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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Objectivity Journalism and Objectivity in Crisis Journalism

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Interdiction:

No nation is immune to crises. In times of crisis, individuals often experience disorientation and instinctively turn to the media for information. During such periods, the public relies on media outlets to understand the nature, severity, and scope of the crisis - including the extent of damage, casualties, and financial and human losses. This is where crisis journalism fulfills its role by addressing the questions and concerns of its audience - a responsibility inherent to the field.

Journalists bear a unique responsibility due to the distinct social role of their profession. The social contract expects journalists to serve as impartial and independent communicators. While news media are expected to report objective facts, many outlets are influenced by political, ideological, and economic interests, which can shape their coverage—or lack thereof. Although objectivity is a foundational principle of journalism, its application during crises requires specific considerations. This research examines the concept of objectivity in news reporting and explores factors influencing its maintenance in crisis situations.

Method:

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach based on library research. By consulting scholarly books, domestic and international academic articles, and online sources, it reviews the perspectives of experts and scholars on the concept of objectivity in crisis journalism.

Findings:

Experts argue that maintaining objectivity in crisis journalism is complex and involves inherent tensions. The nature of the crisis significantly influences objectivity; during conflicts, for instance, security concerns and the protection of military information may prevent journalists from reporting with complete objectivity. Similarly, safeguarding individual privacy can limit objective news coverage. Conversely, some contend that journalists have a duty to report events objectively and without censorship.

Several factors influence objectivity in crisis reporting. First, the role of journalists in providing aid is debated. Proponents argue that journalists have humanitarian obligations alongside professional duties, which may affect objectivity when assisting affected individuals. Opponents, however, assert that journalists should focus solely on objective, comprehensive coverage of events.

Another factor is journalist trauma. Covering crises often exposes journalists to dangerous situations, potentially causing physical or psychological harm. Such trauma can introduce bias and affect reporting.

Finally, citizen journalism, while beneficial in many respects, poses challenges to objectivity. Due to a lack of familiarity with ethical and security considerations, citizen journalists may inadvertently spread misinformation, violate privacy, or exaggerate events due to personal or political biases. This can hinder effective crisis management. Although citizen journalism can be valuable in normal circumstances, it often presents significant challenges during crises.

Conclusions:

Given the unique characteristics of crises, objectivity in crisis journalism differs from that in other forms of reporting. It is intertwined with ethical and security considerations that demand specific guidelines. Each type of crisis requires a distinct reporting approach, and media policies should reflect these variations. Journalists must adhere to their organization's ethical and security protocols, which should be clearly outlined in comprehensive crisis guidelines. These guidelines should assist journalists in making informed decisions about publishing news and images in alignment with ethical standards.

Additionally, news organizations should provide psychological support to mitigate trauma among crisis journalists. They must also develop strategies to address challenges posed by social media, such as misinformation. Continuous monitoring of social media platforms is one potential solution.

Citizen journalists should also be educated on ethical and security standards to avoid compromising the privacy of victims and their families or hindering official crisis response efforts.

Data Availability Statement

Data available on request from the authors.

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Ethical considerations

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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