

A literature review of the factors impacting on objectivity in news journalism

by

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Dedication

To African Sudanese Journalists who have been victims of professionalism in the war torn Sudan. This accomplishment, as well as any I shall be lucky to have in the future will be dedicated to the struggle of African journalists in their fights for press freedom in the continent.

I would like to mention a few names that this work should be dedicated to; Alfred Taban, Atem Yak Atem, Victor Lugala, and Rebecca J.Okwuci who strive to remain objective in difficult war situation. I would also like to dedicate any professional achievement that I may have in the future to Carlos Cardoso of Mozambique who lost his life because of his passion for the journalism profession.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Objectivity has been the most debatable issue in the history of journalism and there are, therefore, many different ways of looking at it. Media academics such as Gans (1979) and Tuchman (2000) refer to objectivity as an examination of contents of collected news materials. Glasser (1992) points out that objectivity is a balance of beliefs restructured by a journalist and presented against independent thinking. It is difficult to test the objectivity of journalists because it is the credibility of facts gathered by a journalist that lies at the heart of objectivity. In Glasser's opinion, the "notion" of objectivity is flawed against the newsman's mandate of reporting responsibly. Objectivity is therefore professional principle through which journalists write news responsibly and present it to their audience as a final product (Glasser, 1992).

This study will discuss objectivity also in reference to the problems that journalists face when they cover news stories. It may be that journalists may have problems searching for stories not because they do not embrace journalistic principles of fairness, clarity and objectivity, but because of the way in which facts are presented to them by news sources (Fred and Wellman, 2003). There have been some cases whereby media audiences have wrongly been made to think that journalists are biased in their coverage.

For example, the 2003 Iraq invasion by US-led forces, where correspondents were made to practice embedded journalism is a good example of how circumstances could force a journalist to succumb to soldiers' demands of keeping their war casualties away from their cameras. It is worth noting, however, that being biased for a journalist in such a war situation could be circumstantial in the sense that an American journalist covering a story in Iraq's capital, Baghdad, would be regarded as a spy by Iraq's troops. Likewise, an Iraqi journalist chasing stories in the coalition force's camps in Iraq's capital would be treated as a traitor by the Iraqi people (Fred and Wellman, 2003:21).

There is no doubt that in the situations described above objectivity in journalism can be affected. It is against such background that this study will investigate the factors that affect objectivity in the print media. It is vitally important to bear in mind that bias should not be confused with editorial columns that express the opinion of publishers, or editors for that matter. The question of objectivity goes back to the gatekeepers, whereby the editors as gatekeepers decide what to publish and what news stories reporters should gather. So the question of objectivity in the news can be dealt with by the editors who decide which story should be run by their respective newspapers. According to Fred and Wellman (2003:32), editors and media owners are the decision makers in the field of journalism.

1.2 Research Problem

There is not doubt that objectivity is one of the core values of journalism. However, due to the very many problems journalists are faced with in their profession, individual journalists never find it easy to embrace journalism's principles because of the nature of the profession. Thus, the question of objectivity arises. As we have already stated, objectivity is sometimes understood by different people in different ways. There are two situations where a reporter can be biased when reporting certain events. (a) When the information the reporter has collected in his beats is imbalanced and when the account of facts gets distorted in process of transmission from one person to other. (b) When the facts collected lack clarity because the source of information misinformed the reporter and the editor in this situation can always get the whole thing wrong (Hackett, 1984). In addition to this, ambiguity of facts can influence journalist's objectivity if he cannot find the source to help him/ her verify them.

It is arguable that journalistic principles do not always prevent the distortion of facts, which is the reason why journalists embrace accountability, clarity, and objectivity in their journalistic practice (McQuial, 1994). There are situations where the news source becomes reluctant to provide the details of news account because of fear of being misquoted in the story. It may happen also that journalists are can neither determine the credibility of the source of news information nor the validity of news events due to circumstances surrounding the events. Therefore, the concept of journalistic objectivity may be taken to

mean interpretative and analytical objectivity because of the emphasis put on it to discover the truth (Hackett, 1984). This makes one wonder whether objectivity in journalism practice has not been adapted merely to safeguard the future of this profession because ambiguous facts collected could undermine its practice. It is easy to see, for example, how journalism principles can always be affected if the news editor and news reporter deal with an influential news source who dictates what the reporter should write. It is issues and problems like this that this study wishes to discuss with the focus being on the factors that impact on news objectivity.

1.3 Research Questions

Journalistic objectivity has a long history dated back to 1820, when universities and colleges in the United States introduced journalism as an academic discipline. According to Hackett (1984) the ideal of objectivity is a way through which journalists differentiate facts from opinions. In short, it is a presentation of factual accounts of events using neutral news reporting techniques. The presentation of account of facts has always been affected by many factors. Based on the research goals and review of related literature, the following questions are formulated:

1. Can the political or ideological convictions of a journalist affect objectivity?
2. Can ownership of the media influence journalist's objectivity?
3. Can news editor's relations with the owner of the newspaper or television station affect objectivity?

4. Can the presentation of conflicting point of views affect objectivity?

1.4 Justification of the Study

Many studies have been carried out on journalistic objectivity starting in 1920 with Walter Lippman (Tuchman, 2000). However, all these studies did concentrate on lack of objectivity in the media. None of these studies attempted to identify the factors impacting on objectivity. There have been few studies that investigated bias in news media in the recent years (Hackett, 1984, Session, 2003). Tuchman (2000) studied newsmen's separation of facts from opinions, whereas Gans (1979) discussed the distortion of facts in the news media. In addition, Glasser (1992) defines objectivity as being bias against independent thinking. It is therefore important that this study reviews literature that deal with factors that impact on news objectivity.

1.5 Research Objectives

It has been noticed that objectivity carries different connotations in different forms of media, be it newspapers or television stations. Therefore, the objectives of this study are:

1. To review various "definitions" of objectivity.
2. To identify and analyse factors that influence objectivity in journalism.
4. To draw tentative conclusions on objectivity as a core journalistic value according to which journalists collect news and disseminate to audience.

1.6 Research Strategy

This being an extended literature review study, the research strategy involves firstly searching for pertinent literature both manually and electronically at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University library. The manual search involved locating and photocopying relevant material from different books and journals. The libraries of other universities such as Rhodes University and the University of Fort Hare were also consulted. Electronic searches included academic search engines and Internet surfing which was aimed at finding articles published on the Internet. Literature reviews, as explained by Mouton (2006: 179), are “studies that provide an overview of scholarship in a certain discipline through an analysis of trends and debates”. The research questions here are usually descriptive questions and/or theoretical and conceptual questions. The reviews are usually either critical, state-of-the-art reviews or integrative reviews. Mouton explains that a review is essentially an exercise in inductive reasoning where one works from a “sample” of texts that one reads in order to come to a proper understanding of a specific domain of scholarship.

One of the strengths of a review is that “a comprehensive and integrated review ... provides one with a good understanding of issues and debates in the area that one is working in, current theoretical thinking and definitions. One strong limitation, however, is that a literature review can, at best, only summarize and organize the existing scholarship, Even a critical review cannot produce new, or validate existing empirical insights. The research

strategy adopted in this study is by definition a non-empirical one. It involves conceptual analysis. Friedl, de Vos and Fouche (2004: 437) state that conceptual research is a type of advanced literature review which studies source material ... which contains information pertaining to the concept(s) in which the researcher is interested. Mouton (2006: 175) describes conceptual analysis as 'analysis of meaning of words or concepts through clarification and elaboration of the different dimensions of meaning'. He notes that such determinations are 'linked to theoretical and philosophical traditions'. One of the major strengths of this strategy is that it brings conceptual clarity "which explicates theoretical linkages and reveals the conceptual implications of different viewpoints". I hope by this literature study to throw some clarity as to the usefulness and necessity of the concept of objectivity in news journalism.

