framework linking communication settings, starting from news sources and interest teams through the media to the public. It is here that agenda setting and framing share common ground.

Methodology of the Study

Most commonly, the study of the informative treatment of election campaigns has intended to carry out from cross-sectional approaches (Muñiz et al., 2017). This study has applied a cross-sectional research design since it addresses the need to document facts at a single moment in time (Ruane, 2005) just as a snapshot checks a moment in time; cross-sectional research captures information at one moment in time. This study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed research approach hence a cross-sectional strategy entails data gathering in more than one way and at one period of time to collect a body of quantitative and qualitative data in connection with two or more variables respectively which qualitative data has given detail support on early collected quantitative account of

the subject (Bryman & Bell, 2019), which are then examined to detect patterns of association (Bryman 2012).

The researcher used a mixed method approach to resolve the paradigm debates between qualitative and quantitative research approaches to become a widely used mode of inquiry (Creswell, 2014; Terrell, 2012). The population of this study was the streaming news (204) which are election-related news (archives) of Bonga FM 97.4, and the sample was selected intentionally from March 2021- May 2021, because this period was the time during which the campaign was actively delivered to the public based on the time frame of NEBE. So in this study, the researchers applied stratified sampling depending on time stratification (in three Months) and selected the sample (40%) from each stratum through systematic random sampling from each section/month.

The common way "for selection of items for the sample from each stratum, resorted to is that of simple random sampling. Systematic sampling can be used if it is considered more appropriate in certain situations" (Kothari, 2004, p. 63). So to have a representative from each stratum, this formula, $\text{Stra1} = \frac{ni}{N}\text{n}$, $\text{Stra2} = \frac{nii}{N}\text{n}$ & $\text{Stra3} = \frac{niii}{N}\text{n}$ has been applied; or $\text{Stra1} = \frac{n}{N}ni$ has given as a common coefficient to multiply by the rest total of each stratum simply. Where ni, nii & $niii$ stand for the size of each stratum, N total number of population and n stands for whole sample size. By using this formula, from each stratum, 26, 31, 25 (82 in total) samples were selected as a sample.

The data has been gathered quantitatively through scheming and coding news stories in order to identify how they have framed election related stories. To do so, two coders were selected from JU postgraduate program students who are the speaker of kafigna and trained to code the archive news. After training the coders, pilot study was conducted on 8 (10% of the sample) news stories in order to check inter coder reliability. The researcher has used the formula proposed by Holsti (1969) i.e. R= $\frac{2M}{N1+N2}$, where M is the number of coding decisions on which two coders agree, and N1 and N2 are the total segments by the first and second coder, respectively (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011:172). The researcher used this model for its simplicity, however, there are other models for more than three and complex coders. So, the inter-coder level of agreement was 93.75% which indicated the existence of adequate reliability.

In addition to this, five purposively selected practitioners of the station have given the in-depth details, and document reviews were used as qualitative data. So, the data of this study was analyzed mainly in a quantitative way statistically via SPSS version 26 and qualitatively by scheming the in-depth interviews and qualitative content reviews relating to the document reviews. For the reliability and accuracy of the data, the interviews and three productions have been transcribed, translated, and qualitatively interpreted carefully. The translation was done by the researchers with great responsibility.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Findings and Discussion

Since the main purpose of this study was to investigate news framing trends of local media, issue selection/focus matter more while setting agendas, particularly second-level agenda setting i.e. framing news stories during the campaign. In this part of the presentation and finding, the study intended to identify the levels and types of issues reported since the selection of cases directly affects the framing and finally affects that of the entire audience. Events, however, can be considered specific components of issues (Rogers and Dearing, 1988 in Gunter, 2000). So, based on existing pieces of literature and the results shown below, this study reveals how every process starting from issue preference contributes to one's news framing of political communication. However, events are not exploited from the issue, but the nature of events determines the types of issue. Precisely, events can be seen under issue preference, particularly in political reporting.

A story that is newsworthy, interesting, significant, and about people is going to be a very good story indeed. One way of deciding the strength of a story is to check how much the story is nearest to the target audience (proximity) it meets. This is why the audience needs more about the issue that matters in his/her living, especially in the country side. As the purpose of this study, the most demanding concern at local stations is working to the satisfaction of their audience in terms of making the news items worthy of their living. The audience can perceive the news by reframing or taking it as it is if and only if the story is about their lives since it comes after practical association and tasting. So, frame building and analysis go through issue selection, and the station's issue-level was dominantly local (65.8%).

