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# IDEOLOGY OF OBJECTIVITY IN POLITICAL JOURNALISM.

## Attitudes, values and beliefs around truth as a possible horizon?

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Brasileira de Pesquisadores  
em Jornalismo

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**ABSTRACT** - From a critical-discursive approach, automatic and reflexive contents are analyzed around “objectivity”, as a stylistic-normative code and cultural device with mythical contours, shared by journalists and audience of political information. Based on interviews conducted under an ethnographic approach between 2012 and 2014, professionals from different mass media in Córdoba-Argentina, first discuss the self-perception of their contemporary role and the conditions of their daily link with sources and events. Given the inter-subjective nature of the phenomenon, in a second moment the contrast between the journalistic perspectives and the perceptions of local audiences, gathered in simultaneous experimental sessions, is included. Through an analytical triangulation strategy, a significant circularity link between professional definitions and consumption expectations is noticed.

**Keywords:** Objectivity. Ideology. Journalistic routines. Political information. CDA.

### **A IDEOLOGIA DA OBJETIVIDADE NO JORNALISMO POLÍTICO: Atitudes, valores e crenças em torno da verdade como um horizonte possível?**

**RESUMO** - A partir de uma abordagem crítico-discursiva, conteúdos automáticos e reflexivos são analisados em torno da “objetividade” como um código estilístico-normativo e um dispositivo cultural com contornos míticos, compartilhados por jornalistas e público de informações políticas. Com base em entrevistas realizadas a partir de uma abordagem etnográfica realizada entre 2012 e 2014 junto a profissionais de diferentes mídias de massa em Córdoba-Argentina, são discutidas primeiro a autopercepção de seu papel contemporâneo e as condições de seu vínculo diário com fontes e eventos. Dada a natureza inter-subjetiva do fenômeno, em um segundo momento foi discutido o contraste entre as perspectivas jornalísticas e as percepções do público local, reunidas em sessões experimentais simultâneas. Por meio de uma estratégia de triangulação analítica, notou-se uma ligação de circularidade significativa entre as definições profissionais e as expectativas de consumo.

**Palavras-chave:** Objetividade. Ideologia. Rotinas jornalísticas. Informação política. ADC.

**IDEOLOGÍA DE LA OBJETIVIDAD EN PERIODISMO POLÍTICO.  
Actitudes, valores y creencias en torno a la verdad  
como horizonte ¿posible?**

**RESUMEN** - Desde un enfoque crítico-discursivo se analizan contenidos automáticos y reflexivos en torno a la "objetividad", como código estilístico-normativo y dispositivo cultural de contornos míticos, compartido por periodistas y audiencias de la información política. Con base en entrevistas realizadas bajo un enfoque etnográfico entre 2012 y 2014, a profesionales de diferentes medios masivos de Córdoba-Argentina, primero se discuten la auto-percepción de su rol contemporáneo y las condiciones de su vínculo cotidiano con fuentes y acontecimientos. Dado el carácter inter-subjetivo del fenómeno, en un segundo momento se incluye el contraste entre las perspectivas periodísticas y las percepciones de audiencias locales, recopiladas en sesiones experimentales simultáneas. Mediante una estrategia de triangulación analítica, se advierte un significativo vínculo de circularidad entre definiciones profesionales y expectativas de consumo.

**Palabras clave:** Objetividad. Ideología. Rutinas periodísticas. Información política. ACD.

**Ideology of journalistic objectivity: the daily nature of myth,  
value and social expectation**

Following the historical-philosophical analysis of Denise Najmanovich (2016), it is possible to see how the myth of journalistic objectivity finds significant roots in the divorce of the subject from the represented object, as a modern scientific code turned into a compulsive and universal methodological discourse with colonial expansion. It is a set of notions and beliefs about the relationship between perception and representation, including the problem of reality and the status of truth as part of the conceptual framework of myth. In order to represent his reality as faithfully as possible, the subject erases the marks of his inter-subjective existence and validates an inhumane staging, condemning subjectivity to the denied space of "source of distortion or error". Thus, the methodical plot of objectivity tends to (re)produce individuals who are alien to their social conditions and are confronted with the nature of their everyday environment and sensitivity.

Najmanovich (2016, p. 212) stresses that “there is no text outside of its materialization” and that this is not innocuous since a key cost of modern representationism is to have turned the subject, media and language into “mere passive intermediaries” in the reproduction of knowledge, structuring knowledge at a distance from experience as a guarantee of “objectivity”. However, if, as the author points out by proving the mythical nature of objectivity, we are on the way to exhausting its epistemology as a “domination project”, then it is worth reflecting on the place of journalistic objectivity and its current value discourse in the ways of experiencing social reality in a mediatized way. In this regard, the present investigation tries to shed light on the way in which cognitively and socially these dimensions of judgment are sustained, trying to contribute to the clarification of the current projects and possibilities of change around the ways of informing us politically in society.

As for the role of “objectivity” as a central value of journalistic work that is now strongly supported in the discourse and practice of many institutions, its emergence is recognized with the professionalization of the press at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although at that time it was a functional code for its massive rise, nowadays its political inadequacy to the effective journalistic exercise of the informative production stands out. Embedded in standardized procedures of news treatment, where the central assumption is the shifting of the narrator “I” through strategic discursive devices that operate relating truth and credibility<sup>1</sup>, this is a project incompatible with the human condition in general and the journalistic profession in particular, where in any case the result is an “illusion” (representationist) of impersonality, technicality and neutrality among other fictional attributes. It is important to recognize how this illusion disappears when taking into account the mechanisms of selectivity and visibility inherent in news production: editorial decisions regarding which facts can be turned into news, which ones can be covered and which ones cannot, with which criteria these contents are related, titled and illustrated are daily examples of unflinching subjective discretion.

Although “objectivity” has been a ritualized defense tool against external criticism and a “traditional form of communication shared by heterogeneous and massive audiences” (Chillón, 1997, p. 48 quoted by San Martín, 2008, p. 76), in societies such as the current ones marked by inequalities and multiple concentrations, marked

by bombardment and overabundance of superficial information, the discourse has become obsolete and inconsistent with a socially committed and politically responsible journalistic profession. Placing the construction of information interest within a political model of society, where it is possible to recognize the power of the mass media to carry out agendas and spaces for public discussion, the role of “citizen journalism” as opposed to the concept of “objective journalism” (Miralles, 2006) that dominates liberal models of communication and democracy is highlighted. In this sense, through informative strategies that place political events in the context of the daily experiences of public opinion, the formation of citizenship as a public is a fundamental institutional responsibility of journalism and an activity radically different from the mere construction of audiences.

