



OBJECTIVITY: WHY IT IS IMPORTANT AND HOW IT CAN BE REALISED IN MEDIA PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT: *This study interrogates the growing tendency to assume the impossibility of journalistic objectivity. Specifically, it sieves through the controversies and articulates the way forward. The study adopts a Discourse Analysis approach and anchors its contentions on the Correspondence and Coherence theories. The analysis concludes that journalistic objectivity is distinctively a news function. And that it is not only desirable but possible and realisable if approached within a defined context. Based on this framework, the study provides a standard for achieving journalistic objectivity in media practice.*

KEYWORDS: Objectivity, News, Content Genre, Journalism.



INTRODUCTION

Objectivity is one of, if not the most contentious concept or norm in media practice. Its contentious character is driven not much by its nature as by ascription. It is often treated as a concrete, indispensable norm or an elusive, abstract or fluid concept. Specifically, some see it as a mere journalistic wish or an obstacle to more responsible and constructive practice (Iggers, 1998). For others, it is a vague reality streak (Myrick, 2002; Rosen, 1993; Rosenthal, 1969) or simply a deception (Thompson, 1994; Morgan, 1992). Whatever the characterisation, it has been traditionally viewed as the cement of good journalism that has, over time, been smeared by some to obscure its true essence and defended by others to promote its value.

While some contestations are germane and offer great value to the debate, others are diversionary or outrightly misleading. Some of the debates have discountenanced objectivity by questioning its relevance in media practice. Most importantly, much of the debate has approached objectivity as a loose term stripped of defined meaning and context. As a result, it becomes difficult to undergird objectivity to a specific essence and value. Even within the journalism profession, it is very unlikely the essence and value of objectivity could be served if it is not contextualised but treated as a broad spectrum that weighs in on all genres of media content in equal measure.

Of concern is the fact that although objectivity is the basis for professional integrity, credibility, public trust and confidence, it lacks a defined character that is specific, attainable and measurable. While objectivity has been made to take “on almost mythical status” (Forst, 2011, P. 73), Williams and Stroud (2020) have summed up the problems lack of objectivity in the news has brought. According to the authors, the news we read and view is a combination of facts and opinions, as well as neutrality and bias, sometimes conveying partisan political perspectives. Stroud and Reese (2008) identified a deeper problem. They are worried that this development has led to a situation where the traditional distinction between reality and entertainment, news and opinion, and indeed between the professional and the amateur, has been blurred. Thus, without a defined identity, objectivity, as a norm, would continue to float like a philosophical abstract. As a pillar of journalism (White and Barnas, 2010), there is a need for deeper insights towards standardising objectivity.

Myrick (2002) admits that much of scholarly debates on objectivity contend that objectivity is difficult to pin down and the pursuit of it. This conception results from using approaches and ideas drawn from such fields as history, sociology, political science, and organizational studies. Some interrogated its historical nature (Allan, 1997), its epistemological links (Durham, 1998) and philosophical foundation (Ward, 2010), its cultural and social interdependence (Makki and White, 2017). Maras (2013) has summed up these contentions concluding that objectivity is, at best, passive and generally ineffectual. In all of these, researchers have focused more on whether objectivity is achievable, not on how it can be practised. There is a particular dearth of research interrogating objectivity as a news function.

This is in part due to the seeming loss of interest and significant limitations in attempts to contextualize objectivity and set possible limits for its application. Even as many are persuaded to believe that objectivity cannot be operationalised, we use some fairly simple analysis to characterise it.



Therefore, this paper sets out not to dwell so much on abstract contentions. We attempt to provide criteria upon which objectivity acquires a definite form and character in media practice. That is, a framework or guide for journalists in operationalising objectivity. For this reason, resource materials for this study have been stretched in time, relying on strings and strands of intellectual discourse beyond “currency” as of necessity. It is instructive to do so first because of minimal research on objectivity criteria mapping, resulting in what Maras (2013) sees as a deficit in relating theory to practice. Second, due to a logical necessity requiring objectivity to first be a measure of a criterion, the absence of which its application is not justifiable.