Types of the issue repported
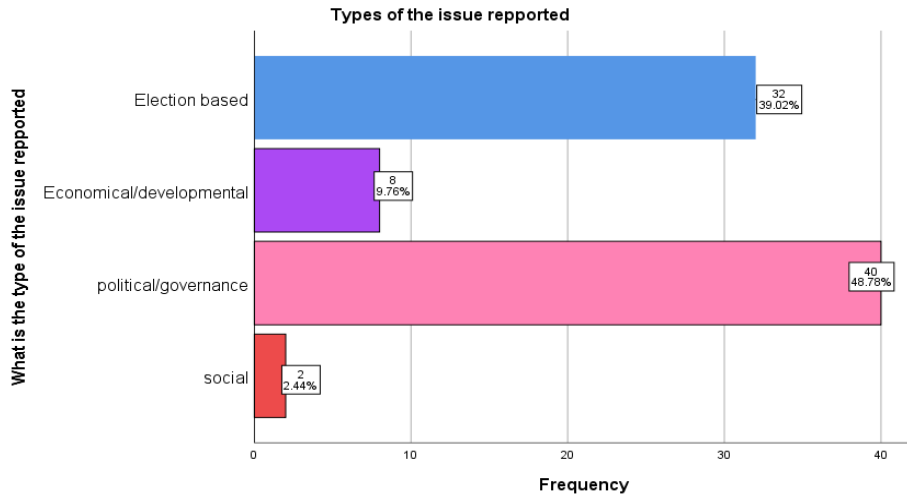
According to the data indicated above on the bar graph, the news stories reported during the campaign of the 6th general election of Ethiopia in the station (Bonga FM 97.4) have been leveled at local dominantly and focused mainly on political issues (48.8%) and election based (39%) respectively. In this section, the finding on issue selection i.e. the dominance of political issues over others especially on election-based matters directly affects the framing. This is why to frame; someone has to select what is to be framed. If an election-based issue was dominant while selecting cases, then the informative framing would become a dominant frame.

Dominant Frames Used

As the first objective of this study, the following data were presented in terms of presenting the dominant types of news frames used during the 2021 election campaign of Ethiopia via Bonga FM 97.4. Following the types of news frames, detailed data on the determinants that have gone through in farming are presented in compiled tables from SPSS output. So, it is possible to see from these data how to issue selection, source selection matter on tone distribution to parties, and determine the types of news framing.

Types of frames

Strategic

Issue

Informative

0   20
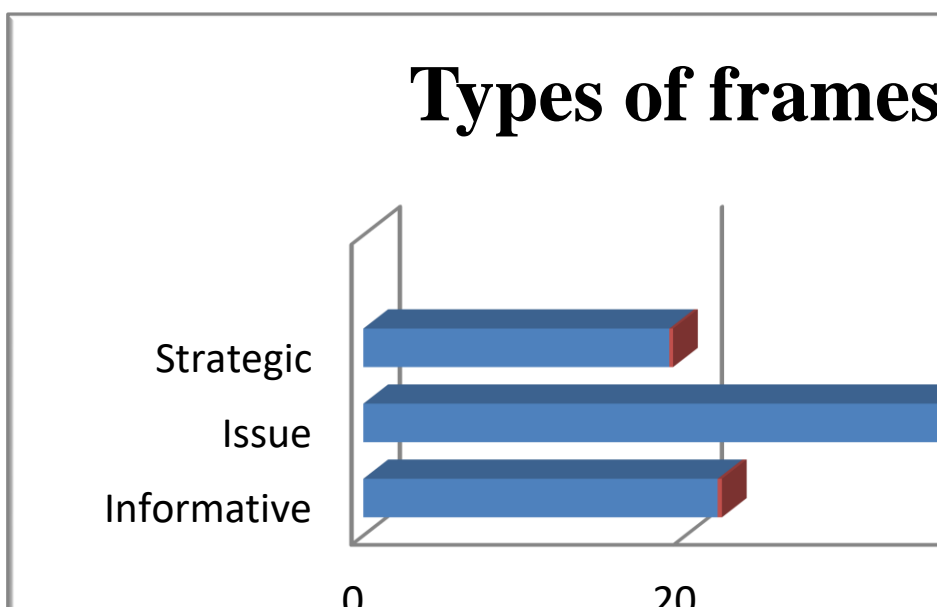
Based on the result shown above, the dominantly revealed frame of the station was the issue frame (41 news out of 82 i.e. 50%), and the informative frame was the next, i.e., 22 news (26.8%) which also followed by strategic frame 19 news (23.2%). Is the difference between informative frame and strategic frame significant? As it has been seen in the literature review and conceptual framework, these frames are found in the collective process which was from issue selection to source usage tone distribution. Most commonly, political issue in their nature leads the framing category into issue framing and strategic as this study finding also revealed. The political issue can be related to any cases, personnel, and institutions; since the political actors intended to achieve their goal at the election in giving relief to the public. Concerning informative framing, it is simply related to the election-based issue which is mainly intended to give knowledge and information about elections i.e. sourced from democratic institutions and finally reveals a neutral tone.

To have a clear line on their practice on news framing, this study tried to investigate how their dominant frame was as such, and if they were under fear or favor via in-depth interview. As is evident in the extract, they were not under fear or favor although they haven't framed as they planned, as explained by Respondent 02: "I think this round of election related news was reported out of fear or favor, because our main concern was informing the public about the advantages and features of election rather telling about parties." (Respondent 02)

In addition, let us refer to NEBE's code of conduct No 02/1013-Article 16 - Responsibilities of the Media on Electoral Issues:

- The state media must ensure that all competing political parties have a fair chance to present their case to the electorate.

- Election-related news, reports, and current affairs broadcasts by the media should be up-to-date, impartial, balanced, and accurate.