Acknowledging the tensions and contradictions that this renewal of positions and procedures implies for contemporary journalism, an exploratory investigation carried out in 2004 among journalists from three national newspapers in Argentina (*La Nación*, *Clarín* and *Página 12*) reveals a self-recognition of the social function of journalism under two key circumstances: the power and influence of the activity given its “privileged access” to events of public interest and the narrow effective margins of autonomy for its professional practice. It would be a “conscience” that fails to insert substantial changes in its routines, naturalizing multiple pressures (technical, organizational, political, economic) and limiting its responsibility under “an ethic limited to individual work, to the note as a unit of work, to the area covered” (San Martín, 2008, p. 78).

The ideal of objectivity strongly resists abandoning the professional imaginary and even demystifying the search for truth as a political construction rather than a means of knowledge, for San Martín (2008) “negotiating” with one’s own subjectivity still seems to be “more difficult than taking for granted the possibility of neutral distance” (79). In this line, this research shows how the value code imposed by this “ideology” of objectivity on political information moves from journalistic routines to the significant link between audiences and news. In terms of political information, recent studies show that even in the face of strongly expanded communication structures in their content offerings, the choice of media and access channels continues to be a behavior adjusted to belief systems and attitudes. This endogeneity of consumer decisions (Iyengar & Simon, 2000) is also linked to the supply decisions of the media market (DellaVigna & Gentzkow, 2009),

based on the effect of “credibility” as a positive attribution that enables the persuasive effect of the information transmitted, either as an attitude built on the trust of the audience or as a quality strategically fostered by the source of the message.

Through institutionalized processes of de/re-contextualization of events, the news (re)produces an ontology of the social world. This mechanism of objectivization is amalgamated within certain routines of social legitimization of the procedures of thematisation, visibility and representation of the discourse of information: thus “the news, as a whole and through its constant action, determines the knowledge that an individual has of his environment and his position with regard to this environment” (Saperas, 1987, p. 21). In the same direction, the socio-cognitive implications of rhetorical strategies and journalistic stereotypes that operate by “anchoring” the social sense and indicating the “political-performative character of the media-informative interest” (Paz García & Alonso, 2016, p. 186) in the coverage of political events have been discussed locally. In view of the role of ideology as a criterion for the expository selectivity of media audiences, experimental researches on the persuasive effects of political information analyzes the impact of editorial news and the political biases of media sources. Gerber, Karlan & Bergan (2009) develop a field experiment around newspaper reading, finding that if people perceive journalistic information as neutral, they are more likely to be influenced. Seeking to clarify certain cognitive mechanisms of information processing, Feldman (2008) realizes another experiment on “opinionated news”, a growing genre among television informational formats. Their results connect with those of Gerber et al. (2009), finding that people fail to recognize media coverage biases consistent with their previous attitudes, while the journalistic device of “objectivity” becomes a social value incorporated into their informational expectations as an indication of credibility and trust.

Within this mental-attitudinal scheme supported by normative elements, the processing of sources and contents based on the attribution of objectivity versus ideology is also contingent on affective responses: mistrust in the media dilutes its effects and increases the weight of selective exposure (Feldman, 2008, p. 27) and “opinionated news” in comparison with those of neutral appearance often generates a negative processing of its source. Recognizing these contemporary scenarios, this research rehearses an articulated view of the conceptions and perceptions of key players in the processes of social circulation of

political news. It is hoped to contribute to the direction of an integral perspective of the informative processes of public opinion, attentive to their constitutive complexity and multi-dimensionality.

### **Players profile of the study and methodology**

The main discursive corpus analyzed consists of a series of interviews with local journalists conducted between 2012 and 2014. These are the experiences and perceptions of eight journalists (from Córdoba-Argentina) who share substantial features for the investigation: they are professionals specializing in political information and, although they constitute a numerically small sample, it has been constructed under specific criteria of heterogeneity or internal variability such as gender, seniority and professional training, experienced media formats, responsibilities performed and institutional membership<sup>2</sup>. These characteristics show differential inter-subjective conditions integrated into a situated research design that responds to three key factors in a qualitative research process: a) the investigator's *operational capacity*, including a manageable number of cases in the conditions posed by the research context; b) *saturation of categories*, allowing a comprehensive approach to the subject studied; and c) the *nature of the phenomenon*, consisting of practices-representations-perceptions accessible through an attentive and personalized dialogue.

It is worth mentioning that in qualitative studies the sample size is not important from a probabilistic perspective, since the researcher's interest is in reaching "depth" in the process, rather than representation or generalization, aiming at "quality" rather than quantity in the sample used (Hernández Sampieri, Fernández-Collado & Baptista Lucio, 2006, p. 562). Thus, Table 1 (which summarizes the profile of each interviewee under an agreement of confidentiality and anonymity) shows specific background, such as starting work in their own businesses (interviewees 3, 4 and 5) or entering the world of journalistic production directly (interviewees 1, 2 and 8), which contribute to the heterogeneity of the sample but whose consideration at the individual level exceeds the research objectives. These are attributes underlying deep traits that make up the story of each interviewee as a unique and unrepeatable experience, whose approach here is contextual, as a linkable record inter-subjectively and validly contrastable within the global research process.

**Table 1** – Characteristics of journalists interviewed

<b>N°</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Seniority (years)</b>	<b>Studies</b>	<b>Current institution (membership)</b>	<b>Main roles (background)</b>
E1	Female	10	University studies	Private medium	Local news writing Regional news voice-over Investigation for local reports Digital projects design and edition
E2	Masculine	12	University studies incomplete College studies	Private medium	Local news production Investigation for local reports Local news writing and edition Digital projects coordination
E3	Masculine	28	College studies	Public medium	Local news presentation News voice-over on/off and management Regional news voice-over and production Entertainment presentation
E4	Female	33	University studies incomplete	Public medium	Administrative task and television mobile unit Sport article Local news production and coordination, micro-news presentation
E5	Masculine	25	University studies incomplete	Public medium	Bulletin and magazines production Local news production Television mobile unit
E6	Female	31	University studies	Public medium	National news writing Magazines presentation and production Television mobile unit Criminal and local news articles
E7	Female	26	University studies incomplete	Private medium	Music production Television mobile unit Local news articles
E8	Masculine	15	University studies	Private medium	News voice-over and production Criminal and local news articles Television mobile unit

Source: elaborated by the author.