We believe this study, even if the result does not add substantially to the broader inquiry, or resolve any controversy, may stir further academic activity, which may stimulate another perspective to the debate. If it does, it may resolve the problem of audience expectation and standards of performance by standardising normative values on defined criteria. Thus, journalists would no longer be enveloped in vague and fluid conceptual orientations. As a result, accountability and responsibility would become more professionally realistic and generally actionable. All of these reservations surrounding objectivity hinge on the illogicality of the contention that it is not realisable. For to say so is to assume that we know what objectivity is. For if we do not know it, we cannot say if it is not realisable. And if we know it, it is a logical fallacy to deny that its characteristics or form can be established and practised.

Problem of a definition

Like most definitions, attempts to define objectivity are subject to controversies. Whatever the controversies, any attempt towards a definition is an acceptance that objectivity exists. There is not a single word that exist that does not have a corresponding reality. It is what is that is talked about. One cannot talk about what does not exist. Relying on this truth, Megill (1994) has stated four different senses in which objectivity can be viewed: Philosophically, it is seen as ideal, representing things as they really are. It is also viewed as a discipline providing a sense of consensus among members. It can also be approached as interactional. In this sense, it is subjective and relies on the interplay between subject and object to define reality. It is finally understood as a procedure that establishes an impersonal method of investigation towards attaining truth. For these reasons, many definitions of objectivity differ on what objectivity is and how it should operate (Maras, 2013).

Roger (2019) defines objectivity as a condition in which reporters, in the coverage of hard news, do not embellish their feelings, prejudices or biases into the stories. Dennis and Merril (1984: 111) provide a more detailed approach that offers a conceptual outlook focusing on three key issues: separating facts from opinion, presenting news in an emotionally detached manner and presenting news in a fair and balanced manner. By this, objectivity is simply an approach. In this context, it is an approach to news writing and presentation. It presents news in an impersonal, accurate, disinterested and emotionally detached manner. Such presentation meets Wien’s (2005) demand on journalists to distil their person from the journalistic product. This is consistent with the journalistic function – to report the news, not to create it. We align with this framework in our discourse.

However, objectivity cannot be treated simply like an item. It is the result of distinctive elements or assemblages often requiring a convergence of coherence and correspondence. Take the case of the alleged murder, correspondence must be established between the act and



established principles (evidence), all of which are then located within the law to establish culpability or otherwise.

In this context, objectivity is a method of verifiable information reflecting the factual elements that give an event its distinctive character.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts Discourse analysis. It interrogates contentions in the objectivity discourse. Generally, we undertake a view of arguments that seek to delegitimise objectivity. Specifically, we interrogate contentions that question the reality, desirability, and possibility of realising objectivity. We have also examined views that objectivity is a drag on the socio-political truth regimes. We argue that objectivity as a norm is function specific – it is prescriptive. However, scholars often misunderstand it, including professionals who ascribe to its responsibilities that unduly overstretch its legitimacy. We further contend that objectivity functions based on the traditional and unique nature of news and that it is both realisable and measurable in media practice. We equally find it objectionable that scholars approach objectivity as a delegitimising force to other journalistic genres like features, opinions, editorials, and news analysis.

Our approach relies on previous intellectual discourse. We analyse key contentions in the various arguments, the basis upon which we articulate appropriate responses in defence of objectivity. The concept of news and its relationship with objectivity is similarly examined, and a framework for the standardisation of objectivity is consequently provided.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Correspondence theory, supported by the Coherence theory. The theoretical trust is laid on the assumption that objectivity is a truth function (Bo & Melladu, 2020). It is, therefore, a necessary condition for achieving the desired correspondence with existing reality. It presupposes a reality that is independent of us – it exists whether we know it or not. It is a product of the criteria we set for its being. If we can only discover it, then we need an authority on which to define its form. If it is human-centred, it is a product of our values and beliefs. We illustrate these two positions in the assumptions of the Correspondence and Coherence theories:

Correspondence theory

The Correspondence theory is often traced to Aristotle's description of truth. In his characterisation of truth as correspondence, Aristotle notes that it is false to say of what is that it is not or of what is not that it is, "... while, to say of what is that it is, and what is not that it is not, is true (Metaphysics, 1011b25, cited in David, 2022). Although the definition does not explicitly highlight any intuition to correspondence, it alludes to a relationship made clearer in Aristotle's later work: The Categories (12b11; 14b14, cited in David, 2022). Here Aristotle lays out underlying things like logically structured situations and facts that make statements true on the basis of their relationship to reality.



