

The Failure of Media to Do Its Job – Fabricating the Truth Instead of Reporting It

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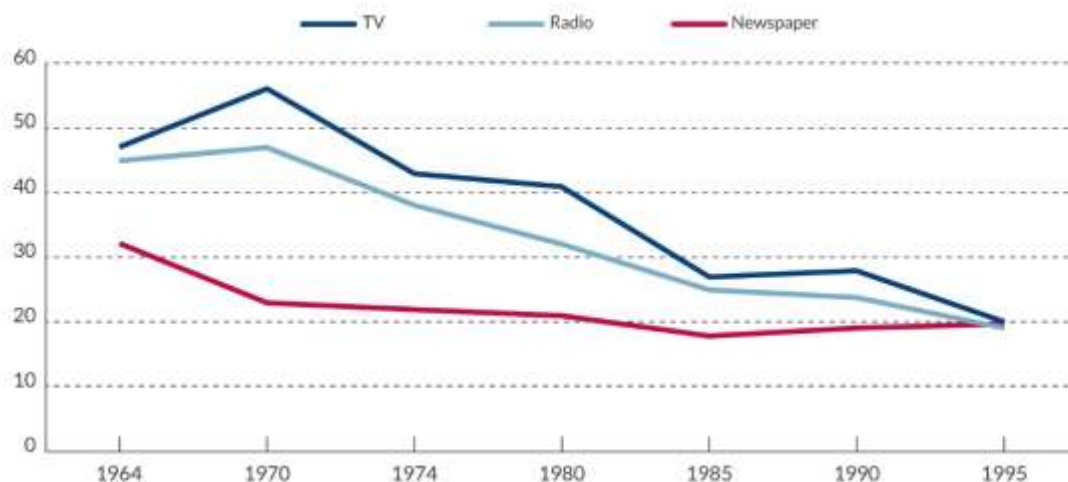
I Preliminary Notes

Each day, German media provide detailed and reliable reports on current affairs. They also publish a wide range of comments, often with sophisticated analysis. Normally, the coverage is good and deserves trust. This does not apply to reporting of spectacular events like migration in 2015 and spectacular coverage of trivial topics like emissions from diesel engines in 2018.

Public confidence in media coverage has decreased and the number of newspaper readers has declined. Most observers attribute this to the Internet. Is this explanation valid? In Germany, trust in the media has declined only slightly and trust in journalists has remained rather stable. In contrast, trust in the objectivity of reporting has steadily declined since the 1970s (see Figure “Objectivity of Reporting Assessed by Readers, Listeners and Viewers”).

Objectivity of Reporting Assessed by Readers, Listeners and Viewers

Statement: „... reports truthfully and always gives things the way they really happened”



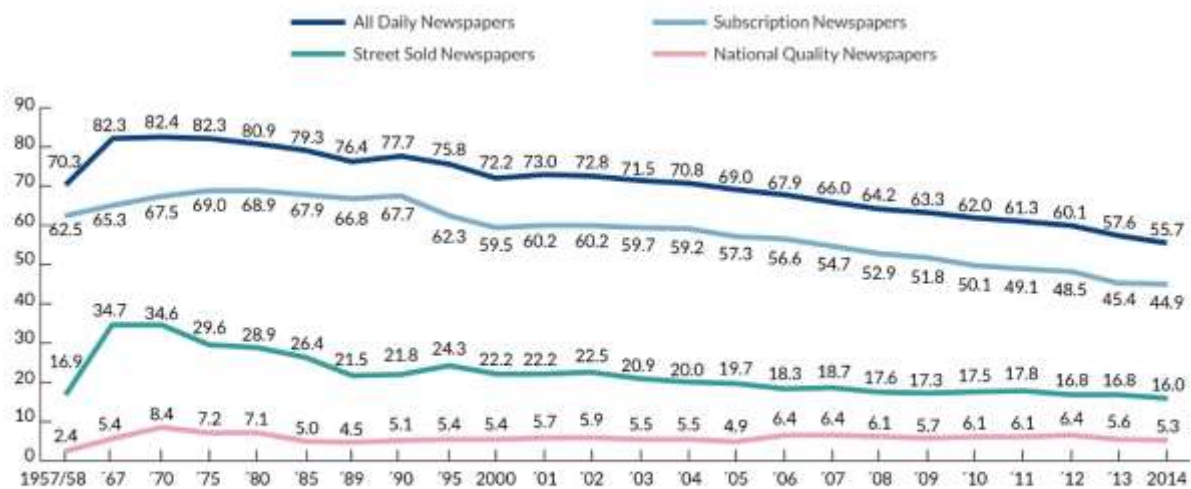
Source: Berg, K. & Kiefer, M. L. Massenkommunikation. Eine Langzeitstudie zur Mediennutzung und Medienbewertung 1964-1995. Baden-Baden 1997, p. 243, p. 252.

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Thesis 1: The image people have of the mass media and the one they have of journalists are not in danger. They remain quite stable at a rather high and low level, respectively. Nevertheless, images do not really matter. In contrast, opinions about the objectivity of media coverage in general and about controversial topics are relevant, because they reflect concrete impressions. These opinions have become increasingly negative. This is a long-lasting trend. Image campaigns will probably not stop it.

The loss of readers, listeners and viewers does not have the same causes as the dwindling confidence in objectivity. Nevertheless, the two relate to each other. In 2014, all types of German print media had fewer readers than in the 1970s (see Figure “Reach of Daily Newspapers”).

Reach of Daily Newspapers



National Quality Newspapers: until 1979 FAZ and Welt; since 1975 FAZ, Süddeutsche Zeitung and Welt; since 2006 FAZ, FR, Welt, Welt kompakt, FTD, Süddeutsche and Handelsblatt; since 2013 without FR, FTD

Base: Population West Germany, 1957/58: 14-75 years old, 1967 and 1970: 16-70 years; since 1975: 14 years plus

Source: Allensbacher Archiv, ID-Survey 446 ans Allensbacher Markt- und Werbeträgeranalysen, AWA '67 until AWA2014

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Thesis 2: The decline in trust in the objectivity of media coverage and the decline in readership began long before the Internet came into being. The Internet might have accelerated the declines; nevertheless, it is not a major cause. Blaming the Internet does not solve the problems but hides them instead. What are these problems?

II Perception of Journalists' Role

In post-war Germany, Anglo-American journalism became the model: separating opinions of journalists from information, unadulterated reproduction of information, etc. These and some other aspects formed the core of objectivity. Representatives of publishers and journalists summarized them in the German Press Codex (Publizistische Grundsätze). Beyond public confessions, even in the 1970s many journalists followed the German tradition of opinion journalism, which claims superior insights.¹ First breaks in the public commitment to objectivity emerged as prominent nuclear energy opponent Franz Alt, who had headed the TV magazine *Report* for 20 years, claimed: "There is no objectivity." Alt interpreted objectivity as a transcendent truth ("only God is objective") and mixed it with the demand for objective representation of facts.² Following the intellectual zeitgeist, Alt and some of his colleagues laid the ax to the root of journalism's credibility.³

The career of radical constructivism pushed forward the deconstruction of objectivity in journalism and social sciences. According to these critiques, there is no objective reality. All perspectives are bound to individual conditions, characterized by social influences. This is not completely wrong but fails to specify conditions of different degrees of objectivity. Instead, it opens the door to morally inflated subjectivism, euphemistically called "Haltungsjournalismus"⁴ (attitude journalism). Thus,

¹ Köcher, R. Bloodhounds or missionaries: Role definitions of German and British journalists. *European Journal of Communication*, 1986, 1, p. 43–64. Donsbach, W. & Klett, B. Subjective objectivity. How journalists in four countries define a key term of their profession. In: *Gazette* 1993, 51, p. 53–81.

² Alt, F. Es gibt keine Objektivität oder: Nur Gott ist objektiv. In: Kunczik, M. & Weber, W. (eds.) *Fernsehen. Aspekte eines Mediums*. Köln: Böhlau, 1990, p. 31-36.

³ Hampton, M. The "objectivity" ideal and its limitations in 20th-century British journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 2008, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 477–493.

⁴ Reschke, A. *Haltung zeigen!* Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2018.

journalists are “positioned to give shape to the news in a way the descriptive style does not allow”.⁵ The new self-image of many journalists changed the character of media coverage. From 1960 to 2007, in the US, UK and Germany the index for a “hard-facts-first structure” declined substantially. In contrast, the index for “direct and indirect speech” increased remarkably.⁶

In the 1970s, top German journalists and politicians agreed that politics had more power than the media.⁷ In 2008, correspondents in Berlin and members of the Bundestag agreed that the media have more power over politics than politics over the media. Over the decades, the power relations perceived by politicians and journalists have reversed. Recognizing the imbalance of power, in 2008 politicians were satisfied if both had similar power, whereas journalists wanted to increase the superiority of the media.⁸ A synthesis of power and attitude claims is “impact journalism.” Its goal is the strategically planned dissemination of articles to preselected, influential people, who “can make decisions in order ... to generate appropriate solutions.” If the contacted do not act in the expected way, the next “report loop will discuss the causes of blockages.” In addition, unfulfilled expectations of social groups are “to turn into impact actions,” which become the subject of new reports, etc..⁹ In former times, journalists were proud to be distanced observers of society. Now, many are dedicated actors trying to change society. They transferred Marx’s argument that “philosophers have only interpreted the world, it is necessary to change it” to journalists.

III Estrangement of Journalists from Their Audience

1. Social Milieus

For decades, journalists have been “adapted outsiders”¹⁰ – adapted to their closer social environment, outsiders in relation to society at large. In 1989, 39 percent of the generation of “grandfathers” among German journalists had political beliefs similar to most of their audience; of the generation of “fathers” it was 33 percent, of the generation of “grandchildren” 30 percent. The generations moved apart from their audience. In the same period, the proportion of journalists who held beliefs similar to most of their colleagues rose from 39 percent to 44 percent. The individuals moved towards each other.¹¹ In the following years, journalists cultivated a negative image of their audience. Compared to 1993, in 2005 German journalists considered their audience to be more right-wing, uneducated, politically disinterested and ineffective.¹² Had the audience changed or had German journalists? Did German journalists have more prejudices in 2005 than in 1993? In any case, in 2005 they looked down on an audience that they viewed as intellectually limited.

⁵ Patterson, T. E. The news media: An effective political actor? *Political Communication*, 1997, Vo. 14, No. 4 p. 445–455.