As for the methodology used in the dialogue with the professionals, it was used the semi-structured interview technique applied under an ethnographic approach, as “conception and practice of knowledge that seeks to understand social phenomena from the perspective of its members” (Guber, 2001, p. 13), giving priority to the “how are” the local production processes of political information for its players and how the meanings represented in their speeches affect their daily practices. Likewise, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective directs and structures the analysis developed, allowing journalistic objectivity to be approached from the perspective of its own players and as a social problem with a semiotic anchor. Under a broad conception of the semiosis as an irreducible part of material social processes, the CDA enables a structural and interactive approach where “the social shapes the discourse” and this in turn constitutes the social: “the situations, the objects of knowledge, the social identity of people and the relations between them and groups” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 367). With the critical influence of Western Marxism, the CDA also finds in the notion of “ideology” an articulating concept between social representations and subjective interpretative schemes or frameworks. Ideologies “control social practices in general and discourse in particular” (van Dijk, 2003, p. 47): at the micro level, they facilitate and organize interpersonal and intergroup interaction; while at the macro level, they constitute relations of power and dominance.

From an open approach to the complexity of the phenomenon of objectivity, since “in order to determine whether a given discursive event carries out an ideological task it is not enough to analyze the texts; it is also necessary to take into account how those texts are interpreted and received, and what social effects they have” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 393), partial conclusions are presented here from the triangulation<sup>3</sup> of different approaches and perspectives around the social processing of political information.

### **Political? conditions and limitations to journalistic routines in the local context**

From different backgrounds and institutional frameworks, depending on whether they belong to public financing (cases 3, 4, 5 and 6) or private property media —with marked leadership in the local market— (cases 1, 2, 7 and 8), different conditions are evident



in the daily news production routines of the interviewees. Within a first line of limitations (text highlighted in **bold**), which find their *raison d'être* in the size of the local market and the material or technological resources dependent on the advertising budget, next it can be observed how the proximity to sources and the official advertising guidelines are significant pressures for the private media; while a reduced technical infrastructure (underlined text) also subject to the ups and downs of the official guidelines, emerges as a central problem among the public media.

- The difference in the smaller cities is the **proximity to the sources**... you come across the sources when you go out to eat, when you go to the cinema, not like in Buenos Aires, where you have another scale and another dimension [...] You have from **smaller environments** where the pressure against the media is felt more by the proximity and because there are **competitive and market contexts that make the media depends exclusively or very strongly on the official guidelines**, to medium-size environments where the media has some autonomy...  
(E2, in discussion with the author, September 22, 2012, transcript).

- The difference with Buenos Aires is that we have one television mobile unit... América has 30, Crónica has 70, TN has... more than twenty... a small **difference in money, budget**...  
(E3, in discussion with the author, May 24, 2013, transcript).

- **So who was supporting us? The local government on duty... being a public medium unfortunately depends on the one who sets the guideline**... official guidelines are always the highest guideline, what governments set are the highest guidelines with which the media lives... unfortunately, this is so...  
(E4, in discussion with the author, August 8, 2013, transcript).

On the other hand, there is a second line of constraints or limitations linked to internal organization or culture that operate both “from within” journalistic institutions and “from outside”, depending on market demands or the actions of social powers that affect professional routines. *From within*, demands are often problematic when new and urgent requirements arise (text underlined) within the framework of a working culture already known and shared. In this regard, it is also evident below how productive times are accelerated to the point of affecting the quality of editorial controls and any possibility of critical distance or investigation (text highlighted in **bold**) with respect to the materialized political “facts”.

- If you're on the Internet, the times are real time, so those decisions, we've calculated them, are made about 200 times a day... [...] that used to be every 24 hours, on the Internet that speeds up because the Governor is talking now and you have to publish the title half an hour later at most... this relaxes this whole editorial process and editorial controls... and let's say you're very, very, very netless, with the possibility of making many mistakes, so you need highly trained people to do things well because otherwise you screw up all the time. You make a mistake in a surname, in the name of a street, in a number and it is already published...

(E2, in discussion with the author, September 22, 2012, transcript).

- There is no time... there is no such thing as time in political topics, let's say... immediacy, is the urgency, it's trying to detect the most important thing... And well, the agenda is a whole subject... **the agenda is a whole subject, how it marks you... many times we are functional and we end up marking the agenda the power wants and not what people are interested in**, but... What happens is that immediacy... is a vicious circle that benefits power... and a lot because you don't end up deepening many times absolutely nothing, and you should have to go deeper into management, ideologies, eh... in the real political projects, that's where we fail... many times it doesn't depend on just one, **you do as far as you can, as far as you are left, as far as you want to go, as far as others wants you to go, it's a lot of factors**, it's not so easy... it would be good if it were much easier, let's say, **a lot of political pressure is exerted over the media, mainly because of a guideline**, so that leads to the political agenda being limited, totally limited...

[E5, in discussion with the author, May 15, 2014, transcript].

Faced with the demands of the market, there are also internal barriers that are not so much generational as value in terms of how to comply with competitive requirements. Thus, the following fragments show a strong line of communication between the tendency to reproduce the news agenda of power previously pointed out by the interviewee 5 and the experiences of journalists with editorial responsibilities in different mediatic formats: this is the naturalization (text highlighted in **bold**) of a circular and self-reference construction of the thematic agenda<sup>4</sup> —around the leading local market media —which is adopted as the starting point of all the journalistic routines developed with a greater or lesser level of specificity. Next, the professional arguments offered in each case are highlighted in double-underline typography, in the face of such systematically adopted coverage decisions.

- We consume a lot of radio in the morning, AM, in general X and X [radians of the same business group], and from there we get... and then we watch newscasts, that is to say we are always listening to radio in the newsroom, one on each radio and we have 3 TVs, each one is tuned into different channels... **and always X and X** [television channels of the same business group]... because we have always used them, but not because we have anything in particular...

(E1, in discussion with the author, September 19, 2012, transcript).

- **Competition has two sides**, one is "we can't not have that that others have", we can't not have that, "but we're going to have it to the way of our medium" and suddenly, we have things that others are not doing because they're not interested... it seems to me that it is a question of content management, editorial line and social commitment, each medium seems to me to be socially committed, let's see, sorry... the social commitment is not a commitment to those most in need, the social commitment is a commitment that you make **to the society that listens to you...**

(E3, in discussion with the author, May 24, 2013, transcript).

- In theory, radio and television have to go before newspapers but in practice it's happening quite the other way around... so I read newspapers, I read the Internet... but indeed information is repeating what is already said in other media, of course! That's why I say, poor the **production** girls, but I say to them "you that do **redundant work**"... before I make a note I receive 3 or 4 calls from different producers who tell me the same thing... before the producer called me on the phone, the boss was there and we were there or at most we could have a secretary... since there are producers we could do more original things... **all the same** and all the same, I don't know if you watch the news, but if you watch the 10, 12 and 8 the three of them have the same things, eh, the three of them have exactly the same thing...

