

The influence of government advertising on print media content in Lesotho

Felile Moholi

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Abstract

Worldwide, commercial print media, by virtue of being privately-owned, are understood to be insulated from the influence of the state. However, critical political economists argue that the commercial media are vulnerable to the influence of powerful interests because of their high level of dependency on advertising for survival, particularly in developing countries, where the bulk of advertising comes from the government. This situation prevents the news media from effectively fulfilling their normative role in society. It also perpetuates erosion of professionalism in the work of journalists and editorial independence of many newspapers, which are often unable to resist the pressure from advertisers. This study examines the extent of government advertising in the most popular weekly newspapers in Lesotho, and investigates how advertising influences the production of editorial content. The results of the study show that the government of Lesotho is the biggest advertiser in print media and it uses advertising as a tool to suppress press freedom and the freedom of expression in the media and also as an incentive, encouraging media organisations and journalists to provide positive and maximum coverage towards it. The case of Lesotho suggests that the media in countries with less developed economies are under a lot of pressure to produce news content that satisfies the interests of those who have political and economic power at the expense of journalistic professionalism, editorial independence and media's responsibility as watchdog to the government.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination or at any other university.

Felile Moholi

_____ day of _____, 2015

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1. Introduction

By virtue of being privately-owned, commercial print media is perceived as being insulated from state influence (see, for example, Siebert et al, 1956). However, critical political economists have argued that commercial media are beholden to advertising, particularly in Africa and other less developed regions of the world (Rhodes, 2014; Reuter and Zitzewitz, 2006). According to their argument, commercial newspapers in many countries rely on advertising revenue for survival. In countries that are less developed, the main source of advertising for the print media in general is the government (Ingram and Henshall, 2008; McChesney, 2004). The situation makes journalists and news media outlets vulnerable to the influence from advertising companies and the government (Beder, 2009; Kilbourne, 2011; Al-Hasani, 2008). Some media commentators, on the other hand, argue that media practitioners should stick to professional ethics when creating and processing news information even in the face of pressure from advertisers, in order to achieve objectivity, fairness and credibility in their reporting (Chinenye, 2012; Cowling et al, 2010).

The mass media in Lesotho, as in most parts of Africa, is also trapped in the struggle to produce quality journalism against the demands of advertisers, especially the government, which is the biggest source of advertising revenue for most of the print media outlets in the country. This study seeks to investigate how far government advertisements dominate pages of print newspapers in Lesotho, and to gain an understanding of how the government's advertising influences print media content in the country. Content analysis was carried out to quantify the volume of adverts from the government in proportion to adverts from the private sector. The study also engaged with journalists from both private and state-owned print media organisations, through semi-structured interviews, to describe and analyse their experiences and feelings about the government's advertisements as a form of control and influence on print media content. The outcome of this research contributes to the discussions about the role that the media should be playing in the development and enforcement of the country's first ever all-encompassing media policy, which, at

the time of this study, was under formulation by different media stakeholders, as part of national efforts to promote democracy by ensuring freedom of the press. The only existing media-related law in Lesotho has been the Lesotho Telecommunications Act of 2000, which has now changed to the Lesotho Communications Authority Act of 2008, after it was broadened to include the broadcasting sector. The study also contributes a foundational resource for the development of future media-related laws and for further studies on media in Lesotho, and makes a contribution to studies of journalistic professional cultures.

1.1. Background and Context

Lesotho is a small landlocked country with a population of about 2 million people. The majority of the population (about 70%) live in rural areas of the country and subsist on farming (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 2007). The official languages are Sesotho and English but English is mostly used as a business language (Armstrong, 2006). The country, which is totally surrounded by South Africa, is a fragile democracy, headed by a king. However, the king does not have any executive or legislative power. The executive power is vested in the government which is headed by a prime minister (Kapa, 2013). Since attaining independence in 1966 the country has gone through a number of political systems: a multiparty democracy (1966-1970), a one-party state (1970-1986), military dictatorship (1986-1993) and the return of multiparty democracy which is currently in place (Maleleka, 2009).

In 2012, Prime Minister, Thomas Thabane, became the head of the first-ever coalition government in Lesotho, made up of three political parties: All Basotho Convention (ABC), Basotho National Party (BNP) and Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD). The three parties had joined forces during the 2012 elections to unseat the then leader, Pakalitha Mosisili, who had been in charge of a one-party government since 1998 (Matjama, 2013).

However, in 2014 there was a political crisis caused by conflict between coalition parties. The subsequent tension between the government, opposition parties and armed forces led to early

dissolution of parliament, followed by snap elections, in February 2015, which saw Mosisili returning to power through alliance of his political party with other seven parties. The parties formed another coalition government and Thabane became the leader of opposition parties (Mohloboli, 2014).

During the crisis there were clear divisions among media organisations. Some newspapers and radio stations gave favourable coverage to certain coalition leaders and their political parties and others showed direct sympathy and support towards the other political leaders in government, while criticising their opponents on the other hand (Makatjane, 2015).

Ever since the country became independent in 1966, the government has used the media as a tool for relaying its views and promoting the ruling party's propaganda (EISA, 2010). Until 1993, the state-owned Radio Lesotho was the only radio station allowed to operate in the country and its only function until today is to propagate the government's viewpoints. Similarly, the government's TV-Lesotho, which is the only television station in the country, has been serving the same purpose since its launch in 1998. In the print media, the state owns two newspapers, *Lesotho Today* and its Sesotho version *Lentsoe la Basotho*, which only cover government-related events and views. The Lesotho News Agency (Lena), the only media organisation with offices in all the 10 districts of the country, is also owned and fully controlled by the government (Misa, 2008).

The private media consist of 10 commercial radio stations which only emerged after reforms that saw relaxation of restrictive laws on private broadcasting and opening up of airwaves in 1993, after Lesotho held its first democratic elections (Misa, 2008). There are also 12 weekly newspapers publishing in Sesotho and English and three quarterly magazines, all publishing in English. Most of the outlets in the private media sector are owned by religious organisations, while the rest are owned by independent entrepreneurs (Matjama, 2013). The government's control and influence on media content is more direct on broadcasting as the industry is regulated through the Lesotho Communications Authority Act (Limpitlaw, 2011).

There are no laws regulating the print sector. A national media policy draft, which had been ignored by different governments since 1997 (Matjama, 2013), received little attention from the 2012-2014 coalition government. The Thabane-led coalition government had made a public commitment to enact the media policy before it was booted out of power following the snap election in 2015. In the absence of any print media laws, the government has maintained heavy control of print media content through different indirect means: under different regimes journalists have been beaten up, arrested and prosecuted, some killed and others deported for being critical of the government and the ruling party. Other forms of indirect influence included bribes, sponsorships, gifts and advertisements which are normally given to the most influential journalists and news organisations by government officials to buy their support and loyalty (Bujitu, 2005).

However, advertising is seen as the most effective mechanism through which the government influences print media content, due to the heavy dependency of private media organisations on advertising revenue. Reports have shown that most of the newspapers in the country depend wholly on advertisements for survival and the government is the biggest advertiser contributing about 80% of the revenue for both private and state-owned media outlets (EISA, 2010). In the past decade, Africa Media Barometer has expressed concern over the problem of media control through advertising. In one instance, *Public Eye*, one of the country's leading weeklies, was almost forced to shut down in 2007 as a result of revenue loss after the government issued an order to all its departments and parastatals to stop advertising in the newspaper, claiming the paper was antagonistic to the ruling party (Misa-Lesotho, 2008). According to the Africa Media Barometer report, after the Lesotho government's directive to stop advertising with *Public Eye*, government adverts were directed to another paper, *MoAfrica*, which had publicly declared its support for the government (Misa-Lesotho, 2008).

The high cost of printing, especially for Lesotho, most of whose newspapers are printed in South Africa, is a very serious inhibiting factor for the growth of the print media in the country. The

country's weak infrastructure, coupled with the fact that the majority of the population lives in the rural areas, means fewer people are likely to spend money on buying newspapers (Bujitu, 2005). Lesotho is barely industrialised; its only significant industry are the textile factories, which employ up to 40 000 workers (IRIN, 2011)). The government is the biggest employer and any significant business in the Kingdom will not amount to much without doing business with the government. In this kind of a situation, there are two assumptions: that publishers who depend more on a specific industry for their advertising revenue are more prone to a higher degree of influence from that advertiser than others, and that the more an organisation or company advertises with a given publication, the greater is the coverage of its product or activities in that publication (Rinallo and Basuroy, 2009). In the case of Lesotho, the government is the industry that most publications depend on.

Apart from financial constraints, lack of professional skills is one of the major factors allowing advertisers' influence to penetrate newsrooms in Lesotho. Currently there are no institutions offering media or communication studies except the National University of Lesotho, which runs a diploma programme on Mass Communication on a part-time basis (JUL, 2014). More efforts to promote media studies in Lesotho were done by a Malaysian university - Limkokwing University of Creative Technology - which was introduced in Lesotho in 2008, but ever since its inception it has been heavily criticised for offering dubious qualifications (JUL,2014). According to the Journalists' Union of Lesotho report, most of the journalists in the country are youngsters who enter the field without any academic qualifications and they only learn the rules adopted by their specific media organisations, which, in most cases, are not based on the journalism professional principles, but often on the commercial interests of the media owners (JUL, 2014). As a result, most of the journalists remain vulnerable to manipulation, not only by the media owners but also by external forces such as advertisers and sources of information.

1.2 Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent do the government's advertisements dominate print media publications in Lesotho?
2. To what extent does the government's advertising influence coverage and production of news content in the print media in Lesotho?
3. What are the experiences, observations, perceptions and attitudes of journalists towards the influence that the government's advertisements have on print media content?

These questions will lead the study to the achievement of a general understanding about the possibility of independent commercial media in less developed countries like Lesotho.

1.3 Rationale

Research on the media in Lesotho has mostly been focused on health communication, especially given the prominence of HIV/AIDS in the country. Since the early 1990s, Lesotho has been known as one of the leading countries in Southern African with an HIV/AIDS prevalence of 23% (UNICEF, 2013). Most academic research has largely tended to be a review of approaches to communication and information campaigns in health matters, such as articles and films on HIV and related matters like the thorny issue of concurrent sexual partnerships as factors stalling progress of interventions on national health matters. Examples here include the study by Strand (2009) on "The Portrayal of HIV/AIDS In Lesotho in Print Media", "Multilingual Practices and Language Scaling in Behavioural Change Communication on HIV/AIDS in Lesotho" by Konosoang (2012), and "Role of Development Communication in Fostering Social Change: Evidence from Lesotho" by Dinbabo (2013).

Given this background, NGOs in Lesotho have been seen to be mostly supporting communications research projects that are related to health over the past decade, such as the study on "Multiple Sexual Partnerships Migrant Labour and the Making of an Epidemic: Knowledge and Believes about

Aids among Women in Highland Lesotho”, which was funded by K4Health in 1994 (Romero-Daza, 1994). Other areas of media research that received support from the NGOs, especially international donor agencies in the past few years, are those to do with media and democracy, such as the work of Maleleka (2009) on “The Impact of Democracy in Lesotho” which, was funded by Kelloggs Foundation.

Little attention has been given to the actual work of journalists and the influences around their work in Lesotho. This study will be the first to look into how print media content is influenced by advertising in Lesotho. Although a number of studies have identified several factors from within and outside news organisations that affect news content, this study will focus on the influence of advertising because of the fact that advertising, not only in Lesotho, but in many developing countries, is the major source of revenue on which most newspapers rely for survival (Chomsky, 1988) . So understanding how this important source of revenue influences the process of news production, especially in the situation of Lesotho where almost all players in the media compete for one major advertiser, which is the government, is crucial. The understanding will make a contribution to the on-going national debate of the role of the media in Lesotho in relation to the formation and adoption of the country’s first-ever general media policy.

The apparent dominant focus by media researchers in Lesotho on HIV/AIDS and other health-related issues is a clear demonstration of what Guy Berger is talking about in his effort to describe the patterns that academic writers on Africa followed after colonialism in the continent of Africa, particularly in Southern African countries (Berger, 2002). He says that “after independence, much academic writing on Africa, including on African media was focused (functionistically) on development concerns” (Berger, 2002:23). However, Berger (2002) indicates that some writing focusing on democratisation and the role of the media in democracy on the continent only emerged in the 1990s, but those writings were still drawing on the already existing concepts from Western theories. Berger (2002) argues that concepts such as civic society and public sphere are usually used

in the context of African media and yet they originate from societies that are completely different to most of those in the continent. Berger (2002) is just one of many scholars who have expressed concern about an uncritical approach which seeks to apply Western models without regard to the context.

Shaw (2009) notes that relying on Western theoretical models to analyse journalism practice in Africa “hinders the analytical theorisation of journalistic precepts which have evolved locally in most countries of the developing world” (Shaw, 2009). Similarly, Skjerdal (2012) says the Western influence undermines and misinterprets the local culture. On the other hand, Francis Nyamnjoh describes the effect in a more fierce way, saying implementing Western liberal democracy in Africa is like “trying to force onto the fully-figured person, rich in all cultural indicators of health African are familiar with, a dress made to fit the slim de-fleshed Hollywood consumer model of a Barbie doll-type entertainment unit” (Nyamnjoh, 2005).

