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How To Define Objectivity In Journalism

Prof. Ali Raza¹

Dr. John Smith²

Dr. Fatima Saeed³

Designation

¹Department of Social Sciences, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)

²Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford, UK

³Department of Social Work, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

Abstract

This article takes a look at the theoretical institutions that were the impetus for the development of the concept of objectivity in journalism. This paper contends that the notion of objectivity in journalism may be traced back to positivism, which was an earlier historical theoretical school, and that it has close ties to this school. Journalism has made a number of attempts to break free of the positivist objectivity paradigm, but none of them have been very fruitful thus far. The report goes into detail about each of these different activities. A topography of journalism theory is presented as the concluding section of the study. This section examines journalism theory through the prism of the concept of objectivity.

Keywords: objectivity, positivism, journalism, history

Introduction

The credibility of journalism is significantly contingent upon its capacity to faithfully represent reality. There would be a lack of interest in the field of journalism if journalists were to assert that the news they provide consists of fabricated representations of the non-existent. The interdependence between objectivity and ideas such as "truth" and "reality" is evident. Therefore, if we consider the existence of a paradigm within the field of journalism, it is possible to identify one in the necessity for objectivity in disseminated news. However, the implementation of objectivity in a journalist's work should be considered as a separate issue from its use as a guiding principle.

Several media institutes have made efforts to operationalize the concept of objectivity. These include Mainstream media, Scientific Journalism, New Journalism, and Precision Journalism, which incorporates Computer-Assisted Reporting. In order to effectively implement concepts, individuals must engage in independent thought or draw inspiration from external sources. When practitioners, such as journalists, want a theoretical framework, they predominantly resort to the second scenario, which is the prevailing occurrence.

The objective of this essay is to illustrate the efforts made by the aforementioned journalism institutions in implementing objectivity by incorporating elements of scientific theory into their practices. Through the lens of objectivity, this analysis aims to explore the journalistic concept of objectivity and afterwards examine the many journalistic inclinations and their correlation with different scientific theoretical frameworks. Commencing with the notion of objectivity, I shall strive to elucidate the domain sometimes referred to as the realm of journalism philosophy.

The field of journalism can be characterized as a craft rather than a science, implying that it is not influenced by advancements in scientific theory. Consequently, one could argue that engaging in this pursuit lacks purpose. Moreover, the existence of any association between different scientific theoretical movements and journalism remains completely speculative.

Nevertheless, further investigation suggests that this stance is unsustainable. Scientific tendencies are pervasive throughout all aspects of societal consciousness. Furthermore, until journalism is prepared to acknowledge its complete lack of intellectual substance, it employs notions such as "truth," "reality," and "objectivity." Hence, it is imperative for the field of journalism to carefully consider the implications and practical implementation of these notions.

It's over for positivity! Positivism should live on!

In the second part of the 19th century, the field of journalism began to earn its reputation as a respected profession. The University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri, is credited for offering the first ever university journalism course during the years 1879 and 1884. According to the most recent edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica (2003), the first journalist union was established in the year 1883 in the country of England. According to Hindman, the industry is referred to as "mainstream journalism," which is a modern word that continues to refer to the predominant form of journalism that is favored by the vast majority of journalists in our modern times.

The prevalent norm or the behavior that is generally recognized as acceptable. The practice of journalism is distinguished from other fields by the fact that it adheres to certain professional rules and makes use of particular approaches when gathering and disseminating news. According to Hindman (1998:177), mainstream journalists frequently consult official sources in order to get

information. They also strive to maintain objectivity in their reporting, create a secure emotional distance from the subject matter, and present the data in a particular way.

August Comte is credited with coining the term "positivism" and designating it as a scientific theoretical framework, as stated by Kjrup (2000:289). This occurred roughly forty years earlier. The thesis of this research is that a sizeable proportion of the journalistic and scientific communities subscribe to the positivist view that objectivity should be viewed in a positive light.

Positivism's adherence to a commonsense epistemological approach, which says that knowledge is confined to what can be directly witnessed through our senses, is one of the factors that contributes to the philosophy's appeal. Perception of one's surroundings is the one and only route to getting new information. The process of acquiring a specific level of knowledge can be compared to the methodical organization of the fundamental components that make up the entirety of human knowledge (Hackett and Zhao, 1998:109–110; Kjrup, 2000:288–307). This comparison was made by Hackett and Zhao (1998) and Kjrup (2000).