(E6, in discussion with the author, May 19, 2014, transcript).

This is how, "from within", external economic and ideological conditions are also sustained, which, due to their own political weight, seem to be automated to the point of becoming unconscious in the daily machinery of news production. Likewise and *from outside*, at least three key circumstances recognized in the dialogue with the interviewees are putting pressure on the journalistic institutions: a) the lack of regulation and effective control of access to public information, b) the work of strategic intermediaries (cabinets and spokespersons), and c) the expansion of the possibilities of direct communication provided by social networks, sharpening some distance from the sources of information in the construction of political news. Thus, this change in the relationship with sources and audiences runs parallel to the contemporary rise of social networks as a revolutionary technological tool, at a communicative and political-democratic level (a phenomenon highlighted **in bold**, particularly evidenced in Argentina in the case of Twitter<sup>5</sup>).

[...] **people with digital tools are emerging as a fifth power that controls everyone else, aren't they?** Now, this possibility of taking the picture with a mobile phone and uploading it, or... a gag of a mistake in a journalistic title captured in a screenshot... so what you have there, let's say, is... **the media were for a long time the privileged actors of public communication...** that power is changing, today publishing is a button, let's say, before to publish you needed a huge infrastructure, **today publishing is a button**, so if publishing is a button what you have is a change of power, **today the power is beginning to be distributed differently thanks to the access that the Internet** which is allowing people to have a public voice, then we can discuss how influential that public voice can be, what happens is that **people are learning...**

[...] **Above all, Twitter... and on Twitter besides the politicians who write themselves, there are operators, there are representatives who write**, people who write to them on Twitter...

(E3, in discussion with the author, May 24, 2013, transcript).

Lately to the overlay of political dynamics and communicative structures in some cases highly centralized (in the case of the sources) such as chaotically de-centralized (in the audiences access) in the field of political information, the **self-censorship** underlies as a daily practice (textually highlighted **in bold**) ruled by ideological-editorial lines that, from their discourse the interviewees experience as highly changeable and sensitive lines to a current context of polarizing contours. As a self-defense mechanism in the face of this constrained horizon, two dimensions of its daily "logic" can be distinguished: a) professional "autonomy", limited at the individual level and "contained" by a hierarchical chain of responsibilities in terms of coverage decisions; and b) economic "dependence" on the environment at the structural or collective level, as a definitive and omnipresent tension that has to do with various transformations (rise of the entertainment industry and commercial management criteria, trade union and political pressures, etc.). Table 2 shows both dimensions, arranged in parallel in order to recognize the way in which the political journalist in each case is shaping a certain articulation or practical "stitch" between them, in a daily work field crossed by multiple political tensions.

**Table 2** – “Professional Autonomy” and “Economic Dependence” Dimensions as constituent tensions of daily self-censorship in political journalism practices

PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY	ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE
<p>- I understand that some news, which I don't know if they are biased, are dealt with special care, those that are related to the Group, I mean, <b>not because one tells you “you must write about this like this”</b> but err... how can I say, <b>there are things that... are carried out by editors...</b> and, when an editor says <b>“let me see how is this article going” one cannot fall...</b> (E1, in discussion with the author, September 19, 2012, transcript).</p>	<p>- <b>You can be independent when you have the money to sustain your medium...</b>The one that acts on his/her own, you know, <b>who is not necessarily independent either, on one way or another there is always a kind of dependence on certain things.....</b> I believe that the media does not dare criticize their sponsorship, their role...and that means not being independent... <b>not biting the hand that feeds you...</b> (E1, in discussion with the author, September 19, 2012, transcript).</p>
<p>- You <b>can't tell the people working in our teams “you can't speak about this issue”...</b> when there is an issue that may be a burning issue. What happens is that <b>a whole internal discussion process to set the limits comes into action,</b> how far do we want to go without being victims in an operation? This <b>is an inner consideration that you make when you write, produce, but it is also something you value together with the Editor...</b> and there is a point in the pyramidal process of journalism in which the Media Director is who determines after being consulted by the Editor, taking the responsibility... (E2, in discussion with the author, September 22, 2012, transcript).</p>	<p>- It is clear, let's say, that you speak <b>from a value, subjective point of view, from the company you are working point of view,</b> so you are not a robot that starts writing...the context influences on you, affects you for better or for worse. So if you work for a medium that is aligned with the government or against it, what you have is a <b>self-censorship of things you would like to say and you cannot or you know... you do not even mention it... There are moments in which you can and moments in which you cannot... so you can profit from those opportunities,</b> when you see... when the image of a government is declining or you know the medium for which you work not... (E2, in discussion with the author, September 22, 2012, transcript).</p>
<p>- And <b>when we sit at the news writing table, we don't say “no, we are including this news that is a left-wing news and then we are including that right-wing news to get an informative balance”, no!</b> <b>“we are including this one because we think it is important to mention it since it has an impact on certain aspects or because many people are interested on them or because it affects many citizens”,</b> and that's all! (E3, in discussion with the author, May 24, 2013, transcript).</p>	<p>- <b>Mass media, around the world, take a stand,</b> all media adopt a position and you have <b>3 kinds of political positions in mass media,</b> you say “yes, one side, the other side and the centre”, no, <b>here you stand for the officialism or the opposition. So, which is the center position? Intermediate alternative is not informing, misinforming...pure entertainment...</b> (E3, in discussion with the author, May 24, 2013, transcript).</p>
<p>- Err... [objectivity] <b>is possible if you want it, if you are a professional, if you mean to be objective,</b> most reporters in the streets are... <b>most of them find the way to say things...</b> (E4, in discussion with the author, August 8, 2013, transcript).</p>	<p>- There is always a society reflexion that reaches the media, then it is a matter of how you deal with it because <b>I believe that you cannot go beyond some limits, no media can, no media is absolutely unbiased,</b> that's a lie, it isn't, forget about it! It is like this. (E4, in discussion with the author, August 8, 2013, transcript).</p>