- The media and journalists should avoid direct or indirect pressure from: a) the owner of the media, b) the government, c) the advertising agency;

In relation to the rule of election board, they perceived as they have been trained to frame similarly however the code of conduct clearly guide to be fair and balance:

> Hence we have been trained and oriented from election NEBE; we framed and reported as such with other mediums like EBC, FANA, WALTA and others. So I think the previous 6th round election was framed similarly through different media outlets even in private/public, national/local. (Respondent 01)

Of course, it might be similar with the way/standard they used to frame, but it is difficult to decide the frame itself can be the same because frame is out of different process like issue and source mainly. Also, the training manual was about how they have to report, and maintain balance rather than about specific issue selection or framing types.

Almost all respondents believe that their station has played a meaningful role in serving the public by reporting the news that can add value in informing, promoting their states on democratic voting; although their efforts to give relative voices to all constituent parties was limited because of different internal and external factors revealed:

> We have reported this round election campaign better." (Respondent 03)

> When I say this, I am not ignoring the gaps in the total conditions like the scope of political and democratic practice, the media and journalists' commitment, limitations of capacity and budget. (Respondent 05)

Despite the limitations the informants raised (dominancy of political issues over informative issue and ruling party over opposition), this round

election has been reported better at this station. The main reason for those gaps was limited status of opposition parties as respondent 05.

Also their state in terms being free from fear or favor, the result disclosed as they look free from explicit pressure. Their main limitation was budgetary to perform their plans to focus on informing public including the opinions from public itself; even the above quantitative finding reveals as their focus was on political issues. At the same time the respondents reveals as they have been on the way of ruling party in one or another way, because the existing situation like an organized infrastructure/resources and the incompetency of opposition parties make them as such:

> The ruling party has used sufficient opportunities through different stages, meeting, launching, and putting developmental cornerstone to promote itself and has gotten coverage; but the opposition parties were unable to set such conditions. Not only this, but they also were unable to give their members to have their ideas as source and initial of news story. (Respondent 02)

So, this view shows that the access of political events converts them to focus on it than informative issue. However, they raised this reason as a factor that hinders them not to select issues inclusively; the request on their professional efforts could be raised. Because there was no clear authorized restriction in the station do their best:

> Our station was open to treat all parties, but the opposition parties were not ready to promote themselves via our institution. Even most of them haven't organized as party rather than simply named as X party. (Respondent 04)

Additionally, they expressed as opposition parties were under psychological challenges, and they do not trust on the station whether it has been free from fear and favor. When we come to this view, the media's role was vital to change if such awareness gaps were occurred on the opposition parties. It is obvious as such change could not be real at single setting, but their daily activities could gradually change the situations.

In short, the result of framing type (dominantly used frame type) was resulted from their focus when selecting issue, source usage and following tone distribution which boosted the issue and strategic frames. If the focus and their sources were not as such, their dominant framing would be informative, and fairness on the tone distributions to parties could be maintained. But, in this case (findings above); there is an

implication on how station has given better chance to PP which has been shown from source and tone frequencies, however, their justification on this manner is existed. So, based on the above findings, issue frame the station's dominant frame type used; informative and strategic frames were also applied respectively, next to issue frame.

Source of the News Stories

In news media, following an issue selection, source is the crucial concern, however, it is linked with the focus/issue and could be extended to the attribution; it leads the reporters to frame the news story as it has been contributed as possible. When the reporters get information from a source, they normally need to attribute that information to someone. Attribution means to tell the readers or listeners the name and title of the person who is interviewed or document the reporter got the information from. When we come to the main concern (political reporting), our professional treatment while sourcing and attributing could affect the decision of the voters hence being sourced and attributed agent can be more prominent and dominant up on the counterparts; this is why the researcher has reverberated most through literature review about fair treatment of the different bodies or parties if the report/issue is not about neutral matters and informative case.

Table 1: Frequency of the source in the news stories

Used Sources in the news stories	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Official	19	23.2	23.2	23.2
Civic organization	17	20.7	20.7	43.9
Ruling party/PP	22	26.8	26.8	70.7
Opposition parties	3	3.7	3.7	74.4
Public	18	22.0	22.0	96.3
Other	3	3.7	3.7	100.0
Total	82	100.0	100.0	

Where do you get the categories- the coding categories?

As we can see from the above table 1, the station's news stories were dominantly derived /sourced from the ruling party which was drafted from issue selection i.e. political issues based on the finding and finally sourced in such orders (26.8% of the ruling party, 23.2% of officials, 22% of the public, 20.7% of civic organization and lastly 3.7% of opposition parties).

To support this finding, let's see how the respondents reacted to their source usage in news production/framing. They confirmed as official and ruling party dominancy for their reasons.

> The most used source was the ruling party personnel (either from governmental or party events). This was because it has used the events to promote itself and after all, we follow the events, but the oppositions are not strong enough to set the events as much as possible. (Respondent 05)

> It is obvious as we have mainly used official sources and that was linked by ruling party personnel however our focus is informing the public by adding value for their existing knowledge on election. (Respondent 02)

Still, they justified in detail as their main intention was to cover public issues and to use public sources as well civic organizations. But, it is possible to overcome this limitation by focusing on and following the public-based issue by using them as a source. Precisely, their event selection (political) affected them to be in a single way predominantly:

> We have used governmental and ruling party sources since it has more opportunities than others however our focus was election board information in terms of awaking the public. (Respondent 01)

As the researcher tried to find out what sources they have dominantly used for their news stories, most of the respondents (three of them) take that their dominant source was mainly government officials and the ruling party since more opportunities led them this way however their intention was on informative cases with civic organizations and official sources like NEBE. Even these interviewees revealed as they have used PP sources indirectly within official sources; one of the respondents (respondent 05) clearly explained as their dominant source was the ruling party either by government or party personnel because of following the events as a media.