As the way forward, a number of alternative African journalism models have been developed such as *ujamaa* journalism in Tanzania, *ubuntu* journalism in South Africa and oral discourse (Skjerdal, 2012). However, some scholars who believe the African models cannot work on their own have called for a revisit of Western journalism concepts in order to find ways of making them more suitable and more relevant to the African media environment (Berger, 2002; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Shaw, 2009). Others, on the other hand, have suggested blending of both the Western and the alternative African models to produce new concepts that will improve journalism in Africa (Shaw, 2009).

This study will make a contribution to the efforts intended to promote the understanding of journalism practice in Africa and to accelerate the development of the media on the continent by providing knowledge about how the media in Lesotho, as one of the African countries faced with the same problem of western influence, function and also by identifying the challenges that journalists in the country encounter, which will help in the decisions about what kind of strategies are needed to address the problems of African journalism in general.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The success of the media in the developing countries is determined by the economic conditions under which they operate (Alexander, 2004). In most of the media markets the main source of income is advertising, without which many news organisations struggle to survive (Chinenye, 2012). Representing critical political economy theory, Jonathan Hardy argues that this dependence on advertising revenue “is the single most important way in which advertising influences media content” (Hardy, 2014: 152).

On the same note, Rinallo and Basuroy (2009) argue that when publishers depend on advertising for survival, they become vulnerable to the pressure of the advertisers to organise news content in a way that suits their (advertisers)’ interests. In some cases, the advertisers exercise their control on the media content by interfering with the daily duties of journalists (Al-Hasani, 2008).

A number of studies have confirmed the interference of advertisers with the work of journalists. In a US study of 50 newspaper editors, 90% said advertisers tried to interfere with newspaper content, 70% tried to stop news stories altogether and 40% admitted that advertisers had indeed influenced a story (Beder, 2009). In another study of 41 newspaper editors, 90% said advertisers had threatened to pull their advertisements because of unfavourable coverage and 40% said advertisers actually pulled their ads (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

The fear of losing advertising revenue and the pressure to attract more advertising are some of the reasons which force journalists and their managers to deviate from the principles of journalism and be biased towards the advertisers. In showing how the influence of advertisers has affected journalism, Kilbourne (2011) says because of pressure from advertisers the media organise their content in two major ways: “by suppression of information that could harm or offend the sponsor, and also by inclusion of editorial that reflects the advertiser’s product in a positive manner”. Sharing the same point of view, Germano (2008) asserts that media organisations “distort” their content to

accommodate the demands of advertisers. The degree to which news content is distorted is determined by the amount of advertisements provided by any particular advertiser. However, Baker (1992) argues that advertisers are not blind to the fact that their advertising with newspapers cannot make an impact if those newspapers do not consider the interest of consumers. He indicates that when consumers are not happy about the content of a certain newspaper, they will not read it and the advertisers would equally lose. He therefore contends that a wise advertiser cannot make demands on the media content, which reduces consumer satisfaction.

As Basuroy and Suman (2009) point out, the more a company advertises with a given newspaper, the greater is the coverage it gets in that newspaper. Given that the government is the biggest advertiser in most of developing countries (Al-Hasani, 2008); the implication is that media content is dominated by government propaganda. Riaz (2003) argues that governments use advertising as an incentive to influence positive and maximum coverage by media organisations. Gehlbach and Sonin (2008:10) note that:

Even if the owner of the outlet is private, however the government may be able to indirectly control news content, providing inducements to encourage the private owner to bias coverage from the commercial optimal editorial policy.

Coyne and Leeson (2009) argue that the advertising industry is dominated by government advertisements in many developing countries, which technically means the media in general in the developing countries survives through government funding. The warning that Coyne and Leeson (2009) make from this analysis is that the reliance of the media on the government advertising can lead to manipulation of the media by the government. As they put it:

Government advertising erodes the independence of media and allows government officials to capture the media to serve their own private interests. This has the effect of diminishing

the credibility and effectiveness of the media as the monitoring device (Coyne and Leeson, 2009).

Although (Guyot, 2009) argues that journalists are imperfect and that they may find it difficult to resist the pressure of advertisers, he also argues that allowing economic demands to control news production can be dangerous to the quality of journalism and the development of democracy. In the same way he contends that the pressure from advertisers may force media organisations to change their editorial content, but warns that the effect of such pressure is that “credibility, balance and objectivity are being jettisoned for profitability”.

To address this problem Chinenye (2012) recommends self-regulation for the media. According to him media organisations regulate themselves in order to avoid interference from the government and other stakeholders in their work. He posits that the best form of self-regulation is adherence to the principles that guide the professional practise of journalism.

Professionalism as observed by Soloski (1989) controls the conduct of journalists by setting standards and norms of behaviour which they follow and also by determining the professional methods of rewarding them for the work they do. This, according to Potter (2009), allows flexibility on the work of journalists as they get to make independent decisions without much supervision from their editors and interference from external institutions, and it also helps to build the credibility of reporters and their media organisations in the minds of news consumers. In the words of Soloski (1989):

Since news professionalism establishes norms of conduct for journalists it is unnecessary for individual news organisations to arbitrarily establish elaborate rules and regulations for staff members. Also, there is no need to establish expensive and time-consuming training programmes for news journalists since all journalists come to the organisation with a certain amount of professional training.

Cowling et al (2010), on the other hand, point to clear separation of editorial and advertising/sales departments of commercial media organisations as one of the best ways of keeping editorial content safe and free from the influence of advertisers. They argue that the separation of the two functions is highly important for the protection of newspapers and journalists' credibility and promotion of professionalism in the production of news content.

According to Cowling et al (2010), advertisers sometimes hide behind advertising when they want to persuade newspapers to publish their information in the way they want it to appear to the targeted audience. In such cases the information is displayed as commercial content in the format of editorial content and is run in advertorial or special supplement sections. This, as they demonstrate in the case of South Africa, creates a lot of ambiguity on editorial content and allows the influence of advertisers to flow easily, hence the need to build a strong wall between advertising and editorial.

2.1. Theoretical framework

This research draws from a number of theoretical areas in trying to understand the extent to which newspaper publishers are beholden to the dictates of advertisers.

2.1.1 Normative theories of the press

Compared to other communication theories, the normative theories of the press are seen to be unique in that they do not provide any scientific explanation or assumption about the media, but they offer an ideal way in which the media operate under different political and economic situations (Christians, 2009). McQuail (2010) describes them as working theories because they mainly provide guidelines of what the media should do and should not and the criteria for what is good and what is bad.

Amongst the best-known of normative theories are: Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility and Soviet media.

2.1.1.1 Authoritarian: This theory assumes that all forms of communications are controlled by the governing authority (Siebert et al, 1956). In this view, according to Rutt (2012), the media plays the role of enhancing the ruler's power and any expression or opinion which is believed to be undermining the ruling authority is not allowed.

2.1.1.2 Libertarian: The theory proposes that the media should operate freely and without any kind of interference by the government, and also that individual members of the public should have complete freedom of expression regardless of whether their opinions oppose those of the government (Baran and Davis, 2008). In the words of Brown (2012), "The libertarian press has the right to publish anything, anyhow and anywhere". However, Brown (2012) has criticised this approach for being too concerned about the right of the public to know and ignoring the people's right to privacy and the nation's right to security which are equally important in any democracy.

2.1.1.3 Social Responsibility: This is one of the normative theories which stands between the Authoritarian and Libertarian models because it gives the media full freedom on one hand and allows external controls on the media on the other hand (Ravi, 2012). This, according to Middleton (2009), means that the media is free but it has to comply with certain obligations to serve the public good. Ensuring compliance with those obligations is mainly by setting up high professional standards of informativeness, truth telling, objectivity, accuracy and balance (McQuail, 2010).

2.1.1.4 Soviet Media: This theory assumes that the government takes total control of the media and uses it to serve the interests of the working classes. The approach says the government has absolute power to control any media for the benefit of the people and the private control of the media is not allowed (Van Blerkom, 2011).

In general, the four normative theories have been criticised for being too idealistic, failing to recognize changes in societies and political situations, failing to recognise other existing political approaches and failing to take into account media systems in the Third World (Uguru, 2013).

However, these theories, as they are, are important and relevant for this particular study because they are mainly concerned about the relationship between the government and the media, which is what the study is basically trying to understand in the case of Lesotho. These theories provide the guidelines for identifying the normative roles of the media in Lesotho and help to understand how far the influence of the government, as an advertiser, is affecting the performance of the media on its expected roles as a watchdog.

2.1.2 Propaganda Model – Institutional factors

The propaganda model, developed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky suggests media content is influenced by structural, political and economic factors of the organisations in which they are produced (Mullen and Klaehn, 2010). According to the duo, this model, which seeks to understand the media behaviour by looking into the organisational pressures that constrain and influence news content in a commercially-based operation, argues that news information goes through certain “filters” which shape the product that ultimately goes to the audience for consumption. It identifies the five filters as follows:

- Concentrated ownership, owner wealth and profit-orientation of the dominant mass-media firms
- Advertising as primary source of income
- Reliance on information provided by “expert” and official sources
- Flak as a means of disciplining the media
- An external enemy or threat

In the words of Cromwell (2002) this metaphor explains “how dissent from the mainstream is given little or zero coverage, while governments and big business gain easy access to the public in order to convey their state-corporate messages”.

This approach is useful for this study because it addresses different issues around the topic being investigated. It provides a clear guide for investigation of the topic and presents themes from which data is analysed. For example, the influence of the governments' advertising in this study was assessed from the levels of ownership, advertising as source of income, sources of information, competition and so on.

From the level of advertising, the propaganda model predicts that since advertising is the major source of income for mainstream media, the fear to lose or not to get advertising affects the choices that newspaper editors make on what stories should be published and how they should be presented (Model, 2005). For this study, the metaphor provides a reliable guide towards understanding how economic factors affect decisions in news production, as part of my investigation.

However this approach has been criticised, among other things, for failing to take into account media professionalism and objectivity in describing the patterns of media biases resulting from institutional influences such as the pressure to meet advertiser's demands against professional demands (Pedro, 2011). Media sociologists argue that news organisations operate as bureaucracies staffed by professional personnel who work according to standardised rules and practices and their participation and conduct in the process of news production has an impact on the final news product (Manning, 2001; Schudson, 1997).

2.1.3 Sociology of News production

The sociology of news production theory, according to Stephen Reese (2014), seeks to answer the question of "what makes news?" It studies news as a by-product of social organisations, occupations, professions and social construction of ideology (Manning, 1950). At a professional level the theory assumes that the professional training that media workers receive leads them to "produce a social reality in which agreements among social groups are the norm and in which new

ideas and behaviour are treated as undesirable oddity” (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). According to Soloski (1989) the concept of professionalism is concerned with service to the society and is based on principles of anti-profit and anti-market. “Cost is not seen as being the determining factor in the delivery of professional service” and serving society, not financial reward, is seen as the main reason for one to become a professional.

In journalism, professionalism helps journalists to identify the information that is worth transmitting to the public and informs them on how best that information should be delivered to different audiences (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Currently in Lesotho there are no academic institutions offering journalism training, except for one university which only offers Mass Communication at Diploma level. This lack of training institutions is one of the major factors hindering professionalism development within the media sector as the newsrooms are mostly filled up with young people with no formal training in journalism (JUL: 2010). The sociology of news production approach assists the research in gaining an understanding on the role that the media professionalism or the lack of professionalism plays in constraining or facilitating the government’s interference in news production, as an advertiser in Lesotho.

The questions about what information is worth publishing, how it should be published and who makes the decision about such information are the questions that the sociology of news production theory also seeks to answer through the gatekeeping model (Schudson, 2000).

According to Shoemaker (1991) gatekeeping is the process by which the information that is available in the world gets cut down into smaller messages that are then transmitted to the public at a given time. The activities of gatekeeping include selection, addition, withholding, displaying, channelling, shaping, manipulation, timing, integration, disregard and deletion of information (Karine Barzilai-Nahon, 2011). The key gatekeepers in these activities have been identified by McNelly (1959) and Bass (1969) as reporters and editors and their decisions are influenced generally by their own

personal subjectivity such as their education, sexual orientation and social background (Manning, 1950).

The gatekeeping model, however, has been criticised for failing to take into account the external influences which also influence the process of news production (see, for example, Roberts, 2005). Among the critics, Brown (1979) points out that gatekeepers do not have independent powers; they are governed by “impartial” rules.

This model helps, in this research, to identify key actors in production of news content in the print media in Lesotho and to understand how far their personal attributes allow or prevent the government’s influence and interference on their work.