Chapter 2

Objectivity and its various definitions

2.1 Introduction

This study aims to examine the factors that influence objectivity in print journalism. This chapter will explore and discuss the various definitions of objectivity in news journalism. According to Glasser (1992:179), objectivity in journalism is a notion that is committed to the supremacy of observable and retrievable facts. Glasser further points out that objectivity is a balance of beliefs restructured by a journalist and presented against independent thinking. He contends that it is always hard to test the objectivity of journalists because it is the credibility of facts gathered by them that is called objectivity. For him, the ideology of objectivity is flawed against the newsman's mandate of reporting responsibly.

In Cohen's (1992) definition of objectivity, he argues that it is a demand of facts that makes journalists keep their own personal perspective, emotion, interpretation and other subjective notions out of the news. For him, objectivity can be seen as a reporter's duty of digging out factual details of an occurrence and honestly reporting it to the editors to produce the final news to newspaper readers. According to the Encyclopaedia of Applied Ethics (1998: 381), objectivity is a guiding principle of contemporary journalism according to which news should be reported without bias. There have been sharp

criticisms against the ideal of objectivity due to its broad and complex nature. However, Fred and Wellman's study (2003:21) suggest that more studies should be undertaken in order to justify the notion of objectivity.

As stated in chapter 1, objectivity shall be discussed in reference to the problems journalism practitioners encounter when covering news stories. We observed that in this respect, journalists may be having problems searching for stories not because they do not embrace journalistic principles of fairness, clarity and objectivity, but because of the way in which facts are presented to them by news sources. Lichtenberg (1997:225) asserts that the ideal of objectivity is always on attack from media critics because it does not look attainable to them. Therefore this criticism comes from all directions. However, objectivity in journalism might not be the same as that of scientific objectivity. What people call objective reporting in the journalism profession refers to the reporting of all versions of the same story told by witnesses as well as those involved in the story, with the journalist or reporter keeping himself/herself distanced from the story. Objectivity is considered as a cornerstone professional ideology of journalists in liberal democracies and most people agree with this. In fact, objectivity in news is thought by most writers to be possible and desirable in the search for truth (Lichtenberg, 1997). Despite all the criticism against objectivity, it remains a very attractive proposition in news journalism (Glasser 1992).

There are a number of reasons why some people conclude that objectivity cannot be attained. A number of critics make it look impossible by

emphasising factors that influence individual journalists' notion of objectivity. To Tuchman (2000), the adoption of objectivity in the media can be traced back to the 1800s, when all the media standardised the ideology of objectivity as an acceptable way of handling news stories in the United Kingdom and North America. As a result, media had to add objectivity to their traditional values so that it became a working guide towards their mandate of providing news, current affairs and entertainment (Glasser, 1992; Gans, 1978). As Tuchman (2000) puts it, objectivity in print journalism has become a central strategic ritual in which reporters tackle news materials. Media scholars, including Tuchman, Glasser, and Schudson have noted that the journalistic tenet of objectivity is the only way forward, although there has increasingly been criticism against it.

Lichtenberg (1996:378) and Birds (1990) believe that journalists produce news genres, which are well examined, and conduct themselves as independent observers when covering news to be presented to their newspapers readers. According to Birds, contemporary journalism embraces a complexity in which journalists embark on more interviews to have as many people quoted as possible to ensure that his/her own opinion is out of the story that he/ she is presenting to editors. In addition, modern journalists, most of whom have attended journalism schools, apply journalism ethics in their daily newsgathering and also use the philosophy of objectivity as a road map in their profession.

Lichtenberg (1996) and Tuchman (1972) explain that a complaint that an article written by an individual reporter lacks objectivity would make sense because it is inevitable that some facts attached to the story cannot be verified. Ward (1999) also believes that journalism seeks to keep objectivity as its news routine in order to operate and disseminate the most desired information. In other words, Ward suggests that a new way of dealing with the question of objectivity is to adapt pragmatic objectivity. Journalism is governed and still guided by the principle of objectivity and nothing more powerful than that.

Reese (1997: 425) argues that objectivity has been a cornerstone in American print journalism, adding that there is no way it cannot exist in journalistic practice. Reese describes traditional studies of objectivity as balanced and translated into social reality, which journalists can and ought to present to newspapers' readers. Journalists, like other professionals, have no better way of handling news than embracing the journalism tradition of objectivity as their way of dealing with complex news coverage (Ward 1999: 4).

It can be argued that journalists sometimes are made scapegoat of status quo. Having realised that objectivity refers to the reportage of knowledge and reality free from a reporter's interpretation, it is important also to accept Ward's (1999) argument that no human knowledge can be perfect. Based on that, it may be argued that chances for objective reporting in print media are very high when journalists strive to report only the truth and without bias.

In this respect, Glasser (1992) points out that the ideology of objectivity means reporting news without a journalist's own perspective. Ward (1999), however, explains that journalism is always an interpretation of an event in which a journalist constructs meaning out of it while separating his/ her own opinion. In pursuance of this, journalism, over the years, has developed its own traditional norms such as accuracy, balance, impartiality, factuality, fairness and truthfulness to ensure that news is reported objectively (Ward 1999: 5).

Reese (1997) also underscores that argument that the notion of objectivity requires that factual details of an event be reported without distortion. It is important to note here that journalism has therefore, according to Ward (1999: 8), developed another model that takes objective reporting away from the traditional way of reporting into an interpretive kind of reporting. According to him, this pragmatic news objectivity still encompasses the old pluralistic theory of journalism, which allows the print media to assume the role of the public sphere in which the media become the informer, the educator and the entertainer to the public. As Glasser (1992) has already mentioned, journalistic objectivity is also defined as evaluations and judgements of newsy events by a journalist who stands as a private observer. This view is supported by Ward (1999:9) who argues that journalistic traditional values such as accuracy, balance, fairness, factuality, impartiality and accountability work to complement objectivity in news productions. Therefore, objectivity cannot be discussed in isolation to these journalistic norms.

Ward (1999) explains that journalism ethics has been providing guidelines to create flexible objective journalism in which journalists do not only look at the newsworthiness of stories, but also consider the impact of the news on the readers. Lippman's definition (1964) of the concept of objectivity as an epistemological assumption that prescribes how social reality should be reported is a good one because news events are categorised as social events. For Lippman, a news report is a construction of an event by a newsman who translates the events into reality to inform and educate eager newspaper readers. For him objectivity is a product of the process of philosophical constructing.

Glasser (1992) contends that journalistic objectivity is an ideology defined as a set of beliefs that function as the journalist's claim to action. Lichtenberg (1998) says objectivity is a strategy of hegemony used by the members of society to dominate others. To Tuchman (2000), objectivity is a strategic ritual that defends a journalist from lawsuits of covering undisclosed information for his newspaper readers. Hugh (1964) also defines objectivity as a procedure to serve a purpose of fact finding as ritual. Objectivity is one of the core values in the journalistic profession; however, its adaptation in varying cultural backgrounds seems to be a little bit problematic (ibid). This is why the notion of objectivity tends to differ from one newspaper to another (Dansbach and Klett 2000). According to Dansbach and Klett (2000), objectivity is a key value in newspaper journalism as it sets a standard that makes the ideal of objectivity acceptable to all who practice journalism.

Objective reporting is aimed at a valid and true explanation of breaking news in a certain status quo (Dansbach, and Klette 2000:170). The history of print journalism and the notion of objectivity in it can be traced back to the 1800s, when journalism became an academic discipline in colleges and universities in the United States and the United Kingdom. Newspapers began to embrace objective reporting and began to free themselves from political parties in order to help in building democratic institutions in society. So they became independent media institutions, which explored their market interests by applying objectivity as their traditional norm and value as they sought capital. Mirando (2001) argues that the developments of objectivity underwent phases in newspaper industries:

1. The newspapers sprung up as a commercial product that needed protection. However, the only way through which this could be achieved was to adapt objectivity and develop objective reporting.
2. The newspaper editors and publishers attempted to embark on investigative journalism to smoothen their journalism practice, only to discover that investigative journalism was never free from bias.