In addition to this, it can be seen how the station's source-tone relationship was constructed and echoed by the ruling party:

> Correct developmental and good governance questions shall be found by the prosperity party, Cheta woreda residents said. The administrator Mr. Mebratu Meshesha who was found at the Support demonstration told the 6th round election is unique because the question i.e. being organized as a regional state which was raised for a long period is going to be answered. (29/09/2013 E.C, Evening)

When we see this news story, it is sourced to the public first and immediately attributed official who was ruling party personnel. However, the event was the party's; it is possible to make it inclusive from the corners of the residents (sourced). It is clear how the source and attribution used in news stories directly contribute to the station's frame categories during campaign reporting.

## Tone of the News Stories on the Political Parties

Perspective and tone while reporting news stories are very crucial points, particularly on political content since they carry too many implications. When dealing with tones, all common tones (positive, negative, and neutral) are useful and have their roles in changing public perceptions, and after all, they should have been treated carefully in a professional sense. However, most might not give the necessary credit; a negative tone itself has an important role if the reporters take care of journalistic concerns. In this view, the tonality of the news stories including negative ones plays a vital role in creating credit/weight on the issue even if it depends on the ownership of the media organizations (Hoff, et.al, 2020).

Through various studies and pieces of literature in media studies, tones were operationalized differently as also negativity as well. Jamali & Hussain (2021) divided negativity into three dimensions i.e. non-directional negativity, directional negativity, and actor-related negativity. Non directional negativity is further divided into overall tonality, not from a pessimistic outlook. Directional negativity is divided into conflict-centeredness and incapability and misconduct. The third dimension is individual actor-related negativity. In one and another way, it would be preferable if the negativity was non-directional or unintentional, however, the result of this study has not depicted negative tones at all.

An issue of tonality depends on the trends and editorial regulations as well as the interest of the medium whether private or public. It could be simple to understand the tone and a trend when the medium was party

however it is not practical in our country. This way the public media have to work effectively on making and delivering a variety of tones to the audience; unless it seems like a partisan institution when its tone is the same. For instance, if its (news) source and tone are dominantly one/single, it tends to be propaganda rather than inclusive news stories. Still, the importance of negative tone is important in political communication in a sense of the actual reality and public benefits to have concepts on the parties before decision. Let us relate this to their editorial policy, as in: "The activities of political parties that engage in illegal activities, whether they have a legal personality or not, will be made public." (Ed. Policy, Part 4: 4.2)

As we have seen in the station's editorial policy, it initiates to use of all tones although they haven't applied negative tones in campaign time on parties. This shows how the reporters were unable to apply such manuals and principles effectively as the next result via pie chart shows.
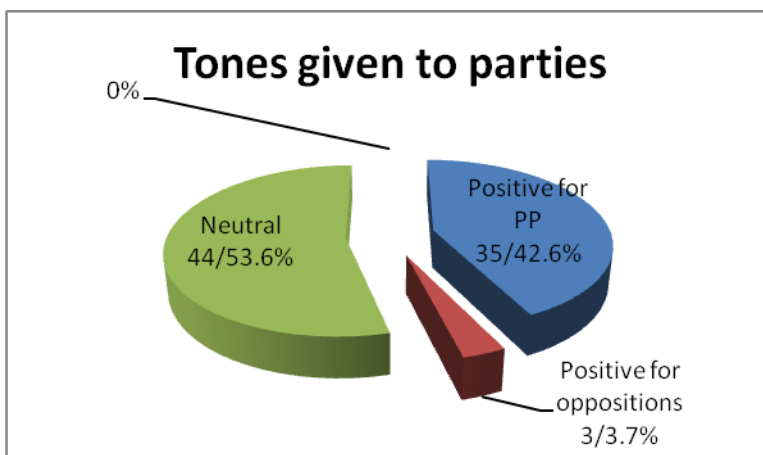
Did you use SPSS for analyzing your quantitative data?

As we can see from this result, the station dominantly revealed a neutral tone (53.6%) and a positive for the ruling party (42.6%) respectively. When we compile all data results the tone was neutral has been derived from election-based issues and public/ civic organization sources while positive for the ruling party was derived from the political issue through party personnel and some official sources. But, still, the tones for opposition parties are limited to only 3.7% (for the rest 6 parties) compared with 42.7 (for the single ruling party). However, their neutral tones were dominant, and positive tones which highly varied among different parties were not treated moderately.

It is possible to see how the news tone via frames can add value to the party on the public mind from one sample news story:

> Kafa zone prosperity party females league members and supporters say prosperity will work to all females' benefit as it makes them equally leading. (06/09/2013 E.C.)