<p>- One always faces the Journalistic Company superior objective: making more money. The same as any company... and <b>when the moment comes to issue the article you depend on the editorial line of the medium</b>, and if the Editor feels likes saying that your objectivity is over, it is over, in that moment... (E5, in discussion with the author, May 15, 2014, transcript).</p>	<p>- Nowadays, for example, parity is being discussed. The discussion has taken two months so far. Who is the one that does not accept giving a 1% rise in salaries to get to an agreement? There are private media that prohibit assemblies. Prohibit! under the threat "I pass by and I fire you", so you consider that <u>fact reality which is out of what is the information...</u> (E5, in discussion with the author, May 15, 2014, transcript).</p>
<p>- Nowhere you can find individual press freedom, <b>you are lucky if you work in a place, in a medium, with which you sometimes agree and then some less important news, where maybe you can have more freedom in how you contextualize the topics, but not key topics...</b> because you have a boss and Capitalism is like this, at least you don't have to say what you don't think...I also think that <u>the journalist also shapes his or her role according to the media he or she works for...</u> (E6, in discussion with the author, May 19, 2014, transcript).</p>	<p>- Now, the Producer has a relevant role, the boss works with the producers and we are waiting to see what report are we instructed to do, <b>practically we are producers' puppets...</b> it is very difficult to propose some of our ideas in this sense... <u>now you work a lot with producers, situation that bothers us a little, to journalists. This happens in all media...</u> (E6, in discussion with the author, May 19, 2014, transcript).</p>
<p>- I believe that independence is a word that outgrows media... <b>I believe independence exists in each one and as far as you clearly understand... how to work on that.</b> Do you know what I mean? (E7, in discussion with the author, July 4, 2014, transcript).</p>	<p>- First of all, you need to know the editorial line of the media for which you work for. Each company has an editorial line and, today, they are absolutely exposed... So, <b>finding the way to make the information approach the company editorial line</b> can be done perfectly... (E7, in discussion with the author, July 4, 2014, transcript).</p>
<p>- <b>This is the match we have to win every day as journalists, the match of independence</b>, because this is the with which I will make my living the rest of my life... objectivity, not subjectivity, independence, I mean, that the person who listens to me or reads my articles knows that I am independent from the medium for which I work for, that what that person reads or listens is my unbiased opinion... (E8, in discussion with the author, August 14, 2014, transcript).</p>	<p>- It is not easy...because..., <u>because the market, the context, the political powers play many times...</u> and profession has become very difficult due to all these interests involved... <b>one is not a suicide bomber</b> and I won't say "this or that" tomorrow, I mean, it is understood how far can we go <u>and what are conditioning aspects that go beyond your role as a professional, you can't go against that!</u> (E8, in discussion with the author, August 14, 2014, transcript).</p>

Source: elaborated by the author.

In the previous table, you can see some coincidences as regards a self-regulate and experienced as "logical" professional exercise margin (note the underlined expressions), acknowledging that business interests have impact on the editorial line, in an acceptable way daily with few windows of opportunity to escape from their material "logic". Editors and Producers work as "guardians" of media ideology-economic limits while tensions are individually metabolized by professionals in their habits

of producing news “matching” their environments. However, when being consulted as regards their commitment with audiences and their expectations towards the situation, journalist perspectives converge in the controversial need of not assuming a political intervention but taking back the “mediator” role that historically characterized mass journalism. Thus, it is noticed the idea of “objectivity” as the troubling but “believable” journalistic institution social shelter. Withstanding the tensions going through it, the idea of “objectivity” continues existing inextricably linked to “credibility” as substantial value framing for the relationship with audiences, highlighting its methodic and viable condition as a professional tool to approach truth.

### **“Truth” as a professional goal. Feasible? in the way to “objectivity”: “responsible subjectivity” Ethics and Method**

In the following statements, the idea of **“truth” feasibility** (highlighted text in **bold**) arises in each moment in which the “objectivity” topic is presented. As said before, this concept permeates self-perception and environment perception that professionals manage in their daily work.

- I believe that in journalism, up to certain extent, although it is necessary to show versions and tell, portray different versions of reality, **facts should not be forgotten**, let's say, you can calculate how many people are marching, because there are ways to calculate how many people can gather in a block, you know the meters and space to know how many people there are in a specific place, so instead of to say “according to the organizers, the number of participants were...” you say “well, **the truth must be in between these versions**”, I believe that we should polish the journalistic methods to show facts and to tell facts, don't you think? Because err... there are things that happen, the accident occurred, there were witnesses... (E2, in discussion with the author, September 22, 2012, transcript).

- The reporter in the street is a human being that faces the news, you have it in front of your eyes, you can't avoid taking part in it, it is impossible, so what do you do to assure objectivity? telling objectively what you see... trying not to get to a value judgment [...] **The journalist has the obligation to tell the truth on top of everything, he or she must inform the truth, you can't distort information you give to people**, because when you distort it, and we go back to the beginning, when you are **distorting reality, you are manipulating**. [This is avoided] listening to both parties, having the two versions... we have one, we must have the other version and this is what we are not getting, in no medium. It is as if there is a culture in which you hit and then you wait for the answer, do you understand? This is what I see in the professional culture, but, what is what insures objectivity? having the two versions of a fact... people are not supposed to look for the versions, we have to give them that... (E4, in discussion with the author, August 8, 2013, transcript).

All in all, “objectivity” methodology, even acknowledging its subjective limits, would include “witness” contact with events, direct source dialogue, valueless use of language, version contrast among other techniques (underlined) that should be part of the nowadays professional ethic-stylistic tool box. As regards this, the rule of working with “two versions” of the news is replicated among journalists belonging to the two mass media environments consulted (private and state) as instrument of “balance” (underlined text below). Also between those who have University Studies, the concept of “responsible subjectivity” is repeated (in **bold**) as a metaphor of feasible objectivity in the way of exercise of maximum relevance and social meaning for the audiences:

-There is something that seems real to me, and this is **responsible subjectivity**... I think it is a great concept since one has to assume that he or she speaks from a point of view, but he or she must be responsible ...I mean, journalism gives you all the elements to be as neutral as you can...so, use them! if you write political information, you must try that both sides are represented, if there are two sides, if there are three...you must try to balance... (E1, in discussion with the author, September 19, 2012, transcript).

-It is a diffuse area, because even though there is an Ethics and there is a concept or idea of freedom of expression or press freedom, nowadays, actually it is very difficult to find absolute objectivity, that is why a new term has been coined: **responsible subjectivity**... so, which is the sieve that will be used to nuance that impossibility of being absolutely objective since it is impossible due to our human being state: scruples, I believe that information is the priority, the one that turns into the news. And when opinion time arrives, each one must say “In my opinion...” [...] *now you say “well, this means that one can never have the freedom to achieve journalist balance.” Of course it is possible! Get interviewed people live and there you will get balance.* It is very common to listen to mass media handling the weight of opinion and balancing it to the appropriate side for them according to their editorial line... so you believe that you achieve balance having one interviewed person from each side, no! No, balance is achieved in different ways, I believe that, making it clear that it is your point of view, one can give his or her opinion and that freedom will depend on where you work because, you know, you must make a living, you must pay the rent... (E3, in discussion with the author, May 24, 2013, transcript).