2.1.4 Critical political economy

Generally, critical political economy is concerned about the inequalities in society and how they are reflected or promoted by communication structures (Browning and Kilmister 2006). Its priority is on the interplay between economic organisations and political, cultural and social structures (Boyd-Barret, 1989). In terms of the media, McChesney (1989) points out that the concern of critical political economy is the ways in which news is influenced by relations between media ownership, editors, sources and news consumers, and power relations. From this perspective media production is seen to be increasingly falling into the control of fewer large corporations and being altered to suit the interests and strategies of those corporations. This is a big worry for critical political economists because conglomeration and concentration of media ownership in the hands of the few people means enormous influence on media content and enormous power for the few.

For advertising, the biggest concern of critical political economy is about the implications of media dependence on advertising revenue and the implications of advertisers’ influence on the media (Lee, 2011). As indicated by Hardy (2014) there are “critical concerns about the growing amount of advertising carried, the placement of advertising, the invasiveness and reach”, but the main critique

is around influence on non-advertisement content. According to Hardy (2014), the critique implies that commercial newspapers cannot avoid the influence of advertisers because even if the advertiser does not bring any advertisement, they have to compete for the advertiser's attention and serve the interests of the advertiser in order to survive. This could be the pattern for Lesotho's private newspapers. Although it is very easy to open and operate a newspaper business in Lesotho in the absence of stringent media laws, the issue of survival is the most worrying one. A number of newspapers in the past decade, such as *The Mirror*, *Setsomi*, and *The Source* have had to close down because they could not get advertisements (Misa, 2005).

This theory is the umbrella theory for this study which helps to establish and understand the relationship between different elements of the media which play a part in the influence of print media content in Lesotho and also to explain how political, economic, structural and cultural factors work together or against each other to enable advertisers to exert influence on media content and ultimately to establish how advertising from the government in particular affects the content produced by print media organisations.

3. Methodology

This study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Combining both methods in a single research, according to Matveev (2013), helps to achieve a high level of reliability on the data collected and a greater depth of information about the subject being investigated, at the same time.

3.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis technique was adopted for this research. Content analysis is described by Zeh (2005) as a “quantitative research instrument for a systematic and intersubjective description of communication content starting from a research question”. According to the author, one of the aims of content analysis is to study media content using statistical methods. This method is most suitable for this study because it helped to address the first research question “To what extent do government’s advertisements dominate print media publications in Lesotho”.

In order to quantify the volume of adverts from the government as a proportion to adverts from the private sector, five newspapers were studied during the month of November 2014. The newspapers are: *Lesotho Times*, *Sunday Express*, *Public Eyes*, *Moeletsi oa Basotho* and *Informative*. The five newspapers are the only ones which have consistently continued to operate, since their inceptions, despite numerous challenges which forced many other newspapers and magazines out of operation during different political regimes since independence. *Moeletsi oa Basotho* is the oldest surviving private newspaper, started in 1933, while the youngest, *Sunday Express*, only came into existence in 2000, two years after its sister newspaper *Lesotho Times*, which is currently one of the leading newspapers, was launched.

Although *Moeletsi oa Basotho* is not a commercial newspaper, it was included in this study as an example of how newspapers which are financially stable survive under the same political and economic environment. Since this study is based on the assumption that privately-owned newspapers in Lesotho, like in many other developing countries, are prone to the manipulation and

influence of the government because of their dependency on it as the biggest and most prominent advertiser, the comparison with *Moeletsi oa Basotho* as a financially independent private newspaper will demonstrate the ideal way of running a newspaper that is expected to truthfully, independently and accurately inform the society, and show how far not being economically stable exposes newspapers and their content to the abuse of advertisers and the ruling class.

Permission to study the identified newspapers was sought from the managers through formal letters indicating the purpose of the research and explaining how each newspaper was expected to participate in the study.

For the purpose of content analysis, 20 issues /editions of each newspaper, published during the period between 2011 and 2014 were randomly selected. This period is important for this study because it is the time during which the relationship between the media, especially the print media and the government, came into the spotlight due to massive changes in the political setting in Lesotho. Before 2012, Lesotho was ruled under a single party system in which all the decisions of national governance were done by one ruling party. At that time it was very easy to see whether a media organisation was pro or anti-government, but after the 2012 elections, things became different as the country came to be ruled under a completely new system of governance, a coalition government, in which three political parties shared power. At that time the media was seen to be dividing towards the three parties. Other media houses became sympathetic to the main opposition party, which, before the elections, had been the ruling party, while others became clear mouthpieces of the ruling parties, thus triggering interest about distribution of advertisements from the government and raising questions about the commitment of media organisations to professionalism.

The content analysis exercise, which was carried out at the editorial offices of each of the five participating newspapers took two weeks between November 10 and 21. *Public Eye* was the first to be investigated. The researcher was provided with bound files of newspaper copies for each year

from 2011 to 2014. Five issues were randomly selected for each year to make the total number of issues to be studied 20, for the four year-period specified. Since the purpose of this exercise was to address the first research question, "To what extent do government's advertisements dominate print newspapers in Lesotho", the researcher felt 20 was a reasonable number to provide a full picture about the flow of advertisements in each newspaper and to reveal patterns that may be existing in the allocation and placement of the advertisements.

From each of the 20 copies, the researcher went through every page to count all advertisements appearing in each copy. All the advertisements were recorded, noting their sources, their sizes and the pages on which they were placed. The information was then entered into an excel programme to calculate the average adverting ratio for the paper and the percentage of the government's adverts from that ratio. The same process was followed for the other four newspapers over two weeks.

3.2 Qualitative method

According to Bricki (2007), qualitative methods in most cases focus on understating the experiences and attitudes of participants and aims to find answers to questions about what, how and why. Adopting interviews, for this study, as one of the qualitative methods, enabled the researcher to effectively address the main questions of this study and achieve a clear understating about the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of the participants towards the issues being investigated. Mancosa (2000) adds that one of the advantages of qualitative methods is that they reveal depth of understanding and richness of details, which is what, was attained by the study through the interviews.

3.2.1 Interviews

The study used in-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to acquire data. The advantage of this method as argued by Struwig and Stead (2001) is that it combines both structured and unstructured interviews, which helps to increase the reliability of the findings. Stating the

importance of unstructured interviews Babbie (1995) says they allow the participants to provide comprehensive explanations in response to the questions being asked.

Mancosa (2000) concludes that semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions “enable exploratory discussions that allow the researcher not only to understand the ‘what’ and ‘how’ but also to grasp and explore the internal dynamics of the research topic”. The flexibility of this method helped the researcher to acquire the most relevant information, as the respondents for this research were free to go as far as they could in their responses to each of the questions asked, which allowed a free flow of information and made it very easy to pick up straight answers to the main research questions on how journalists perceive the government’s influence on print media content.

3.2.1.1 Selection of interviewees

The interviewees for this study were selected by the researcher from the main print newspapers mentioned in the previous section. The selection was based on their work experience, their level of education, and the positions they held in their respective organisations. A conscious decision was taken in the selection process in order to enable the researcher to identify the most suitable respondents, especially in this case of Lesotho where the population from which the sample had to be drawn, was already too small (less than 10 active newspapers and less than 40 practising journalists) to worry about issues such as inclusiveness and representativeness which other sampling methods are concerned about.

3.2.1.2 List of Interviewees

Organisation	Name	Position
<i>Informative</i>	1. Boitumelo Koloi	Editor
	2. Mots’elisi Mohale	Reporter

	3. Lineo Mojalefa 4. Lerato Monaheng	Reporter Senior Reporter
<i>Lesotho Times</i>	1. Bongiwe Zihlangu 2. Billy Ntaote 3. Bokang Maraisane 4.T. Mtungamiri	Political Editor Senior Reporter Sub-editor Production Editor
<i>Public Eye</i>	1.Tapera Chikuvira 2. Modekai Musundire 3.Lerato Mosili 4. M. Maeka	Chief Editor Chief Sub-Editor Reporter
<i>Sunday Express</i>	1.Caswell Tlali 2. Maraka Motanyane 3.Lerato Nyao 4. Keiso Mohloboli	News Editor Columnist Senior Reporter Senior Reporter
<i>Moeletsi oa Basotho</i>	1.Rethabile Mabaka 2.Reitumetse Mothae 3.Monare Molapo 4. Maleshoane Seitlheko	Reporter Editor Reporter Reporter

3.2.1.3 Setting

Data collection took place in the city of Maseru, Lesotho, in November 2014. This place is the home for majority of print media organisations in the country. Interviews were conducted at the editorial offices of the participating organisations. Permission to do so was sought from the management of each organisation and suitable times were arranged with each participant through emails and telephones.

3.2.1.4 Data analysis

The study adopts a triangulation method for data analysis. According to Guion et al (2009) “triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analysing a research question from multiple perspectives”. Drawing from Thurmond (2010) the authors identify one of the advantages of triangulation as its potential to create innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon and produce unique findings.

4. Research Findings and Data Analysis

As outlined in the previous chapter, this research looked at five privately-owned newspapers: *Lesotho Times*, *Sunday Express*, *Public Eye*, *Informative* and *Moeletsi oa Basotho*. Data collection was done at the offices of each of the newspapers, in a form of content analysis and interviews.

This chapter discusses research data and findings obtained from the two methods of data collection, as described in sections 4.1 and 4.2 of the research design.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section sets out the background of each of the five newspapers studied for this research: how they were established, their organisational structures and ethos, and their business models. Section 2 focuses on discussion of the findings from content analysis, and section 3 deals with analysis of findings from interviews.

4.1 Newspapers background

This section presents the background of each of the five newspapers under study, showing how they came about and how they have been conducting their businesses since they were established. The information used in this section was obtained from previously published documents, websites, newspapers' copies and interviews with the management of the newspapers in question. As indicated in the introduction of this research, the study seeks to achieve an understanding of how advertising, particularly from the government, influences print media content in Lesotho, from the perspective of journalists in this country. The sample of these journalists was drawn from the five newspapers mentioned above, from which content analysis for the same study was also done. Therefore, the background information about these newspapers is very important to bring into the study as it will provide a better sense of the environment from which the findings were obtained and will also give an insight into some of the organisational factors which shape or influence the opinions and views of journalists regarding their work, as it will be seen in the next sections of this chapter.

4.1.1 Public Eye

Public Eye is a weekly newspaper publishing in English every Friday. It circulates in Lesotho and the Free State province of South Africa (Thai, 2014). Established in 1997 by a former local journalist, Bethuel Thai (Osis, 2011), *Public Eye* is currently classified as the leading newspaper in Lesotho, with the largest circulation of 20 000 (Misa, 2013). The paper boasts the biggest number of experienced journalists (see, www.publiceye.co.ls), and is seen to be the biggest platform for advertising, among all the print media outlets in the country (Chikuvira, 2014). It was the first publication to hire foreign journalists in the country, in an effort to improve the standard of journalism locally, in the late 1990s, according to the paper's website. Currently the editorial department of *Public Eye* is headed by a Zimbabwean editor, Tapera Chikuvira who has been with the newspaper since 2004, and the subs desk is led by another Zimbabwean, Mordekai Musundire, who joined in 2008 (Thai, 2014).

Public Eye's success as Lesotho's top independent newspaper has not come easily as it went through some tough times since its launch in 1997. Many other newspapers did not survive the hard economic times (JUL, 2010).

Unlike other newspapers which first appeared on the market with a lot of fancy and attractive features that were meant to immediately draw the attention of readers and advertisers (See, for example, *Lesotho Times*: April, 20 -27, 2008, *Friday Flyer*: March, 13, 2010, and *The Post*: November 16, 2014), *Public Eye* started publishing as a weekly, on a photocopy paper (A4) printing only 50 copies, for almost 12 months (see, www.publiceye.co.ls). Just when it started making progress – increasing the number of copies from 50 to 500 per week, changing from photocopies to newsprint and improving on advertisements, the newspaper experienced a huge setback as a result of the 1998 political riots, according to the website. At that time, many business buildings in the city of Maseru and some neighbouring towns were looted and burnt down by protesters unhappy about the outcome of the 1997 elections, the website further shows.

Like many other businesses at that time, *Public Eye* lost most of its assets. The situation was further worsened by the fact that many of the offices that provided information had closed and many investors and service providers, including printers, had fled the country fearing for their safety, according to Africa Barometer (2012). As a result, *Public Eye* suspended publishing for six months (Thai, 2014). When it came back in 1999, it struggled to get adverts as many businesses were still paralysed and the government was not willing to give business to this newspaper because, at that time, it was understood to be favouring the opposition (Africa Barometer, 2012).

According to *Public Eye's* website, the government on two separate occasions, officially banned advertising in this paper and issued an instruction to all its departments to stop subscriptions in 1998 and 2007 (www.publiceye.co.ls). *Public Eye*, claims on the website that it survived “due to unwavering support of the loyal readers and its consistent ethical reporting”. The newspaper believes its loyalty and professional service to the public is what has made it become “the number one national newspaper and the most trusted independent voice in the market” (see:www.publiceye.co.ls).