The ideal of objectivity became the only way through which one could run a newspaper. Thus, editors and publishers of newspapers attempted to advocate for the standardisation of journalistic principles such as objectivity, fairness and accuracy in order to protect them from lawsuits (Mirando 2001). In many aspects, objectivity works to replace any other protective measure journalists working for independent daily newspapers should think of

(Dansbach and Klette 2000:171). It was not until World War One that objectivity emerged as a method to replace the old journalism tradition of subjective reporting. This would ensure that the future of newspapers was safely guarded (Lippman 2000). Then the demands by news editors for eyewitness accounts in stories increased, and the need to employ investigative journalism to cover disclosed social events were high.

Lippman's notion (2000:133) of objectivity in journalism reflects strong beliefs and a deep understanding of the philosophy of contemporary journalism. In this context, objectivity, or rather objective reporting was introduced in such a way that it detaches the reporter's opinion or the editorialised kind of writing from the much-needed presentation of facts. Journalists regard objectivity, accuracy, balance and fairness, as well as giving two sides of the story, as characteristics of objective news reporting (Dansbach and Klette 2000:135). When objectivity was introduced in mainstream journalism in the United States as a core journalistic value, media critics criticised the ideology, saying it could not exist and could not be achieved because of the emotions of journalists reporting in the field (Lichtenberg 1997).

However, Lippman (1964) argues that journalists' change of hearts and beliefs of verifying facts can open up an opportunity for objective journalism. Lippman's sense of objectivity (2000) was such that a model of news gathering and reporting that would be impartial and fair ought to be developed. In the philosophy of journalism, the notion of objectivity is defined as a set of beliefs where a certain moral truth would remain true and desirable

in journalistic practice (Mirando, 2001). The essence of this is that something balanced and impersonal must be reported, because journalists represent a tradition of truth and honesty whenever they report news. Objectivity introduces a routine procedure in handling arguments from two sides, and therefore defends newspapermen from unbalanced reporting.

Attempts to redefine and rediscover objectivity have suffered continuous attacks from media critics as the notion of objectivity has been regarded as journalists' predicaments of the consequences of their reporting (Dansbach and Klette 2000, Tuchman 2000). Ryan (2001) explains that objective journalism has frequently been made the scapegoat of other journalistic failures, while media critics themselves fail to understand objectivity and also fail to define the term "objectivity". In defence of objectivity, Ryan (2001:2) says critics do not provide any alternative to objective journalism and do not provide any reasons as to why objectivity should not have been what it has been. The critics and defenders of objectivity might have better arguments if they could create a common understanding of the term "objectivity". Critics have "over the years" attacked journalists for allegedly being biased in reporting, and for a lack of commitment to objective journalism (Ryan 2001:3). Journalists' lack of commitment to the ideology of objective journalism has indeed been a challenge to those who advocate for objectivity in print journalism. The contemporary analyst questions the validity of the notion of objectivity, which may lead to the study of its philosophy and redefine what journalists called objectivity in the print media (ibid).

According to Glasser (1992), the definition of objectivity is a presentation of well-examined factual details of an event constructed to fit in the psyche of the newspaper readers. So any assumption that objectivity is uncritically reporting facts and opinions representing only two sides would be naïve of the critics, as objective journalism is not all about presenting facts, but it also looks at the impact of news run by a newspaper on the readers and television viewers.

It has been discovered that journalistic objectivity is not the same as scientific objectivity, as journalistic objectivity is based on the verification of facts and the separation of the reporter's viewpoints from the story, whereas scientific objectivity is based on laboratory results. However, journalistic objectivity shares some core values with scientific objectivity, which only differs because journalists collect information and disseminate accurate reality ((Ryan 2001).

It is important that journalists should stick to these journalistic norms to be able to practice objective journalism successfully. Whenever there is a breaking news story, journalists cover the event and process it. This starts with gathering the facts. Then the news is processed; it goes from news reporter to the editor, and from the editor the news is disseminated. Thus, news is always independent from journalists' personal idiosyncrasies (ibid).

The success of objective journalism depends on the integrity of the practitioners and the norms to which they are committed. Objectivity is a set of procedures that enables a journalist to be autonomous in his/her news reporting (Gans, 1979, Ryan 2001). Objectivity also protects journalists from libel suits and editorial reprimands (Tuchman 1978, Sessions 2003).

Journalists justify their pursuit for news as being objective and detached, which produces the news material. The results of scrutiny of the facts of a news story make a journalist objective in his writing ((Gans, 1979:184).

Objectivity is described as enabling journalists to arrive at an evaluative conclusion and to relate opinions and interpretations (Gans 1979: 186). Journalistic values are considered to be reactive to the news, rather than prior judgements, and are considered to be evaluations, which journalists use to determine news selections (Gans 1979, Shoemaker 1996, and Reese 1998). Gans (1979:187) argues that objectivity becomes a necessity, as journalists who bring news to people at home need to be protected. There is also the need to protect journalistic credibility.

According to White (2000:121), those who make the process happen are called gatekeepers. News stories are always transmitted from one gatekeeper to another until a final decision is made on the news item. The gatekeepers can be people who deal directly with the news in newsrooms and sometimes can be people who are indirectly involved in the news production, for example, the person who owns the newspaper and the editors. Because different newspapers have different criteria for what makes news and more the same with different cultures, news selections can be affected. A case in point would be Russia, where the newspapers never report crimes such as bank robberies. China never allows criticism against the government to enter newspapers; however, an individual can write his/her complaints and distribute it to the government offices (Curran, 1998).

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This review examines and critiques the literature relevant to the study of the factors affecting journalistic objectivity and the implications of this for journalists. I will start by discussing the major criticisms levelled against the concept of objectivity and then proceed to analyse issues which undermine journalism practices. I will do all these in order to go ahead and argue for the importance of objectivity in journalism. In spite of all the criticism and controversies around the concept, It is my argument that objectivity is a necessary and invaluable tenet in journalism and democracy.

3.2 The sociology of news and the critique of objectivity

Objectivity is not only a much discussed and misunderstood concept, it is also widely criticised. Herman and Chomsky (1994:2), in their propaganda model argue that 'the raw material of news must pass through successive filters, leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print'. They argue that these filters fix the premises of discourse and interpretations and the definition of what is newsworthy in the first place. These set of news "filters" include owner wealth and profit orientation of the dominant media firms; advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; the reliance of the media on information

provide by government, business, and “experts”; and “flak” as a means of disciplining the media. Under these constraints, it can be argued that seeking objectivity would be an ideological illusion. In their words:

The elite domination of the media and marginalisation of dissidents that results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able convince themselves that they choose to interpret the news “objectively” and on the basis of professional news values. Within limits of the filter constraints they often are objective; the constraints are so powerful, and are built into the system in such a fundamental way, that alternative bases of news choices are hardly imaginable (Herman and Chomsky, 1994: 2).

The above views seem to be supported by Baker (2002: 27) who argues that ‘the rush to adopt “objectivity” as newspapers’ ruling journalistic norm was a tool used to promote the advertiser-rewarded, mass-appeal newspapers. This is because the ‘purportedly objective style offends few people and leaves more people reasonably, even if less intensely, satisfied than would, for example, a partisan style. Baker goes further to argue that as a ruling norm, objectivity tend toward reduced product differentiation and leads to monopoly papers. In his opinion, the increasing rule of objectivity as the journalism’s dominant norm and the increase of monopoly papers correlated throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the steady increase of advertising revenue as a contribution to newspaper revenue.