Now one can see how the media messages can make a picture in the audience's mind with their tones. In such a news story, the station was giving positive tones to that party and it was also the proper task of the party, but the task will be meaningful when it gives the necessary opportunity to competing party as NEBE's rule that supports the principles of journalism as Retief (2002:86), makes an attempt to define this elusive word and says: "Fairness is firstly an honest attempt to: *b. Ensure that all parties get their say i.e. equality" and NEBE's* Article 16 –"The state media must ensure that all competing political parties have a fair chance to present their case to the electorate". With this regard, the study has tried to show the overall image and gaps among the practitioners from the integrated data via quantified content and document reviews that reveal how tones make the content strong.

On the other hand, there were no registered negative tones; this shows how the station was not aware of the function of negative tone while framing election time reporting to show their limitation by showing clear images in the public mind. A negative tone is about presenting one party/institution in an inclusive way that contains both weaknesses and strengths unless it would not become meaningful. "Negative news stories are framed as a failure, fiasco, crisis, frustration, default, threat or disappointment" (Hoff, et.al, 2020: pp. 4). From this view, we understand how negative tones are important to reveal political organizations and candidates to the public before they decide to vote.

Shortly, this study found that tonality matters in the station were not treated fairly; since negative tones on parties were not seen, and even positive tones were not distributed fairly. When the researcher came to this end based on the data presented, the station tried to make its tone dominantly neutral even if it was challenged to moderate the rest tones for parties. However, it might be difficult to maintain the fairness of tones because of the existing reality including parties' capacity; it is possible to give a relative distribution to all parties in the election region. But, the data shows that there were parties that did not get tones.

Challenges Faced

From the above presentation, we can see how the station has framed the election campaign for the 2021 Ethiopian general election. In this case, it was not possible to conclude that the station was able to capture all of those aspects of political reporting and make them more effective. However, some things have been done by the media station to achieve better practices in framing election campaigns. As the study planned from the very beginning through the research question and objective stated at number four, to identify the challenges, there were some challenges encountered by the media house during their tasks. In most practical scenarios, there are obvious factors that limit the activities of practitioners not to be in the position they are supposed to be in. Having this reality on the ground, the researcher had to take into account the fact that some challenges can affect the journalists before concluding; and they are forwarded below as the informants.

According to the informants' presentation/responses onchallenges/factors that hindered the station and reporters, we have extracted the findings as follows:

- Incompatibility between source and capacity level among the ruling and opposition parties. Existing infrastructure and administrative structures were serving as the door for that of the ruling party/PP directly or indirectly.

- The limitations /lack of transparency on reporters' selection to be trained and to report campaign news; the selection was based on the interference of party-affiliated officials.

- Budgetary limitations from the station to go further up to the remote areas to make the coverage and framing inclusive via public opinions.

- Awareness gap with the opposition parties in willingness to sell their idea via this station as a public resource. They have suspected the station because of the previous trends and psychological pressures on them from different institutions which have linkages with the ruling party.

- Indirect pressures from officials at lower administrative structures in the public that could be from ruling party's personnel not to give opinions freely on parties.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate how Bonga FM 97.4 reported its news stories during the 2021 general election of Ethiopia, and

after all, it was in order to forward some fruitful suggestions. So, to be included in this purpose, the researcher received some input from the practitioners who could be committed more to their routine tasks:

> Election-related issues should not be sudden tasks per five years; they should be regular tasks since their role is invaluable to feed the democracy from its baseline. When such capacity-building training and supports have been set, its focus should not be limited to national media rather such local (branched) media should be concerned to fill their skill gaps in terms of their role for their local community and after all the main works remain in that community when the election is held. (Respondent 05)

In one or another way, the reporters share as the training on such events should be inclusive to such local stations to serve the public in this setting. However, there was training for reporters, but it was not sufficient and the attention/chances for the stations in the local setting were limited. Also as respondent 03 and 04, competing parties should be structured well to step their reporting manner and democratic practice in general.

Based on the professional concerns of the journalists the researcher interviewed, an issue of media independency in terms of ownership has better be reformed hence the above fairness suspicions, different pressures like the quest for party membership, and budgetary limitations were derived through this case.

> Media stations should be reformed in terms of ownership and managerial bodies. Now public media like this station is led by government/party nominees and after all, you cannot be commutatively fair. (Respondent 03)

With this regard, there were no huge problems with theoretical changes in our country's media as stated in the problem statement, rather than its applicability on the ground because of different bodies including the practitioners. Even we can see how their editorial policy guides that of professional reporting/framing for it says, "Public meetings convened by legitimate political parties; peaceful demonstrations and press releases and other works will be covered." So it had to be practical.

Also, possible supports and training from NEBE are better to be seen, and at the same time, EBA should improve the activities to use such parallel public institutions properly by prioritizing principles and ethics of journalism:

> Firstly, EBA/ current EMA should work hard on the misinterpretation of media on NEBE's rules however NEBE's role is vital in making conditions and rules." Also, NEBE has to improve on inclusive support while training the journalists. Mostly, The professionals at the federal level trained and generalized as nationally worked, but this time the media personnel at the local level could miss more and be less initiated to work as properly as expected. Since it is about the practice of real democracy at the grass root level, the activities in the local setting should be focused more. (Respondent 01)

This respondent also strongly raised the limitations which lay on journalists including him and how they have to improve themselves through individual as well as institutional efforts to have inclusive concepts of political reporting and commitment. When we integrate the practice of democracy from the grass root level, the role of local stations is at the core. As NEBE gives special attention to election regions in the community from the very beginning, special and attentive support had better be given to the reporters at local stations.