While the bigger part of this newspaper's space is devoted to advertising (see, section 5.2), the rest of the space in the paper contains news mainly on politics and governance, entertainment and sports, as well as opinion and analysis (See, for example, *Public Eye*: July 23, 2011, *Public Eye*: December 06, 2012, and *Public Eye*: September 18, 2014). The paper also has permanent pull-out sections such as Business - which covers finance and economy; Workplace/Careers - focusing on labour, tenders, jobs, studies and courses; and the Lifestyle section - covering leisure and entertainment (Musundire, 2014).

4.1.2 Lesotho Times

Lesotho Times was launched in 2008 as an independent newspaper with a mission to provide news in Lesotho “without fear or favour” according to its motto, (see *Lesotho Times*: August 14 -20, 2014)

This weekly paper, which comes out every Thursday, is the first in the country to be owned by a foreign investor (Matjama 2014), Zimbabwean Basildon Peta, a journalist who was forced into exile because of his alleged negative reporting about the Mugabe regime (Byne,2001). He worked in South Africa for Independent Newspapers before going into business in Lesotho, according to Byne (2001).

Unlike *Public Eye* which took almost a decade to win the trust of local advertisers, *Lesotho Times* immediately came out carrying adverts from almost all the most prominent advertisers (see, *Lesotho Times*: April 20-27, 2008). At the time, *Public Eye* had dominated the market for many years (JUL, 2010). *Lesotho Times* proved, soon after its establishment, to have attracted not only the advertisers but also the interest of readers as the copy sales also kept improving (Mohale, 2014). The secret behind *Lesotho Times'* speedy achievements soon came out. It had "stolen" the key advertising officer and some of the most prominent journalists from *Public Eye* (Tlali, 2014).

In addition, since *Public Eye* was perceived as antagonistic to the government, the government of the day embraced *Lesotho Times* as an alternative and in the process they provided government advertisements (Chikuvira, 2014).

Lesotho Times' intention to create tough competition for *Public Eye* also became obvious. It adopted *Public Eye's* style of writing and its business model (Letsoela, 2012). From the onset *Lesotho Times* carried the same pull-out sections that *Public Eye* had: Business, Workplace/careers and Weekender, which covered the same issues as its rival (see, for example *Lesotho Times*: April 20-27, 2008 and *Public Eye*: April 16, 2008). When *Lesotho Times* joined the market, *Public Eye* was still running a pull-out section called *Mosotho* which covered issues in the Sesotho language (Thai, 2014). According to Thai (2014), *Mosotho*, at the time this study was done, was run by *Public Eye* as an independent and fully-fledged newspaper. *Lesotho Times* also developed a similar section called *Mohale* to ensure that it did not lose out to *Public Eye* (Tlali, 2014). However, *Mohale* was phased out after a few years, according to Tlali (2014).

When *Lesotho Times* was started in 2008, most of its senior positions: Chief Editor, News Editor, Chief Sub-editor and Sub-editors were all filled by Zimbabweans (Letsoela, 2012). Although all of them later left – some joining *Public Eye*, others forming their own newspaper in Lesotho and the rest returning to Zimbabwe (Tlali, 2014), at the time this study was conducted *Lesotho Times* still had key editorial staff members as Zimbabweans.

Lesotho Times is described by some media analysts as one of the most influential mainstream newspapers in Lesotho (see, for example, Gender Link, 2011). On the other hand the paper describes itself as “the leading weekly newspaper in Lesotho” on its Facebook page. Its circulation is estimated at 18 000 and its distribution cover the 10 districts of Lesotho and a few towns in the Free State province of South Africa.

4.1.3 Sunday Express

Sunday Express is the Lesotho’s only Sunday paper. It shares the same owners, clientele, staff, offices and most of its news content with *Lesotho Times* (Tsepo: 2014). It was established in 2010 as part of *Lesotho Times*’ efforts to expand its business in Lesotho (Peta, 2012). However, the *Sunday Express* was not as well received by both readers and advertisers as its sister paper, *Lesotho Times*. The content analysis findings, discussed in the next section, show that between 2010 and 2013, it only managed to increase the number of pages from 12 to 16, but in 2014 the pages were reduced back to 12 because of the struggle to secure enough advertisements. Its circulation fluctuates between 8 000 and 12 000 (Mtungamiri, 2014).

Because of lack of advertisements, most of the *Sunday Express*’s pages are filled with international news from the internet (Mtungamiri, 2014). The few pages devoted to local content carry stories mainly on politics, entertainment and sports. In most cases the stories are a repeat or continuation of those published in the *Lesotho Times* during the same week (see, for example *Sunday Express*:

February: 14, 2011 and *Lesotho Times*: February 8, 2011). The few advertisements the *Sunday Express* gets every week are mainly from the government (see section 5.2 below).

4.1.4 Informative

Informative newspaper was first published in July 2006. It is part of the BAM Group of Companies, whose vision is to be “the leading empire in the media industry towards delivering world class, information, services and experience”, according to the group’s website (see, www.the-bamgroup.com). There are 10 companies under the group, operating in Lesotho.

Some of BAM’s objectives are:

- To provide information to the society in Lesotho;
- To provide tools necessary for communication; and
- To assist with financial management of businesses for development and also to facilitate trading opportunities in various industries in the country.

So the major role of the *Informative* newspaper, as part of the conglomeration, is to provide information which promotes corporate development in Lesotho (Koloi, 2014). Unlike all the other newspapers in Lesotho which generate revenue from both copy sales and advertising, the *Informative* newspaper has a completely different business model. It is a free newspaper whose target audience is specifically the corporate readership (JUL, 2010). With its circulation of 12000 (Koloi, 2014), *Informative* focuses on profiling successful businesses and business people with the aim of encouraging prospective and growing businesses in Lesotho (BAM Media, 2009).

Although *Informative* shares the same major advertisers like government, Vodacom Lesotho, Econet, Nedbank, FNB, Standard Bank, etc (see, section 5.2 below) with *Lesotho Times* and *Public Eye*, it has a number of different adverts that it runs exclusively every week from specific advertisers. These advertisers include Twins Ts’epang and Nts’epeng, Lebo Networks, Mokorotlo Galaxy Entertainment,

Finite Magazine, Achiever Magazine, BAM Consultancy, BAM Media, BAM Promotions and BAM Group Foundation, all of which are part of the BAM Group. These companies, according to Koloï (2014), are charged only 10% of the advertising space they book.

Besides its dominant business stories, *Informative* also carries a pull-out section called *Moits'okoli*, which runs business stories in Sesotho and focuses mainly on small entrepreneurs, cooperatives and street vendors (BAM Media, 2009). The paper also covers sports and entertainment news (Koloï, 2014).

Unlike *Lesotho Times* and *Public Eye* which boast foreign editors, at the time of this study *Informative* was led by a Mosotho editor, Boitumelo Koloï, who had come for a second stint after leaving the paper previously to join *Lesotho Times'* sister paper, *Sunday Express* in 2013 (Editors Forum, 2014). The *Informative's* editorial department was previously headed by a Zimbabwean editor, Lloyd Mutungamiri, who left in 2012 to join *Public Eye* but later left to join *Lesotho Times* where he was still the editor at the time this study was conducted (Tlali, 2014).

4.1.5 Moeletsi oa Basotho

Moeletsi oa Basotho (the name means the Basotho's advisor) is the second Sesotho newspaper to be published in Lesotho after *Leselinyane la Basotho* launched by the Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS) in 1869 (Rosenburg, 2003). *Moeletsi oa Basotho* was launched by the Roman Catholic Church in 1933 (Motinya, 2014). According to Rosenburg (2003), the Catholic Church openly supported traditional Basotho chiefs and some of their customs, while the PEMS church and *Leselinyane la Basotho* were seen to be representing the voices of the Basotho elite.

He argues that the *Moeletsi oa Basotho*, which up to the time of this study was still run by the Catholic Church's Congregation of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Mazenod – about 20km from the Maseru city centre – adopted the same Catholic Church culture and reported news in favour of the Lesotho's chiefs.

The paper was distributed to all the Catholic missions in Lesotho and also in some parts of South Africa where there were large numbers of Basotho working in industrial areas (Khaketla, 1972). According to Rosenberg (2003), in 1950 *Moeletsi* had the highest circulation in the country, which he only measures as “three times larger than that of *Leselinya la Basotho*”. As of 2002, its circulation was 20000 (Encyclopedia, 2002).

Both Khaketla (1972) and Rosenberg (2003) confirm that *Moeletsi oa Basotho* newspaper took an active part in the political battles during the colonial period and after. Demonstrating the role of the paper in political campaigns during the regime of Leabua Jonathan, the first Prime Minister of Lesotho, after independence, Khaketla (1972) writes that:

“This paper (*Moeletsi oa Basotho*) more than any other, contributed to the vilification against the King. *Moeletsi* is read in every Catholic home in Lesotho. It was therefore, an excellent medium for disseminating the propaganda that was being generated against the King...and the whole opposition” (Khaketla, 1972: 238).

At that time speculation was rife that King Moshoeshoe II wanted to overthrow the government of Jonathan, with the support of opposition leaders, as indicated by Khaketla (1972). He says *Moeletsi oa Basotho*, because of its favourable reporting towards the government, escaped the ban imposed by Jonathan, who was also the leader of the then ruling Basotho National Party (BNP), on all the newspapers which were believed to be supporting the King and opposition party, Basotho Congress Party (BCP), at that time.

Lauer (1992), who describes the Catholic Church as a “powerful, all pervasive institution” in Lesotho, also agrees the church, through its newspaper, *Moeletsi oa Basotho*, “lent its support to the ruling party (BNP) in the first elections ushering Lesotho's independence”.

Although things changed after independence in 1966 on how newspapers understood their role in democracy and how governments perceived that role, seemingly *Moeletsi oa Basotho* has not

changed in its beliefs. Complaints about its reporting on the government never stopped. . In 2011, for example, the paper was hauled to court by then Prime Minister, Pakalitha Mosisli, who also led the Democratic Congress (a splinter party from the Basotho Congress Party), for a story which he said was defamatory (Molomo, 2011). According to Molomo (2011) the *Moeletsi oa Basotho* story, published in October 2011, alleged that Mosisli had embezzled M8-million (R8-million) which had been given to his office for the country's development. Mosisli wanted M2-million in damages. The case was however dismissed by the court.

Unlike the other four newspapers discussed above, *Moeletsi oa Basotho* owns its printing press (Motanya, 2014) while the others are printed in South Africa (Misa, 2012) and it is printed in black and white (see, for example, *Moeletsi oa Basotho*: December 9, 2014).

For news content, *Moeletsi oa Basotho* covers mainly political stories for the leading pages, the rest of the pages carry BNP and the Catholic Church news and announcements (Motanya, 2014). This paper gets its few adverts mostly from the government and almost all of those ads are in Sesotho and they often come from three departments: the Central Bank, Land Administration Authority and the IEC (see section 5.2 below)

4.2 Content Analysis

This section presents and discusses the results from the content analysis carried out in all the five newspapers under study, focusing mainly on identifying the major advertisers for each newspaper, defining the nature of their advertisements and describing how those advertisers share the available advertising space in the newspapers. The section starts by looking into the newspapers' advertising ratios to see how much space is actually devoted to advertising by the newspapers.

4.2.1 Advertising ratio

Figure 1: Average newspaper size and advertising ratio

Newspaper	Total number of pages	Advertising Ratio
Public Eye	32	58.01%
Lesotho Times	32	51.21%
Sunday Express	16	23.70%
Informative	32	53%
Moeletsi oa Basotho	8	13.07%

Figure 1 above shows that out of the five newspapers; three of them (60%) devoted more of their total space to advertising (more than 50%) and less than half to editorial content. The other newspapers (40%) committed only less than 30% of their pages to advertising, while the rest of the space was filled up with editorial content (more than 70%).

According to *Public Eye's* publisher, Bethuel Thai, newspapers need at least a 40:60 advertising ratio (40% advertising and 60% editorial) in order to make a profit (Thai, 2014). This then means the majority of the newspapers (60%) studied for this research were on the right track of making business and maintaining continuity even if they did not have other major sources of income besides advertising.

However, the amount of space that newspapers reserve for advertisements is not determined by the publishers but by the flow of advertisements, especially for publications which depend on advertising revenue for survival.

The end of year, for example, is normally a lean period for newspapers' advertising revenue as there are fewer adverts coming in. As a result, newspapers are forced to cut down the number of pages to

balance the ratio. This was found to be the case with all the newspapers studied, except *Moeletsi oa Basotho*. In 2013, *Lesotho Times*, for example had 32 pages on the edition of December 12, but soon after the festive season, it went down to 24 pages on the edition of January 9, 2014.

For any paper to be able to grow and achieve a required advertising ratio, it has to be appealing to advertisers. *Public Eye*, for example, grew from publishing on an A4 photocopy paper with almost zero adverts, as noted on the previous section, to becoming the leading newspaper in Lesotho with the highest advertising ratio of 58%. This was after its long and concerted efforts to win over advertisers from different sectors of the economic. The efforts included changing its editorial policy, business model and staff, in order to appear attractive to prominent advertisers such as the government, which is the reason why the newspaper kept growing up and increasing advertising space as more and more advertisers became interested in them. However, it should be noted that its steady growth does not mean it did not also go through some dry seasons, like other newspapers, in which adverts decreased drastically for various reasons like the one mentioned in the example of *Lesotho Times* above.