⁶ Esser, F. & Umbricht, A. The evolution of objective and interpretative journalism in the Western press: Comparing six news systems since the 1960s. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2014, Vol. 91, No. 2, p. 229–249.

⁷ Hoffmann-Lange, U. & Schönbach, K. Geschlossene Gesellschaft. Berufliche Mobilität und politisches Bewusstsein der Medienelite. In: Kepplinger, H. M. *Angepasste Außenseiter. Was Journalisten denken und wie sie arbeiten*. Freiburg i. Br.: Verlag Karl Alber; 1979, p. 49-75.

⁸ Kepplinger, H. M. *Journalismus als Beruf*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2011, p. 21–40.

⁹ Ronzheimer, M. Impact-Journalismus – die Ausgangslage. In: KMGNE (eds.): *Inputpapier zum Symposium am 10. Dezember 2018 im Umweltbundesamt*. Berliner Bismarckplatz. Im Rahmen einer Sondierungsstudie des Umweltbundesamtes. Berlin, 2018.

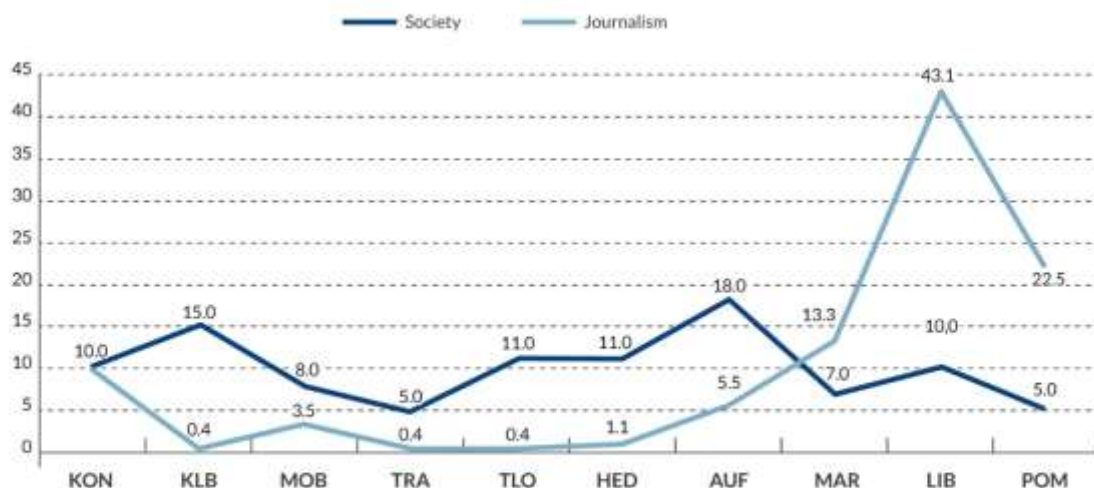
¹⁰ Kepplinger, H. M. *Angepasste Außenseiter. Was Journalisten denken und wie sie arbeiten*. Freiburg i. Br.: Verlag Karl Alber; 1979, p. 7–28.

¹¹ Ehmig, S. C. Generationswechsel im deutschen Journalismus. Zum Einfluss historischer Ereignisse auf das journalistische Selbstverständnis. Freiburg i.Br.: Verlag Alber, 2000, p. 139.

¹² Weischenberg, S., Malik, M. & Scholl, A. *Die Souffleure der Mediengesellschaft. Report über die Journalisten in Deutschland*. Konstanz: UVK, 2006, p. 297.

The derogatory distancing of many journalists from their audience reflects their social distance: they live in different social and mental environments. In Bavaria in 1999, 43 percent of journalists, but only 10 percent of the population belonged to the “liberal-intellectual milieu”; 22 percent of journalists, but only 5 percent of the population to the “postmodern milieu.” As a consequence of this, the social milieus of the vast majority were barely represented by journalists. The imbalance mentioned was stronger in public broadcasting (TV and radio) than in the private press, more pronounced in departments for local/regional and cultural/social affairs than in the departments for politics and economics.¹³ (see Figure “Social Milieus in Society and Journalism”).

Social Milieus in Society and Journalism
In Percent



Explanation: KON: Conservative-technocratic milieu; KLB: Petty bourgeois milieu; MOB: Modern-middle-class milieu; TRA: Traditional worker milieu; TLO: Worker milieu beyond tradition; HED: Hedonistic milieu; AUF: Ascendant oriented milieu; MAR: Modern worker milieu; LIB: Liberal intellectual milieu; POM: Postmodern milieu.

Source: Raabe, J.: Die Beobachtung journalistischer Akteure. Optionen einer empirisch-kritischen Journalismusforschung, Wiesbaden 2005, p. 206.

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2. Co-orientation and Convictions

Members of all professions orient themselves to their colleagues. In no profession, however, does this happen so quickly and intensively as in journalism. Journalists track the weighting and evaluation of current events by colleagues in organization they work for and in other media. This rapidly connects individuals and collectives with each other and accelerates the formation of opinions in newsrooms and in journalism in general. Because of the intensive and rapid co-orientation, common convictions emerge, which confirm each other and condense to claims of truth, against which the population must justify their opinions. For many journalists it is not about opinions, but about facts. Anyone who does not recognize this cannot or does not want to perceive reality as it is. Two commissions responsible for testing nuclear power plants and their consequences found that the accident in Fukushima was of no relevance to German nuclear power plants,¹⁴ and that the accident in Japan posed no severe risks to the health and life expectancy of the Japanese.¹⁵ Nevertheless, in 2015 more than two-thirds of German journalists agreed with the thesis that Fukushima provided “conclusive proof” that the risks of nuclear energy are unacceptable.¹⁶

¹³ Raabe, J. Die Beobachtung journalistischer Akteure. Optionen einer empirisch-kritischen Journalismusforschung. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2005, p. 260–266.

¹⁴ RSK Anlagenspezifische Sicherheitsprüfung (RSK-SÜ) deutscher Kernkraftwerke unter Berücksichtigung der Ereignisse in Fukushima-I, 2011.

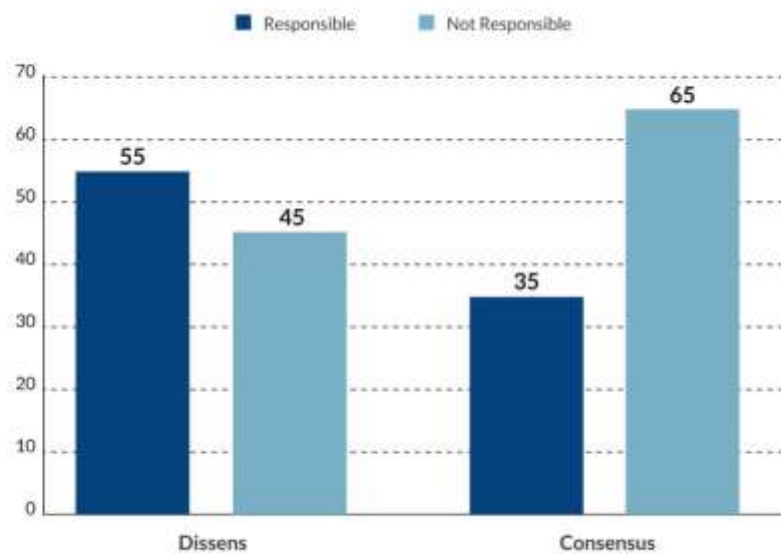
¹⁵ UNSCEAR. UNSCEAR 2013 Report, Vol. I, Scientific Annex A. New York, 2014.

¹⁶ Kepplinger, H. M. & Viererbl, B. Borderline journalism: Why do journalists accept and justify questionable practices that establish scandals? A quantitative survey. Journalism, 2018, DOI: 10.1177/1464884918801077.

A quasi-experimental survey of German journalists points to a consequence of their co-orientation. All read the following description: *“The only doctor in a small town made a deadly mistake. If a journalist reports about it, the doctor must leave the place and the inhabitants have no doctor. If he does not report about it, the doctor might make a similar mistake. Both decisions can have negative consequences. Is a journalist morally responsible for these consequences or not?”* Half learned that the journalist’s colleagues disagreed with the action he took. In this case, the majority believed the journalist was responsible for the negative consequences of his decision. The other half learned that he acted in consensus with his colleagues. In this case, the majority believed the journalist was not responsible. Such mechanisms foster the adaptation to prevailing opinions, protect against criticism from colleagues, and encourage journalists to exaggerate because it might enhance their reputation as a “critical” journalist (see below) and thus promote their careers (see Figure “Impact of Colleagues’ Opinions on Journalists’ Responsibility”).

Impact of Colleagues’ Opinions on Journalists’ Responsibility

In Percent



Source: Knirsch, K. Zweck und Mittel im Journalismus. Warum Journalisten die Wirklichkeit gelegentlich anders darstellen als sie sie sehen und wie sie mit den Folgen umgehen. Mainz, 2005, p. 229

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Thesis 3: The distribution of journalists’ opinions and milieu affiliations might have always differed from the distribution of these opinions and affiliations in society at large. Nevertheless, it has developed into a serious problem. As long as journalists had relatively limited contacts with their colleagues, acted as neutral observers and regarded their coverage as a service for their audience, their social position had limited impact on their reporting. There are two reasons why these conditions no longer exist. One is the new perceptions many journalists have of their role; another is the extended and accelerated co-orientation between them. Both factors promote the willingness to adapt to prevailing opinions in editorial departments, reduce the variety of perspectives at publications, bind media outlets to the expectations of social milieus and increase the mental and social distance to the rest of society.