Particularly in the last statement, the *logic of self-censorship* appears again (last text in *italics*), precisely as “logical” element -being redundant- in the exercise of the journalist activity, as opposed to the “ideological” consciousness as regards the political effect of third party and own work. As “truth” is kept as ideal professional horizon, self-censorship arises as common limitation, uncomfortable but absolutely “manageable”. In this way, “objectivity” and “ideology” as its opposing side emerge as problematic ideals or concepts around which there are some standard methodological recipes. It is about contradictions and



tensions felt and verbalized usually in a complex way on the part of the interviewed people, sometimes in an ambiguous way by connecting it more with economic dependence and less with ideal or political contents.

### **Contrast and mapping of concepts and/or perceptions linked to journalist objectivity between professional and local audiences**

Simultaneously to the field work with journalists, 48 experimental sessions were conducted among citizens from Córdoba who were consumers of local political information. Randomly, each participant (volunteer) was suggested to read one of four news versions about the same event published in two pre-selected newspapers<sup>6</sup> (*La Voz del Interior*, opposing tendency newspaper and *Página 12*, official newspaper). The experimental treatment of this news included the anonymization of source against acknowledgement of identified source, analyzing the impact of perception of the ideology point of view in the informative experience<sup>7</sup>. Four experimental groups resulted among which, and among other aspects which deep approach exceeds the present research objectives, consumer individual perceptions were evaluated around ideological labels and biases attributed to the selected news. In this way, in the following statements it has been pointed out how the observation of “lack of objectivity” in the news is associated to the use of certain persuasive resources and strategies (underlined text).

- “The thing is that, actually, there is a quote of another newspaper article, so the selection made... There are quotes and a few connectors, it makes me think... I mean, it makes me think that there is no coincidence in this resource having been chosen...” (Interviewee 015\_A24, in discussion with the author, November 15, 2012, transcript).

- “Exposition is sometimes quite fatalistic... the sometimes exposed way is very personal [...] the way in which it is written, the way in which he or she expressed, the anger sounded very particular, very personal, and the phrase particularly, radical, fatalist, for me that article is a column, I mean, small, it deals with little information and about what he directly knows, if it was a more objective article it would be longer and it would present aspects on which there are discrepancies and things like those...” (Interviewee 050\_A59, in discussion with the author, December 4, 2012, transcript).

While most interviewees emphasized the predominance of passages between “predominance” and quotes with “no treatment” together with the selection and cutting of key politicians “sayings”, as text element indicators of informative bias, among those who could

not identify a manifested political-ideological orientation in the news some cutting and contextualizing marks were emphasized as intent evidence. In this context, a participant that was not able to visualize the political orientation or specific intention of the noticed bias highlights the subtle effect produced by the statements re-contextualization: “there is a underhand tendency... as a letter that is formed and as a conclusion, guides in a way that one provides opinion against of... writing between inverted commas and cutting a part by presenting it out of context, is not only giving importance to a text, but re-shaping... taking one thing from a place and set it in another...” (Interviewee 014\_A23, in discussion with the author, November 15, 2012, transcript).

In short, in the interviewed consumers evaluations underlies the expectancy of finding “objective” information, descriptive and with no ideology, as desirable and feasible effort if the journalistic “interest” can detach from political disputes about which it tries to inform, situation that they observe with skepticism in the context of political polarization to which the press cannot escape: “...it is as if one would be tormented, because you can see an image that provides you with some information and you say ‘it is true’, but you see another image that presents a different information and wait, it sounds logic, so is like one cannot tell up to what extent is immerse in a world of lies, if both sides are hitting...” (Interviewee 033\_A42, in discussion with the author, November 23, 2012, transcript). This situation in which audiences are uncomfortable facing a radical journalistic discourse speaking in ideological terms, has been pointed out in psycho-social empirical studies that update the theory of media malaise in the frame of selective hostility phenomena (Arceneaux, Johnson & Chad, 2012) which is expressed in front of a hyper-fragmented media market that offers contents which are highly polarized, as for early socio-criticism analysis about the competence dynamics of an information industry that expands fighting between qualification and information purposes (Charaudeau, 2003). Precisely in the paradoxical plot of this tensions between “homogenization” and “differentiation” (Verón, 2004) is where structural contradictions of the tacit agreement between producers and audiences are reproduced daily as regards journalistic information, demanding both parties the guaranty of a discourse which is “objective”, as ideal as unsolvable in the context of another contemporary phenomenon which is dynamic and multi-determined as the political polarization.

On its part, as mentioned in previous sections, in the interviewed journalists’ discourse the emergency of a “version journalism” arise as

substantial contextual data, as problematic practice connected to the credibility crisis that journalism suffers and its trap in a current context of deep political polarization. As regards this, the latent political-editorial limits in self and hetero definition that professionals express in their daily work, although they are not recognized explicitly by them, underlie in the particular way in which each journalist positions her/himself and the medium where she/he works. From this complex relation plot, of contents frequently automatized and not always available directly to the reflexive consciousness in the daily informative treatment of political news, routine operative political practices emerge such as the exercise of self-censorship, referred to in the approach to the professional autonomy and economic dependence dimensions (Table 2). As pointed before, self-censorship is lived by journalists as a self-defense mechanism facing a constrained and polarized horizon that sutures as erosion condition of the political as well as journalistic word. This would be a dichotomous straitjacket between opposing and official discourses where the benefit of discussing this dispute in the communicative area, reaching mass audiences and controversies that turn out to be temporary, present as counter face the cost of deepening the credibility crisis of local journalism relative to its detachment from sources and audiences already pointed out. Besides discursive conflict that frequently reaches high levels of violence, “homogeneity” resulting from this struggle is highlighted as key element of discomfort for the audiences and journalists confronted because of the opposing ideological positions. For the case of Argentinean Press, Balán (2013, p. 477) has pointed out that homogeneity is possible due to the “lack of separation (invisible word) between the editorial opinions and the news column” that configure the informative coverages, affecting the content, tone and space given by the mass media to certain political news.