Objectivity is viewed as a dichotomous construct within the framework of positivism. Within this paradigm, persons are categorized as either subjective or objective, depending on how they view the world. The idea that an individual's subjective opinions, personal beliefs, and predispositions can have an effect on one's knowledge is what is meant by the term subjectivity. The ability to communicate factual information without being swayed by one's own preconceived notions is what is meant by the term "objectivity." The idea of a fact refers to an experiential phenomena that can be met in a person's life in a manner that is subjective to that person, and that can then be understood by other people through a mode of perception that is shared by all of those people.

In addition, the indisputable correctness of a certain truth is commonly accepted to be the case. According to the accepted definition of the term, an individual is regarded as objective if and only if they can exhibit a willingness to deliver factual information. Because of this, one of the most important pre-requisites for adhering to the principles of positivism is the capacity to differentiate between objective facts and subjective views.

There is a chapter in a course on modern journalism that is titled "Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion."

In the previous examples, the authors provided a description of the visual, aural, and olfactory stimuli that they had experienced. These observations were genuine and offered empirical evidence of happenings that any person who was there at the scene may or may not have personally witnessed. According to Rich (2000:85), authors give readers the opportunity to form their own unique points of view.

In line with the positivist stance on objectivity, it turns out that there is a clear line that can be drawn between opinions and facts that can be identified and differentiated. In this setting, journalists have a responsibility to report only on facts that can be independently verified and first-hand observations. It is the responsibility of the journalist to preserve impartiality in their work, to refrain from including personal viewpoints, and to provide readers the opportunity to arrive at their own judgments based on the facts that is presented.

It is also possible to find the aforementioned assertion in Danish, in which it is said that it is the responsibility of a journalist to give information that is objective and free of any bias, so enabling readers to independently establish their own opinions. Ufer, drawing reference to an illuminating

passage from his prior master's work, vehemently emphasizes the significance of refraining from making subjective judgements, such as naming a fire as "terrible" or otherwise. He says this in order to emphasize the significance of refraining from making such evaluations. In addition, I would appreciate it if you could guarantee that the report is finished. The opinions you offer are not something that other people care much about. The people have a sense of interest regarding the events that have taken place (Ufer, 2001:39; translated from Danish, emphasis in the original).

As a consequence of this, Ufer's former instructor emphasized that his pupils have the ability to separate their personal identities from the journalistic initiatives they pursue, chronicling just the objective happenings (that is, the facts) and removing any subjective points of view.

The ability to differentiate between theoretical concepts and real-world examples might provide difficulties when used in the real world.

According to Andrén, Hemánus, and others (1979:11; author's translation), the criticism of the concept of objectivity in this model is predicated on the realization that facts, as we currently understand them, do not have any inherent meaning and must be interpreted through underlying associations that are frequently not immediately observable. This is the understanding that underpins the criticism.

The fact that the journalist is required to choose the context in which the data is positioned is the root cause of the problem. In addition to this, he arrived at this conclusion on his own, independently and subjectively. Journalism, much like the discipline of science, has struggled at times to adequately appreciate this corpus of knowledge. Because of this, a significant amount of reflective discourse relevant to this subject, in addition to academic literature on journalism, continuously advocates for the differentiation between factual information and personal perspectives, albeit with some degree of caution. In other words, the line between factual information and personal viewpoints should be clear. In the context of a course on journalistic source critique, Thurén (year) brings to light the difficulty of discriminating between subjective opinions and objective descriptions of reality, as an example of which can be found in the preceding sentence.

The question that needs to be answered concerns the possible significance of the situation. Does it only consist of an abstract framework and have no practical applications? It is vital that the ending section of this chapter give a triad of justifications (1986:11; translated from Swedish). This is necessary in order to maintain the separation between factual information and subjective opinions, which is the focus of this chapter.

Thurén goes on to elaborate on three explanations for the imperative character of this separation, which are as follows: To begin, the application of this technique provides significant value to the political debates that take place. Second, the application of its principles effectively refutes the false concept that subjective perspectives may be objectively quantified. Last but not least, it provides light on the enormous influence that opinions have on the individual interpretations of reality that people have. Despite this, this does not provide compelling evidence that Thurén's theory is more accurate than other competing hypotheses. Some people, who are aware of the potential complications involved, choose to create a clear difference between subjective opinions and objective realities. These people are conscious of the potential complexities involved. The topic of investigation for Schudson's doctoral dissertation is the development of the idea of objectivity as it has been applied to the profession of journalism. Within the area of social science,

he identifies the exploration of the ideal of detaching factual knowledge from subjective values as the purpose of his research. He explains this as his "research objective." This course of action was taken by me because I have a deep-seated disdain for the "value-free sociology" theory and the attendant ideas that go along with it. In addition, I discovered that it was challenging for me to simply accept any cavalier dismissal of the idea that anything had no value. Individuals, even those who have opinions that are in opposition to those held by the ideal, have a tendency to adopt the ideal's ideas due to the robustness of the ideal. In addition, we will be defining the term "objectivity" in the context of this discussion as the notion that values and facts may and should be kept separate entities (Schudson 1990:2-3).