Another critical dimension is introduced by Koch (1990: 19) who argues that news is a social construct empowered by a cultural history and a tradition of institutional practice based on material and cognitive realities. In his defence, he makes reference to studies which argue that to a great degree, a social context defines or frames, politically and socially, the information that will be presented as news. Far from objective news, what the news frame offers therefore is an encoded “preferred reading”. Koch argues that “given possible multiple readings of mass media, the power of the news lies in its ability to ensure that readers or other active users are presented with the same or similar bureaucratically created and ideologically embedded accounts. For this reason, the frame may be more important than the specific details that it organises”. (1990: 20). Koch concludes that ‘The assertion that all news functions as the frame or context of an event, thus distorting by the act of selective description, affirms the proposition that real objectivity is a chimera, a false Grail that all observers may seek but which remains unobtainable (*Ibid.*).

Yet another critical dimension is provided by Edgar (1992: 112) who argues that from a hermeneutic perspective objectivity, in the sense of ‘correspondence to the object’ is inapplicable as a criterion by which reports may be judged. A report must select from the range of possible (and acceptable) interpretations that a social event yields. One author who has reviewed literature that is critical of objectivity within the sociology of news production is Michael Schudson. Schudson (2000: 175-195) discusses the three dominant perspectives in the area: Firstly, the political economy “that

relates the outcome of the news process to the structure of the state and the economy and the economic foundation of the news organization”, secondly, the social organization perspective “which tries to understand how journalists’ efforts on the job are constrained by organizational and occupational demands” and thirdly, the cultural approach “which emphasizes the constraining force of broad cultural traditions and symbolic systems, regardless of the structure of economic organization or the character of occupational routines”. These perspectives all raise doubt that objectivity is attainable.

Brian MacNair (1998: 12) argues that “there is no universal, *objective* journalism ..., only *journalisms*, with different styles and hierarchies of news values, shaped by and specific to particular societies at particular times”. He agrees with some of the views above that far from being objective, “journalism in all its forms is, despite its claims to truthfulness, above all a *construction*: an intellectual product ...” and that “The journalist is a cod in a wheel over whose speed and direction he or she may have little or no control ... The claim of journalistic objectivity is essentially an appeal for trust, even in situations where the facts of a situation may not be fully known (*ibid*; 62-65). All these arguments seem to strike a huge blow to the concept of journalistic objectivity. It is my intention to demonstrate, however, that this is not the whole story. Most of these views are based on a misunderstanding of the concept.

3.3 The nature of objectivity

Both Tuchman (2000) and Gans (1979) attempted to empirically test the idea of objectivity. Tuchman's findings showed that the newsmen use the label news analysis to place a barrier to problematic stories that the managing editor cannot easily verify. In order to run a story a news reporter has compiled, the editor needs to call a number of sources to know the credibility of the story. This process, according to Tuchman is the most problematic formal aspect of objectivity for the newsmen.

Gans's findings reflects the 'ideology' of objectivity as a norm designed to make journalists embrace truth in media practice; reinforce cultural standards, and public opinion. He spent a lot of time observing and talking to journalists who handled problematic issues in news coverage. He was interested in professional values, professional standards and the external pressures that shaped journalist's notion of objectivity. Lichtenberg (1998) and Schudson (1996) tried to study the cultural influences on journalistic objectivity. Lichtenberg's assertion of objectivity appears to involve a certain controversy and setting up of oneself as an authority. Lichtenberg is convinced that objectivity enhances news media credibility. However, since the cultural effects on objectivity cannot be discussed in isolation from other factors, this literature review, therefore, shall discuss the works of journalism authors such as Tuchman (2000) and Gans (1979), who have written about more recent situations where journalists who, for example, cover wars do not apply journalistic principles, such as objectivity and impartiality.

A number of journalism academics who have studied notions of objectivity feel that there is a need to have criteria with which objectivity can be described and be acceptable to all who practice journalism (Donsbach and Klett 2000). According to Glasser (1992), objectivity in journalism is a set of beliefs that commits a journalist to scrutinising the facts to find the truth about a certain events which an editor classifies to be newsworthy. Glasser argues that an ideology can be a moral code that promotes journalistic practices, which assumes a watchdog role of the media in support of certain circumstances, while Walter Lippman (1992) looks at objectivity as a concept which challenges the epistemological thinking of balancing reporting that brings independent reality. Lippman (1992) points out that newspapers and television news channels become accountable when editors' judgement of the news is wrong. The professional value of objectivity has experienced some criticism from journalism critics, who claim that objectivity cannot be achieved and who insist that the notion that print journalism can be objective is a flawed understanding (DeFleur 1991 *et al*).

According to Philip Meyer (1987), the core professional value of objectivity has been symbolised by the following: (a). Rectifying facts and separating the writer's opinion from the news, and (b). Substantiating news from editorial columns. For Tuchman (2000), objectivity is a routine procedure whereby editors carefully look at the contents of their newspapers before they reach the final production. This is done partly by the editor perusing the contents for fairness and balances the facts objectively so as to ensure that the newspaper does not carry anything libellous or defamatory. Tuchman's (2000)

on the other hand describes objectivity as a strategic ritual protecting newspapermen from risk of their trade. For Tuchman, some of the techniques used in the objectivity ritual include: (a). Presenting factual evidence; (b). Supporting any truth claims; (c). Quotes from people; (e). Judicious use of quotation marks, and (f). Structuring information in inverted primed form.

According to Glasser (1992), objectivity in journalism helps journalists understand three principal developments, each of which contributes to bias in news, namely: (a). Objective reporting is biased against what the press typically defines as its role in a democracy. (b). Adversary press: By this Glasser means that objectivity in journalism is biased in favour of the status quo. (c). Stereotype opinion and the press. Glasser observes further that journalistic objectivity is an ideology that is committed to the supremacy of the retrievable facts. According to Glasser's explanation, ideology has been interpreted as a set of beliefs which allow for journalist's claims for objectivity. Glasser describes the idea as being biased against the watchdog functions of the press in favour of the news events being reported. Glasser further elaborates that the second bias of his ideology of journalistic objectivity is bias against free thinking that requires journalists to keep their points of view out of their stories. In Glasser's third bias, the notion of objectivity is described as being biased against the journalists' social responsibility.

Beyond the argument by Glasser regarding the ideology of objectivity as being biased against journalism practice, there are other factors that contribute to lack of objectivity in journalism. All these challenges which

continue to face journalists come from different directions and, most importantly, from politicians who always try to use the media for their own campaigns. Whenever the media have failed to meet their expectations, they claim that the media is not objective (Lichtenberg 1998:381). Objectivity, according to Schudson (1996), is a backbone of American journalism. However, journalists have been finding it hard to maintain objective reporting in newspapers. This has been ascribed to circumstances. For example, in Africa where civil wars are widespread; journalists collect news stories from sources who are politically affiliated to warring parties. It is by all means certain that such sources would influence the stories these journalists write.

This criterion demands that journalists detach their own points of view from stories, interpretations, and other subjective factors. The duty of a journalist is to report news events, not to create news. Lippman (1992:161) describes journalistic objectivity as a product of a process of philosophical thinking because the ideology is open for debate and, most importantly, criticism. Lippman's conception of objectivity ascertains the epistemological assumption that talks about reality in a subjective manner.

According to Cohen (1992), the concept of journalistic objectivity attracts a lot of criticism, but one still finds that journalism critics unconsciously accept it. Pragmatic objectivity, according to Ward (1999:4), is a new approach that sets a more realistic objectivity framework as journalism suffers bitter criticisms from critics. He says that objectivity is knowledge of reality that is

independent of reporter's perspective. Ward's pragmatic objectivity does cover incorrect assumptions.