On the other hand, *Moeletsi oa Basotho's* situation is completely different. It has the lowest advertising ratio of 13.07%, and yet it has been publishing continuously for over 70 years without any clear efforts to attract more advertising. This shows this paper is not dependent on advertising revenue, and therefore it is not under any pressure to impress any advertiser. The literature review in chapter 2 showed that newspapers which rely on advertising revenue for survival become vulnerable to the influence of advertisers who normally use their economic power to gain control of media content (Hardy, 2014). In the case of *Moeletsi oa Basotho*, it is clear that it is free from any influence and control of any advertiser because of its independence. This can be proven in a number of ways. Firstly, since its establishment in 1933 up to the time this study was conducted, this newspaper has been printing, in black and white, as noted in the previous section. This is something which nowadays can be considered to be old-fashioned, and can be seen as a turn-off for readers

and advertisers. But *Moeletsi oa Basotho* is clearly not interested in and not under any pressure to change its printing style, considering the number of years it has been publishing without any desire to add colour. Even the competition that came with newspapers like *Lesotho Times* and *Informative*, which have very bright colours and run many attractive sections, have obviously meant nothing to *Moeletsi oa Basotho*.

Also *Moeletsi oa Basotho*, as demonstrated in figure 1, has the lowest number of pages (8), of which more than 70% of the space is dedicated for news content. That content, as elaborated in the newspapers background section, is mostly stories promoting the Catholic Church and the Basotho National Party (BNP), which this paper has been associated with ever since it was established. The firm stance that *Moeletsi oa Basotho* has maintained about the two institutions, even at the time when the BNP was no longer in power, is a clear indication of its unwavering commitment to serve the interests of its defined target audience and not to make money through advertisements, which would have compelled it to create different sections and increase the number of pages in order to fit in different types of stories that are appealing to different advertisers and ultimately increase their advertising ratio.

4.2.2 Major Advertisers

This section looks at the characteristics of different advertisers who advertised with the five newspapers under study, during the period covered by this research. The section focuses mainly on the manner in which the advertisers distributed their advertisements among newspapers and the rate at which they did that, in each newspaper, in order to identify the biggest advertisers for the Lesotho's print media, and to rate the government's advertising spend and measure its dominance in different newspapers.

All the advertisements recorded during the content analysis exercise are grouped into four categories: government, telecommunications, banks and others. The categorisation is based on the

frequency of ads from the same sector. The government category includes all ads from different government departments and parastatals, as well as private projects funded by the government. The banks category covered ads from commercial banks including FNB, Standard Bank Lesotho, Nedbank and Stanlib, while the telecommunications category covered ads from Econet and Vodacom, which are the only telecommunications companies in Lesotho. The rest of ads which did not belong to any of the three categories mentioned above, such as those from NGOs and foreign governments and international institutions were put under the others category. The advertisements in each category included all those which were carried in the special supplements published during the period covered by the study. The four categories are looked into in each of the five newspapers, starting with *Public Eye* and the findings reveal that the government is indeed the leading advertiser in the print media in Lesotho, as suggested in the study background chapter.

4.2.2.1 Public Eye

Advertisers choose to advertise with certain newspapers and not others for a number of reasons including quality and credibility of news, reputation of the newspaper and target audience. In the case of Lesotho, many advertisers did not have much choice as *Public Eye*, for many years, enjoyed the monopoly of being the only reliable independent newspaper before newspapers such as *Lesotho Times* and *Informative* came up, bringing a very tight competition for it. Figure 2 below shows that *Public Eye*, during the period that was covered by this study (2010 to 2014), had adverts from companies and organisations in all the four categories mentioned above. Among the four categories it was found that this newspaper got advertisements consistently (every week) from the government, the four commercial banks mentioned in the banks category and the telecommunications companies, specified above. However, the government was putting more advertisements than the rest of the companies in all the categories (54%) followed by other companies sharing 23%, telecommunications companies with 14% and the banks sharing 9%.

4.2.2.2 Lesotho Times

Lesotho Times, being more than 20 years younger than *Public Eye*, clearly started following in *Public Eye's* footsteps, copying some of its most important business strategies such as its marketing plan. *Lesotho Times* had the same number of pages and carried advertisements from almost all the companies and organisations which advertise with *Public Eye*. Although the *Lesotho Times's* advertising ratio is slightly lower than that of *Public Eye* as shown in Figure 1, the manner in which advertisements are placed in both papers is generally the same. For example advertisements from Econet and Vodacom Lesotho appeared consistently on the same pages and in same sizes in both papers every week. Another important similarity was on the government advertisements. Just like in *Public Eye*, the advertisements from the government in *Lesotho Times* dominated the space devoted to advertising. Figure 2 shows that the government occupied 55% of that space, followed by others with 27%, telecommunications with 12% and banks with 6%.

4.2.2.3 Sunday Express

Being a newspaper that was established in the family of *Lesotho Times*, at the time that the *Lesotho Times* was becoming highly attractive to advertisers and readers, as noted in the newspapers background section, *Sunday Express* is clearly riding on the back of *Lesotho Times* and does not appear to advertisers and readers to be independent of its sister paper. This is evidenced by the fact that it publishes mostly stories that appear in *Lesotho Times* during the week, as the previous section showed, which confirms its vulnerability and lack of independence.

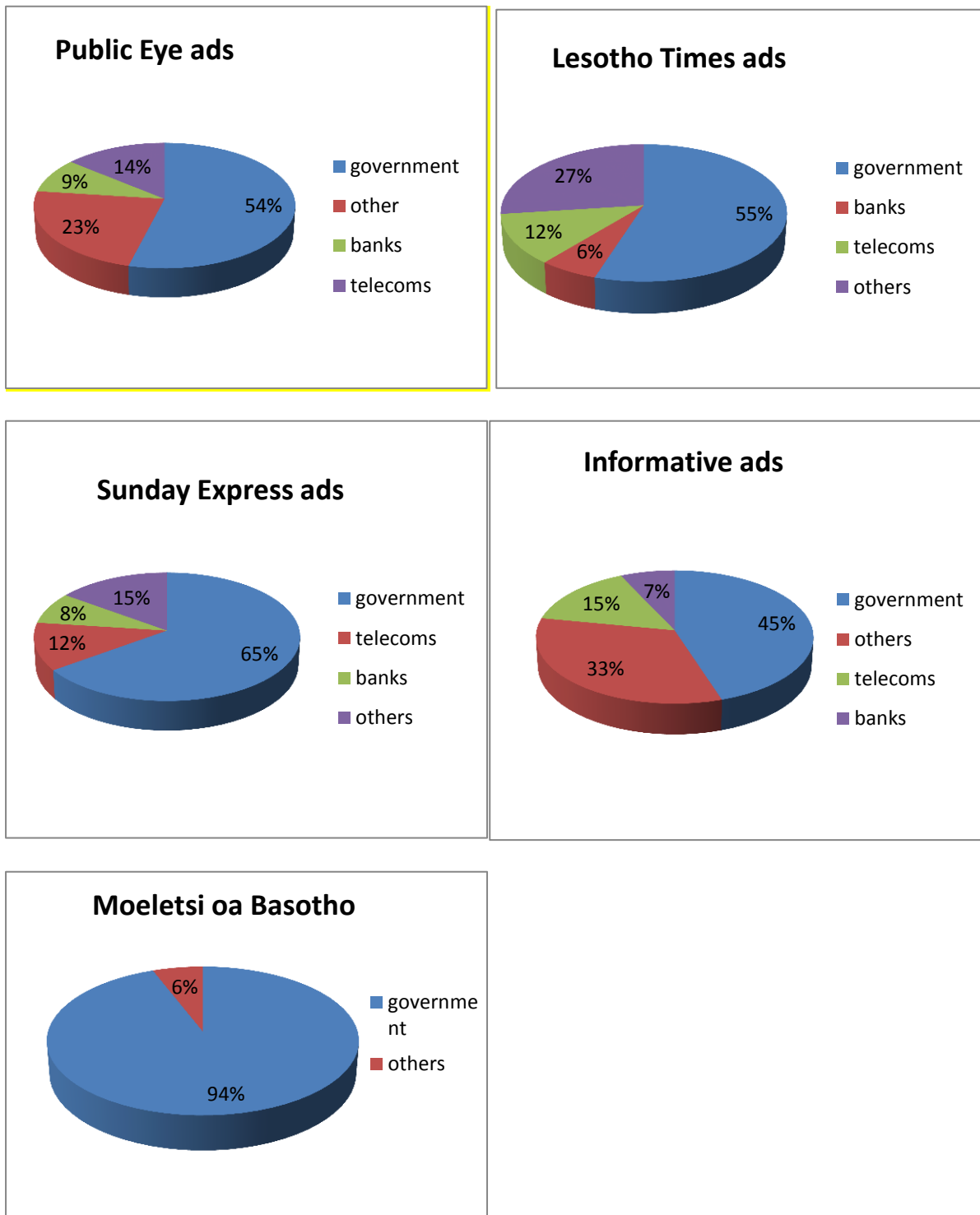
Obviously advertisers would not be interested to advertise in a newspaper which is just an extension of a well-established paper; they would rather be interested in the main paper, which is clearly the reason why *Sunday Express* is struggling to get advertisements while *Lesotho Times* is doing so well. However, this does not mean all advertisers have the same perceptions about this paper as the content analysis results have proven that it is still getting advertisements from all the four

categories, described at the beginning of this section, even though it is in very small numbers, accounting for only 23% of the total space, as shown in Figure 1. According to Figure 2, the majority of those ads come from the government, which covers 65% of its advertising space. The government is followed by others with 15%, telecommunication with 12% and the banks with 9%.

4.2.2.4 Informative

Companies which sell products and services to the public often need the media to advertise those products and services to their target consumers. Being a newspaper belonging to a group of many companies doing different businesses means that *Informative* newspaper was created, among other reasons, as a tool and cheaper means of advertising and marketing its sister companies' products, while also making profit at the same time. This was proven in the content analysis results which revealed that majority of ads in the *Informative's* others category came from companies operating under BAM's Group of Companies, to which this paper also belongs and those companies, as mentioned in the background section, are charged only 10% of the normal advertising rates. Also, the fact that the editorial content of this newspaper is specifically about issues that are meant to promote the specific interests of BAM, as the background also indicated, is another confirmation of *Informative's* special responsibilities to BAM. However this is not in any way a hindrance to other advertisers as all the categories were found to be appearing in *Informative*, in almost the same way as in most of the other newspapers. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the government was still

Figure 2: Newspapers average ads percentages



appearing as the biggest advertiser with 45% of adverts, followed by others with 33, telecommunication with 15% and banks with 7%.

4.2.2.5 Moeletsi oa Basotho

Unlike other newspapers which have to make efforts to attract advertisers and to keep the existing ones happy, *Moeletsi oa Basotho* is one of the few newspapers in Lesotho which are clearly not beholden to advertisers at all in order to survive. This is proven by its consistent low rate of advertising, and its persistence on reporting that focuses mostly on two institutions; the Catholic Church and the BNP, which contribute very few advertisements. The two institutions are part of a very small number of advertisers, whose ads appeared in the other category, covering only 6% of the total advertising space, as figure 2 shows. The rest of that space (94%) carried news stories about the church and the BNP.

While it is clear the majority of the newspapers make efforts to woo the government through various marketing strategies to advertise with them, in the case of *Moeletsi oa Basotho*, it is the government which voluntarily brings its adverts to this paper for one reason, which is to get its specific messages to majority of Basotho throughout the country as *Moeletsi oa Basotho* is the only other newspaper after *Leselinyana*, which publish in Sesotho and reaches the majority of the rural population (80% of the Lesotho population) who speak Sesotho only. All the government ads which appeared in this paper were in Sesotho and came only from four offices: the Central Bank, Lesotho Land Administration Authority, the Independent Electoral Commission and Local Government.

This section has shown us that the government of Lesotho, regardless of having its own media outlets, which include newspapers, radio stations and a television station, is the major advertiser for most of the independent newspapers in country. The government also advertises with every newspaper regardless of its ownership, organisational culture and size. The big question here is, being the biggest advertiser, what does this mean to the newspapers, especially those which survive

through advertising revenue? The propaganda model, discussed earlier, hints that governments use advertising to gain control of news content, and the critical political economy theory further suggests that institutions which give more adverts to newspapers tend to get more favourable coverage. The next section will discuss the views and perceptions of journalists on how advertisers, especially the government, influence newspapers' news content through their adverts.

4.2.3 Interviews

This section presents analysis and discusses the research findings from interviews with journalists from the print media in Lesotho, as described in chapter four. The interviews were meant to lead the research towards understanding how the government's advertising influences news content in the print media, from the perspective of the journalists. The sample of the interviewees was drawn from all the five newspapers discussed in the content analysis section above. The section begins by examining the background of the respondents, to show the level from which the subject of this research is assessed. Then the presentation and discussion of findings is done in two parts. The first part focuses on direct forms of advertising influence on the processes of news production and the other part looks into the indirect forms.