IV Critical Journalism

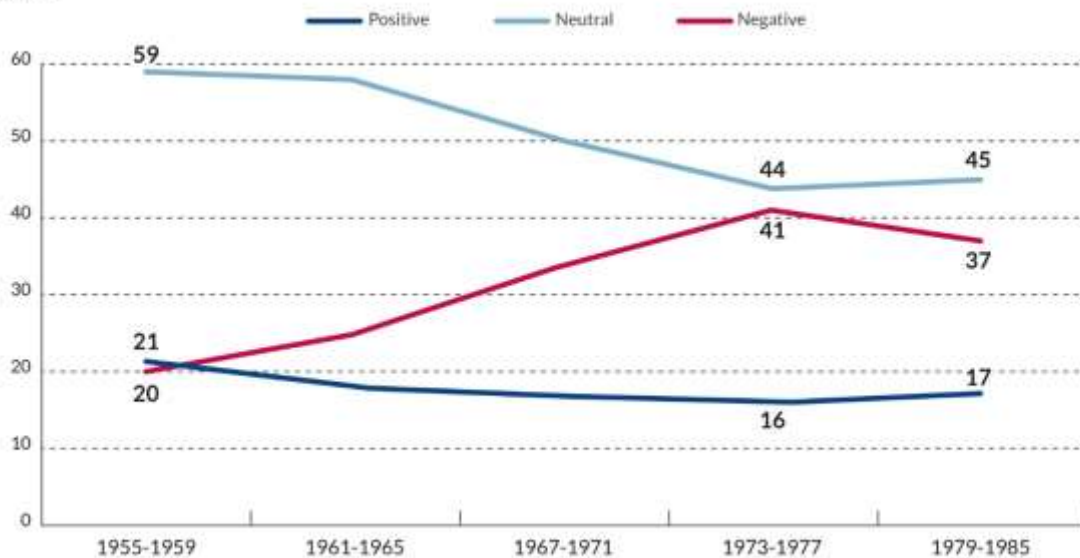
Criticism rests on a rational weighing of data and arguments for and against facts, opinions, decisions or actions. In the past, a critical journalist was one who did not publish a report until he

had solid evidence.¹⁷ Today, journalists believe themselves to be critical when they combat grievances of all kinds. In news and comments by the media, a general objection has supplanted judicious presentations of pros and cons.

1. Negativism

In the period from 1979 to 1985, a major German public radio station (HR) published almost twice as much negative news as in the period from 1955 to 1959. It culminated in the 1970s (see Figure “Negative News from Public Radio Station”).

Negative News from Public Radio Station
In Percent



Source: Kepplinger, H. M.: Realitätskonstruktionen. Wiesbaden 2011, p. 122.

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In the decades following this analysis, the focus on negative events continued to increase. From 1984 to 2014, the proportion of negative news published by a major newspaper (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*) about politics and business rose from 38 to 44 percent. From 1989 to 2014, the proportion of negative news broadcasted by a major TV news show (*Tagesschau*) rose from 41 to 59 percent.¹⁸ The degree of negativism in German mass media is not unique. In 2012, 53 percent of the reports on politics appearing in German media were negative; in Austrian media the figure was 69 percent, and in Swiss media 49 percent.¹⁹ In the United States, the preference for negative news

¹⁷ Westerstahl, J. & Johansson, F. News ideologies as moulders of domestic news. *European Journal of Communication*, 1986, 1, p. 133–149.

¹⁸ Karidi, M. *Medienlogik im Wandel. Wie sich veränderte Akteur-Struktur-Dynamiken in den Inhalten der Nachrichtenmedien widerspiegeln*. Wiesbaden: Springer, 2017, p. 78.

¹⁹ Engesser, S., Esser, F., Reinemann, C., Scherr, S., Matthes, J. & Wonneberger, A. Negativität in der Politikberichterstattung. Deutschland, Österreich und die Schweiz im Vergleich. *M&K*, 2014, Vol. 62, No. 4, p. 588–605.

also significantly increased.²⁰ The increased number of scandals²¹ is probably a consequence of the trend to push negative news.

Thesis 4: The equation of criticism with the focus on negative events and opinions rests on a fundamental error. It spread for several reasons: the new self-image of journalists; the augmented opportunities to present themselves as critical; the disruptive potential of negative news; and last but not least, the public's interest in negative news. As a consequence, the gap between "reality covered" and "coverage of reality" increased.²²

2. Problems and Solutions

Beginning in 1950, the living standard in Germany increased, the housing shortage decreased, people could take holidays in foreign countries, etc. Fifteen years later, there was an economic crisis. However, compared to the 1950s, the progress was obvious. Nevertheless, starting in the early 1960s, three quality newspapers, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Welt* published an increasing number of news stories on domestic problems while the number of reports on solutions slightly declined. This development was particularly evident in reports on politics and society. By contrast, the slightly negative coverage on foreign policy changed little²³ (see Figure "Coverage of Newspapers on Problems and Solutions in Germany").

²⁰ Moy, P. & Pfau, M. With malice toward all? The media and public confidence in democratic institutions. Westpoint, CT: Praeger, 2000.

Capella, J. N. & Hall Jamieson, K. News frames, political cynicism, and media cynicism. *The Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1996, 546, p. 71–84.

Patterson, T. E. *Out of Order*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994

²¹ Geiger, T. & Steinbach, A. Auswirkungen politischer Skandale auf die Karriere der Skandalisierten. In: Jarren, O., Schatz, H. & Weßler, H. (eds.): *Medien und politischer Prozess*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996, p. 119–133.

Eisenegger, M. Negierte Reputation. Zur Logik medienöffentlicher Skandalisierungen. In: Ludwig, M., Schierl, T. & von Sikorski, C. (eds.): *Mediated Scandals. Gründe, Genese und Folgen von medialer Skandalberichterstattung*. Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2016, p. 33–57.

Allern, S. & Pollack, E. Nordic political scandals – Frequency, types and consequences. In: Ludwig, M., Schierl, T. & von Sikorski, C. (eds.): *Mediated Scandals. Gründe, Genese und Folgeeffekte von medialer Skandalberichterstattung*. Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2016, p. 146–163.

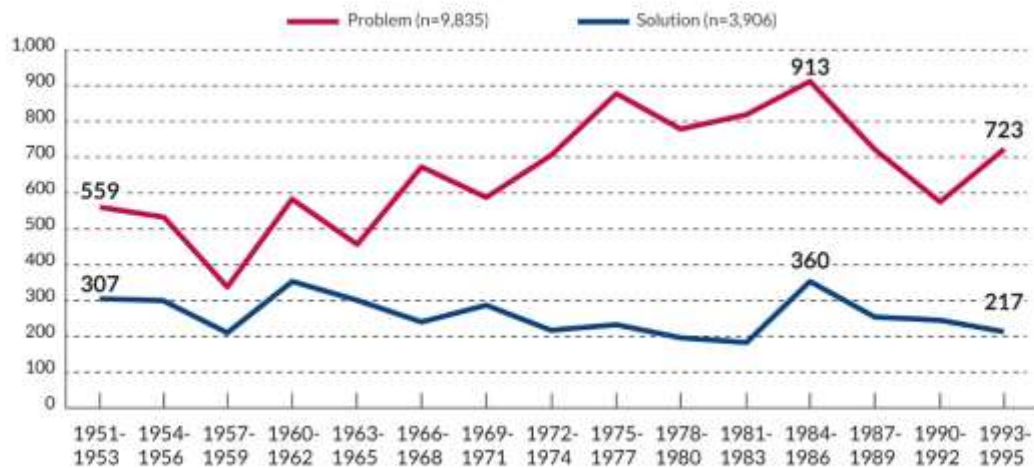
Kalb, M. L. *One Scandalous Story: Clinton, Lewinsky, and Thirteen Days that Tarnished American Journalism*. New York: Free Press, 2001.

²² Kepplinger, H. M. *Künstliche Horizonte. Folgen, Darstellung und Akzeptanz von Technik in der Bundesrepublik*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag; 1989, p. 111–140.

²³ Kepplinger, H. M. *Die Demontage der Politik in der Informationsgesellschaft*. Freiburg. i.Br. Verlag Karl Alber, 1998, p. 69, p. 70.

Coverage of Newspapers on Problems and Solutions in Germany

Number of News Reports



Source: Kepplinger, H. M.: Die Demontage der Politik in der Informationsgesellschaft, Freiburg, 1998, p. 69.

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Thesis 5: From news reports about domestic events and topics, readers of respected national papers could get the impression that the government was increasingly failing to solve the growing number of national problems. Fortunately, readers cannot remember all the negative messages over a long period. However, this type of coverage might have contributed to the decline in trust in public institutions. Assuming that all newspapers presented solid and reliable evidence, one has to conclude that news media can create a false impression by focusing on factually correct reports. It follows that the objectivity of reporting depends not only on the correctness of individual contributions, but also on the weighting of positive and negative news of problems.

3. Purposes and Unintended Consequences

The economic success of the Federal Republic and the growing prosperity of the population resulted from technological developments and the performance of its industry. However, technologies of all kinds – refrigerators, cars, medicines, nuclear power plants, etc. – have unintended negative consequences in addition to their intended positive purposes. From 1965 to 1979, four respected German daily newspapers and three respected weekly papers covered – with some deviations, but in about the same intensity – the purposes and negative consequences of a very wide range of technologies. After that, reports on the unintended consequences determined the image of technologies. This development was followed by a second one: from 1974 to 1986, the papers more often covered the potential damage from technology than the potential benefits. To put it differently: the coverage of risks dominated the coverage of opportunities²⁴ (see Figure “Coverage of Purposes and Unintended Consequences of Technologies”).

²⁴ Kepplinger, H. M. Künstliche Horizonte. Folgen, Darstellung und Akzeptanz von Technik in der Bundesrepublik. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1989, p. 88–93, p. 155–157.

Coverage of Purposes and Unintended Consequences of Technologies

Percentage



Source: Kepplinger, H. M. *Künstliche Horizonte. Folgen, Darstellung und Akzeptanz von Technik in der Bundesrepublik*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1998, p. 155.

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Thesis 6: Concentrating on undesirable implications of intentional behavior has become a typical feature of reporting on many issues – decisions on laws and regulations, economic innovations, sporting events, etc. These posts create negative frames, which guide the perception not only of technologies. Therefore, rational public discussions of important decisions – the construction of a new railroad station in Stuttgart, the phasing out of nuclear energy, the safeguarding of European external borders and the avoidance of fossil fuels – are hardly taking place. Social institutions appear as cause of problems, opponents of decisions by elected bodies receive much publicity and significant veto power.

4. Instrumentalizing Experts

Opinions of journalists influence the coverage of major conflicts and scandals.²⁵ Since the mid-1970s, this has been a common practice in Germany.²⁶ Similar data are available from the US.²⁷ A recent German example is the coverage of nuclear energy. One year before the accident near Fukushima, 85 percent of German journalists were against extending the life span of nuclear power plants.²⁸ After the accident, many newspapers and magazines reported primarily on experts confirming the views of journalists.²⁹ There was only one significant exception (NZZ). Not surprisingly, of ten German papers analyzed, six significantly preferred negative statements from

²⁵ Kepplinger, H. M., Brosius, H.-B. & Staab, J. F. Instrumental actualization: A theory of mediated conflicts. *European Journal of Communication*, 1991, Vo. 6, No. 3, p. 263–290.