The struggle that Schudson and a large number of other academics and possibly some members of the journalistic community go through to fight against the allure of the positivist concept of objectivity is something that they all have in common.

Researching history and journalism for writing

Allow me to elaborate on few further aspects where the realms of positivism and journalism converge.

The field of journalism is impacted by its positivist origins in two notable aspects: firstly, in its understanding of the purpose of "narrating a narrative," and secondly, in its reliance on evaluating sources. The study of history has influenced various elements of journalism. In the subsequent paragraphs, I will present arguments supporting the notion that borrowings might be regarded as remnants of historical events.

Leopold von Ranke, in his 1824 publication titled "Geschichte der romanischen and germanischen Völker," presented a critical examination of historical narratives pertaining to preceding eras. In contrast to his contemporaries in the field of history, his objective was to produce historical accounts that adhered to the principle of "Wie es eigentlich gewesen."

The line need to be understood as a departure from the practice of chronicling events, which mostly focused on narrating compelling stories during earlier periods. It should be emphasized that this interpretation should not be regarded as an accurate representation of historical truth, as subsequent historians have construed it. These historians held the belief that Ranke's objective for the field of history was to employ primary materials in order to reconstruct historical events and periods. The sources served as integral components of a historical puzzle, whose proper assembly would yield a comprehensive and precise depiction of the past. Throughout the 20th century, with a special emphasis on the 1960s, scholars in the field of history gradually came to acknowledge that this endeavor was not only unfeasible but also excessively labor-intensive. The significance of the past diminishes as it recedes into history. The act of finding interest in historical matters becomes compelling and pertinent primarily when one encounters a captivating issue that holds significance in the present or future. Hansen (1999) posits that a contemporary understanding of historical research would advocate for the reconstruction of past events within the framework of present-day concerns.

The recurring notion of the feasibility of capturing the essence of "wie es eigentlich gewesen" in journalism is a topic of ongoing discussion. In the subsequent discourse, I shall adhere to two distinct criteria. Both of these excerpts are derived from book introductions that analyze historical subjects. Initially, the Swedish Eastern Europe correspondent, Richard Swartz, articulates that he

proceeded to position himself at his workstation and commenced documenting his recollection of events spanning almost three decades, with the intention of preserving them before they faded from his memory. Swartz has been reporting on Eastern Europe for nearly three decades.

The actual state of affairs can be traced back to the work of Swartz (1996:7-8), as documented in a Danish translation of the original Swedish text.

Swartz undertakes the ambitious task of recording a span of thirty years in Eastern European history. The above passage is derived from Nybroe and Mylenberg's (2001) report on the Danish parliamentary election campaign.

The objective of this book is to offer a comprehensive depiction of the significant Danish politicians who had a role in the campaign. To elucidate the circumstances wherein the majority of voters were largely uninformed at the moment they exercised their electoral choices. This narrative explores the manner in which politicians exert influence over both the tangible reality we inhabit and our perception thereof.

Furthermore, It should be noted that not every information included in this book may be regarded as factual, as we have previously clarified. Several undisclosed occurrences may have occurred throughout the campaign that, due to various factors, remained undiscovered (Nybroe and Mylenberg 2002:8–9, emphasis in original; translated from Danish).

Both literary works endeavor to reconstruct historical events without a distinct central focus in the present, despite the authors' efforts to delineate the subject matter (the manipulation of reality by politicians) and their own misgivings regarding the comprehensiveness of their presentation (this book does not encompass the entirety of the truth).

As previously mentioned, journalism draws upon the source criticism of positivist historical study. When engaging in historical research or producing journalistic content, it is widely acknowledged that sources vary in their reliability and truthfulness. Kristian Erslev gained recognition for his development of a system of conceptual pairings that can be utilized for the purpose of categorizing sources. According to Kjörup (2000:55), it was postulated that the relative veracity of sources may be assessed by categorizing them based on their typology.

Due of the inherent challenges associated with conclusive source classification, historians engaged in extensive debates regarding this matter until the 1960s. The categorization of sources should be dependent on the specific subject under investigation, as their roles and functions exhibit variation. One effective method to illustrate this concept is by providing an illustrative instance derived from my personal experience in conducting source critique sessions for journalism students. A schematic depicting the layout of the area above the students is presented to the students, accompanied by the following textual information.