Basically, the theory assumes that reality (events, issues, things) exists independently of us, and we can only be seen to have reflected reality if our description of it corresponds with its being. An event exists whether there is a journalist in the world or not. Thus, to reflect the real or true picture of the world requires a specific form or style of presentation that does not corrupt reality. So, objectivity becomes the bridge that establishes a correspondence between our propositions and the reality we reflect. It establishes conformity with facts and agreement with reality. The correspondence theory lays out the propositions that are compatible

The correspondence theory, however, has been criticised based, among others, on claims that its propositions can only apply to facts but not to matters of morality. And that it is too simplistic. While our focus does not include theoretical expositions, we believe simplicity claims fail to realise that achieving correspondence requires a process that makes specific and rigorous demands to justify truth. Secondly, it does not connote ineffectual relationships. This explains why the theory is functionally an imperative on which to anchor this paper.

Coherence theory

The Coherence theory is traced to Aristotle, specifically, his definition of truth. It assumes that the strings of beliefs we harbour are what give the world and things in it a reality. Thus, our propositions about reality must cohere with our beliefs for reality to exist. In this sense, an event exists because it is consistent with our strings of beliefs, which are shaped by experience and knowledge. Thus, if we agree that objectivity is a standard of measuring a true reflection of the world, such agreement must be erected on some other basic beliefs. It is for this reason that such principles as detachment and non-embellishment of facts are imperatives for objectivity. Thus, coherence theory is built on the existing knowledge base and, therefore, epistemic. This is because it assumes that a given belief exists because of other beliefs we harbour (Pardi, 2015).

Like the correspondence theory, the coherence theory has also been criticised. Critics contend, among others, that where it is confronted with propositions identifying truth between two divergent claims on one subject, it becomes difficult to establish the grounds upon which to accept one as true and the other as false. It is, however, appropriate in this study as a support theory because our ideas of good journalism are a function of our established beliefs.

Key issues in the discourse

Several issues have been raised to discountenance objectivity. Schiller (1981), for instance, contends that objectivity is ‘polysemic’ – open to different interpretations. McQuail, (1992) shared similar thought when he acknowledged that the problem with objectivity is its inability to be free from other sets of values. He further admits that all human communications are “subjective, value-loaded, incomplete and distorted (Dennis & Merrill 1998: 106). The reality is that cultural influences are part of our humanity. They shape our understanding, thinking, interpretation and assumptions. Indeed, only a figure stated without interpretation or analysis could be valued judgment free. Thompson (1973: 44) opines that only figures like box scores, race results, and stock market tabulations can be said to value judgment free. If we stretch McQuail and other similar arguments further, even scientific findings would be subject to similar controversy. Words have cultural and other value relations. The moment they are used to describe scientific results, they inevitably incorporate values into the results. What is



required therefore is to treat objectivity as a norm or concept that attains its true essence and value if approached within a context-specific reality.

Iggers (1998:19), in his criticism of objectivity, says it is a drag preventing journalists from “playing a more responsible and constructive role in public life”. Rogers (2019) presents a particularly emotional instance, which seems to delegitimise objectivity. He asks whether a World War II reporter who enters a concentration camp and sees “hundreds of gaunt, emaciated people and piles of dead bodies” would have the nerve to interview an Allied soldier he followed into the camp to rescue captives, then, in an effort to be objective, also interview “a Nazi official to get the other side of the story?” Rogers thinks that would be impossible or unreasonable. However, it is indeed situations that tempt the reporter’s emotional stability that makes objectivity a media imperative. In their study “How did the media report on the great East Japan earthquake? Objectivity and emotionality seeking in Japanese media coverage”, Uchida, Kanagawa, Takenishi, Harada, Okawa & Yabuno (2015) found “that the news media generally reported neutral and objective factual information about the event.” The ability of Japanese reporters to uphold objectivity tamed their emotions, producing objective and professional reports, and ultimately the public interest mantra was better served. Thus, interviewing the Nazi soldier could, for instance, answer the “Why” question (one of the five Ws and Hs of news) and lead to a more complete story.