Discussion and Interpretation

Framing Campaign Time News

The media are essential to democracy, and a democratic election is impossible without it. A free and fair election is not only about the freedom to vote and the knowledge of how to cast a vote, but also about a participatory process where voters engage in public debate and have adequate information about parties, policies, candidates, and the election process itself to make informed choices (ACE, 2017). Furthermore, the media acts as a crucial watchdog to democratic elections, safeguarding the transparency of the process. Indeed, a democratic election with no media freedom, or muted media freedom, would be a contradiction. To fulfill their roles, the media need to maintain a high level of professionalism, accuracy, and impartiality in their coverage. Regulatory frameworks can help ensure high standards. Laws and regulations should guarantee fundamental freedoms which are essential to democracy, including freedom of information and expression, as well as participation.

According to D'Angelo &Kuypers (2010), a key question in much of the literature on media framing of politics and public affairs is, how independently do the media frame issues and events, versus simply passing along to the public the frames originated by powerful political actors? In a position where an issue has been selected and sourced, the

journalists can be led through agents where the source originated and is attributed. This situation could be taken as indirect sponsorship while political communication is a strategy. Political actors typically target the news media to convey intact their preferred frames to the public. Yet a prevalent theme within the news-framing literature is that issues and events are framed as much by the decisions of journalists and editors by the intentions of political actors.

The point is that the media's independence in crafting news frames varies across political contexts. This expands upon Sparrow's (1999) argument that "whether journalists are combative or cooperative in their relationship with public officials" depends upon context. This is why the above finding depicts that the political issue selection led the medium to frame strategically followed by the issue frame. It is also possible that one time a frame is used to argue in favor of an issue, while another time it is used to argue against the issue. It is advisable to strategically collect sources of "frame sponsors" who use frames for strategic purposes, including, for instance, pressure groups, NGOs, and political parties (D'Angelo &Kuypers, 2010: PP 94). Of course, the finding of this paper shows that the favored issue has shaped the frames to be strategic, next to issue frame and informative frame; but as the surveillance function of the station, it is better if it could be informative frame dominantly and the others if they have been treated professionally.

Editorial integrity: the responsible application by professional practitioners of a free and independent decision-making process that is ultimately accountable to the needs and interests of all citizens (Flanagan & Clarke, 2007). There are several challenges to the editorial integrity and independence of the media which are arising in the Member States. Governments should also observe the issue of "the enormous imbalance" in returns between news media outlets and find legal and practical solutions to rectify this imbalance (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004). Media professionals and media outlets should increase voluntary adherence to, and respect for, professional codes of ethics and "establish or strengthen responsibility for disseminating campaign time news¨.

Editorial integrity in the media calls not only for accuracy, honesty, and fairness but also for sound and independent judgment by editors and journalists. Journalists and media outlets must be free to report and publish without undue constraints and fear of violence or arbitrary treatment at the hands of State authorities (Buhr, 2003). In this connection, the station that the study focused on has been challenged to integrate such policies with a professional eye on the ground. Based on

the finding presented above, the reporters have been in difficulty applying this professional integrity to better practice campaign reporting.

Fair Reporting/Fairness in Election News

Fairness is more practical than conceptual in the newsroom through achieving its process which is directly linked with the principles of journalism. However, it is concerned with all journalism principles, objectivity and impartiality come first if we stand for fairness in news reporting, especially in political communication. Even if we have strong feelings about an issue, we must not use the news to put it over in our arguments; we must not try to give extra time or better coverage to people we agree with and less time or worse coverage to those we disagree with. From the above efforts to define "fair", Retief (2002:86) attempts to define this elusive word and says:

> Fairness is firstly an honest attempt to: a. Balance your report in such a way that no party is misrepresented either by your choice of words or by the lack of proper context; that would be unjust; b. Ensure that all parties get their say i.e. equality; c. Give coverage to different parties concerning their importance i.e. moderation.

For a good journalist, objectivity and impartiality are two sides of the same coin. If we can be objective and control our personal feelings on an issue, we can also be even-handed in our treatment of all sides. "Although impartiality or bias can enter all areas of journalism, the greatest dangers lie in reporting politics, industrial disputes, religion, race and sport"*(Ingram et. al,2015, P.328)*. Any area in which people have very strong feelings can lead to conflict and to bias in reporting the issue. The same general principles which govern objectivity can also help the reporter to be impartial. Reporters should forget their personal preferences while working on a story stand back from it and try to look at the issues through the eyes of people both for and against. That may not change their personal opinion that something is wrong, but it will help them to be fair(Ingram et. al,2015, P.328*)*. There are several ways journalists can allow personal bias to destroy objectivity and impartiality in the way she/he handles the news. Practitioners should be aware of the dangers at each stage of the process of news production, from the first decision to cover a story through to its presentation; although the reporters of Bonga FM 97.4 were unable to be fair as the result of the study.