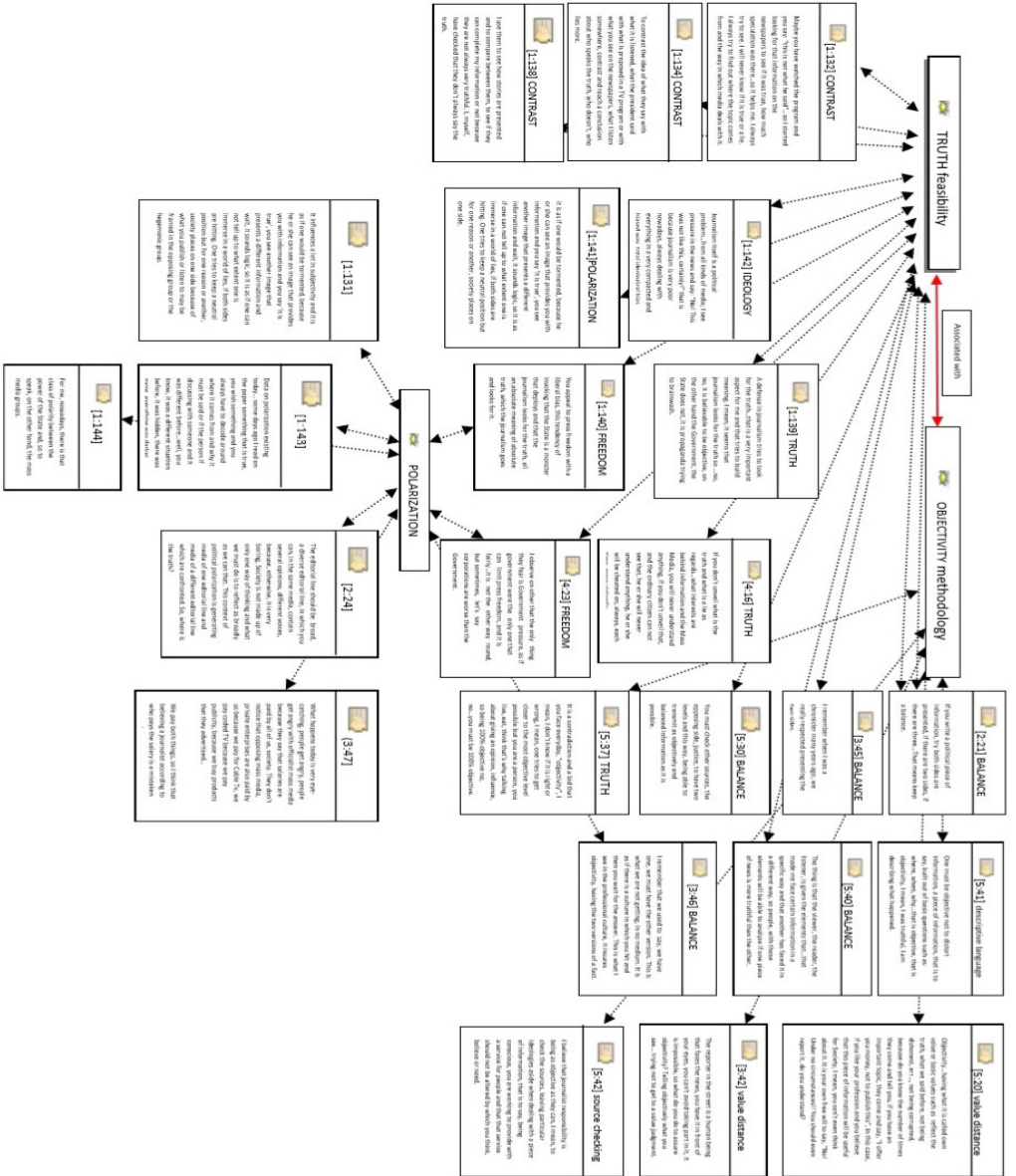
On the other side, together with the complex political diagnosis that goes through the journalists and audiences experiences, value expectations are also verified shared around an informative “truth” ostensible by journalism under the code of “objectivity”. With the objective of evidence this meaning links, through software Atlas.ti of qualitative processing of texts, next it presents the development of a map of inter-category relationships between consumers and journalists perceptions. A central axis in this map is the search for “balance” or “contrast” in the building of “objective” political information, materialized in the consultation of at least “two versions” and more than one source, as ideal element that is repeated in daily practices inside

both groups. It must be pointed out in the map presented, only some of the most significant discursive statements are represented around each category, with the idea of visualize relationships of meaning and reciprocal comprehensibility with no intention of being exhaustive and far from any quantitative representative approach that, as mentioned before, exceeds the research objectives. From this perspective, it may be appreciated as the search for “balance” between sources on the part of the journalists (statements 2:21, 3:45, 3:46, 5:30 and 5:40) corresponds significantly with the profound need of searching for “contrast” of journalistic versions among consumers (statements 1:132, 1:134, 1:138), in a tendency to adjustment between a journalistic “methodology” of “objectivity” and a “feasibility” of finding the “truth” of facts as shared expectancy between professionals and audiences.

Likewise, in the statements aligned to the right in the map, other complementary procedures are highlighted as the use of descriptive language, the value distance and source checking. Although all these tools configure the informative discourse building methods ideally with no ideology, where “objectivity” is also emphasized not only as a possibility but also as journalist work ethics, contradictions are noticed when recovering the traditional role of social intermediation and political un-veiling in which professionals try to self-locate, highlighting the context of polarization that permeates the development of political journalism today. In this sense, dominant or generalized perceptions around conditions of autonomy or “freedom” with which journalist “truth” can be reached find critical voices as internal (statement 4:23 highlighting interests that exceed political polarization between government and the opposing side) as external (statements 1:139, 1:40, 1:141 and 1:142) emerging from the consumer vision of political information, for whom “objectivity” derives in a liberal discourse full of intention and not believable in the context of contemporary society. Both expressions are pointed out within a central frame that signals a central zone of clash and concurrence between professionals and audiences perceptions.

Finally, both groups stand out in the context of their production and consumption practices of political information, inherent complexity of mentioned polarization context in the sense of tolerance conditions and ideological resistance that generally turn the production and consumption of political news in a highly constrained activity, complex and in occasions tiring in the democratic exercise of the rights of expression and information.

**Graph 1** – Map of journalistic and consumers’ perceptions around the phenomena of “objectivity” and associated discursive categories (own development):



**Final reflections, as a way of not-closure.**

As regards “objectivity” as access mythic methodology to “truth” in the area of political journalism, it is observed that even acknowledging their daily multiple limitations (hierarchical dependence in the making of decisions, editorial line and political-economic forces, lack of autonomous budget, productive time tyranny, among others), it performs as a substantial value and normative ideal in the nowadays professional ethic-stylistic tool box. As used ways of observing and observe-us in which we have been socialized, in the analyzed perceptions unresolved tensions become material as long as the objectivity mandate has worked in journalism as in audiences, sentencing human subjectivity to the denied space of “error or distortion source” (Najmanovich, 2016).