Journalistic objectivity in the 20th Century has been a rudimentary guide for any reporter gathering news. Ward argues that traditional objectivity does not have an ethical defence as it is based on a false assumption, so whenever it is criticised, nobody can defend the ideology. The relevancy of news objectivity is questioned because journalism has developed an interpretative approach towards the news (Ward 1999:5). He (Ward) says critics claim that journalism lacks objectivity because journalists tend to be more politically-inclined than what they are supposed to be.

In looking at objectivity, Ward's pragmatic objectivity does not recommend a journalist's detachment from journalistic values and subjective perspectives. In addition to this, journalism continues to test interpretative reporting and evaluate the journalists' perspectives. In other words, Journalists adopts investigative journalism as a new approach to news reporting. The researcher understands journalism critics' concerns about objectivity, because other professions, such as the medical and legal professions have to be licensed in order for a professional person to be able to officially operate. If you are in a profession which does not necessarily issue licences to the practitioners, chances are that a mad man, whose profession is journalism, for example, can decide to publish malicious stories that serve his best interests in society. My understanding of objectivity is such that a journalist collects his facts with two sides of it from both victims and witnesses and restructures it in a news

format, passing it to the news editor, who allocates columns in tomorrow's newspaper.

Every single paragraph a journalist writes is an interpretation of his or her knowledge of some news he/she has collected. A journalist's interpretation is part of supporting facts and values, because the supportive facts reporters collect when compiling stories are meant to complement and supplement certain knowledge of reality that newspaper readers expect in their newspaper edition. Ward (1999:6) asserts that an analysis can be objective if the truth claims can be justified. Journalism embraces interpretative reporting because news events are compiled with at least some degree of conceptualisation, selections, theorisation and evaluation (*ibid*). There is no writing that is free from the journalist's interpretations, values and perspectives. Moreover, objectivity is a judgement based on the presentation of facts of a newsy event. In contemporary journalism, therefore, the analysis of news has turned the notion of objectivity into a hotly debated area of news inquiry (Ryan 2001).

In some studies, journalism scholars such as Tuchman (2000), Gans (1979) and Glasser (1992) found it hard to empirically test news objectivity. The reason here had been that there was no formula with which these researchers could measure news objectivity as the ideology turned out to be too philosophical in many ways. This journalistic principle involves interpretation, evaluation and most importantly, judgement. The concept of objectivity has two norms through which it can be tested: (a) through the norm of factuality which requires that a journalist look at the truthfulness of information collected

and its relevancy; (b) through the norm of impartiality which requires a reporter to detach and disengage himself or herself from the event he/she is covering (Tuchman 2000). This is unlike Ward's pragmatic news objectivity (1999:7), which argues that interpretation and the writers' opinion should be part of news reporting as long as they are justified on the basis of facts.

Objective reporting involves a complex judgement and an interpretation that weighs all forms of journalistic standards. Objective judgement is a judgement about all reasonableness of a belief, theory or news report. An interpretation is objective if it is justified according to the available standards. In other words, it will require the researcher to look at newsworthiness, news relevancy and factuality, which can only be evaluated by news editors. Journalism requires one to adopt different notions of neutrality for different types of stories. For example, for straight forwards news information, two forms of neutrality are desirable: 1) cautious neutrality means the reporter does not take side, and avoids contentious issues. Journalists must be careful in handling news information to avoid controversies. Caution is appropriate where there is no credible news source; 2) liberal neutrality gives the journalist a chance to make explicit and evaluations and judgements as long as they are based on facts (Ward 1999).

3.4. News Distortion

In this section, I shall discuss bias and distortion in the news. Social scientists and other journalism critics complain that news is often distorted. The distortion in the news is blamed on journalists who cover the news. Frankly speaking, journalists can be answerable to their readers only if the facts made available to them are correct but in their reporting they omit some facts because they want to do a favour to someone involved in the story. There are two circumstances in which news can be distorted. Firstly, when distorted facts are made available to a journalist and the situation is such that the people involved cannot be reached for comment about the events. Then the newspapermen can go ahead and publish the news article. If someone later claims that what appeared in the newspaper is not factual, and the person makes the facts available to the newspaper, then the newspaper should run the story together with an apology. This is always regarded as an inevitable case of distortion, whereby the newspaper editor cannot help verify the facts. Secondly, when news source intends to give false news factual story is lost. It becomes difficult for the reporter to scrutinise the facts in such an instance. The reporter is compelled to publish insufficient news information.

News distortion, according to Gans (1992:192), may be valid occurrences in relation to those circumstances that make the source of news information withhold some of the facts. News distortion is often attributed to certain factors, such as journalists' political and unconscious ideologies. Other issues, like an imbalance of information made available to a journalist, can

cause the distortion of news facts which were initially correct. Gans looks at the external reality without considering the internal factors that impact on objectivity. For instance, if the news editor has an interest in a news event, his/her interest will influence the reporter's news coverage; the editor being the final person in the newsroom who decides which news items should be run in which columns. The editor's relation with the reporter can therefore affect the reporting of the news. Gans further asserts that asking wrong questions can lead the subject to giving the wrong information. However, I do not think that the way the question is asked can lead to giving the wrong answer by the respondent, if the person understands the question correctly. I believe that there is a kind of distortion of news which is deemed inevitable, based on circumstances surrounding the news event.

News events that are not in a newspaper's diary can be hard to cover because they are not on daily schedules. When news is breaking out there, pressmen learn about these events some time later, when victims and witnesses can no longer be reached for comment. For example, there was a plane crash that killed the world-famous Kenyan photo-journalist Mohammed Amin on the Comoros Island. The plane crashed in the Indian Ocean and the footage that Reuters later used in their reportage was recorded by a tourist who happened to be at the beach when the event occurred. Reporters arrived at the scene much later to cover the event (www.ifj.org). It may be true that journalists sometime employ the wrong methods to gather news. However, if a journalist investigates a story using the wrong methods to disclose what is uncovered, but he manages to get the facts, this reporter has fulfilled his duty

as a journalist. Handling hard news, where the person who has an account of the facts is not available for comment, can be problematic. So the news editor can risk publishing the story without convincing facts.

Ward (1999) argues that pragmatic news objectivity is the degree to which interpretation differentiates hard news from soft news. It has been argued that journalistic objectivity shares some core values with scientific objectivity. In addition, journalistic objectivity encompasses philosophical constructs that support its traditional values, namely accuracy, balance, impartiality and clarity. Accuracy means completeness of information collected. Balance means that there are both facts and opinions, representing only two sides. Impartiality means, among other things, that journalists must be objective in presenting facts and opinions, which includes verifying information, evaluation and judgements of the account of conflicting facts. Ryan argues that journalists are not only answerable to their audience; they are also accountable to their employers who challenge their professionalism. Thus, journalists know that so much is expected of them by their employers as well as the newspaper readers, as far as objectivity is concerned (Ryan 2001: 5).

Although Sessions (2003) describes objectivity as a journalistic hallmark in the United States, that might not be the case in Third World countries, where there are still governments under military regimes. For instance, local journalists who report for their newspapers in war torn countries such as Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Iraq may find it particularly difficult to be objective. Because they are identified as

members of a specific community, their access to information throughout the country would be made very difficult because of suspicion. In those situations in which they manage to gather information, they may fail to be objective because the situation which they report dictates the kind of stories they write. As witnessed in the US-led invasion of Iraq, the journalists end up practicing embedded journalism. Because of ethnic differences, we can argue that many people in Africa feel comfortable when foreign journalists cover their stories because they are not bound by local politics informed by tribal disputes. The reason could be that foreign correspondents do not belong to any local tribes and may not pay allegiance to local structures.