On Friday, February 6, 2004, Charlotte was observed carrying an apple, coinciding with her scheduled instruction on source critique. Upon the journalism students' arrival and subsequent seating, one of them was observed consuming an apple. The individual made the decision to employ the apple as a means of emphasizing the inconsistencies between the testimonies provided by the witnesses and the tangible proof, although being aware of its nutritional value. Consequently, she allowed the apple core to remain on the table.

The apple core serves as immediate tangible proof, whereas the preceding information constitutes a testimony provided by a witness. However, it is important to note that this assertion may not hold true in all circumstances. This is due to the fact that the overhead, which refers to the additional costs or burdens associated with a certain situation, may unexpectedly become evident as concrete evidence while attempting to elucidate a historical event that transpired over the designated instructional period. In a like manner, the sources might be likened to the plastic components within a kaleidoscope, as they undergo modifications in both their veracity and configuration upon agitation. In the realm of historical source criticism, it is evident that a similar pattern emerges with several additional conceptual combinations.

The conceptual pairs of first- and second-hand witnesses are extensively employed within the positivist historical tradition by journalists. A source who was physically present at the occurrence is classified as a primary witness, whereas a secondary witness possesses intimate knowledge of the incident. In accordance with the positivist historical tradition, primary sources hold greater significance in terms of veracity (Fink, Manniche et al., 1996:15). The efficacy of this particular approach for assessing the quality of sources is inherently limited. In the scenario when an individual who directly observed an occurrence lacks prior knowledge and fails to appreciate the particular details of that event, what would be the implications? In the event that the eyewitness has conducted a comprehensive investigation, collected, and scrutinized a multitude of testimony, what are the resulting implications?

Nevertheless, within the realm of professional journalism, there exists a tendency to rekindle the idealistic notion that firsthand narratives possess a greater degree of veracity compared to secondhand narratives. This inclination is most conspicuous in the endeavors of war correspondents. The news anchor in the studio poses the question, "What is the current situation?" to journalists who are located at a significant distance from the ongoing conflict.

At times, the journalist may find themselves in a situation where they have recently arrived in the region and have not yet had the opportunity to don their protective bulletproof vest. His perception is limited to the visual and auditory stimuli accessible to individuals who possess Internet connectivity. The individual in question lacks expertise in the field of military tactics and is also not well-versed in the specific geographical area in which he is now situated. The reason his account is showcased on the evening news program is due to its perceived credibility in comparison to testimonies from witnesses residing in Copenhagen or smaller Danish municipalities such as Odense.

However, it should be noted that journalists, unlike researchers, do not necessarily possess a complete lack of empathy, and there have been instances in which the positivist notion of objectivity in scientific inquiry has been challenged inside the realm of media.

Conclusion

, My argument is that the following picture becomes clear when viewed through the lens of the notion of objectivity in journalism, which serves as a prism for understanding what can be called journalism theory. At this time, the overwhelming bulk of journalism has a nature that is generally optimistic. The field of journalism has made a number of attempts throughout the course of its history to break away from the positivist school of thinking and its inherent bias toward objectivity; yet, it wasn't until the introduction of new journalism that these efforts were finally successful.

There is still a strong connection between positivism and the majority of modern journalism, as well as the majority of ordinary thought and scientific investigation.

The notion of objective positivism in the field of journalism is not now the most pressing problem.

Rather, it would appear that a sizeable percentage of the media is unaware of the roots of the idea of objectivity as well as the challenges that are associated with the usual use of this term.

When Schudson (1990) underlines the difficulty of "shaken off positivism" in scientific and journalistic activities, he is probably true in his assessment of the situation. The encouraging news is that the discussion on the definition of objectivity in journalism is still going strong. This is the case despite the fact that journalism, like much research, seems to be trapped on the positivist motorway and that previous attempts at "exits" from this highway have proven to be unsuccessful. When it comes to meeting their own criteria for neutral reporting of the news, journalists continue to face challenges on a daily basis.

The positivist schools of thought in both science and journalism have come under fire for their unduly simplified and restricted representations of the real world. If journalism were to begin showing interest in other scientific theoretical areas, there is a chance that the field may advance. Imagine for a moment that Heidegger, Gadamer, and hermeneutics, the scientific study of interpretation, had been the theoretical groundwork for the field of journalism. What would modern journalism be like? What sort of journalism would we have now if it had been influenced by the theories of Saussure and Eco? What kind of journalism would we have today if it had employed notions from structuralism or semiotics rather than positivism?

The one and only time that journalism attempted to move away from positivism and adopt a different scientific theoretical approach, a profoundly unique kind of journalism arose as a result. The new journalism was never successful in the marketplace, most likely because it posed significant moral problems. Hermeneutic, semiotic, or structuralist approaches to journalism do not appear to have been explored to the best of my knowledge. Maybe making an effort was the right thing to do anyhow.

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