

# Impartiality (Journalistic Reporting Styles)

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**KEYWORDS**

*objectivity, subjectivity, opinion, commentary, professional standards*

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**Brief description**

Impartiality is a journalistic norm that requires journalists to not express their opinions within factual-based news stories and to report fairly and balanced on opinions and viewpoints from others (e.g., Bentele, 1988; Donsbach & Klett, 1993; Hackett, 2008). Based on the impartiality standard, journalists should only express their own opinions in news formats that are intended for this purpose and appropriately labelled (e.g., commentaries).

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**FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

The journalistic norm of impartiality is often analysed in the context of studies on media performance (e.g., Fahr, 2001; Maurer, 2005; Seethaler, 2015). Here, elite media outlets are often compared with popular media outlets. An increasing convergence between these types of media may also be a sign of an increasing tabloidization of elite media. However, increasingly opinionated news stories can also be regarded as an indicator of a more interpretive journalism.

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**REFERENCES/COMBINATION WITH OTHER****METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

Content analyses can be combined with survey data on the editorial policy/ ideological orientation of the respective media outlets (e.g., see Kepplinger, 2011 with his research on instrumental actualization) (see Salgado & Strömbäck, 2012 for an overview of interpretive journalism).

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**EXAMPLE STUDY**

Seethaler (2015)

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**INFORMATION ON SEETHALER, 2015**

**Author:** Josef Seethaler

**Research question:** The study is a cross-media analysis of media performance in Austria. Furthermore, media performance indicators are evaluated from the standpoint of different models of democracy (representative liberal, deliberative, participatory).

**Object of analysis:** 1) newspapers (paid press: Standard, Presse, Kleine Zeitung, Kronen Zeitung, Kurier, Oberösterreichische Nachrichten, Salzburger Nachrichten, Tiroler Tageszeitung, Vorarlberger Nachrichten); 2) newspapers (free dailies: Heute, Österreich); 3) public service/commercial and national/regional radio stations (Ö1, Ö3, FM4, KRONEHIT, ORF – Radio Niederösterreich, Radio Oberösterreich, Radio Steiermark, Radio Wien, 88.6 Wien, Antenne Steiermark, Life Radio Oberösterreich, Radio Arabella Wien, Radio Energy Wien); 4) national public service (ORF eins, ORF 2, ORF III) and commercial (ATV I, ATV II, PULS 4, ServusTV) TV stations; 5) online (derstandard.at, krone.at, oe24.at, orf.at, gmx.at)

**Time frame of analysis:** four artificial weeks (without Sundays) in 2014

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**INFO ABOUT VARIABLE**

The degree of the appearance of the journalist's point of view (in factual news formats) is evaluated on a 5-point-scale ranging from "explicitly personal" (1) to "purely distanced-impartial" (5).

**Variable name:** Unparteilichkeit [Impartiality]

**Level of analysis:** article



**Values** (in German): 1) explizit persönlich gefärbt; 2) eher persönlich gefärbt; 3) sowohl persönlich gefärbt als auch distanziert-unparteiisch; 4) eher distanziert-unparteiisch; 5) ausschließlich distanziert-unparteiisch

**Level of measurement:** ordinal

**Reliability:** six coders, Fleiss' Kappa: 0.97

**Codebook** (in German) available under: <https://www.rtr.at/medien/aktuelles/publikationen/Publikationen/SchriftenreiheNr12015.de.html>

→ see also DFG-Project “Media Performance and Democracy” (<https://en.mediaperformance.uni-mainz.de/>)

SchriftenreiheNr12015/Band1-2015.pdf

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