Journalists may draw their frames from a variety of sources in the news stories. Journalists dedicated to the "watchdog" role may not readily

accept a political actor's framing of an issue or event at face value; rather, they may see it as their job to reframe the actor's point of view. Political actors typically target the news media to convey intact their preferred frames to the public. Yet a prevalent theme within the news framing literature is that issues and events are framed as much by the decisions of journalists and editors as by the intentions of political actors (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010, p. 265). In campaign news, in contrast, journalists often see it as a mark of unprofessionalism not to introduce alternative perspectives on what the candidates are saying and doing. In line with this thought, the journalists of the station this study focused on have given restricted focus to the alternative perspectives on what political actors framed/said.

Additionally, the textual contents (NEBE's Code of Conduct 02/2013 and Editorial policy of the station) presented above and attached in appendix - E support how political content was framed, sourced, and given the voices to all competing parties impartially. At the same time the finding of this study depicts, there were performance gaps among the station's practitioners because there were no problems with the rules and editorial policy however there were implicit pressures on them as the respondents' justifications beyond budgetary and not being transparent on the selection of journalists to train and report campaign news.

Precisely, we can take as the above dominant frames used in the station (issue i.e. 41 news out of 82 and informative i.e. 22 out of 82 and strategic i.e. 19 out of 82). As the former studies in Ethiopia by (Ashenafi Abate, 2013) revealed issue frames are dominant over other frames unlike other parts of developed nations their dominant frame was the strategic game frame during the campaign period. As a developing nation, particularly in the local setting, no matter if the issue frame was dominant, the request here is fairness in the distribution of issues and tones i.e. Most of them have been given to the ruling party since the dominant tone of the sample was for ruling party/PP.

Selection of News

Busy newsrooms constantly have to make decisions about which stories to cover and which to ignore. The selection of stories can introduce a very basic bias if it is not done objectively. Simply because you disagree with a government, a group, a party or an individual does not mean that you can suppress all stories which show the good side of them and cover only those which show them unfavorably (Ingram, et.al 2015). This is particularly important at such times as election campaigns. Our decisions

on which stories to cover should be made on the principles which govern what makes news. News should be new, unusual, interesting, significant, and about people. The exact balance of these criteria may vary depending on our audience. So we must develop an accurate understanding of what is news to our audience, and then be fair and consistent in the selection of every story.

According to the pieces of evidence shown above in the presentation session, there was no remarked restriction to a selection of issues or giving coverage including the station's editorial policy rather than the limitations on applying it in real. The other reality as it was possible to give voice to the competing party was their news story which was streamed on 17/08/2013 E.C., as in: "EZEMA Party says as it will work to realize people's economical and political justice by answering the questions on this issue." (17/08/2013 E.C)

 So, if it were possible to give coverage to different polls of parties, it would be better to frame, source, and give tones to all parties relatively, however, it may not be possible to make it accurate/equally.

Choice of Sources

Even if journalists have to overcome personal prejudice and decide to cover a story which found disagreeable, they must still take care that they are fair in their choice of sources of information. It is not fair to choose to interview an attractive personality for a cause you support but an unattractive or muddled person for a cause you oppose (White & Rutherford 2009). There is also the danger that, if the reporter is asked to cover a story he/she dislikes doing, he/she will fail to put enough energy into finding interviewees and arranging to talk to them (Arpan & Peterson, 2008). It is obvious that an issue selection is an input for a story source, and that source plays a vital role in giving a specific voice or tone via its attribution if there.

If practitioners want to be good journalists, they have to put their best effort into every story that way they produce a good product and objective. When the study entails objectivity, itis deals with the method the reporters have passed from the very beginning (issue selection, source, attribution, tone) rather than personally being objective. The result of this study depicts that the sources used and attributed to news stories of the station are dominantly official and party sources. Broadcasters' perception of their role in this event and the powerful influence of political sources were factors that encouraged policy-focused coverage, while the journalistic routine of balance and media

organizations' perceptions of what would attract audiences favored frame (Dekavalla, 2018). As the researchers tried to argue in this session, particularly at the framing part, most news was sourced from the ruling party and officials with less contribution of journalistic interpretation because we find this concern from the tone distribution to parties. Unless the stations (journalists) critically see/interpret the words of the officials, the power of such sources can be under caution to divert the audience.

Tone Distribution

A small but growing part of news studies has started to consider media frames in political agenda-setting works with the impacts of source and tones respectively. These works provide powerful support for the applicability mechanism as the driver of the media outcome. The study by Thesen (2011 & 2013) on Denmark is worthy in this regard. From the survey of parliamentary questions, he shows that information with bad sound and information that attributes responsibility for the worse condition to the government leads to more questioning behavior opposition than of government.

The political potentials of the media's political agenda-setting influence, finding, for instance, that issues from the media agenda are more likely to attract attention if a party enjoys ownership of the issue. Supplementing the debate on why political parties respond to the news, it is argued in this study that ownership is only part of the picture and that policy responsibility, together with news tone, constitutes a stronger explanation of news politicization (Thesen, 2013). Much information is, certainly, often more important for the party than for the government; as the matter of fact, it is a downright impact on the public.