Kelkar (2019) has unravelled one of the most striking truths about the “post-objectivity” paradigm. He insists “post-reality” results from two interlocking energies seeking to reconfigure American political identities around the Republican and Democratic parties and to establish an alternative media ecosystem around the Republican party in which legitimacy is established by questioning media “Objectivity.” Thus, the debate, which Kelly (2019) calls “partisan segmentation in the contemporary news market,” is not so much about generating facts or engendering social pluralism or a plurality of ideas as it is to establish dominance in ideological distinctiveness.

Dennis and Merrill (1984: 106), drawing from what they refer to as the nature of communication, argue that objectivity is nothing but the story “subjectivising” that is “judgmental, value-loaded, incomplete”, as a result, reflects nothing more than a piece of distorted reality. Interestingly, these arguments have failed to recognise the gulf between intrinsic or innate and perceptive or practical application. Journalistically, objectivity is normative and prescriptive. Some contend that it is a depersonalised and rationalised procedure (Borger, Hoof & Sanders, 2016), an intellectual method that provides a transparent approach to the fact, evidence and verification (Dean, 2022; Ward, 2018). It is, therefore, distinctive of application. Blurring the gulf creates conceptual distortions and scapegoats the method rather than interrogates the journalist’s unwillingness to be principled, sufficiently disciplined and compliant. Indeed, Vos (2011, p. 438) had earlier prophesied that “Objectivity in journalism” is destined to be a “scapegoat.”

Other contentions view objectivity as serving the interests of the established order (Pressman, 2019). McGrill (2004), Carey (1999), and Rosen (1993) also believe objectivity disconnects citizens and leaves the public alienated from participation. They often rely on the logic that those in power make the majority of journalistic sources. It is these sources the journalists ascribe legitimacy to as being official and reliable. While the use of official sources cannot be discountenanced, the normative value of objectivity does not bear prescriptions on source



types. If anything, it is our limited appreciation of its prescriptive function, its essence, that is influencing contentious journalists' source choices and preferences.

Others query the journalist's power to select an issue or event to report and conclude that the selection discredits journalistic claims of objectivity (Li, 2020). Rather, it is viewed as the consecration of ideology or class interest (Rogers, 2019; Mattelart, 1980). That may sound like an oversimplification to constrain a professional necessity. Issue or event selection is naturally inevitable. Just like a medical doctor with scores of patients awaiting his attention may not attend to all of them, least at once, and often gives preference to some, who, by his judgment, needs more urgent attention. His judgment will result from a critical assessment based on sound professional criteria. So, too, is the journalists' selection weighed on the balance of professional criteria. Under such situations, the assumption that selectivity bears ineffectual relationships that delegitimise values is overstretched. Besides, objectivity, understood as a process, needs to be operationalised within specific contexts with limits and bounds.

Pressman (2018), Carey (1999), and Mattelart (1980) further insist that objectivity decontextualises and alienates the journalist's right to explain the facts. And that journalism is also losing its literary genre, creative, imaginative and interpretive power. As a result, the journalist and the facts are detached from the social system, and a corresponding meaning to the facts is lost. First, Mattelart's demand for interpretation of news is a call for what (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997) says is distorting news, and for Jones (2004), has led to a decline in public trust in the media. Mattelart's reference to context is also contentious. His observation and Carey's seem to approach journalism practice as a single-frame genre – that hard news is the only form of news or content delivery. Ward (2018) reminds us that straight news reporting is just one of many types of media genres that serve democratic needs and through which journalists can unwind great explanatory power in a participatory, analytical and interpretative way. Such genres like features, opinion columns, and editorials provide context and accommodate personalised tones. They permit overt points of view and engage rather than alienate or detach the facts and journalists from social links.