Patterson, T. E. & Donsbach, W. News decisions: Journalists as partisan actors. *Political Communication*, 13, p. 455–468, 1996.

²⁶ Kepplinger, H. M. *Künstliche Horizonte. Folgen, Darstellung und Akzeptanz von Technik in der Bundesrepublik*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1989, p. 148.

²⁷ Lichter, S. R., Rothman, S. & Lichter, L. S. *The Media Elite. America's New Powerbrokers* (1986). New York: Hastings House, Book Publishers, 1990, p. 169–219.

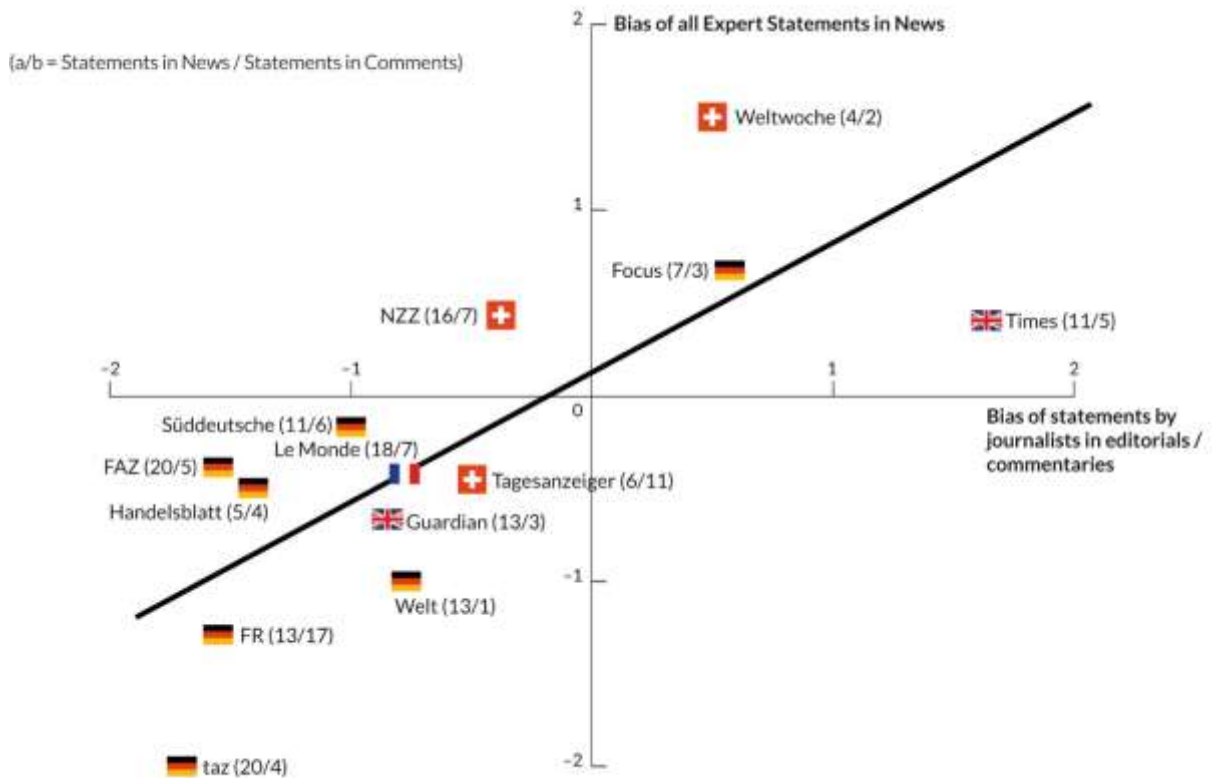
Puglisi, R. & Snyder Jr., J. M. Newspaper coverage of political scandals. *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 73, No. 3, p. 931–950, 2011.

²⁸ Mothes, C. *Objektivität als professionelles Abgrenzungskriterium im Journalismus. Eine dissonanztheoretische Studie zum Informationsverhalten von Journalisten und Nicht-Journalisten*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2014, p. 198.

²⁹ Kepplinger, H. M. & Lemke, R. Instrumentalizing Fukushima: Comparing media coverage of Fukushima in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. *Political Communication*, 2016, Vol. 33, No. 3, p. 351–373.

experts, which confirmed negative statements of journalists (see Figure “Instrumentalizing Experts”).

Instrumentalizing Experts



Source: Kepplinger, H.M. & Lemke, R. Instrumentalizing Fukushima: Comparing Media Coverage of Fukushima in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. *Political Communication*, 2016, p. 363.

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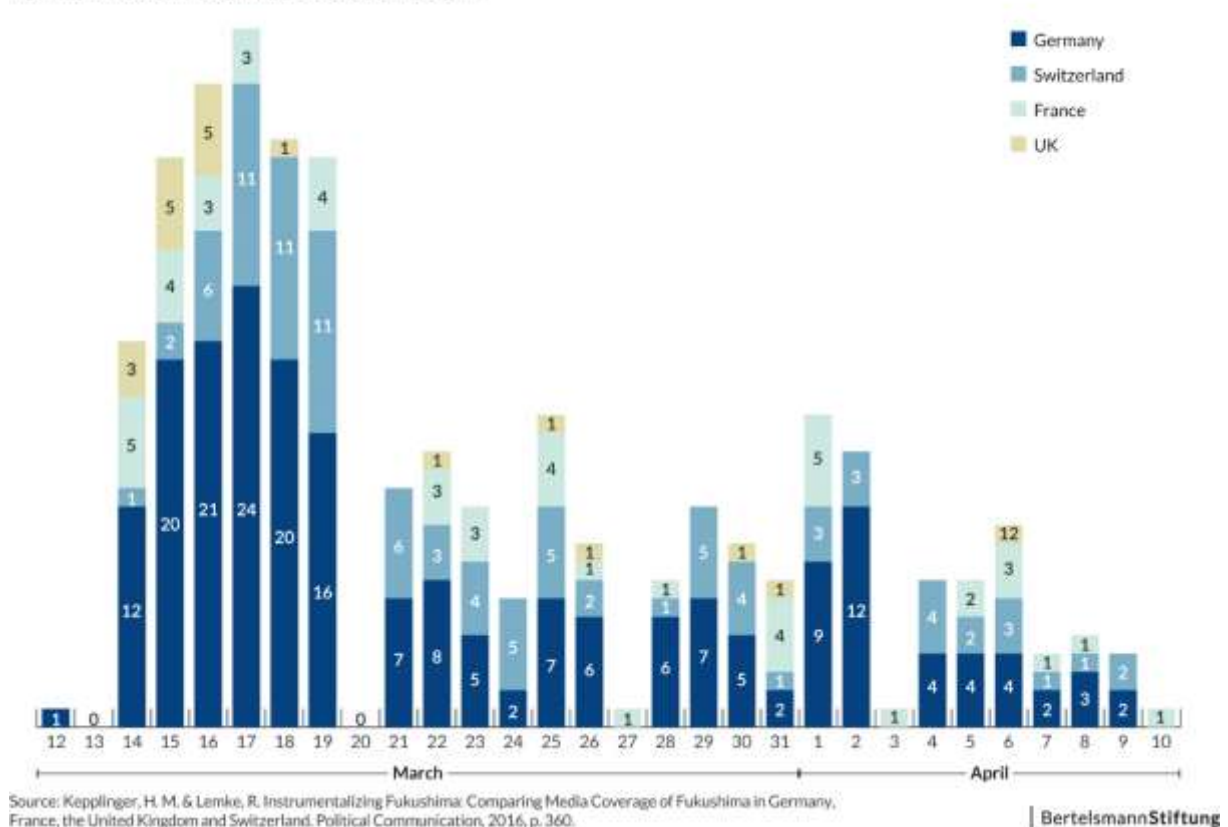
Thesis 7: Journalists have no professional competence for most events and topics they report on. However, they gain quasi-competence gathering information from competent experts. Therefore, they should let the most competent experts have their say. If they preliminarily cite experts who confirm their own opinions, they are failing to do their job. This approach does not provide the public with the best information available and thus hinders the development of well-informed opinions.

5. Framing Relevance

There are two possibilities to convince people of the relevance of an issue: solid facts combined with value arguments and the extensive presentation of (seemingly) neutral information about negative events or developments. This procedure is called framing. Framing events is effective because the audience believes they are personally drawing conclusions. However, this might be a fallacy. Based on the facts provided, they sometimes draw the only conclusion, which is reasonable. The effectiveness of frames depends not on the factual accuracy of the information, but on its credibility. Credibility is high when mass media repetitively present similar views. An example is the framing of the nuclear accident in Japan as a domestic problem. German journalists framed the accident in Japan as evidence of the unreliability of nuclear energy and created a direct link to German nuclear power plants. Three days after the accident, two respected German papers published more than 10 articles dealing with nuclear energy in Germany, three days later 24. This created the impression that the accident in Japan, caused by a tsunami, is highly relevant for Germany's nuclear industry. In contrast, journalists working for comparative newspapers in France and the UK rarely depicted domestic nuclear power plants in the context of the accident in Japan.

In the UK, the Office for Nuclear Regulation concluded in 2011 that “in considering the direct causes of the Fukushima accident, we see no reason for curtailing the operation of nuclear power plants.” In France, in 2013 the government decided to extend the operational life of 58 nuclear reactors from 40 to 50 years. In Germany, the parliament (Bundestag) decided to close down all nuclear power plants by 2022³⁰ (see Figure “Framing Nuclear Energy as Domestic Problem”).³¹

Framing Nuclear Energy as Domestic Problem



Thesis 8: Framing guides recipients’ processing of information. It prevents information overload and often allows own considerations. However, as a manipulative technique, framing can be precarious, since recipients’ views can be influenced in a way that goes far beyond the information provided. A recent example is the framing of emissions from diesel engines as an important problem by the heaped claim that they would cause 140,000 “premature” deaths. The result was outrage, though no one knew what “premature” means – one day, one week, one month, several years?