It is pertinent to mention here the complete shift of style of reporting that was witnessed in the United States after the Islamist terrorists attacked New York and Washington D.C on 11 September 2001. American journalists who were ever critical of the government's foreign policy became mindful of the security of their people and became partisan reporters (Cali 2002:292). It would seem that the attack disarmed them from their journalistic traditional norms of objectivity and impartiality. The attack forced American journalism to change and transformed journalists in that they were challenged to abandon the position of special observers that they have always occupied. It made the principle of objectivity irrelevant and unobtainable (ibid). For decades the kind of reporting practiced in American newspapers was adversarial and highly critical of civil rights movements, the Vietnam War, and Watergate scandal. However, after 11 September, the notion of objectivity in the United States became something of the past.

Another factor affecting objectivity is the fact that journalists are sometimes faced with conditions which are unfamiliar to their environments. For example, those journalists who went to Afghanistan had reasons to work as embedded journalists as they were in a situation whereby they were moving in a military escort to chase their stories. They could not find any neutral versions of the stories they were getting because they reported from those areas which were recaptured from the Taliban government. The foreign correspondents in Afghan Capital Kabul could not move freely because of a fear of being kidnapped by the Taliban and Al Qaeda militiamen. In addition, those journalists who were reporting in Pakistan were scared away by the killing of their colleague from the *Wall Street Journal*, journalist Daniel Pearl, in February 2002.

This study does not aim to defend journalists; neither is it trying to claim that there is absolute objectivity in the newspapers. In a way, one can argue that there is no absolute objectivity in journalism. But when one looks at the circumstances in which journalists find themselves, one will agree that it can be very expensive for a reporter to be objective, especially because objectivity cannot be absolute. So journalism critics should acknowledge that nothing in human knowledge can be absolute, as Ryan (2001) rightly puts it. Lichtenberg (1998), says that critics have failed to provide an alternative to objectivity that can work as a substitute that may help critics to appreciate and accept what journalists regard to be objectivity in the news media.

This means that journalism critics should be content with what journalists called objectivity, since the notion of objectivity with which they work may not be the same as those of other academic disciplines. It is taken for granted that reporters and editors are faced with various challenges when selecting stories to run in their newspapers. They are always faced with issues of conflict of interests, which start in the newsrooms, whereby publishers sometimes attempt to dictate what news reporters and editors should run in their newspapers. Objectivity can be affected by some activities in newsrooms which reporters are bound to accept as normal work challenges. For instance, deadlines are major problems that journalists are faced with. Newspaper editors assign their reporters to cover stories and allocate columns in tomorrow's edition even before the reporter comes back with his story. One can imagine the pressure under which a reporter works when an editor depends on him for a story which is still being investigated. If the reporter fails to meet his deadline it automatically affects the newspaper's production. It does put sub-editors in trouble - they have to consult with managing editors to seek a possibility of using the column for running another story (Tuchman 2000).

In conclusion, journalism critics who have been claiming that the media lacks objectivity may be doing so because the media does not necessarily depict anything of interest to them. The success in journalism depends on its traditional values which guide journalists in their news scope. Objective journalists tend to detach themselves from any political, social, economic and cultural interests that interfere with their journalistic works because they have

a duty to carry out and make sure that all the relevant information is collected and disseminated to newspaper readers accordingly. Reporters make every effort to ensure that the news they obtain is complete, relevant, clear and to the point. Journalists keep up to journalism standards and journalistic norms of completeness, relevancy and objectivity. Objectivity in journalism is meant to help governments keep law and order. Ryan (1999:8) points out that objectivity allows for the free flow of information from bureaucrats through the media to the public using reliable sources of information. Reporters are people who recognise news in such a way that it does not take them long to spot news information. When they realise that the story does not include two sides, they make sure that it is investigated. Although journalists recognise facts before they consider writing about the subject, they face many challenges which range from obtaining information from dissenting sources to meeting the deadlines. Sometimes, it is even hard to identify credible sources to interview for the story the reporter has learned about in his/her news beats. Thus, I would like to say that journalists are not responsible for lack of objectivity in journalism. Objectivity is a ruse which journalists have devised to protect themselves from the risks of their trade (Tuchman 2000:123).

Journalists can claim objectivity by quoting their subjects and following the procedures whereby they formally attribute their stories to the sources. The use of quotes in journalism is meant to help reporters suppress their own opinions and agendas. Objectivity requires that journalists fulfil their mandate of obtaining information from sources that are politically, economically, socially and culturally centred. Objective journalism works in the interests of

the readers of newspapers. According to Ryan (2001), critics claim that bias and sensationalism attract a lot of readers. Journalism demands that journalists participate in social activities. Journalism is a social institution that effects change in society. If journalism becomes a vehicle for social change, then journalists must have superseded their individual interests and embrace objectivity that can enable them to practice better journalism, (Ryan 2001:13). An assumption that objectivity does not make journalism a good career should not be given a chance to confuse committed journalists, as no editor and publisher will ever advise his or her field reporter not to apply objectivity in his or her news gathering. Journalism is intended to consider anything that improves the public life and suggest solutions for communal problems. Journalism can set a goal and provide a forum for discussions. Journalists must uncover problems and help the decision makers to seek practical solutions.

The researcher believes that the reason why journalism critics fail to provide alternatives to objectivity is that some of these critics are not honest in their critiques against journalism practices, because they cannot justify their critiques (Gans, 1979). Some who have reasons do not convince journalists that journalistic objectivity can no longer work. Secondly, they have not introduced any approach that can be used to ascertain and collate its credibility with that of objectivity. The critics did not give themselves time to find out that there are inevitable cases where journalists cannot verify some information, because of the circumstances surrounding the story. For

instance, the question of whether or not there were Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq. It seems obvious that no journalist could verify the facts about this while Saddam Hussein was still in power. Gans (1979:187) argues that objectivity is reinforced by the necessity and the need to protect journalistic credibility. Journalists consider objectivity as their road map for gathering news information in which they deal with news sources who attempt to bribe them to write in their favour. Objectivity prevents journalists from writing stories they consider to be lies; that is why they seek a third opinion when chasing a story deemed to be newsworthy.

3.5. Conclusion

Journalists, like other professionals, are committed to objectivity. The fact that their journalistic work makes them not only answerable to the audiences, but accountable to their bosses for economic loss they cause because of levity, causes them to tend to be more careful with news handling. The work challenges which range from the deadlines to demands of disclosure of sources of news refuted are big issues that require journalists to embrace objectivity (Tuchman 2000 and Ryan 2001). Thus the ideology of objectivity in journalism is designed to set a standard for journalists to have a sense of direction. The notion of objectivity should reinforce cultural standards and public opinion for which journalists are educators. Objectivity makes journalists free, and independent observers whose duty is to search for truth in a way that reinforces moral and social responsibility (Ryan 2001). It is acknowledged that journalism critics argue that journalists are not objective

enough in their profession. In fact, the ideology of news objectivity has been attacked for decades. Some critics argue that it is unrealisable and that it is undesirable. But, it is also good to know that journalists are people who are concerned about the well-being of society and their fight for objectivity should be accepted.

Chapter 4

Major Factors that Influence Objectivity in Journalism

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will review the major factors that influence objectivity in news journalism. The following factors have been identified as playing a crucial role:

1. News selection procedures and gate keeping; 2. The impact or influence of culture; 3. Favours; 3. Personal relationships; 4. Organisational structures; 5. Newspaper ownership; 6. Deadlines.

4.2 News Selections and the role of gatekeepers

An American social scientist, the late Kurt Lewin, came up with a news selection model called “Gatekeeping” around 1922 which is popularly used in news selections. In practice, gatekeeping is a way through which editors judge the newsworthiness or validity of stories as news. According to Kurt as quoted by White (1997) and Shoemaker (1997) “Gatekeepers are editors who assess the newsworthiness of news information collected. The term “Gatekeeper” is a phenomenon regarded in the media as an important process (White, 1997). It is meant to describe the process in which news passes through channels that ascertain facts and determine the credibility of the news information and permits publication. The process is often governed by the decision makers called the gatekeepers who understand the functions

and factors that affect the news (Shoemaker, 1997). A number of factors are put into consideration when news editors pass news stories for publication. This includes news characteristics such as (a) news worthiness (b) clarity (c) impartiality (e) relevancy and (f) objectivity. This makes the process of news selections a ritual. However, to determine whether the news is important or not is not the only task the gatekeepers carry out (White 1997:65).