An appropriate response to claims of value inclusion as a criticism against the possibility of objectivity has been provided by Gans (1979). In what he calls "value exclusion", Gans (p. 183) lists: being objective, disregarding implications and rejecting ideology as three ways to sieve out value influence in the news. Imagine journalists were free to include values, show solidarity, take stands, and form reality judgments according to their "paraideology" (Gans, 1979: 203) or allow themselves to be influenced by ideological leanings. The right of the reader to independent judgments and decisions based on facts would have been interrupted or uprightly usurped. The reader would have been led or misled to think along the journalist's perspective. This kind of approach could lead to reader passivity and indoctrination and could propagandise content.

Glasser's (1992) grouse is that objectivity abhors advocacy journalism. It also favours the status quo, inhibits independent thinking and abdicates journalists' responsibility (Pressman, 2019; Frost (2011); Bell, (1998). These are concerns that reveal the deep misunderstanding of objectivity. First, advocacy is not a function of straight news. In what way and to what extent can demands to present a straight news story in a factual, unbiased, fair and detached manner compromise the creative, interpretative, and analytical abilities of the journalist to freely express in other content genres? These assumptions are, in part, driven by complex realities



that have forced the media into a more personalised and opinionated, more interactive and communal, and generally, less objective practice (Kinsley, 2006).

There are also claims that commercial interests prompted the birth of objectivity; as a result, it does serve commercial interests. However, Anderson's (2016, 29) account is particularly instructive. He argues that media practitioners' hush response to the traffic of "interested parties seeking control of newspaper content" gave birth to media objectivity. They had resolved to keep news safe and insulated as a piece of what he describes as "disinterested, fact-based, balanced, and fair-minded reporting" that reflects reality. It was a need for truth, order, fairness, factuality and trust in insidious, chaotic yellow journalism.

The "post-reality" (post-truth, post-fact, post-modernism, post-objectivity, etc.) construct provides a seemingly diversionary perspective to the criticisms against objectivity. Apostles of this school of thought would want to question everything, including what has existed as a proven fact. They believe that if the truth must be attained, it will be through a process of "subjective pluralism" - a convergence of various perspectives. The problem, as Paulino (2018) notes there are too many people with different perspectives to exhaust. This kind of consensual understanding is neither truth sensitive nor a logical proposition of fact and correspondence. In fact, rather than lead to a consensual truth, the logic of this pluralism can only lead to varied truths.

It is this thinking that led Ward (2004) to the conclusion that in this 'post objectivity' era, it is fashionable to question the existence of any such thing as "truth", "fact", or "objectivity". Indeed, Farkas & Schou's (2020) analysis of post-truth and alternative facts suggests the two are not only a threat to democracy but perilous propaganda in the contemporary media landscape. Because as William & Stroud (2020) note, the same event covered by different media outlets would be reported differently, not on the basis of facts, but on each organisation's subjective reality.

David (1997) believes the construction of a new form of objectivity, in which there is "justified interpretation" (Figdor, 2010: p. 2), is nothing but honest mediation leading to what Ward (2004: 269) calls "intersubjective agreement". Meyers (2020) may have alluded to the partisan influence behind the 'new objectivity' when she traced reconsideration of the objectivity norm to "the emergence of alternative and economically successful partisan models." The problem, as Solomon (2018) contends, is that injection of opinion and insinuation deprives viewers and readers of a neutral set of facts upon which to make their own independent decisions or opinions. The implication is that the new view of objectivity is not concerned with mirroring reality as it is; rather, reality has been stripped of its independence. It is real only to the extent that I see it so.

Based on these contentions Maras (2013) concludes that irrespective of the possibility of divergent facts and truth regimes, subjective objectivity would attract the critical informative needs of the public and would be better served with a twist in news quality. A twist that blends straight news with comedy, documentary or opinion. As interactive as it may be, this assumption teases out more unanswered questions. It is ultimately a call for the reinvention of the conceptual notion of news, its functions and value orientation. It aligns with perceptions of the "post-reality" era accentuated by (post-truth, post-objectivity, post-modernism, etc.) transmuted subjectivity into a phenomenon in which truth becomes variant - communalised



or personalised, slippery and possibly stereotyped. Here, even proven facts would become contestable (Kelkar, 2019).