4.2.3.1 Respondents background

At the beginning of the interviews, the respondents were asked about their personal background information such as their professional training, experience in journalism and their job description. The results showed that the majority of the respondents were senior journalists: editors (20%), sub-editors (10%) and senior reporters (70%) with more than five years' experience in the print media. Twenty percent of them were Zimbabweans who had gotten more of their work experience from that country. Those who had less work experience were mainly from *Informative* and *Moeletsi oa Basotho* newspapers.

It was also established that 60% of the interviewees had at least a diploma in journalism, but those qualifications were obtained from institutions outside the country. About 30% had diplomas in mass communication obtained from the National University of Lesotho, 6% had degrees in Media Studies from the Lesotho branch of a Malaysian university, Limkokwing University of Creative Technology and 4% had qualifications in fields not related to the media.

All the respondents confirmed that they were directly involved in the news production process within their respective newspapers but their specific responsibilities were at different stages of the process, depending on the positions they held.

4.2.3.2 Direct influences

This section looks at different methods that the government as an advertiser employs to directly influence or change the manner in which journalists should be doing their work in the production of news, using advertisements.

4.2.3.2.1 Threats

Like in many countries in the developing world, advertising in Lesotho is the major source of income for the majority of newspapers. Without sufficient adverts, newspapers struggle to survive and in many such cases they end up closing down. The heavy dependency on advertising makes newspapers vulnerable to the influence of advertisers, who often use the opportunity to abuse the newspapers for their own benefit. In Lesotho, the government, being the biggest institution and biggest employer, having too many tenders and jobs to advertise, and having many programmes to promote, has become the most wanted advertiser by almost all newspapers. The interviews revealed that the government, because of this status, expected the newspapers to play by its rules, otherwise they are threatened. One of the respondents Boitumelo Koloi, editor of *Informative*, explains one way newspapers are threatened:

It is the style of the government to threaten us with adverts. I will give you an example, last week we were invited by the Ministry of Health to cover a story. I felt that story was not that important, besides, we were already full with other stories and I felt there was no need to send any reporter there. After the paper came out I received a call accusing us of not supporting the ministry, and telling me that we were no longer going to get adverts from that ministry, should that mistake happen again.

The situation became so desperate that the *Informative* had to adjust its policies in order to make sure that the government is satisfied at all the times, according to Koloji. One of the reporters from the same paper describes the effect of the changes in the policies in another interview:

Question: How much contact do you have with the marketing department here?

Motsélisi Mohale (MM): We have direct contact with them every day. Every morning we go in there to find out from the marketing officers which advertisers want coverage.

Question: And why do you have to be told by the marketing officers and not your editors?

MM: Because the marketing officers used to complain that when they went out to look for adverts, they struggled to secure them in some ministries because the government people complained that our newspaper did not cover their events. So it actually became a policy that we check up with the marketing department before we go out for any other story, every morning.

In the previous section we saw that *Informative* is a subsidiary of BAM group and its major task is to promote the business interests of the entire group, but from the interviews findings presented above, we notice that the responsibilities of this paper on BAM and its target consumers are seriously compromised because of the fear of losing adverts from the government, as the biggest advertiser. The fact that the reporters have to report to the marketing department to be given

instructions about coverage of stories preferred by advertisers means that the editorial authorities do not have control over what is rightfully their work. The work of journalists is directly controlled by advertisers, mainly the government since it is a big institution with activities enough to keep reporters busy almost every day. This clearly shows that the news diary of this paper is organised mainly by the government, which simply means it has direct control of the news content that goes into the paper.

4.2.3.2.2 Privileged access to information

In the cases where journalists do not wait to be invited by the government to cover its already tailor-made events, as we have seen in the incident of *Informative*, but choose to do their own investigations about the government or any other advertiser, the interviews revealed that the major problem that reporters face is lack of access to information. One of the respondents, Lineo Mojalefa shares her observations:

This thing has always been there, even in the past regimes, government officials always avoid talking to journalists, especially those from radio stations or newspapers that are known to be critical of the government. They always claim to be in meetings and while you wait for them to come back to you after their meetings, you see another paper coming out with the same story, nicely polished... Even if you decide to pursue your angle, you already know that it will no longer make sense because the people will have been convinced with the government's side.

Another respondent, Monare Molapo, confirms the bias of the government in dishing out important information to the media saying it normally gives the information to those journalists whose newspapers "go out of their way to demonstrate their support for the government in order to get adverts". Although Molapo could not name any newspaper, he confirmed that he once worked for one such newspapers saying:

What we did there was pure PR (public relations) for the government, at that time it felt good because we came out with stories that other newspapers would never easily get, even the government's own publications did not match us.

What is coming out of this subsection is that even though the government is not very particular about which newspapers it advertises with, when it comes to releasing important information, it is very sensitive. It gives preference to newspapers which are seen to be loyal. The benefit the government gets here is that positive publicity is guaranteed and more journalists will be motivated to report positively about the government so that they get the privilege to interview prominent people like the Prime Minister and ministers, about important issues. For the newspapers, winning the government's trust is the guarantee for best advertising deals.

4.2.3.2.3 Ads pull-out

For newspapers which rely fully on advertising revenue, like the majority of those in Lesotho, the worst form of punishment they can ever get from any advertiser for any wrong doing is the withdrawal of adverts. Although the majority of the respondents said they never had an experience of advertisers actually pulling out ads from their publications, they however generally understood how devastating that is, from the experience of *Public Eye*. As stated in the newspapers' background section, the government of Lesotho pulled out its adverts from *Public Eye* for allegedly reporting negatively about it. Most of the respondent referred to this case when they expressed their views about advertisers who pull out. Billy Ntaote, who was with *Public Eye* at the time of the incident but had moved to *Lesotho Times* when this study was conducted, explains the situation:

The situation got so bad; six of the most prominent journalists were sacked. I was wondering how the paper was going to survive without those guys, I was also wondering how we were going to make ends meet without the government, I waited for the worst to happen.

The chief subeditor for the *Public Eyes* adds:

I was not there at that time but I learnt that was the most difficult time *Public Eye* ever went through. I understand in the first incident, the financial situation deteriorated so vigorously that the paper had to be sent to bed for some months. I am not sure how things were exactly sorted out but what I can tell is that where we are now, we are safe; our relationship with the government is ok.

Although most of the respondents had not yet journalists when the government stopped advertising with *Public Eye* in 1997, they said the knowledge of that incident changed their perspectives and attitudes towards the government. The Political Editor for *Lesotho Times*, Bongiwe Zihlangu, expresses her feelings in her response to the question: “Has your publication ever had any one or any institution pulling out advertisements”:

I don't recall any such incidents happening here, I know it happened at *Public Eye*, it's like the government was not happy about their reporting. I think it was at that time of the 1998 political riots and the government blamed them for reporting in favour of the opposition, I mean government is government and newspapers are at the mercy of the government, we know that for sure. I understand we should be professional and we should not be seen to be taking any sides....but the fact remains that we are in business and we have to make money. *Le mantsoe a Sesotho a ea bolela hore molemo o ea molemong* (Even the Sesotho words tell that you can't bite the hand that feeds you). For me I have learnt to ignore those things that I know won't take me anywhere, like fighting the government, you will never win, instead you will lose business.

A respondent who only learnt about the incident of *Public Eyes* online as he prepared to join the media in Lesotho from Zimbabwe in the year this study was carried out, said he could not say much about how the government's decision to stop advertising with *Public Eye* affected the paper but he indicated that such things happened a lot in Zimbabwe and revealed that in most cases they are done

to force newspapers which report negatively about the government to close, especially when such newspapers are dependent on advertising.

The opinions of the respondents presented in the above discussion are exactly in line with the authoritarian theory, discussed in the theoretical framework, which assumes that the role of the media is only to promote the ideology and power of the ruling class, and any opposing opinion or view is not allowed in the media (Siebert et al, 1956).

In the same way, the government of Lesotho, as the findings show, views newspapers, regardless of being privately owned, as tools that should only promote its views and give no platform to the opposing views. Although the journalists admit that their loyalty lies with the public which should be served professionally, they do not have the power to resist the influence of the government because of their publications' heavy dependency on its advertisements. The decision that the government took to withdraw its advertisements from *Public Eye* was meant to force this paper to change its reporting as it was seen not to be in favour of the government. The move did not only have a negative impact on *Public Eye*, but on the entire print media as other newspapers also learned about the risk of being negative about the government while they depended on it for adverts.

4.2.3.2.4 Special Supplements

Commercial newspapers often publish themed special supplements to draw the attention of readers and advertisers to a certain issue of national interest. The content analysis discussed in the previous section also revealed that special supplements are more popular in *Lesotho Times* and *Public Eye* than in the other newspapers studied for this research. The interviews on the other hand, showed that newspapers mainly use special supplements as a strategy of making extra money from regular advertisers and also as a way of attracting new advertisers. Some of the respondents said they normally get good responses for special supplements from advertisers in the private sector and others pointed out that more advertisements for special supplements came from the government

offices, but they all agreed that special supplements advertisers always wanted to determine the editorial content to go with their ads. One of the respondents, Maleshoane Seitlheko, expresses her opinions during an interview:

Question: Who do you think is your biggest advertiser for your newspaper?

Maleshoane Seitlheko (MS): I cannot really point to any particular company, but I think most of our advertisements come from private companies. What I know is that Vodacom, Econet and some of the banks, are some of them. I know they are always there every week and they are always there even when we do special supplements, they always make sure that they fit into every theme we do...but their only problem is that when it comes to special supplements, hey! We always fight, they always want to behave differently.

Question: How do you mean they always want to behave differently?

MS: You know, under normal circumstances, they just send in their adverts, when it is a half-page or quarter page, they don't care how the rest of the space is going to be filled up but once it is special supplements, they always want to see every detail on the page before we go for printing.

Question: And how do you normally resolve it?

MS: The biggest problem is the marketing people, they panic too much, and they are the ones who put more pressure on us. So normally we print out the pages for them after the layout and they arrange with the advertisers to see their adverts before the deadline.

Question: What kind of complaints do they normally raise?

Ms: Those from the government, for example, would tell you to put a story that is related to what they do in their individual departments, next to their adverts. If it's the Ministry of

Health, they would force you to put a health-related story next to their ad, if it's the Ministry of Sports, they would want you to put a story about sports next to their adverts, remember we already have pages devoted for sports at the back of the paper and our readers are very much used to this. So for us to have to suddenly put some sports stories somewhere in the middle of the paper is definitely a great offence to our readers, which the advertisers don't care about. Other advertisers like the banks would say they don't want to see another bank next to their advertisements, and Vodacom and Econet would suddenly want to dictate what kind of pictures should sit next to their ads, something which they normally don't do.

Another respondent, Lerato Nyao, had a similar concern, showing that because of the pressure journalists get from advertisers when they do special supplements, they came to a decision to let the advertisers to design their own advertorials to go with their ads in every special supplement page.

The direct influence of advertisers also comes out clearly here. The clearly stated incapability of newspapers to prevent advertisers from deciding for them what kind of editorial content they should put in the special supplements is a clear indication of desperation and too much reliance on advertisements. The fact that independent newspapers are too dependent on advertising means that they lose their editorial independence. For the government, as the biggest advertiser of them all, this means it has a better chance of controlling most of the editorial content which goes into the main pages, as we saw in the previous sections, and at the same time has the means of controlling most of special supplements content because of the high volume of advertisements it brings to most of the newspapers, as demonstrated in this section.

4.2.3.3 Indirect Influences

Although it is widely believed that in countries where the media are mostly privately owned, the government maintains control of their content through laws and regulations, in the case of Lesotho however, the situation is totally different. In the previous section we saw how the government of

Lesotho, without applying any kind of law, is able to directly influence the editorial content of private newspapers. As it clearly came out from the views of the respondents, the main reason for this is the high level of newspapers' dependency on advertising revenue, which exposes them to abuse and manipulation by advertisers, such as the government, which take advantage of their poor financial situation, to promote their own interests. Even those newspapers which try hard to shield their news content from the influence and control of advertisers do not go far because an advertiser as big and powerful as the government can afford to use any kind of pressure to get the media under control.

As this study has revealed the government, as the leading advertiser in Lesotho, does not only use direct means of gaining control of the print media content but it also employs underhand methods to exert pressure on journalists and media organizations to provide favourable coverage. In this section, the study takes a closer look at those different techniques that the government and other prominent advertisers use to indirectly influence news content in newspapers, as described by the respondents.

4.3.3.3.1 Sponsorships to newspapers

As discussed in the previous sections in this chapter, the traffic for advertisements in the print media industry is two-way: The newspapers are always chasing companies and organizations for advertisements, and the advertisers on the other hand are always monitoring newspapers to identify those that have the potential to give them the best publicity. However, the respondents revealed that the advertisers sometimes go an extra mile to provide special incentives, on top of the advertisements they give to newspapers, as a way of further increasing their influence on the newspapers. Many of those interviewees, who touched on this issue, pointed out that the incentives often came in the form of sponsorships to their newspapers. One of them explains in an interview:

Question: How can you describe your relationship with your advertisers?