There are more responsibilities that the gatekeepers take up. The fact that two reporters can write the same story putting different perspectives of it confirms the gatekeepers' functions and responsibilities. The gatekeepers set up criteria through which news stories covered can be assessed and passed through the transmitters which make it go from one gatekeeper to another in a chain of communications. The gatekeepers can reassign a journalist or an editor to rewrite the story if the facts are deemed distorted or lacking clarity (White 1997:66). Although news gathering is too procedural, the gatekeepers make it such that news editors fill in some facts that get omitted in the process of transmission from one gatekeeper to other gatekeepers. White (1997:67) further argues that the "gatekeepers" are always experienced journalists, news editors, copy editors and bureau chiefs who have worked for many years and have had different experiences in processing news, news selections and discard those news materials that do not fall in the news category.

In his article entitled the "gatekeeper", White describes the gatekeeper as a man in his 40 years who works as wire news editor and has also held

enormous positions and conducted media researches. White further argues that the gatekeeper has handled both local and international news on daily basis. The gatekeeper deals with wire news from a number of sources such as Reuters and AP (Associated Press). He has an idea of the newspaper's readership and could understand how many people read local and international news on the newspapers. The gatekeeper receives wire news, verifies facts, edits and passes it to other editors for publication. He writes headlines of the stories that appear on tomorrow's newspaper. What makes the gatekeepers unique is the fact that they are decision makers as far as newspapers are concerned (Shoemaker, 1997).

The gatekeeper's role in news media organisations is to keep journalistic values. Given the knowledge and the experiences of the gatekeepers with news selection and news gathering, they are still faced with internal and external factors that sometimes influence their decisions on news materials. For instance, publishers are described as factors that influence what news editor considers to be a good story for the newspaper. Shareholders are also regarded as internal factors that influence news story compiled by field reporters because of their commercial interest in the newspapers. According to Shoemaker (1997:57), gatekeepers are senior editors who edit wire news services and select credible stories for newspapers. While processing the news, the gatekeepers are often faced with many complicated issues which make it very difficult for them to choose stories for newspapers. The gatekeepers do more than story selections. Thus, Shoemaker suggests that "gatekeeping" should be defined as a process of information control which

encompasses message sending and receiving that is passed through media technology.

4.3 The Impact of culture on objectivity

In this section, I shall be discussing cultural impacts on objectivity in print journalism. Objectivity in a journalistic context is a central value according to which journalists construct meanings out of events. However, its attachments to various cultures can affect its application to the extent that a journalist becomes biased towards the subject. For instance, a journalist who grew up in India would have different judgments towards news of the death of an Indian Prime Minister Sanjay Gandhi who died in a plane crash in 1986. The death of the prime minister would be hard news for all the journalists. The most interesting part of it would be that the Hindu culture does not allow burial; instead it does allow burning of the dead body. For the Hindu faithful, the burning of the body does not make news.

An African journalist, who studied journalism at an American University, would categorise this story under hard news, while putting the burning of the body under human interest features. It is likely that the Indian journalist's judgment in terms of both objectivity and newsworthiness would be affected by the Hindu culture in which he/she grew up. In other words, the burning of the dead body for an Indian replaces the burial for an African journalist, whose news judgment would not be influenced, nor his notion of objectivity, because

he comes from a different cultural background where burial of the dead is performed immediately after somebody dies.

In cases such as this, the cultural effects on what journalism practitioners and media scholars consider to be objective reporting can be seen. As far as journalism is concerned, the two journalists share many perspectives when it comes to journalism principles. On the other hand, their cultural differences cause them to have different judgments regarding news. The judgment towards breaking news for the Indian journalist has been influenced by culture and traditional beliefs. Given the fact that the two journalists come from different cultural backgrounds, the notion of objectivity remains the same, but its applications in their respective environments is the only thing that is problematic.

The distinction between sharing a perspective and the ability to understand the ideal of objectivity is a common ground between the reporters. This can also be seen among some other cultures in the Middle East, where Arabs practice female circumcision. As much as a journalist wants to cover female circumcision, the Arab culture does not permit a male to visit that side of the story. So for an Arab, it may not necessarily make news, unless it results in death - then the way in which the circumcision is performed can be questioned. For a European or some Africans, this practice would be considered as an abuse of human rights. The event would not be newsworthy for a newsman from another cultural background. Therefore, I am convinced

that cultural diversity can create a gap in journalistic practice, but can never change journalistic objectivity.

In the works of Tuchman (2000) and Lichtenberg (1997) in which they discussed the cultural impact on journalistic objectivity as well as verification of factual information as a way to be objective when dealing with news, it is clear that objectivity is the way forward. The claims of truth in newsgathering are procedures through which news materials are handled in newsrooms to attain objectivity (Tuchman, 2000). It is arguable that objectivity can only be affected if editors make wrong judgments of the news materials they have received from their field reporters.

Objectivity can often be affected because journalists strive so much to meet deadlines which do not allow them to verify the facts they have collected, and that is why they rely on direct quotes to support the story. It is arguable that some media critics who say objectivity is impossible and undesirable might have mistaken journalistic quotes for objectivity. Quotes in journalism according to Tuchman (2000:128) are regarded as first hand information from eyewitnesses or someone involved in the news. News editors are people who embark on epistemological examinations of news before they determine its publication on their news columns. This process rotates around the news validity, reliability and truth reflected in it (Tuchman, 2000:129). In the interest of objectivity editors assign their junior reporters to an investigatory assignment to substantiate the conflicting information received from the first assignment.

News selections and selections of editorial topics by editorial teams are things that are often dealt with by managing editors in newsrooms whose duty is to protect the future of the newspaper. The competition for market share in the newspaper industries is a big issue where the editor sometimes becomes the only person who can determine which story to run on the newspaper (Tuchman, 2000:130). The issues such as selections of editorial topics are left to the editor to handle because of the fear of consequences.

The independence of news from editorial and opinion columns is desirable in journalism today. The reason has been that news need to be separated from the editor's opinions and editorial columns so that journalists can strive for objectivity in their news coverage. This requires all journalism practitioners to apply professional journalism ethics and practice responsible journalism in their daily newsgathering. News selections for editorial topics are dealt with by the editorial teams which are often concerned about the future of newspapers and most importantly the market their newspapers are competing for. Some interests that influence the news the editors plan to run on their newspapers find their ways in because of factors that are unavoidable. An example is, an editor who is dealing with a story his junior reporter has written about the owner of the newspaper caught by a police officer in a sexual scandal with a 15-year-old schoolgirl. They were caught in a City Lodge where they were busy making love as his digital camera directed with remote control records (captured it on film).

The competing newspapers came to know about the story when a police van full of police officers set up a roadblock outside the city to give the culprits no chance for escape. The man was arrested and released on bail with surety worth 100,000 pounds. The editor himself wanted to run the story, however, the dilemma he was faced with now was the future of his job. He was also faced with the struggle to save both the credibility of his newspaper and his boss's image. The editor called his boss to verify facts in the story; however, the man neither confirmed nor denied the news report the editor received from his reporter. Another way of verifying what the reporter gathered would be to call the parents of the schoolgirl involved in the scandal to ask their version of the story. But the sensitivity of the story would scare away the parents of the girl and would not allow them to comment even if they knew what happened to their daughter. Although the editor claimed objectivity in this story, it would definitely be affected because the story would put his job as an editor at risk. Given the fact that the police records might give details of the accused person, the only way to handle this story would be to run it in his newspaper without giving details such as the name and the address of the accused. Knowing that newspapers sell because of credibility, the editor would not leave a novel story of that kind out (www.theory.org). According to Tuchman (2000) these are things which journalists take for granted so often.