The problem with this position is how to approach the truth or objectivity variants that will inevitably result from this subjectively constructed reality. Another legitimate concern is the absence of a substitute for the traditional notion of news, its values and essence, to cohere with shifting notions of objectivity.

Some of these criticisms, as our analyses, have revealed, “lack clarity” and have led to “spurious arguments” (Figdor, 2010. p. 1) that are misplaced, irrelevant, and diversionary and have significantly nudged the debate and its conceptual orientations into a myth rather than practical and realistic construct. Specifically, criticisms against objectivity have demonstrated:

1. Lack of understanding of objectivity as a prescriptive function
2. Lack of understanding of role differences between the normative nature of objectivity and the practical responsibilities of the practitioner
3. Lack of acknowledgement of the values and functions of other content genres like opinion columns, features, news analysis, editorials, and commentaries the journalist could use to respond to social inclusion, participation and engagement needs.
4. Willingness to scapegoat “objectivity” and its normative value than interrogate the journalist’s will to overcome ideological, political, and power controls and ownership influences, which the journalist is equipped, through training, to overcome or resist.
5. A misunderstanding that fails to view objectivity as a straight news function.

Relationship between objectivity and news

Schiller (1981) defines news as a report on reality, not really a story at all, but merely the facts. Another account by Shrivastava (1991) sees news as an account of a recent event or opinion expressed by a source or as a timely report of an event which is of interest. For Harcup (2012: 55), the news is a “selective version of world events with a focus on that which is new and or unusual”. The reporter who reports the event is seen as “a camera on events” (Barnes, 1965: 72). A camera, we know, never shows itself in the picture it takes. Thus, through news, the journalist holds up a mirror to the world so that the viewer can see things as they really are (Frost, 2011). News must be accurate on facts (Anderson, 2016), so that it does not distort and twist the facts (Frost, 2011, P. 24). Accuracy is achieved through objectivity – where the reporter is completely detached, does not include his opinions and presents just the facts in an impartial way. Perilla (2018) believes objectivity is what makes the difference between honesty and accuracy versus falsehood and misinformation. Rosen (1993) had earlier noted that objectivity is key to achieving truth, which he said involves separating fact from values, information from opinion and news from views.

Of all media content genres, objectivity is unarguably a news function. It provides the procedure through which news gains its legitimacy and public trust. It is characteristically a straight news function in which the reporter allows the facts to speak for themselves. It is what makes the distinction between “fact and comment” (Forst, 2011: 73). Journalism does not abhor comment or opinion; it only insists that the journalist clearly separates fact from opinion so



that the reader is not left in doubt whether what is presented is the reporter's opinion or unvarnished facts.

Objectivity resents interpretation, opinion, analysis, and anything that garnishes the facts. For this reason, Williams & Stroud (2020) defined objectivity as reporting "unvarnished facts in a very neutral manner." Thus, one finds the cultural impulses being forced on news quality as contentious. The professional criteria and style of news presentation are required to be culture blind. One finds a parallel in the medical profession where a medical doctor may be culturally sensitive when consulting a patient, but the drug administered is not culture-sensitive but illness specific.

It is in the straight news genre that objectivity finds its legitimate essence. Consistent with this thinking, Rogers (2019); Gauthier (1993) argue against scholarly criticisms which fail to realise that objectivity is a function of straight news reporting. They contend that the objectivity norm applies to reporters covering hard news and insists that op-ed pages (opinion, analysis, commentary, etc.) are not part of it. Objectivity shields news from "free radicals" and deals with "cancerous" elements that could compromise news quality and distort reality. It ensures that the person holding the camera is not seen in the image. Violation of this rule could cause an identity crisis. To ensure the subject's image is not distorted, the journalist must remain completely detached, eliminate all opinions and report just the facts (Ward, 2011).

Achieving objectivity

The basic assumption about objectivity is that a real world of objects and events exists. It is also built on the belief that there is an appropriate language or symbols for representing these objects and events. That there is, as Carey (1989) notes, reality, and our account of that reality should not distort, obfuscate or confuse our perception of that external world.