Monaheng Molapo (MM): Well, the marketing people should know better because they are the ones who deal with the advertisers directly, but as far as I know, the relationship is

smooth with majority of them, we do straight forward business, we give them advertising space and they give us money, period. The only thing that I have seen as a major problem is late payment and the government is very good on that, but to me that is not anything to worry about because we know for sure the money at the end is going to come, and besides giving us a lot of advertisements, the government is also giving us a lot of support even in our editorial department.

Question: What kind of support do you get for editorial department?

MM: Recently the government sponsored the trip of our photographer to... ehh, I think it was Zambia where SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) had organized a ceremony to award photographers from Southern African countries, that trip was very important to the guy because it was his first flight ever, and it also made us very proud as a company because we got to be known internationally.

Question: What other offers can you talk about?

MM: Look, there are too many things the government has been offering to us. Sometimes they offer sponsorships for training of journalists and sometimes they do it for coverage of certain events happening outside the country, it depends. I remember one time we were invited by the Ministry of Communications to send two reporters to China for a study tour. Only one reporter was released for that trip because we had shortage of staff at that time. That trip was fully sponsored by the government. It was a great opportunity and wonderful experience for both the reporter and the newspaper.

Another respondent, Lebohang Lethunya also confirmed that advertisers sometimes do go out of their way to impress journalists or newspapers with special offers. She disclosed that she benefitted from the sponsorships offered by some of the companies and organisations which advertise regularly with the newspapers she works for, including the government. Lethunya said she was sponsored by

Vodacom to cover its event in Mozambique in 2011, and in another one by the government to attend training in Botswana in 2009. Although she said she personally gained a lot from such opportunities, she confessed that “when you are sponsored you lose your loyalty to the profession and become a puppet of your sponsors”.

Describing how exactly sponsorships affects the work of journalists, Caswell Tlali, in his response to the question on “How free are you to criticise the government”, puts it:

Actually the government gives ads and freebies to private newspapers for one reason; to put pressure on those newspapers and their journalists to give it favourable publicity only. If you look at this issue very well, you will notice that the government has got its own media houses, which have all the resources you can think of, but they spend more money on the private media, why? Because they know that the private media are very powerful but their financial situation is so bad that they can do anything or accept anything that puts money in their pockets, even if that thing is against their normal ways of doing their work. Obviously you cannot bite a hand that feeds you, you cannot be flown to England, for example, by the government to cover the Olympic Games and then come back to report negatively about the same government, you won't have the guts to do that, even ten years after that trip, you will still feel obliged to report well about the government, even when there is absolutely nothing good to report about.

Although Tlali admitted that it is very difficult to turn down offers from advertisers because of the fear to offend them and spoil business relations, he stressed that accepting sponsorships from the government and other sponsors, was more dangerous because it simply meant accepting to become the mouthpiece of the government, to distort information in its favour and to ignore or hide damaging information.

4.3.3.2 Massive subscription for newspaper copies

A clear example of how advertisers indirectly influence news content through massive subscription for copies of newspapers was presented in an interview by one of the editors who showed that sometime in 2013, there was a crisis within the Ministry of Justice, in which, among many other things, some of the high court judges and staff members were in a verbal war over appointment of some senior officers, while on the other hand the Chief Justice and the President of the Court of Appeal were embroiled in a bitter fight over issues of courts administration. According to the editor's report, there were too many good stories coming out of such incidences but some of them, he said he could not be published because of clash of interests. He explains:

You know, sometimes I received stories that contained a lot of embarrassing details about the judges or other officials in that ministry (Justice), or the minister himself and then I would say: but these are the people who give us so many adverts. Besides adverts, that ministry, among all the government ministries, is the one which subscribes for the biggest number of our newspaper copies, I think they supply all their offices across the whole country every week, it's a lot of money and you can't risk losing such a good business because of a story. So that was the reason why I spiked some of the stories even when they were very good. I know that made the reporters very sad but when you are an editor, you have to do what is best for all.

Some of the reporters confirmed, in their responses to different questions, that editors often prevented their stories from being published when they carried sensitive information about certain people or institutions. They said sometimes if the stories survived the chop, they were published without some important details or they came out completely different from the original copy.

Lerato Mosili, in her answer to the question on "How does your professional knowledge enhance your work, especially when you are dealing with news involving your newspaper's advertisers",

explained that her professional knowledge did not have much impact on her job because “my work is fully controlled by the decisions of the editors who also have their own interests and influences”.

Mosili, who has a diploma in journalism from the school of Journalism in Tanzania and worked as an investigative reporter, at the time the study was conducted, explained her sad experience about one of her stories which was never published after working hard on it for about two weeks. According to her, the story was about a scandal involving the vice-chancellor and some lecturers at the National University of Lesotho (owned by the government). When she later inquired about the reasons for not publishing her story, she said:

The editor started praising NUL (National University of Lesotho) as a very important client for our newspaper and he tried to calculate the number of copies NUL had already signed for, in the subscription agreement for that year and he went all out to show me the adverts they had put in the edition of that week. I was so bored because he was simply telling me NUL is so important that nothing negative could be said about them, even if it was true.

This reporter indicated that she was very upset and not convinced by the editor’s response because she believed giving quality information to the public was more important than satisfying the needs of advertisers.

Another respondent who had an almost similar experience is Reitumetse Mothae. In his case the story was not killed but it was completely changed from the original angle and some information was removed because of what his editor called ‘avoiding trouble’, according to him. Mothae was telling his experience in response to the question: “Newspapers which criticise the government get less or no adverts from the government, how far do you agree or disagree with this”.

He said his article had focused on the opinions of members of the civil society who were unhappy about the manner in which the Minister of Education and various offices in that ministry had handled the crisis of tertiary education institutions, whose students had gone on rampage, demanding

payment of their scholarships money, which had been delayed. The respondent said in his discussion with his editor after the story was published, the editor explained that he had to reorganise the story and exclude some of the details because the minister had already complained about negative reporting on that issue and had threatened to stop subscription from newspapers which would continue to report negatively about the ministry. Mothae indicated that he learned from the experience that newspapers were more loyal to those who gave them more money than to the people they were supposed to serve.

4.3.3.3 .Personal and financial benefits to owners and chief editors

As shown in the newspapers background section, *Public Eye* became a good example of how badly newspapers in Lesotho could suffer when they did not operate according the interests of the government and as noted in the introduction of this research, *Mo-Africa* newspaper also became a good example of how well newspapers can prosper when they dance to the tune of the government. This was after the government in the late 1990s stopped advertising and subscription with *Public Eye* and started giving massive ads and subscription to *Mo-Africa*, which had, at that time, publicly declared its support to the government (African Barometer, 2005). A number of respondents made reference to these two cases when they described how owners and senior editors get personal and financial benefits from advertisers.

One of the respondents, Motanyane Makara, said after the government turned its attention to *Mo-Africa*, the paper suddenly ballooned in size and circulation because of the increased number of ads and increased coverage of the government's stories. He said around the same period a news radio station, Mo-Africa FM, belonging to the same proprietor of *Mo-Africa* newspaper suddenly surfaced, propagating the views of the government, through the financial and technical support of the Ministry of Communications. Makara was responding to the question: "Publications which get more adverts from a certain organisation give more positive coverage to that organisation, how far to you agree or disagree".

Another respondent gave an example about the same incident of *Mo-Africa*, saying:

Am sure you can remember how everybody was shocked when we first heard and saw Candy (*Mo-Africa's* owner) suddenly driving a big UVR car, it was still very rare at the time, for anybody in the media, even newspapers and radio stations owners to have a simple car, even Thai (*Public Eye's*¹ owner) took a very long time before he could afford to buy a car. So it was clear for Candy that his car was bought for him by the government because it came immediately after he made friends with the BCP (Basotho Congress Party) government and started campaigning for them towards the 2002 elections.

A related comment was made by a reporter who said what she also knew that the time Candy's private car was fuelled from the government's petrol, something she said was very awkward. The same respondent also spoke about foreign editors who were offered side jobs on government projects and also by some of the private companies. According to him, one of his editors was privately contracted to produce a newsletter for one of the government's institutions. He said:

I was always wondering why he was always arguing for the removal of negative stories about that organisation until I learnt from one of my sources about the job he was doing for those people.

In response to the journalists' claims, Candy admitted that the whole purpose of the media business is to make money. He said he got into the business to make money and acknowledged that in any business there are hard times and good times, which he also experienced before getting to the point where his businesses were, at the time of the interview. However, he refuted the allegations that any of his cars were bought for him by the government. He said everything he achieved was through hard work and persistence.

¹ *Mo-Africa* was a Sesotho weekly newspaper, owned by an independent Mosotho businessman, Candy Ramainoane. The paper was closed down due to financial problems after changes in government which saw the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) taking power from the Basotho Congress for Democracy (BCP) following the 2002 elections.

4.3.3.3.4 Absence of media laws

All the respondents were asked: “How far does the absence of the national media policy and media laws in Lesotho enable or constrain your work in relation to the way you are expected to handle pressure from advertisers”. Most of them expressed a common concern about the prolonged reluctance of the government, in all the regimes since independence, to adopt such laws.

Some of the interviewees felt the government was avoiding the laws because of fear of losing control or to have limited power over the media, especially the private media, which it had been comfortably managing through advertising. They expressed fear that the laws would never exist in Lesotho because their absence was an advantage for the government. Billy Ntaote shared his views:

This thing of the media policy has taken too long, I heard the present government is doing something about it now but I think *ba ntse ba re nyants'a phooko feela* (they are just giving us false hopes) like the previous governments. If you look at this issue closely, you will understand why they are reluctant. The media policy or any media law is supposed to provide for the freedom and protection of the media, like freedom of expression and the right to publish freely, and that is exactly what the government is against.

Ntaote further explained that the media laws were supposed to promote accountability among media practitioners but the government was taking advantage of the private media's financial constraints to “abuse” them, knowing they had nowhere to complain or seek protection. In relation to his work, he said the absence of media laws did not mean much to him because “for anything good or bad I do, the credit or the blame goes to the editor”.

Bokang Maraisane added:

I doubt if the media policy will ever be enacted by the government, I have heard that song of the media policy for too long now. Although I have never worked in any country in which the

media operate under the media policy or media laws and I don't know how good or bad it is to be in that kind of a situation, am suspicious that the government is running away from something. I think they are aware that they are not giving the private media their space. They (government authorities) want to keep them (private media) at their mercy so that they can control them the way they want and impose their own punishment on them whenever they feel the media is not supporting them.

Maraisane, a sub-editor at *Lesotho Times*, was one of the respondents whose work was not directly affected by the absence of the media laws in Lesotho but she felt, as a professional, that the laws were definitely needed to "normalise" the relationship between government and the independent media and define the role and responsibilities of the independent media, as there was no difference between the state-owned and privately-owned media at that time.

The same sentiments were shared by Keiso Mohloboli who confirmed that state media and the private media in Lesotho were separated by a very blurred line. She attributed the situation to both the heavy reliance of the private media on government's advertising and the absence of media laws. According to her, the two factors worked together to keep journalists under pressure to write positively about the government. She referred to a number of court cases in which private media organisations and journalists were sued by the government institutions and individual officials for various reasons. In such cases, the government often won and yet there were always no clear laws from which the cases were grounded, according to her.

Contrary to what the majority of the respondents felt about the absence of media laws in Lesotho, a few of them hailed this nonexistence as a great advantage for the private media. Among them, one of the editors originally from Zimbabwe, said in many countries around the world, the media laws worked more for the benefit of the governments than for the media. He said without any legal restrictions in Lesotho, he felt free to do his work without fear of offending any law. The respondent revealed that the only limit to his work was his professional consciousness.

On the same note Rethabile Mabaka said the absence of the media laws meant freedom from “all external forces”. She was asked to elaborate:

Question: What do you mean by external forces?

RM: I mean all these people whom we rely on to do our work, but who are not supposed to interfere with the way we do that work, if you get what I mean.

Question: I don't, please explain.

RM: I mean people like our sources of information, we need them to have something to write about, and people like advertisers, we need their money to be able to publish our news, but it does not mean they have to tell us how we should write and publish information.

Question: So how does the absence of the media laws save you from their influence?

RM: You know, the main thing that the laws do is to put boundaries within which you should work. You are put in a sort of a bottle and anybody you try to interact with from that bottle is given a certain amount of power over your work by the law.

Question: Can you give me an example of what you are talking about?

RM: In South Africa, for example, there are too many media related laws and the way I see them, they give more protection to sources, subjects and consumers of news than to journalists and media organisations. That is why there are always so many cases against the media. Newspapers are always accused of defamation, hate speech, invasion of privacy and so on.