Among difficulties observed, which emerge by challenging the myth without still being able of tearing it down, on the part of professionals arises the losing of the capacity of intermediation as critical circumstance for the social function of journalism today, while among audiences it can be appreciated the substantial losing of credibility in journalist informative task as parallel circumstance, demanding both sides ideally and in a contradictory way the recovery of a socially committed and politically responsible profession. Coincidentally with San Martín (2008), it is noticed the existence of a critical professional “consciousness” that from resignation and/or naturalization cannot insert substantial changes in their daily routines, even acknowledging vital problems around its future role, such as the rise of social webs as paradigm of direct communication between politicians and society. As repeated circumstance in the professional discourse addressed, in this research it can be observed some transformations in the journalism exercise (inclusion of accounts and profiles of social webs, integrated news writing, decisive tendency towards content digitalization, etc.) that account for the impact of the phenomenon on the formal level, even not substantial, since social expectation of “objectivity” continues keeping the discussion or at least the setting of fundamental ontological and epistemological questions such as: which is the role of journalism in a skeptical society that discussed between social exclusion and daily exhaustion in the searching for a guiding “truth” inside the circulating political information?

Likewise, in the context of growing skeptical and ideally self-sufficient societies under a distorted image of an information society, will objectivity ideology tend to be a mechanism, not easily dismantled but at least viewable in the context of routines on the media-informative consumption? If following Najmanovich (2016) saying, from evidence of this processes there is a contribution to deplete a domination project, in future research, the audiences' dynamic capacity should be less thought as a cognitive responsibility of trained citizens in the ideology self- and hetero positioning, and more thoughtful as a relational phenomenon built up from cultural interaction with journalism and other institutions of contemporary democracies in a perspective of reciprocal co-building and influence.

\*Translated from Spanish by Andrea C. Giménez

## NOTES

- 1 Among the stylistic resources of the objective journalism model are the use of neutral, descriptive language with little use of adjectives, the selective use of sources, the recurrent appeal to official people and institutions, the quotation of eyewitnesses and the handling of figures or statistics (Restrepo, 2001; San Martín, 2005).
- 2 As in the case of demographic and political-electoral organization, the structure of massive press market in Argentina has tended to develop in a concentrated manner, with the largest news agencies and mediatic companies located in the capital city (the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires) of the country. In this context, Córdoba is a market with local mass media impacted by this national dynamic: on the one hand, the newspaper *La Voz del Interior*, the radio frequency AM Mitre and the open signal television channel Canal 12 stand out as private companies with the highest rating and linked to the Clarín Group (national multimedia leader with a regional reach); and on the other hand, as alternative means of historical presence in competition are the radio frequency AM Universidad and the open signal television channels Canal 10 and CBA24N, members of the multimedia SRT (Radio and Television Services of the National

University of Córdoba) which receives official financing. The journalists interviewed belong to both types of local media, constituting a balanced sample.

- 3 Within what Gürtler & Huber (2007) characterize as the “heuristic structure” of the research process”, cyclical rather than linear or unidirectional in nature, the “triangulation” strategy can take several strategic forms. In this regard, the revolutionary notion that Norman Denzin proposes in the 1970s is highlighted by understanding triangulation as a method that can be applied to different aspects of research through: a) data triangulation, comparing different sources, informants/ persons, times, spaces/contexts and verifying agreement or discrepancy between their respective contributions; b) theoretical triangulation, evaluating the usefulness and explanatory power of different complementary theories or rival hypotheses; c) methodological triangulation, applying several analysis procedures on the same set of data or crossing several methods to collect different data about the same social phenomenon; d) triangulation of researchers, integrating different disciplinary approaches on the same subject/problem. Understanding “triangulation” as a “heuristic procedure aimed at documenting and contrasting information from different points of view” (Rodríguez Sabiote, Pozo Llorente & Gutiérrez Pérez, 2006, p. 293), this research proposes a strategy of data triangulation, systematized based on the qualitative work with different groups of people/key informants addressed during the research process.
- 4 On this point in particular, in previous researches on local mediatic-informative consumption, it is noted that audiences recognize this circumstance as a factor resulting in fatigue, wear and alienation from mediatic treatment of political events. This satiety around the daily reiteration of news in different media has been addressed in Paz García, A.P. (2012), “Contemporary Dynamics of Public Opinion (2009-2011). Mediatized processes of political information in citizens from Córdoba city”, unpublished doctoral thesis.
- 5 For more information on the establishment of Twitter as a privileged political communication platform in Argentina today and particularly in Córdoba, see Paz García & Spinosa (2014).
- 6 It is about two newspapers of different editorial trajectories and divergent political-ideological positions (local newspaper



in favor of Grupo Clarín -opposing side- and national newspaper, in favor of National Government -officialist side-). To assure parameters of internal comparability, this conditions were applied to journalist treatment of the same journalist and political event on circumstantial importance in Argentina in general and in Córdoba particularly, as it was the conflict between Grupo Clarín and National Government at the time of the Audiovisual Communication Services Law N° 26522 (Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual N.º 26522) came into force, conflict that reached its peak in public exposition at the end of 2012. Two news versions ideologically opposed about a conflict prioritized in the local agenda when starting the field work (November to December, 2012).

- 7 Even though only partial results are presented here out of a more extensive experimental work, with the objective of enabling the dialogical reading between the journalists and audiences perspectives around objectivity phenomena in political journalism, we must point out that a frequent limitation of the numerous studies about this topic has been the prevalence of a centered approach on products and producers of news texts mainly. Considering this and that only some examples for a discursive category of mayor complexity are included here, the current research also tries to provide some empirical value criterion outside the text-critical analysis developed from the subjectivity that the researcher activates. Acknowledging that researcher assessments usually work as the only biases and objectivity tacit standards, at this point the effort is done to apply an analytical line which carefully consider the overlapping of reflexivities produced in the analysis of the journalist discourse. In line with Cramer & Eisenhart (2014), which qualitative investigation highlights the role of textual markers of position as indicators of discursive bias, it must be noticed that “the evaluations of objectivity and biases are the multi-determined part of a dynamic communication more than the fixed quality of a text” (p. 280), with which the problem of political polarization of media places the idea of objectivity in an analytical area crossed by multiple social tensions.

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