Research Paper

David Muschenich

Neutrality and values in journalism

A theoretical concept for journalism studies, borrowed from value sociology

Abstract: **Neutrality in journalism is an oft-demanded ideal and an established quality criterion. Yet the term is rightly criticized as being too vague; even some studies work with imprecise definitions. This is surprising, given that – as this paper shows – neutrality certainly can be differentiated from related terms and understood as an impartial presentation of the topics selected and researched. However, the way the values that neutrality brings with it are understood is also heterogeneous. In order to better understand this aspect, this paper borrows from value sociology to propose separating social *values* from the *value* of an object and, in the same way, understanding the process of *valuing* in the sense of attribution and *evaluating* in the sense of weighing up. This paper recommends that this approach be integrated into journalism studies and thus that the influence of values on journalism be comprehended with greater precision.**

1. Neutrality – important for journalists and their audience

Neutrality is considered one of the central standards of journalism. In fact, linguist Kaspar von Stieler was advocating neutrality in journalism as far back as 1695, arguing that it could be achieved by separating news from opinion (Schwiesau 2016: 2; Geuß 2018: 23).

Right up to the present day, studies show that the majority of journalists in Germany see neutrality as particularly important in their profession. One example is a representative study of journalists in Germany conducted in 2005, which found that »almost 90 percent of respondents want to inform their audience

neutrally and accurately« (Weischenberg/Malik/Scholl 2006: 355f.). According to a more recent representative study on journalists in Germany, »the professional self-image still [remains] dominated by the role of a neutral communicator« (Steindl/Lauerer/Hanitzsch 2017: 419), with slightly more respondents in agreement with this statement than against.

Recipients also name neutrality as a quality criterion they want to see in journalism (Rusch 2017: 517; Newman/Fletcher/Schulz/And1/Robertson/Nielsen 2021: 41). But some results appear contradictory, with respondents expecting journalism both to be neutral and to promote values: »For both the population and the journalists, however, it is not just about neutral information and communication: Both sides also consider promoting tolerance and cultural diversity to be important« (Loosen/Reimer/Hölig 2020: 30). This demonstrates once again that recipients are a heterogeneous group with different expectations – just one of the reasons why, especially when it comes to reporting on disputed issues such as the climate emergency, migration, Black Lives Matter, or the war in Ukraine, discussion ensues at various levels in Germany on whether journalism is succeeding in remaining neutral, or indeed should (cf. Brüggemann/Frech/Schäfer 2022: 7; Krüger 2021; Barfuss 2020; Matzat 2022). Instead, there are calls for journalism to take a stance – something that critics fear actually means giving a view (cf. Welchering 2020).

On the other hand, papers that examine neutrality repeatedly come to the conclusion that »neutrality does not exist« (Herrmann 2021) – or at least, »absolute neutrality does not exist« (Barfuss 2020). Although it is a desirable ideal, they argue, it is not feasible. Or it has limits that run along particular values like red lines (Lilienthal 2020: 44). The fact that people have differing ideas about the extent to which the ideal is feasible may be due to the imprecise definition of neutrality. After all, although it has clearly been a standard in journalism for a long time, neutrality remains largely unspecific (Ojala 2021: 2043).

The aim of this theoretical paper[1] is to define the concept of neutrality more precisely and provide impetus for further empirical research. In order to examine the concept of neutrality more closely, the paper will first demonstrate how neutrality differs from related concepts, which facets define neutrality, and why neutrality is considered desirable as a marker of quality. Building on this, the paper will explain that journalism studies would gain a great deal more insight by considering not neutrality but evaluations in the presentation of reporting journalism. In this, evaluations should not be understood as breaks from the norm, as presentations struggle to do without these. For this consideration, value sociology will be used as the basis for first steps towards demonstrating

---

what may be understood under societal values and how these differ from the individual value of a process, object or person.

As a further starting point, the paper will argue that it would make sense to differentiate between value attributions and evaluations when analyzing journalistic work in the context of the neutrality norm. This differentiation makes it possible to investigate and understand differences between the evaluations in more detail.