The views presented in this section show that the government considered the private newspapers in Lesotho as an important and effective tool for promoting its policies and decisions. This is evidenced

by its determination to communicate its messages through privately-owned newspapers, at a high cost, even when it has its own newspapers where it can advertise and promote its propaganda for free. On top of the massive advertising revenue that the government was already giving to private newspapers, which as discussed in the previous sections, which was clearly intended to give the government access to influence the editorial content of such newspapers, the findings revealed that the government also spent more funds on offers such as sponsorships to the newspapers and personal benefits targeting influential journalists and media owners. The mission behind these offers is clearly to purchase the loyalty of the private media, something which signifies the government's desperation to have them on its side.

The media are considered to be the fourth estate and watchdog of the ruling elite because of their powerful influence on the society. According to Ibrahim (2007), the media in their watchdog role are "supposed to serve as controller of the government", who should, among other things, expose its mistakes and wrongdoings. As the fourth estate, Kruger (2009) writes:

. . . the media are centre of power in their own right. They can influence individual behaviour, they set the agenda for debate, and they can make or destroy reputations.

The government is clearly cognisant of these powers of the media in the case of Lesotho hence its concerted efforts to impress newspapers and their journalists with gifts and other incentives such as massive subscriptions, as a way of putting them under pressure to report positively about it and ignore any information that may expose it in the bad light.

However, the study did not find anything evidence that the newspapers or their journalists were forced in any way to accept the offers presented to them by the government and yet the findings clearly showed that the government benefited positive publicity from such efforts, which means the influence on the editorial content by the government was indirect.

The critical political economy theory suggests that the commercial media are vulnerable to the pressure of advertisers to adjust news content for their benefit (see for example, Bagdikian, 2000). However, Rinallo and Basurroy (2009), drawing from Baker (1994), argue that even when there is no direct pressure from advertisers, journalists put themselves under pressure of self-censorship to impress the advertisers. In the case of Lesotho, this was found to be true because the journalists accepted the government's offers without any clear sign of force and they used their own discretion to reward the government with positive coverage based mainly on the fact that the government was their most important source of revenue, which they could not afford to disappoint for any reason.

This matter, on how some journalists make decisions about news content, has implications on some issues, which are central to the work of journalists:

a) Professionalism

Journalistic professionalism in any media organization, according to Berkowitz (1997), determines what the communicator thinks is worth transmitting to the audience. Among the elements which the communicator considers when making professional decisions for any news story are accuracy, newsworthiness, truthfulness, and fairness and public interest (Day, 1991). The opinions presented in this section and the previous one have proven that professionalism was, in most cases, not considered in decisions about stories to be published by private newspapers, especially the stories concerning government institutions. The decisions were mainly influenced by the interests of advertisers. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argue that the more an institution advertises with a particular publication, the more power and influence it has over its editorial content. Since the study was investigating the government as the biggest advertiser in Lesotho, it is obvious that it had more influence on the newspapers' news content.

While Soloski (1989) argues that professionalism also helps to prevent influence of external forces such as sources of information and advertisers, in the case of Lesotho newspapers it played almost

no role in preventing the influence of the government, according to the interviews findings. Kilbourne (2011) contends that journalists and their managers deviate from professionalism and bias their content towards advertisers when their organizations depend wholly on advertising revenue. In such a situation, Riaz (2003) avers the government use advertising as an incentive to motivate private media houses to provide it with positive and maximum coverage and provide inducements to the private owners to encourage them to divert their focus away from their professional obligations and organizational policies.

This is how the government in the case of Lesotho managed to influence journalists away from making professional decisions as the respondents confirmed that media owners and journalists indeed received personal incentives, on top of the massive advertising that they were already receiving from the government, as motivation to give the government positive and substantial coverage, and that some editors consequently altered and prevented information that was critical of the government.

b) Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is described by Shoemaker (1997) as a process by which billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down into hundreds of messages that reach a given person in a given day. In her work with Stephen Reese, they argue that the decisions gatekeepers make affect news content directly (Shoemaker and Reese (1996). However, they acknowledge that such decisions are not only made at the whim of individual gatekeepers, but they are also influenced by a number of factors, which are extrinsic to them. Such factors include organizational demands, sources of information, advertisers and other media organizations, as stipulated in the introduction. In this study the views expressed by most of the respondents around issues to do with the government's direct and indirect influences on news content, show that the editors in the case of Lesotho newspapers were the major gatekeepers whose decisions were mainly influenced by the government as both the source of information and source of advertising revenue for the newspapers.

While some of the gatekeeping model critics argue that the editors are not the only decision makers in the process of news production because the reporters also make key decisions about the stories they write, which finally get to be published, in Lesotho the argument is relevant up to a certain point. The findings presented above have proven that the reporters had the power to decide on what kind of information to put in their stories and which sources to contact but their decisions did not have much impact on the content that was finally published by their newspapers because their stories went through the process of filtration by editors, who sometimes chose to kill the stories completely or remove certain parts of the stories, or even change them totally, especially when those they expose the government on the bad light.

5. Conclusion

Worldwide, advertising has become the fundamental source of revenue for news media (Bagdikian, 1992). The heavy reliance of media organizations on advertising revenue has put them under a lot of pressure to shift their priorities from serving the interests of the public to serving those of advertisers.

Traditionally, the role of the independent media in any democratic society is to be the watchdogs of the government, which exposes the wrongdoings of those in power, for the knowledge of the public (Das, 2011). In doing so the news media are required by professional standards to honour their primary loyalty to members of the public, by providing them with accurate, truthful and objective information in order for them to be able to make informed decisions about what is happening around (Day, 1991).

However, the poor financial conditions under which the media organizations operate have put them in a situation in which they are unable to fulfil their societal and professional obligations (Wolf, 1992). Instead, they focus their attention on satisfying the interests of advertisers (Alexander, 2004). Roxanne and Haley (2010) clarify the need:

Because it is advertising which pays the bills, the managers of newspapers must keep their advertisers happy.

The authors liken this situation to “feeding a crocodile”, which simply means that keeping advertisers happy is a very dangerous task. The danger is that wealthy institutions use advertising as a way of gaining influence and control of the editorial content of the media, thereby interfering with the freedom of the press and freedom of expression (Coyre and Leeson, 2009).

Since in most developing countries the government is the biggest advertiser (Scott and Sonin, 2014), then it means the government enjoys the biggest influence and more control of what is published by

the media. In this study, the findings show that the government of Lesotho contributed more advertising revenue for majority of newspapers in the country than any other advertiser. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argue that when a particular institution/company provides more adverts to a particular media outlet, it gets more power to influence the editorial content of that outlet, because of the importance of advertising in the survival of media organizations.

In most cases, that influence on editorial content is not used for the benefit of majority of members of the society but it is often used to promote the interests of those who have the political and economic powers (Bagdikian, 1992).

Although some media experts argue that advertising can be used as a way of promoting free speech, whereby business people are given an opportunity to express their opinions and give out information which is often left out in the editorial content (see, for example Collin, 1992 and Baker, 1994), many studies have proven that advertisers also use their economic influence to suppress freedom of the press and freedom of expression, as noted in the literature review.

In this particular study it was found out that the government of Lesotho, as the biggest advertiser in the country, uses this position to gain influence and control of the newspaper's editorial content in order to achieve two major goals; to get positive and maximum coverage, and to prevent any unfavourable information or opposing views from being published. The study reveals that the government employed various techniques to get direct and indirect access to the editorial content.

For direct influence, the government uses methods such as withdrawal of advertisements, threats to pull out ads and privileged access to government information, to pressurize newspapers to publish its own pre-determined information and promote its propaganda without giving any publicity to the opposing views.

This was noticeable in the case of *Public Eye*, for example, in which the government completely withdrew its advertising and subscription from this paper because of allegations that it criticized the

government in favour of the opposition. The withdrawal put this newspaper in a situation in which it was faced with only two options: to die or to fix its editorial content. The fact that *Public Eye* survived and continued to get advertisements from the government, after that incident, confirmed that the paper had to fulfil the demands of the advertiser, in order to survive. In another incident, *Informative* newspaper was forced to fix its editorial policy to accommodate the demands of the government as its biggest advertiser, after receiving threats to pull out advertising.

On the side of indirect influence, the study found out that the government employed techniques such as sponsorships, massive subscriptions, financial and personal incentives to owners and editors, to purchase the loyalty of the most influential journalists and media owners, in an effort to ensure positive publicity from their publications. Clear examples here include journalists who were offered sponsorships for training and also for coverage abroad, and a newspaper owner who received financial assistance towards his personal and other business interests from the government, as well as editors who were offered moonlight jobs by some government institutions.

Therefore, the study supports views as held by the critical political economists that governments use advertising as an incentive to influence positive and maximum coverage (see, for example, Riaz, 2003) and use inducements to motivate journalists to focus their attention away from their organizational demands and give priority to those of the government (see, for example, Scott and Sonin, 2014).

Thus the commercial or independent media in Lesotho, which, unlike the state media, are expected to be independent of government, are seen to be operating under the control and influence of the government, and are particularly complementing the work of the state media, instead of proving a platform for alternative voices and scrutinising the government. This therefore shows that the dependency of the media on government's advertising does not only take away the freedom of the media but it also takes away the right of citizens to receive pluralistic information.

Drawing on the comparative media systems theory developed by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini, Hadland (2007) describes this kind of situation, in which the media lack independence, as a condition caused by too much intervention of state in the media. The theory defines the relationship between the media and political systems under three models: Polarised Pluralist (made up of countries in which party politics and the media are closely related), Democratic Corporatist (made up of countries that have clear limits on state power), and Liberal model (made up of countries in which commercial newspapers survive and grow with little state intervention).

According to Hadland (2007)'s analysis, when the support of state is very high, it means the media system is very far away from the liberal model. This is exactly the same trend that the media in Lesotho was found to be following. Clearly commercial newspapers in Lesotho survive mainly from the state funding, which means they are far from being independent of the government, and therefore their content is subject to the influence and control of the government, thus making journalistic professionalism a non-issue in the work of journalists and their organisations.

The study also observed the behaviour and reactions of journalists and media organizations and it was found out that newspapers which rely on advertising revenue are totally unable to resist any form of pressure or influence from advertisers, particularly the government as the most influential advertiser. The pressure of the government directly affected journalists at the level of editorship and they often reacted by removing completely stories that were negative about the government or removed certain parts of the stories which were found to be offensive to the government. In some cases the editors changed the stories completely to avoid any harm to the government.

This behaviour confirms the argument of Kilbourne (2011) that news organizations which depend on advertising revenue, organize their content in a way that suppresses any information that may be harmful or offensive to the advertiser, or in a way that includes information that portrays the advertiser on the positive side.

However, at the level of reporters, the commitment to report news about the government professionally and objectively was clearly noticeable but such efforts did not have any impact on the final products as the final decisions were done by editors who were also influenced by the pressure to meet organisational demands. Such organisational demands were found to be based on media owners' quest to maximise profit and the need to satisfy the demands of advertisers, which were often fulfilled at the expense of professionalism and media outlets' credibility. Therefore, this confirms the perceptions of the sociology of news production theory opponents who argue that the professional ethics and personal values that journalists bring to work do not have influence on the final news products because those ethics and values are overpowered by the routines and ethos of the organisations within which they work.

Cowling et al (2010) argue that when professionalism and media credibility are affected in the pursuit of commercial profit, circulation and advertising revenue are also affected. Although in this particular study it could not be established how far circulation of newspapers was affected, it came out clearly that the deviance of the editors of the newspapers investigated, from professionalism, was more profitable than dangerous to their media organisations, as it saved the organisations from getting in trouble with the government, which could mean losing advertising or subscription revenue.

However, the danger of this practice was clearly observable on editorial content. Despite numerous efforts that were done by the newspapers to improve their standard of news reporting, including hiring journalists from Zimbabwe, thought to be producing best journalism, and training of reporters outside the country, the quality of news products remained the same because of constant and irresistible interference of the government on the news production process and the consequent pressure to accommodate its demands on editorial content.

Although some journalists felt that establishment of legal framework and adoption of the long awaited national media policy by the government would help to reduce or remove the influence of external forces such as government on media content, it is not clear how such laws would remove

the heavy dependency of newspapers on advertising revenue, which is the only way in which the government is able to penetrate newsrooms and exert pressure on news content. The only possibility is that the media laws, just like the skills imported from Zimbabwe, would only come to be socialised in to the same system that the government is using to control media content, as long as the media are dependent on the government for funding.

While media commentators like Nyamnjoh (2005) and Berger (2002) are concerned about the use of Western models to analyse the media situation in Africa, this study supports the assumption of Hallin and Mancini's Comparing media systems theory that the only way of understanding the news media is by understanding the political and economic systems within which they operate. The study showed that the commercial newspapers in Lesotho are where they are and do things the way they do because of the political and economic environment within which they operate. We saw the attitude of state towards the media, the link between political and economic power and their influence on the media. The study therefore realises that what works for the media in the Republic of Zimbabwe or the Republic of South Africa may not necessarily work for the media in the Kingdom of Lesotho even if the economic challenges are the same, because of the countries' different political systems.

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