6. Withholding Information

Mass media claim to provide all information needed to understand facts. This is especially relevant in reports on possible damages, usually called risks. An example is global warming. The IPCC’s World Climate Reports contain summaries for policymakers, which provide information on the likelihood of the causes, characteristics and consequences of climate change. One week before and after the presentation of the IPCC reports, 15 German offline media and their online editions,

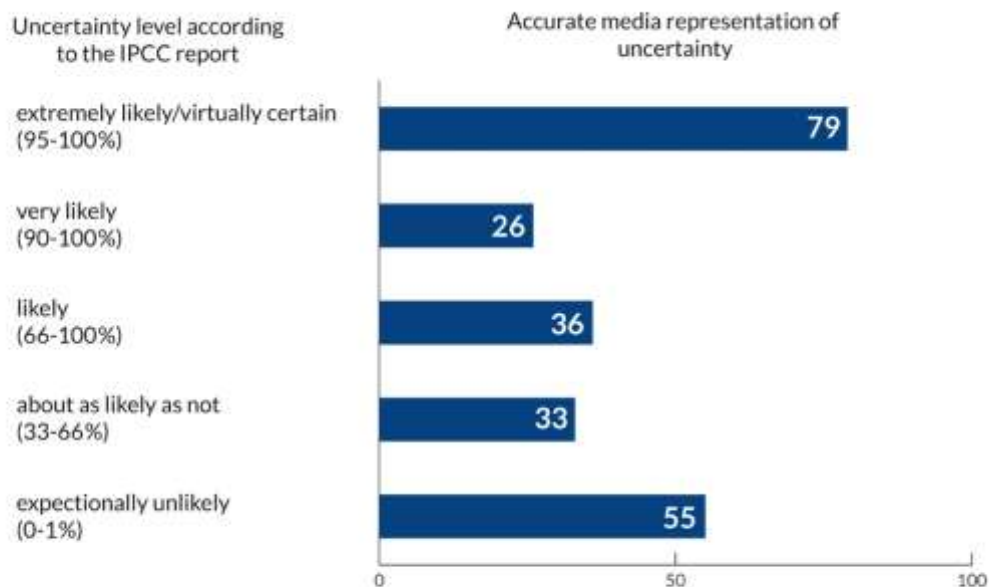
³⁰ Kepplinger, H. M. & Lemke, R. Instrumentalizing Fukushima: Comparing media coverage of Fukushima in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. *Political Communication*, 2016, Vol. 33, No. 3, p. 351–373.

³¹ The following comparable newspapers were included in the analysis depicted in Figure “Framing Nuclear Energy as Domestic Problem”: Germany, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*; Switzerland, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *Tagesanzeiger*; France, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*; United Kingdom, *Times*, *Guardian*.

four TV channels (public and private) and the online portal web.de mentioned just under half of the references in the IPCC reports at least once. Thus, readers and viewers did not get most information relevant for assessing the results.

What information did the media provide? Most frequently, they reported the reliability of the results if they were almost certain, quite often they reported the reliability if they were not at all certain. Relative seldom did so if the results were only likely.³² Thus, the media provided two dominating frames: there are results you must believe and some others that you can forget – and they withheld the information that many other results could be put into question. Thus, they blocked off possible doubts (see Figure “Accurate Media Representation of Uncertainty in the News of the IPCC Report”).

Accurate Media Representation of Uncertainty in the News on the IPCC Report



Note: Content analysis of news coverage in 29 online- and offline media channels

Source: Hassler, J., Maurer, M. & Oschatz, C. So gut wie sicher? Die Darstellung der Ungewissheit klimawissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse durch Wissenschaft, Massenmedien und Politik, 2016, p. 135.

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The lack of information about the low reliability of the statements was probably not accidental. There are other examples. Although German media focused to an extreme extent on the Fukushima reactor accident, almost all hushed up the UN’s extensive UNSCEAR report documenting the accident’s limited impact on the Japanese people. Similarly, after German news media urged President Christian Wulff to resign, almost all hushed up information that the trigger for his resignation was a hoax.³³

Thesis 9: It is relatively seldom for mass media to hush up important information when it contradicts journalists’ basic beliefs. Nevertheless, there is evidence for this practice and its justification by journalists.³⁴ In contrast to concealment of unwanted information, neglecting important information

³² Hassler, J., Maurer, M. & Oschatz, C. So gut wie sicher? Die Darstellung der Ungewissheit klimawissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse durch Wissenschaft, Massenmedien und Politik. In: Ruhrmann, G., Kessler, S. H. & Guenther, L. (eds.): Wissenschaftskommunikation zwischen Risiko und (Un-)Sicherheit. Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2016, p. 122–142.

³³ Kepplinger, H. M. Totschweigen und Skandalisieren. Was Journalisten über ihre eigenen Fehler denken. Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2017, p. 130–151.

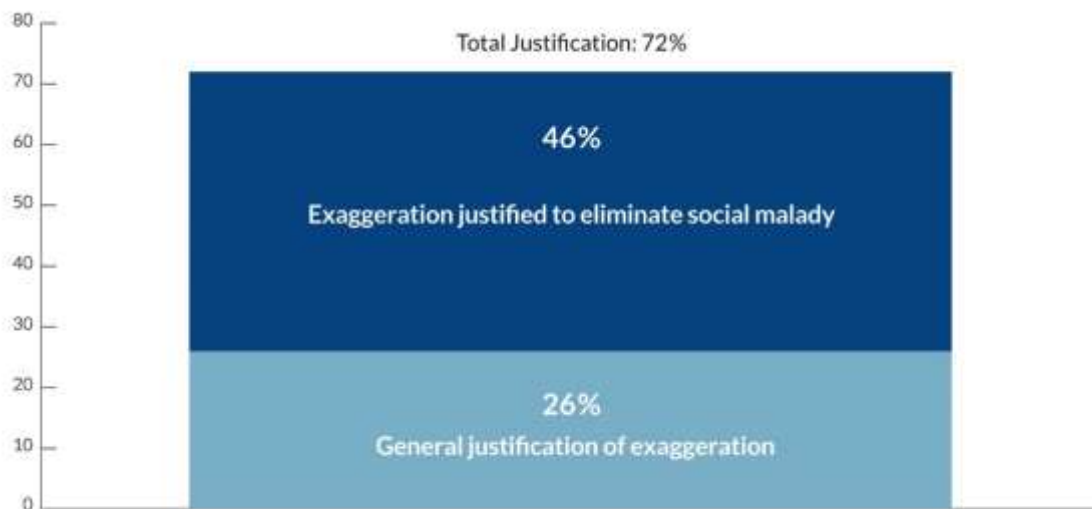
³⁴ Kepplinger, H. M. Totschweigen und Skandalisieren. Was Journalisten über ihre eigenen Fehler denken. Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2017, p. 110–173.

about risks is common practice.³⁵ For example, in 2001 German newspapers and magazines provided sufficient information about the extent of risks from Lipobay/Baycol in only 5 percent of their reports on possible side effects; comparable papers in the US did a little better, but they, too, did not really provide adequate information.³⁶ Reports that do not indicate the likelihood of harm unsettle people and can cause irrational anxiety, because after reading or seeing reports on major potential damages, most people assume intuitively that those damages are almost certain to occur. Therefore, the deliberate withholding and unintentional lack of information may lead readers or viewers astray and may cause false and harmful reactions.

7. Justified Exaggerations

Journalists aspire to portray reality as it is, and they apply even stricter standards than scientists do.³⁷ Nonetheless, many journalists believe it is permissible for them to “portray problems occasionally more exaggeratedly than the problems are when carefully considered”. One-quarter of German journalists generally accept exaggerations; just over half consider them acceptable in exceptional cases. The rest reject them. Most of the hesitant journalists feel they are justified in one instance: to eliminate a social malady. In this case, 72 percent of all journalists accept exaggerations. All scandals attack social maladies. Most journalists probably know their colleagues’ opinions about justified exaggerations. This may motivate some to exaggerate unimportant grievances. This, too, could be a cause of the increasing number of scandals (see Figure “Justified Exaggerations to Eliminate Social Malady”).

Justified Exaggerations to Eliminate Social Malady



Source: Kepplinger, H. M. Journalismus als Beruf. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2011, p. 164-167.

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Thesis 10: There are several unspoken conditions for the use of exaggerations to eliminate a social malady: all people or at least most must assess the case as a social malady; the social malady must be as great as journalists actually perceive it; their exaggerations must reach the intended goal; and they must not cause unintended side effects. In many cases, none of these requirements is given. For example, exaggerations can have severe negative side effects. These include

³⁵ Singer, E. & Endreny, P. Reporting hazards: Their benefits and costs. *Journal of Communication*, 1987, Vol. 37, No. 3, p. 10–27.

³⁶ Kepplinger, H. M. & Klimpe, S. Medikamenten–Risiko und Informationsmöglichkeit von Zeitungslern am Beispiel Lipobay. In: Renner, K. N., Schultz, T. & Wilke, J. (eds.): *Journalismus zwischen Autonomie und Nutzwert*. Cologne: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2017, p. 155–174.

³⁷ Post, S. Scientific objectivity in journalism? How journalists and academics define objectivity, asses its attainability, rate its desirability. *Journalism*, 2014, Vol. 16, No. 6, p. 730–749.

misleading the population, material and immaterial damage, and wrong decisions affecting uninvolved people and companies.³⁸

V Defending Questionable Practices

Many scandals are based on questionable practices by a few journalists whose colleagues are willing to take their frames, spread them further and thus make them meaningful and credible.³⁹ From 2011 to 2015, in Germany violations of the German Press Code cause or reinforced five major scandals.⁴⁰ The five scandals were

- caused by a constructed quote by Minister of Finance Wolfgang Schäuble insinuating a comparison of Vladimir Putin with Adolf Hitler;
- caused by the concealment of the main theme of Sybille Lewitscharoff's speech on ethical problems of surrogate mothers connected with attacks on a few provocative concepts;
- reinforced because of the withholding of important information provided by Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst connected with a misleading interpretation of a quote;
- caused by misleading descriptions of the instigators of violence at public marches organized by Pegida;⁴¹
- caused by speculation about a possible similar catastrophe in Germany after the accident at the nuclear reactor in Japan, whose unique conditions were rarely discussed.

In an online survey, 334 German journalists expressed their opinions – not on the scandals in general, but on questionable practices described in detail.⁴² Based on their opinions, one can identify opponents and advocates of such practices and those indifferent to them. The relative majority are opponents: they consistently found them more or less unacceptable. A small minority are advocates: they consistently found them more or less acceptable. A large minority are indifferent: they found some violations of norms acceptable, others not acceptable, or they did not express an opinion (see Figure “Opponents and Advocates of Questionable Practices”).