It is instructive to note that no word exists without a corresponding reality. "Rhetorically, a name must be a name of something that is. There cannot be a name of nothing" (Bo & Melladu, 2020, p. 236). Wards (2011) has made a significant contribution by setting six standards to defend objectivity. He relies on the traditional view of objectivity as a doctrine and lists: factuality, balance and fairness, lack of bias, independence, non-interpretation and neutrality as standards of objectivity.

Ward's (2011) efforts are neither exhaustive nor incontrovertible. The task of criteria on which to measure objectivity will, no doubt, always be imperfect and contentious. Notwithstanding, we present the following:

Objectivity criteria

Achieving objectivity in the news requires of the journalist to satisfy layers of professional demands. Objectivity is a process. It ends when one begins to ascribe meaning to the facts. When that happens, the embellished facts no longer reflect a distinct reality. They become one's personalised reality. Thus, to achieve objectivity, the journalist should ensure the following:



1. Accuracy: providing information or facts that are exact and correct. The facts, whether in figures, names, statements, etc., are presented correctly and with unquestionable exactitude.
2. Fairness: ensuring equitable treatment of all contending sides in an issue. The reporter makes sure such variables as the choice of words, use of facts, the trend of questioning, choice and use of sources are based on similar criteria for all sides.
3. Neutrality: Presenting the facts and issues without infusing one's opinion or embellishment in a way that favours or disfavors particular side(s) or could influence the relationship or interpretation of the stated facts. Neutrality does not exclude subjectivity (Frost, 2011: 74) but rather demands that the journalist present the facts and positions canvassed by all sides accurately. The journalist's neutrality is preserved as long as there is no word or statement in the story to suggest favour or disfavour of any side in the matter.
4. Detachment – avoiding reporting that suggests remotely, directly, indirectly or by inference what is not intrinsic to the facts of the matter. One can be neutral but not detached. For instance, if the reporter adds his or her voice in a manner that cannot possibly influence interpretation, decision or viewpoint, in favour or against any side(s), he is neutral but not detached to the extent that what he or she added is an embellishment to the facts. Even a simple use of an adjective to qualify a person, such as “iron lady” or any such description, whether such qualification influences the matter or not, compromises his claims of detachment. By that, the reporter has ascribed a specific quality or character trait that is not intrinsic to the facts of the matter but which reflects his opinion of the person or issue so described.
5. Balance – giving both the issues in the news and the parties concerned equal and corresponding attention. It means choices made in the entire process ranging from information gathering to reporting, are approached, from all sides, on the same scale and measure.
6. Impartiality – presenting the facts of the story in a manner that is fair to all contending sides. Not taking a position by words, action or sign that supports or gives an advantage to one or some parties in the matter.
7. Honesty – being conscientiously committed to stating the known facts. It is demonstrated by verifiable factuality, neutrality and purpose, where the purpose is the pursuit of truth.
8. Factuality – facts are presented as they are, unvarnished. Anything that insinuates what is not self-evident in the facts violates objectivity. Facts are so key to objectivity that Donsbach & Klett (1993) identified facts as what contextualise objectivity in their four meanings of objectivity. Frost (2009: 68) stressed the point further when he said, “Anything in a news outlet that is not factual is not journalism.”
9. Context frame – context is the key that justifies fact relevance. It is issue-specific and defines the frame of the picture and limits of what is important, relevant and justifiable. The Voice of America (VOA), in its “Mission and Values” statement, insists that news reports must always be defined by context. Without context, the issue becomes boundless



and loses direction and meaning – the picture loses its reality. Thus, as Maras (2013: 24) notes, objectivity is realizable if approached within a “specific context.”

CONCLUSION

The focus of criteria for objectivity is to establish conditions under which the picture of a story could emerge without the reporter’s illusion, opinion, or thoughts embedded into the facts. Objectivity generally seeks to eliminate influences driven by stereotypes, prejudices, perceptions, emotions, sentiments and application of double standards. It is a distinctive criterion for straight news stories, and it is realised by the extent to which the news is accurate, fair, neutral, detached, balanced, impartial, factual, context-specific and honest. Assumptions that view it as a prescription or norm for other media content genres are largely misplaced. If it were applied in other content genres, it would require a different standard of evaluation that is consistent with the character and principles of those genres.

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