4.4 Deadline

Deadlines are influential factors that affect news production in newsrooms. All journalists' process information in a certain span of time where they have to

structure the information collected and make it available to editors for further review and editing. Limited time forces reporters to seeking background information from familiar sources for easy access in order to enable them meet their deadlines (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Deadlines prevent journalists from embarking on in-depth reporting and make them dependable on prearranged events such as press releases, prescheduled press conferences and other numbers of sources such as Public Relations offices for information (Sessions, 2003, Tuchman, 2000). Consulting various sources would give different perspectives and information details to a story. However, a deadline may force a journalist to resort to a single source so that he can find time to sit down and write his news story. The proximity of the deadline for journalists comes with negative effects in that journalists may not find time to confirm with credible sources and this would affect objectivity and shed bad light on their newspapers because what sells the newspaper is not the story the newspaper is carrying, but its credibility (Sessions, 2003:41).

Tuchman (2000) says that each newspaper is a collection of facts assembled by journalists and news editors for news consumers to read. If, therefore, the deadline affects stories journalists write the newspaper will suffer the consequences, because the newspaper buyers will not buy it. The newspaper readers may choose to buy the other newspapers available. As the newspaper suffers in the market, the owner will hold journalists answerable and accountable for lack of objectivity in the stories published. Although journalistic objectivity is a fundamental principle among journalists in newspaper industries, however, they warn each other of inevitable mistakes

they make because of pressure of deadlines (Tuchman, 2000:131). Newspapers can avoid libel suits if their field reporters detach themselves from stories they write. Newspapers' reporters always do research for stories they are assigned to cover by their bosses, however, the pressure of deadlines and difficulties in verifying facts influences their claims of objectivity.

4.5 Organisational structure

Although newspapers use many news stories from wire services, editors are often faced with difficulties in verifying wire service stories because of the distance they come from. Wire news is always useful as international news on the newspapers and do not necessarily help reduce journalists' work loads so that they can focus more on the credibility of stories (Sessions et al, 2003). Shoemaker (1996) and Reese (1997) argue that the selection of news from wire services affect objectivity because editors find it hard to verify them. The common news sources in newspaper routines are often prescheduled news events that give opportunity for reporters to do research ahead of time and familiarise themselves with the subject background before the event takes place. These news events include court cases, city council activities, civic elections and parliamentary proceedings just to mention a few. Newspaper editors assign their reporters to cover those events and make decisions on where selected stories should be run in the newspapers (Tuchman, 2000:133).

Newspapers have structures which are often an influence on the news production and news objectivity. Their structures and policies are put in place by the newspaper management including managing editors. Shoemaker (1997) and Reese (1996) call these newsroom policies which include the editorial policy and the paper house style. Other external factors that are influential are listed as follows: News sources, Conflict of interest, Newspapers readers, advertisers and the ownership of the newspapers.

4.6 Newspaper owners

Newspaper owners can influence the decisions editors make on news stories (Gans, 1979:193). The reason being that newspaper owners do have commercial interests that do not match with the journalism principles of accuracy, balance, fairness, accountability and objectivity. The newspaper owners dictate to editors in terms of news selections to protect their other business interests. Also, newspapers' owners may want their newspapers to give support to political parties that they favour. This often put the editors in a difficult situation because editors also have to protect their professional interests (Gans, 1979:191). This situation has resulted in news being regarded as distorted because some journalists who write for newspapers are considered as subscribing to partisan political ideologies. The reason why people reach that conclusion is that journalists who support a particular political party will have their notion of objectivity affected by their political ideology.

To end, we wish to underscore the fact that the concept of objectivity is a central concept in relation to information quality (McQuail, 2000:145). In summary, the characteristics of objectivity are as follows: the adoption of a position of detachment; neutrality towards the object of reporting; separation of subjectivity or personal involvement; commitment to accuracy and truth. The ideal standard of professional reporting has been to practice journalism free from partisanship and biasness. As McQuail (2000:146) rightly put it, objectivity is crucial in newspaper industries as agencies of state pursue different interests. Newspapers established conventions of objectivity in order to distance their editorial contents from advertising matters which they run in their newspapers. Readers of the newspapers value journalistic objectivity and therefore choose newspapers which they believe are credible enough to buy and read. On the one hand, newspaper owners find that objectivity offers their newspapers higher and wider market value.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how different factors influence objectivity in print media. Media research on media content has shown that media owners have big influence on contents. As media owners tend to have business interests on their newspapers, they always focus on things that affect production of the newspapers. Thus, Tuchman (2000)'s claims of objectivity as strategic rituals works very well with media because its guidelines for journalists to cover news information the newspaper without interfering with production. Research conducted on media content tended to project on effects of the news on the

audience (readers). However, White's original work of gate-keeping suggest that journalists who select news and frame them can actually have influence on what is produced (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

Deadline: Deadline can be influential to newspaper's production. It may cause journalists to depend on prescheduled functions, press releases, and press conferences. It may force news reporters to use single news source. Tuchman (2000) argues that newspaper is a collection of many stories compiled by journalists. Whenever the deadline is so close doesn't give chance to the editors to read the stories available to ensure that objectivity is not affected. Thus, the editors' role as the gatekeepers for the newspaper is affected greatly. Consequently, the newspapers readers may experience shift of readers to the other competing newspapers. If this newspaper is running an advertisement, its business interest may be affected (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

Media organisation: The structure of media organisation can also impact objectivity in print media. Shoemaker and Reese media organisation's structure can influence decision making in newspaper production. The media organisation's structure includes the goals of news organisation, ownership patterns, news arrangement and the nature of medium.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This literature study has argued that objectivity has been one of the most debated issues in journalism. Indeed there are many in the profession who oppose it. As Gauthier (1993) observes, “(f)ew journalists or journalism scholars today would hazard calling upon the principle or ideal of objectivity. On the contrary, the majority reject or denounce the concept in almost total unanimity”. Litchenberg (2000: 238) also observes that even though “objectivity is a cornerstone of the professional ideology of journalists in liberal democracies” it has been heavily criticised. She goes on that, “aggrieved individuals and groups of all kinds charge that news coverage of this or that issue is unfair, biased, or sensational” (ibid). Ward (1999) makes similar observations. He says that “(m)edia critics claim that news objectivity is impossible because reporters are political actors, not neutral observers ... (and that) Even if objectivity were possible ... it is undesirable because it encourages reporting routines that carry their own biases, such as reinforcing the status quo”.

I have argued that objectivity is still very important in journalism and that without it journalism cannot be what we know it to be. I have tried to give various definitions of objectivity by different writers. I have discussed some of the reasons which make people attack journalists saying that they are

not objective. I have also explained some of the factors that make journalists not do their work properly and write stories that have scientific objectivity. These are problems that they meet in their daily work and that they cannot avoid. To address my fourth research objective, I now end by giving a conclusion about the importance of objectivity in journalism. I will do this by referring to a couple of writers.

I do agree with Gauthier's (1993) defence of "this much beleaguered concept; for I hold that the end of objectivity in journalism would spell the end of journalism itself. In his defence, he argues that objectivity can only be applied to that genre of news reporting known as the "news story. He goes further to argue that objectivity does not apply to news gathering. He concludes that "objectivity's essential concern is the primary, fundamental relationship between the journalist and the facts he or she reports, which is to say, the way the journalist processes information". I also agree with Litchenberg (2000: 240) that "in its core meaning we cannot coherently abandon the ideal of objectivity, and that, whatever they may think, objectivity's critics do not abandon it either." She conclude that to "believe in objectivity is not ... to believe that anyone *is* objective (but that) in so far as we aim to understand the world we cannot get along without assuming both the possibility and value of objectivity" (*ibid*: 252).

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