³⁸ Kepplinger, H. M. Die Mechanismen der Skandalisierung. Warum man den Medien gerade dann nicht vertrauen kann, wenn es darauf ankommt. 4th edition. Reinbek: Lau Verlag, 2018, p. 207–220.

³⁹ Entman, R. & Stonbely, S. Blunders, scandals, and strategic communication in U. S. foreign policy: Benghazi vs. 9/11. *International Journal of Communication*, 2018, 12, p. 3024–3047.

Jackob, N. Die Mediengesellschaft und ihre Opfer. Grenzfälle journalistischer Ethik im frühen einundzwanzigsten Jahrhundert. Berlin: Peter Lang Verlag; 2018.

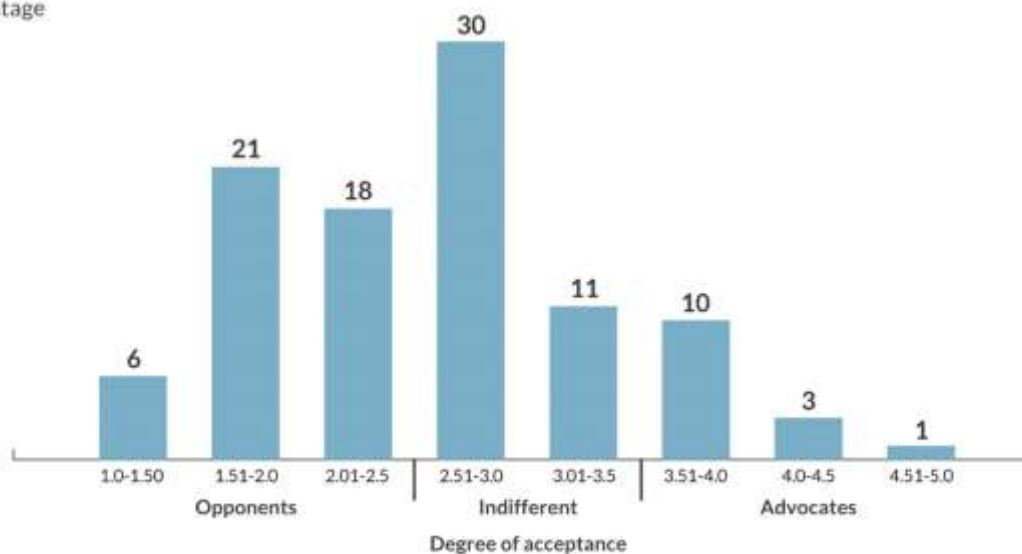
Sabato, L., Stencil, M. & Lichter R. Peep Show: Media and Politics in an Age of Scandal. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.

⁴⁰ Kepplinger, H. M. & Viererbl, B. Borderline journalism: Why do journalists accept and justify questionable practices that establish scandals? A quantitative survey. *Journalism*, 2018, DOI: 10.1177/1464884918801077.

⁴¹ Pegida: **P**atriotische **E**uropäer **g**egen die **I**slamisierung **d**es **A**bendlandes (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West).

⁴² The journalists gave their opinions on whether the practices in question are acceptable on the basis of five-point scales.

Opponents and Advocates of Questionable Practices In Percentage



Source: Kepplinger, H. M. & Viererbl, B. Borderline journalism: Why do journalists accept and justify questionable practices that establish scandals? A quantitative survey, 2018. DOI: 10.1177/1464884918801077, p. 8.

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In a second step, the journalists indicated their opinions on three statements justifying the questionable practices and three arguments criticizing them. All statements related to the individual cases. They represent six arguments. Significant links between statements and the acceptance of practices outlined were identified using complex statistics. A second analysis presents a vivid overview based on percentages. It highlights differences between opponents and advocates. The most relevant argument justifying questionable practices was the claim to privileged insight. For example, 26 percent of opponents but 70 percent of advocates supported the argument: "It's not about what (Schäuble) said but what he meant". The most relevant argument defending questionable practices was the rejection of responsibility (see Figure "Opinions about Statements Defending and Criticizing Questionable Practices").

Opinions about Statements Defending and Criticizing Questionable Practices

	Opponents %	Indifferent %	Advocates %
Claiming privileged insights:			
„It's not about what (Schäuble) said, but what he meant"	26	39	70
„Fukushima gives conclusive proof that the risks of nuclear energy are unacceptably high"	39	27	88
„Lewitscharoff is discriminating against minorities with her polemic statements – media should not take part in this"	29	29	71
Neglecting responsibility:			
„Pegida supporters have the right to a fair reporting of their rallies"	85	27	75
„Spiegel online had an obligation to present both interpretations" (Tebartz-van Elst)	96	55	57
„Concentrating on polemic terms (Lewitscharoff) used, gave a false impression of her position on existential questions"	69	50	43
„Concentrating on the causes of the catastrophe in Japan could have reduce unfounded fear" (nuclear energy)	45	18	17

Source: Kepplinger, H. M. & Viererbl, B. Borderline journalism: Why do journalists accept and justify questionable practices that establish scandals? A quantitative survey, Journalism, 2018. Online first: DOI: 10.1177/1464884918801077, p. 11.

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Thesis 11: The presumptuous self-image of some journalists – their claim to special insights and their rejection of responsibility – corresponds to the self-perception many journalists have and their

ambition to hold power. Arguments by journalists justifying questionable practices and defending them against criticism form a protective shield around the very few who use dubious methods to initiate or promote scandals.

VI Reasonable Frustration and Distrust

Milieu matters. In a representative online survey of 1,488 Germans, 76 percent of the “critically engaged” milieu believe there are “media that express” what they mean “on the issues.” This milieu accounts for 6 percent of the population and feels well represented by media coverage. The similarly small milieu of “skeptical individualists” sees it differently. Only 47 percent feel there are “media that express” what they mean “on the issues.” Obviously, members of this milieu and of many others do not feel well represented by media coverage. They are losers as a result of the shrunken worldview of many editorial departments.⁴³ The impression of large sections of society that the media do not present their point of view is probably a reason for their doubts about the objectivity of reporting. Another survey underlines this. In winter 2007/2008, 61 percent of 1,054 interviewees said they believe a journalist with a negative view of nuclear energy would not publish a physicist’s statement that nuclear energy was environmentally friendly.⁴⁴ This corresponds to results from a systematic analysis of reporting which indicate that the coverage of controversial issues, among them nuclear energy, is heavily biased⁴⁵ (see Figure “Reasonable Distrust”).

⁴³ Jandura, O., Kösters, R. & Wilms, L. Mediales Repräsentationsgefühl in der Bevölkerung. *Media Perspektiven* 2018 (3), p. 118-127.

⁴⁴ Donsbach, W., Rentsch, M., Schielicke, A.-M. & Degen, S. Entzauberung eines Berufs. Was die Deutschen vom Journalismus erwarten und wie sie enttäuscht werden. Konstanz: UVK, 2009, p. 92.

⁴⁵ Lichter, S. R., Rothman, S. & Lichter, L. S. *The Media Elite. America’s New Powerbrokers*. New York: Hastings House, Book Publishers, 1990.

Kepplinger, H. M., Brosius, H.-B. & Staab, J. F. Instrumental actualization: A theory of mediated conflicts. *European Journal of Communication*, 1991, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 263–290.

Schulz, W., Berens, H. & Zeh, R. *Der Kampf um Castor in den Medien*. Munich: Verlag Reinhard Fischer, 1998.

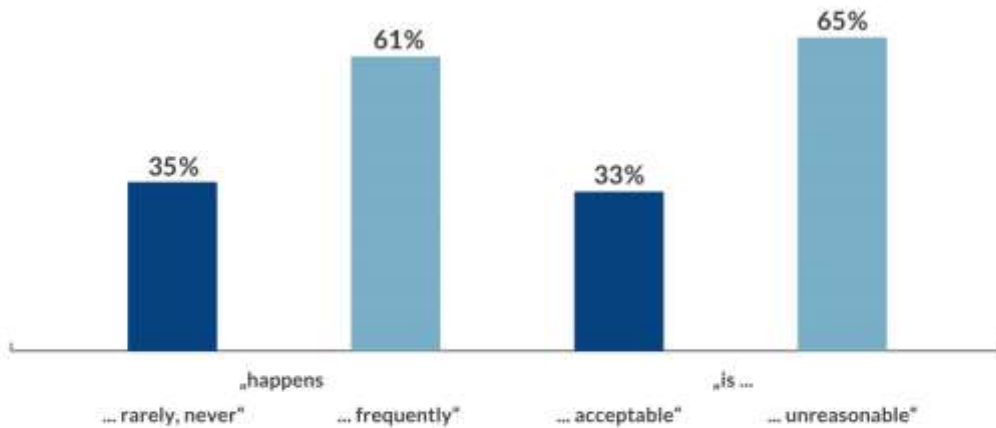
Kepplinger, H. M. & Lemke, R. Instrumentalizing Fukushima: Comparing media coverage of Fukushima in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. *Political Communication*, 2016, Vol. 33, No. 3, p. 351–373.

Reasonable Distrust

Description of case: „A journalist interviews a physicist on nuclear energy, which shows that he considers nuclear energy very environmentally friendly. That contradicts the journalist's opinion, so he does not publish the interview.“

Questions:

1. „Acceptable or unreasonable?“
2. „Do you think that happens frequently ...or rarely/never?“



Source: Donsbach, W., Rentsch, M., Schielicke, A.-M. & Degen, S., 2009, p. 92.

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Thesis 12: Distrust in media coverage correlates with the level of formal education and with individual attitudes. These findings are correct but distract from the problem: the quality of reporting and the relationship of reports to reported reality. Many people who doubt the objectivity of media reports may not belong to the middle or upper class. It does not follow, however, that their doubts are unfounded. Even if in the unlikely case that each of their assessments also reflects a prejudice, one could not conclude that the assessment is not at all based on facts. There are several empirical analyses indicating that media coverage of controversial issues often provides misleading impressions of facts, hopes and fears.

