
Distrust In Journalism: Citizen Journalism

The idea that there is growing distrust in journalism is absolutely valid in today's contemporary society. The idea of a single objective reality must be abandoned, and we must adopt instead the practice of attaining a balanced choice of sources, clear distinctions between fact and interpretation, as well as choosing neutral language over institutional language. These factors will prove worthy of shaping the raw materials needed to provide dignitary public discourse. Political and economic power structures, as well as post-modernistic ideals and the use of social media and new forms of technology all play a role in shaping the public opinion on journalistic objectivity, and whether or not what is being produced and submitted is trustworthy and accurate.

When journalism refers to the idea of objectivity, it is referring to 5 distinct canons; fairness, balance, neutrality, truth and accuracy. However, there is a burgeoning debate surrounding issues concerning media objectivity, of which objectivity has become a question of which values are, and which values ought to be, expressed in news media (Cooper, 1994).

A journalist's individual perception of the world around them as well as their political attitudes will inevitably have an impact on the framing of their work. There is also the issue of socioeconomic oppression within the news industry, where editorial decision-makers and members of the capitalist ruling elite, serve big business interest rather than following a classic journalist ideal of acting as neutral news and event transmitters to their audiences (Reece, 1990).

It has become increasingly difficult for journalists in recent years, to maintain the expected wholly objective attitude and practices in their writing.

Framing stories that are nonthreatening to existing power structures within large news corporations can be seen very clearly in News Corps story selection and headlines. Rupert Murdoch's newspapers control over 60% of Australia's newspaper circulation (Hall, 2020). Murdoch's papers have shown to be blatantly right wing, campaigning for favoured parties with no obligation towards the five canons, this is displayed without remorse through their specific anti labor story selection and defamatory front page headlines.

Kevin Rudd even took to twitter the day after the 2019 election, he wrote: Post-modernists argue that no one can be truly objective, because in order to do so, one would need to completely escape from their own personal bias (Lowrey & Gade, 2011).

This suggestion that most truths are elusive rejects the stability of science that is offered to audiences by empiricism or objective 'truth'. In this post-modern news world, accusations of political and social bias come from a myriad of conflicting social agendas and beliefs between not only individuals, but also their respective cultures and personal experience. These confictions in turn cannot be resolved entirely because of the base post-modernist ideal that being 'truly' objective is seemingly unfeasible.

Digital platforms have changed the traditional consumption, distribution and production of news.

Modern societies are continuously battered with information online, the general public's sensitivity to truth has been dulled as a result of this constant bias and ever-changing news environment. The Internet, and social media in particular have broken down traditional gatekeeper roles- impacting both audiences and journalists. Online content adapts quickly to consumers, shaping and influencing their overall online behaviour, and in turn enabling and encouraging them to stay actively engaged in certain ways. In order to satisfy the demand of these online digital platforms, news producers are pushed to create content that appeals to these elusive audiences, creating content that is emotive and more importantly, shareable.

This contemporary media environment has brought forth new challenges in terms of maintaining an already dwindling journalistic quality.

The digital news environment is extremely fast paced, and relies on a 24/7 news cycle, the struggle to adapt to this faster paced cycle has resulted in an increase of management pressure on writers and thus a reduced quality in their respective journalism products. This phenomenon can be viewed as a breaking down of fact checking from producers rushing to publish content, resulting in a 'publish now, correct later' attitude (Tambini, 2017), instead relying more so on crowd sourced fact-checking.

Some publishers, such as The Sydney Morning Herald have implemented correction strategies for their online articles, whereby their audiences can make explicit corrections and commentary.

Alternative forms of journalism have played a significant role in overall public opinion surrounding distrust in journalism, in particular the concept of 'citizen journalism'. Citizen journalism has grown and developed rapidly in recent years, and has been found to include content for not only online outlets, such as blogs or websites but also a participation and commentary in the news process, including posting on social media, reposting and re-tweeting, tagging, linking and everything in-between. Citizen journalism is different from institutional journalism in its new forms and practices of news production. That traditional notion of news production involves routines of gatekeeping; selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling and massaging of information (Kim & Lowrey, 2015).

The new digital environment of citizen journalism has blurred traditional boundaries of news consumers and producers as anyone, no matter their engagement with certain news topics or qualifications can engage in news production and news distribution. As a result, there has been an increase in the uncertainty of traditional journalist roles, as the digital environment has threatened customary journalism gatekeeping functions, journalistic values, journalistic practices and journalistic norms.

Due to the lack of professional news training amongst citizen journalists, the content they produce may lack accuracy. Citizen journalists do consistently engage in news-making processes, such as issue selecting, collecting, reporting, disseminating and sharing (Kim & Lowrey, 2015). - But with a lack of widely agreed upon principles and guidelines for their practice, these processes are more often than not, unsystematic.

In essence, the ideal of objectivity, regardless of its unattainability, and ill-defined practices, still consistently remains one of the most compelling forces driving the news media toward a long-term goal of balanced, multi perspective journalism. Members of the capitalist ruling elite never cease to demonstrate political and socio economic bias, contributing the downfall in trust from

their audiences. A lack of professionalism together with floods of online information has caused disruption in the 5 distinct journalistic canons; fairness, balance, neutrality, truth and accuracy. Experience with journalism and newsroom culture now continually confronts us with examples of clashing beliefs that cannot be resolved through objectivity.