As has been drawn from the above presentations and findings, there are some implications on how the station focused on political issues by giving some space for current events, and this led them to use the ruling party and government officials respectively as a source. This was the line for their news framing i.e. issue frame dominantly.

When we come to this finding, the number of political issues pushed the station to source the ruling party more and this has given more voice to that ruling party/PP. The big variation/gap here is that the tone given to parties stands at 42.7% (for the single party) to 3.7% (for 6 different parties). In another word, some parties have not been reported/not have gotten a voice from the station. So, in this picture, there is unfair reporting of political issues. If we come back from this line to issues like election-based or developmental issues, it was somehow good if it would

not be dominated by the political issue. If the station gave more attention to the occasional or informative issue, the final framing would become informative, and such fairness problems could be minimized. At the same time, the researcher is not deciding as a political issue is not important; but if the main target/focus of issue selection is political, the process they have gone through had to be fair and balanced to all constituent parties. If this concern had been kept, this issue would have been still important to the public in democratic practice at the grass root level.

The other concern in their framing and reporting was, as they have been working on the principles and orientation of NEBE as well as they have framed similarly with other media outlets:

> I think the previous 6th round election was framed similarly through different media outlets even in private/public, national/local. However, their (media) editorials vary, their goal is one and it is public. (Respondent 01)

Of course, NEBE is an independent and purposeful institution that plays an invaluable role in the practice of free and fair elections. One of the main responsibilities of this institution is supporting and watching the improvement of fair reporting of the media on parties. As the above results show, there were gaps between election rules and the practice of the station because the rule and principles can lead the frame to in a similar way, but the exact fames couldn't be the same.

Indeed, from such reality, one can understand that NEBE is one of the governmental structures, and it is seen as a working institution for the development of democracy. But, there were gaps and limitations from media in practicing such rules with their editorial policy and journalism ethics because most respondents were referring to the NEBE's rule which they have been challenged to apply properly. This paper based on the finding argues that the media had better if it performs its responsibilities and activities to serve the public in the professional eye by having those rules on the ground. If it is not as such, the media cannot be more than the mouthpiece of the government but rather real media whether public or private; because if they think as they have to frame similarly as they have been directed, nothing would be done from the media. Based on the pieces of literature, media have to have its role in setting the agenda as well as framing issues out of any pressures (whether internal or external) being behalf of the public by adding values for better practice of democracy at grass root level mainly in such election time reporting.

Conclusions

As stated frequently, the main purpose of this study was to investigate how Bonga FM 97.4 reported its news stories during the 2021 general election in Ethiopia. It is important to examine the frames in the news reporting during this election because numerous studies (Shaw, 1977; Gunter, 2000) have shown that the way an event or individual is framed, and the issue/agenda set can influence people's perceptions of that event or individual. There are close relationships and valuable effects of issue selection, source usage, and tones on framing political messages. After all, this interrelated sequence led the station's tone to the ruling party mostly and requested fairness in giving equivalent voices to those constituent parties. Thus, the finding of this study depicts that the station has not framed election campaign news stories fairly since its focus was dominantly political issues that stressed ruling party events. It argues that the broadcaster in a local setting has been influenced by political issues and official sources than public issues and public sources. At the same time, this study does not ignore the station used an informative frame secondly, but the argument here is that since their dominant frame was issue/political, it should be fair and balanced for the opposition parties.

The analysis of personal interviews/in-depth interviews shows that the news stories regardless of their gaps, the station played possible roles in informing the public. But, unrevealed pressures of the existing reality limited their efforts to be fair. The opportunities and infrastructures lead the station to the road of the ruling party since it was thought of as a part of the government. At the same time, an incompatibility and awareness gap of opposition parties on the role of media during the campaign affected the station to make balance distribution of the events, whereas the ruling party personnel has experienced this benefits. The findings from the respondents claim that there are implicit factors that lead journalists unable to practice the profession like budget limitations, interference from local administrators, and limited protection for the reporters. After all, this study realized from document review the inability of journalists to practice/apply NEBE's guidelines in line with journalistic principles beyond the challenges they raised. This made the framing not to be specific, balance, and unique to the public in this setting.

Recommendations

The activities of the journalists in political reporting should not be roundly following an election; it should be their routine, professional and

ethical responsibility even after the election whether the voters are performing their tasks or not. Journalists should cover elections independently as a media house, not being dominated by the political party involved to increase fairness in the coverage of elections. The reporters should improve their knowledge and skills in political content/campaign framing, and better to use all their professional efforts to give equivalent voices to all constituent parties while selecting events and framing.

However, the role of NEBE with its election rules is important in coordinating mediated campaign communication schedules, EBA (current EMA) had better work hard to cope up such institutions with media in line with principles of journalism i.e. recognizing and promoting the variety of news framing on behalf of the public interest. There are some possible movements to do this job at the federal level via the current government of Ethiopia; it was not practical in a local setting; which is extended to local administrators to interfere in media activities through their party membership trends on journalists. Media freedom should be exercised by the ruling government so as not to discourage reporters and editors at any administrative structure. Journalists should be protected at all costs from any violence which is because of either political party violence or legal institutions' interference in political campaigns which sparks and precipitates the violence. Media houses should have enough resources for media coverage and other logistics to meet all the costs of adequately covering general elections.

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