VII Control Waiver

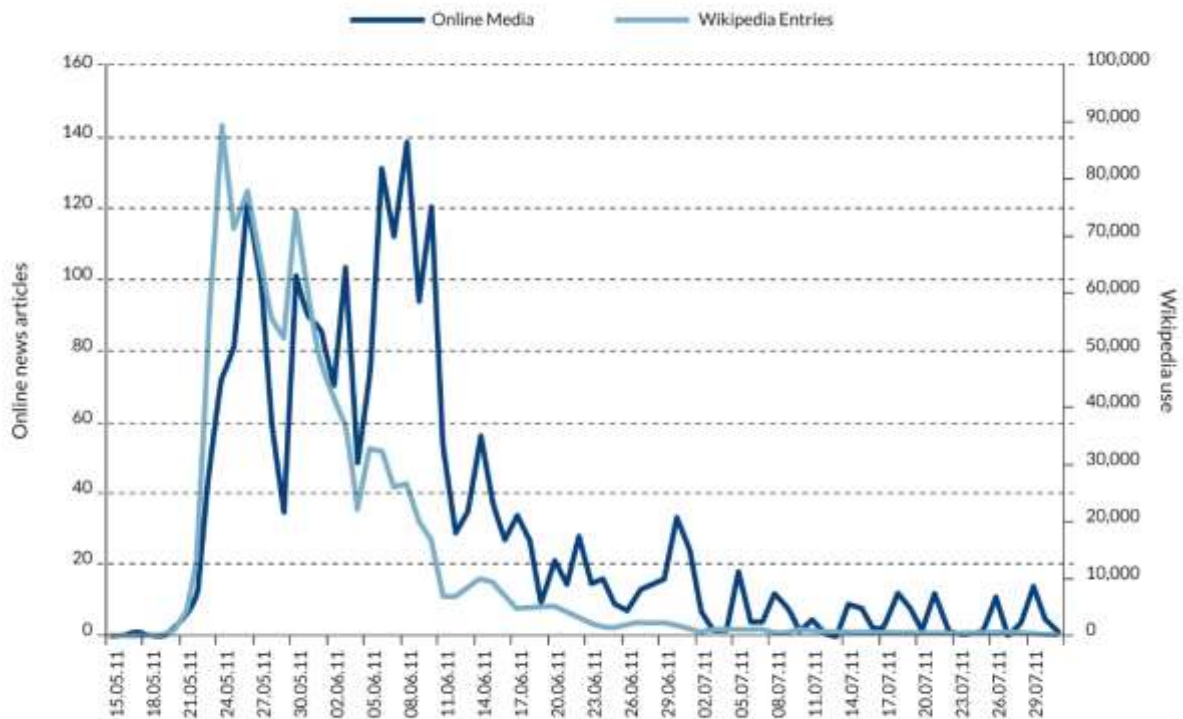
In the US, the Clinton-Lewinski scandal marked the end of traditional media as sovereign gatekeepers. Journalists working for traditional offline media adopted accusations published on Internet platforms that in the past they had refused to publish because they did not meet their traditional code of ethics or contradicted their collective ethical standards. Meanwhile, the interplay between journalists and pseudo-journalists in search of quick and cheap information is undermining journalists' skills. Quantitative evidence is provided by a study of reporting of the EHEC (a type of *E. coli*) epidemic in Germany in 2011. Eleven wide-reaching German, Swiss and Austrian online news media⁴⁶ reported on May 23 about first instances of the outbreak. In the following days, the number of searches for Wikipedia posts about EHEC and related topics increased dramatically. The great interest heaped traditional media coverage. They reported extremely often about EHEC, as the interest in background information from Wikipedia had already declined.⁴⁷ At first glance, one could regard the development as proof of the mass media's ability to provide reliable information. However, there was no reliable information. Most media published speculation and much of the public became extremely frightened. Tens of thousands of people stopped eating vegetables, the market for the suspected products collapsed and farmers whose existence was

⁴⁶ bild.de, spiegel-online.de, focus.de, welt.de, sueddeutsche.de, n-tv.de, zeit.de, stern.de, faz.de, nzz.ch, derstandard.at.

⁴⁷ Maurer, M. & Holbach, T. Taking online search queries as an indicator of the public agenda: The role of public uncertainty. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2016, Vol. 93, No. 3, p. 572–586.

threatened were paid €227 million by the EU in compensation. Instead of doing their job, most media pushed emotions (see Figure “Searches for Wikipedia Entry on EHEC and Coverage of EHEC by Online News Media”).

Searches for Wikipedia Entry on EHEC and Coverage of EHEC by Online Media



Source: Maurer, M. & Holbach, T. Taking online search queries as an indicator of the public agenda: The role of public uncertainty. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2016, Vol. 93, No. 3, p. 580.

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Thesis 13: The Internet is an important source of information and opinions, and can indicate growing interest in current issues. Nevertheless, it is not the task of journalists to incite the need for information through speculation and warnings. Rather, their job is to inform people by providing carefully researched, reliable data. Substance is more important than speed.

VIII Conclusions

1. Normally, German mass media inform the public well. Nevertheless, reporting on controversial issues is often one-sided and uncritical. These are exceptions in the flow of daily reports. Reasons for these exceptions are general changes in journalism.
2. Changes include the self-image of journalists and their claim to power; their affiliation with a few small social milieus; their alienation from the mass of their audience; and their uncritical readiness to participate in any campaign that allegedly prevents or eliminates serious problems.
3. A few journalists are prepared to use questionable methods. Many of their colleagues follow them, turning a personal failure into a professional one. Therefore, there are two problems – the behavior of few breakers and of many followers.

IX Recommendations

1. Reduction of Consonance

Journalists and scientists recruit their younger colleagues through co-optation. In science, a prerequisite for joining the profession is a performance test. A comparable examination does not exist in journalism for good reason. That is why in journalism the field of study and the process of selecting the next generation are particularly important. Two-thirds of German journalists studied linguistics, social sciences or related fields, only 10 percent natural sciences, 8 percent economics, 8 percent history, and 4 percent law. Nearly 70 percent of German journalists first did an internship.⁴⁸

Most interns are likely to apply to media and editorial teams whose reports express their own views. Presumably, most editorial departments consider those interns particularly gifted who think very much as they do themselves. If the applicants and editors behave this way for several decades, journalists' attitudes and role perceptions will become more and more homogeneous. That is what one survey indicates: most journalists believe that the colleagues in their own department share the same opinions that they hold. That is, they are the more dissimilar the farther they are from each other. The greatest distance they perceive is between themselves and their audience (see Figure "Journalists' View of Political Attitudes of Colleagues and Audiences").

Journalists' View of Political Attitudes of Colleagues and Audiences

	Own Attitude %	Most colleagues in same department %	Most colleagues in same organization %	Readers / Listeners / Viewers %
Left	66	59	39	13
Center	15	26	30	69
Right	19	15	32	19

Source: Reinemann, C. & Baugut, P. Alter Streit unter neuen Bedingungen. Einflüsse politischer Einstellungen von Journalisten auf ihre Arbeit, 2014, p. 494.

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Especially during coverage of controversial issues, journalists may agree without sufficient discussion of opposing views, and premature agreement can endanger the objectivity of reporting. Therefore, when recruiting young journalists, publishers and broadcasters should actively seek out young people who study subjects that few active journalists have studied: law, economics and natural sciences. In addition, they should look for potential journalists who come from previously underrepresented social milieus, or have worked in other professions.

Publishers and broadcasters should also think about arranging periodic exchanges of journalists with comparable media in other countries. For example, each week a French, Polish, Italian or Swedish journalist could write about a controversial issue, such as securing the external borders of Europe, causes of the euro crisis, the relationship to China, etc. Conversely, German journalists could provide contributions on the same issues for the guest authors' newspapers. This would enhance the plurality of views and objectivity of reporting on conflicting issues. It could also promote mutual understanding in Europe.

2. Preserve Objectivity

The German Press Code lists a remarkable number of professional rules, supplemented by examples and decisions by the German Press Council. They form a solid basis for assessing the

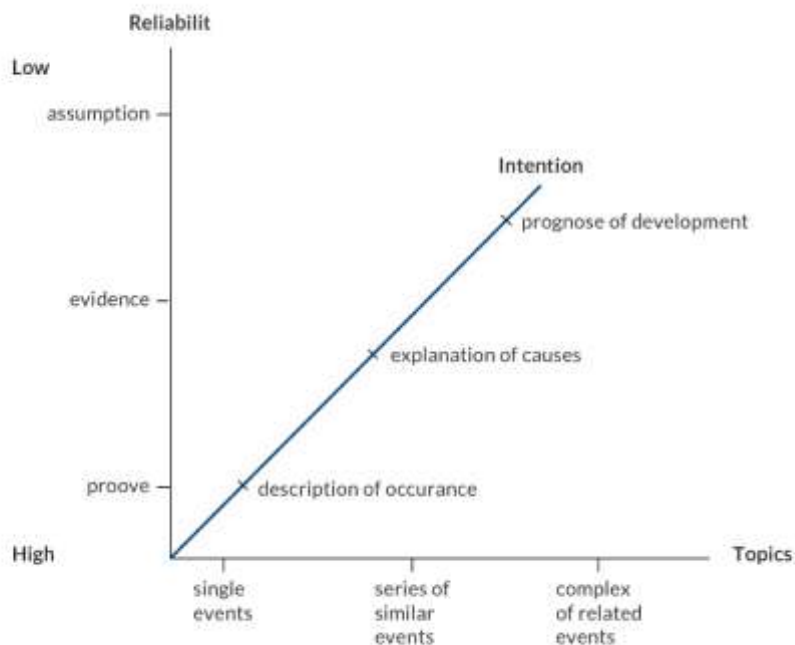
⁴⁸ Weischenberg, S., Malik, M. & Scholl, A. Die Souffleure der Mediengesellschaft. Report über die Journalisten in Deutschland. Konstanz: UVK, 2006, p. 68.

objectivity of reports. However, there are many journalists who do not take violations of the press code seriously and occasionally cover for the behavior of their colleagues. Despite its benefits, the press code cannot provide a foundation for a discussion of objectivity in journalism.

General discussions of objectivity in journalism miss the point, because they inflate the problem. The term “objectivity” refers to something called “essential” and “irrefutable.” Theologians and philosophers use the term in this sense. It also refers to something called “intersubjective” and “reliable.” In this sense, it is common in the natural and social sciences. This type of objectivity can and should be achieved by journalists. Assessing the objectivity of a report, one has to distinguish between at least three aspects: the reported occurrences (single events, event series and statistics of events); their history (causes, motives); and their further development (prognoses). In addition, one has to check the degree of reliability of statements about these aspects (proof, evidence, assumptions). Most likely, the reliability of statements about a single event is higher than the reliability of statements about a complex of related events; and the reliability of descriptive statements about an occurrence is higher than the reliability of statements about its future, etc. News stories and news reports often include two further aspects: assessments (of the event, the history, the evolution) and demands (on the actors involved). In these cases, one has to check the degrees of reliability of the assessments and demands (derived from facts, substantiated with reasons, asserted). Because of the reasons mentioned, as in the sciences, a fixed degree of objectivity does not exist. Instead, the degree of objectivity in journalism depends on several criteria. A simple model may present an idea of the complexity of the problem and possibilities for a rational discussion of its different aspects (see Figure “Criteria of Objectivity of News and News Reports”).

Criteria of Objectivity of News and News Reports

- Model -



Source: Author.

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Assessing the objectivity of reporting in a period or in a country poses a different problem. One has to compare the number (or length, or placement) of news stories with the number of events known from independent external sources. Among them are document centers, official statistics, technical

measures, etc.⁴⁹ Of course, journalists are not obliged to reflect the changing number of certain events. However, if the number of news reports over a longer period significantly deviates from the number of known events, it presents an inadequate and misleading picture of reality – by understating or exaggerating certain events or topics.⁵⁰

Thesis 14: Objectivity is not a categorical property that a report has or does not have, but a property that it has more or less. Therefore, it is necessary to identify relevant aspects to check the degree of objectivity of a news story or news report. The audience can at least expect a high degree of reliability of information about aspects presented in the lower left side of the model presented above. Journalists should be aware of the degrees of reliability of their information and they should disclose limitations as far as possible. Certainly, the majority of journalists act according to these rules – but a minority neglects them and many of their colleagues protect them, justifying their questionable practices.

3. Assurance of Quality

When photographer Juan Moreno provided evidence that Claas Relotius, a top reporter from the German news magazine *Spiegel*, had invented parts of his reportage on a vigilante in the US, he came up against a brick wall. Only when Moreno demonstrated how easy it is to fake e-mail documents did the magazine's editors abandon their resistance (*Süddeutsche.de* December 20, 2018). Thirty years before Relotius' forgery, editors of the news magazine *Stern* published a photo of a bookshelf taken in a small room as part of the first story on "Hitler's diaries" (April 28, 1983). In the photo, they had inserted an arrow. The sub-line read: "His diary was always there (arrow)." Despite an important commonality, the two cases differ. Relotius betrayed readers (and colleagues) because he knew he had faked some of his evidence; the relevant employees of *Stern* probably led their readers astray because they considered Hitler's diaries to be genuine. They were not liars, but uncritical believers. Journalists who lie to their audience have no place in the profession. Journalists who deceive their audience by being uncritical should be criticized in public by name, and given a second chance.

Both cases have one thing in common: the lack of willingness to publicly criticize mistakes made by colleagues. In the case of Relotius, colleagues tried to prevent criticism of a prominent colleague, which would have become public knowledge; in the case of *Stern*, every journalist was able to see the photo's misleading caption. Nevertheless, they did not criticize in public their colleagues who had manipulated the photo. Cross-case information is provided by a quasi-experimental survey of journalists and scientists/engineers. Almost all journalists expected engineers/scientists to criticize colleagues by name in public who endangered lives out of self-interest (risky dismantling of a roof). Almost all scientists/engineers expected journalists to criticize colleagues who endangered lives (during the Gladbeck hostage drama). In contrast, only a minority of both professions considered it necessary to criticize their own colleague after mistakes. However, there was a remarkable difference between the professions: nearly half of scientists/engineers agreed such criticism is necessary, while less than one-fifth of journalists felt the same way (see Figure "Criticism of Colleagues and Members of other Professions"). The extremely low willingness of journalists to criticize their colleagues also becomes evident in their

⁴⁹ Rosengren, K. E. International news: Intra and extra media data. *Acta Sociologica*, 1970, 13, p. 96–109

⁵⁰ Funkhouser, G. R. Trends in media coverage of the issues of the sixties. *Journalism Quarterly*, 1973, 50, p. 533–538.

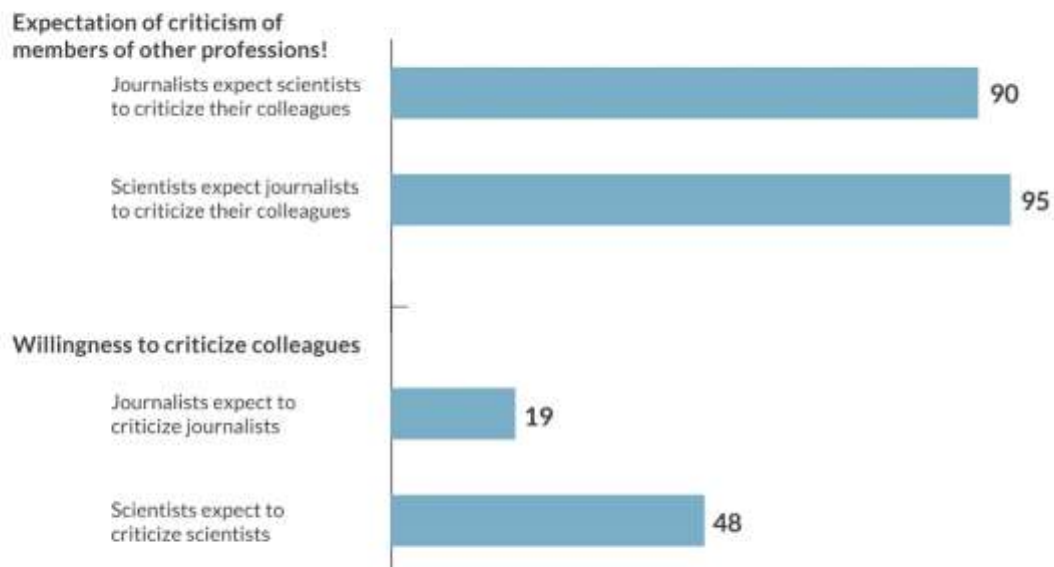
Fishman, M. Crime waves as news ideology. *Social Forces*, 1978, 25, p. 531–543.

Kepplinger, H. M. *Künstliche Horizonte. Folgen, Darstellung und Akzeptanz von Technik in der Bundesrepublik*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag; 1989, p. 111-171.

responses to questions about criticizing colleagues after a factual error, after deliberately one-sided reporting and after the deception of the public out of self-interest.⁵¹

Criticism of Colleagues and Members of other Professions

In Percent



Source: Kepplinger, H. M.: Journalismus als Beruf. Wiesbaden 2011, p. 209.

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Thesis 15: The reputation of journalists rests almost entirely on what they publish. Because all are aware of that, renouncing public criticism of colleagues is understandable. Nevertheless, journalism lacks an important corrective mechanism. As a result, journalism does not achieve the level of quality that it could. In the future, the willingness to criticize colleagues in public for violating important professional rules will be indispensable. Otherwise amateurs will blame them: even without the courageous activities of Moreno, Relotius would have been unmasked because two residents of Fergus Falls, a small town in the United States, documented another faked report by Relotius on the Internet. Thus, two alleged “backwoodsmen” struck a heart-rending blow to a major magazine.

4. Regain Trust

In former times, when journalists still had a major influence on the flow of information, they tended to suppress criticism of their own profession. In today’s digitalized news environment, journalists have lost control over their image and must find ways to cope with this. An online survey of 579 journalists working for newspapers and their online editions indicates that 18 percent had been victims of cyberbullying, and 51 percent had been publicly targeted in a more conventional manner.⁵²

There are important discrepancies between journalists’ short-term responses to public attacks and long-term behavior. During public attacks, most journalists react offensively or aggressively. Every second says, when attacked, he or she “backed up his or her position in another article.” Almost as many say they “decisively rejected the attackers’ position.” Only very few say they “judged events on the subject more cautiously than usual.” These findings indicate that during public attacks, most

⁵¹ Kepplinger, H. M. Journalismus als Beruf. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2011, p. 205-225.

⁵² Kepplinger, H. M. & Post, S. Einflüsse von Schmähkritik auf Journalisten. Forschungsbericht. Mainz, 2016.

feel comfortable with their traditional role. However, after asking if they “have ever thought while working on a post that they could be publicly attacked,” most respond defensively or thoughtfully. They consider whether they can differentiate their “representation more” and question their “point of view more than usual.” Significantly fewer say that they “directly target the suspected wasp nest” (see Figure “Long-term Consequences of Public Attacks”).

Long-term Consequences of Public Attacks

Question: „How did you act in the situation*?“

„Meets (fully)“	Cyber-bullying (n= 97) %	Conventional criticism* (n= 274) %	No criticism (n= 130) %	All (n=501) %
Defensive, self-critical				
„I questioned my view more than I usually do“	47	46	53	48
„I checked if I can stronger differentiate my presentation“	50	44	44	45
„I tried to formulate delicate issues as careful as possible“	17	18	29	21
Offensive, self-assured				
„I have sharpened my point of views as clear as possible“	31	23	33	27
„I showed anticipating how unbelievable that attacker argue or how damaging their demands are“	29	27	24	26
„I tried to stir up the hornists’ nest“	34	25	20	25

* remembering earlier attacks

Source: Kepplinger, H. M. & Post, S.: Einflüsse von Schmähkritik auf Journalisten. Mainz (Forschungsdokumentation) 2016.
 Post, S. & Kepplinger, H. M. Coping with Audience Hostility. How Journalists’ Experiences of Audience Hostility Influence Their Editorial Decisions. Journalism Studies, 2019.

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Thesis 16: In the past, the reputation of all professions was supported by the concealment, cover-up and glossing over of professional errors. This has changed since the 1960s, as more and more insiders have shared their knowledge with the media. Some of the insiders and some media became successful in presenting themselves as consumer advocates. Many of the affected companies, scientific institutes and individuals found some of the critical reports completely erroneous or exaggerated, and many assumed journalists had injurious intentions. However, over time, they learned that the practice of concealing or downplaying no longer promotes their reputation, but endangers it. Since the advent of Web. 2.0, journalists and media outlets have experienced similar conditions. Their confrontation with personal attacks, criticism and denigration has hit them unprepared. However, the long-term consequences of attacks on journalists indicate that many have learned the new rules of public communication, now common to all players, including journalists and mass media. Therefore, the Internet is not a major cause of the loss of trust in journalists, but a chance to overcome it. Journalists, like chemists, engineers, physicists and physicians long before them, should prepare to cope with public attacks and take reasonable criticism seriously – even if it comes in a disagreeable manner.

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