2. Related concepts

While neutrality itself is rarely the focus of theoretical and empirical work, other quality criteria are the subject of broad and critical analysis in scientific discourse. One example is balance, which has been investigated for its occurrence, origins, and effects in the context of false balance (cf. Boykoff/Boykoff 2004; Brüggemann/Engesser 2017; Benham 2020). Even in academic papers that examine neutrality, concepts of neutrality rarely extend beyond demands for the *separation of news and opinion* (Arnold 2008: 499, 2009: 196ff.; Voigt 2016: 53; Westerståhl 1983: 420). What exactly the authors mean by this is not accurately defined, and often becomes mixed up with related demands. One example of this mixing is the four concepts of (1) objectivity, (2) balance, (3) impartiality and (4) independence, which sometimes are even used synonymously (e.g. in Bilke 2008: 11). It may be true that they are related and it is not always necessary to differentiate between them in everyday usage (McQuail 1992: 201). Nor are the other terms defined uniformly. Yet the concepts certainly can be kept separate from one another and used for different aspects in research. In order to consider neutrality as a norm more closely, the terms are differentiated from other terms here. This distinction prevents misunderstandings borne out of the attribution of different meanings.

1. Objectivity in journalism can be understood as the most accurate presentation possible of intersubjectively perceptible phenomena, in which journalists attempt to give up their own particular perspective in favor of an overarching one (cf. Schultz 2021: 25-26). Assuming that journalism constructs reality, it could be put this way: Objective journalistic work should be independent of the journalists; subjective influences should be left out. If one believes journalism to be a human action in which new and relevant factual topics are researched, selected, and presented (cf. Meier 2018: 14), both the research and the selection and presentation should be based on objectivity.

2. Balance, on the other hand, relates to the selection of the positions, perspective, or experts presented, between which there should be a realistic

ratio and balance (cf. Hopmann/van Aelst/Legnante 2011: 244; Maurer/Jost/ Haßler/Kruschinski 2019: 21).

3. Impartiality refers to the requirement that journalists should not belong to a conflicting party on whom they are reporting. However, it can also be understood as an interaction between balance and neutrality (Westerståhl 1983: 420). Journalism should not give preference to any party, in the sense that no party should appear more often in the reporting or be evaluated more favorably (cf. Arnold 2016: 555).

4. Distinct from this, independence does not mean avoiding belonging to or a preference for one party in a conflict, but instead that journalists do not rely on the goodwill of others. Regardless of the influences to which journalists are subjected, the result of the journalists' work is the same (Arnold 2016: 553). In connection with credibility towards the audience, independence can also mean that journalists select topics without influence, rather than taking interests outside their profession as a guide for what they report on. A free choice of topics allows journalism to prove its independence to its audience; it has a duty to no-one but the principle of the public sphere, and that in itself makes journalism credible (cf. Pöttker 2010: 115).

In contrast, neutrality is directly linked to the presentation of journalistic work, as described below. It relates to how journalists communicate information, with the normative standard demanding that they should present it without value judgment. Where there are calls to stop valuing information, this gives rise to the counter-question of what valuing means. In an academic context, it would also be important to clarify how valuing in journalistic work can be investigated.

3. Neutrality

The call for neutral reporting accompanies journalists right from the beginning of their careers, not least in the text books they use. These text books thus lay the foundation for the way many practitioners view neutrality. In his introduction to practical journalism, for example, Walther von La Roche considers value neutrality within the framework of objectivity. When it comes to news, he claims, the rule that everyone in journalism accepts is »no comment« (Hooffacker/Meier 2017: 104). At least in the informative part of journalism, it is important that this standard is adhered to – there is enough time and space for personal opinions afterwards, he argues. This opinion must be clearly separated with a recognizable layout or a separate title. The reason von La Roche gives for this separation is that journalists' judgement can never be totally free from subjectivity; personal comments are expressed unconsciously in individual valuing words, and this must be avoided. Instead, he argues, journalists should allow the opinions of

others to be represented. It is possible to examine and prove intersubjectively whether or not an actor expressed certain opinions (Hooffacker/Meier 2017: 104–105).

Research on journalistic quality also returns to the neutrality norm time and again, often noting the democratic theory aspect of neutrality: Journalism should enable its recipients to form their own opinion (Schönbach 1977: 20–21; Arnold 2016: 552). This standard presents normative overlap with objectivity, balance, independence, and impartiality: Neither influential groups nor the journalists themselves should manipulate their audience. Recipients should be presented with reality in as unadulterated a form as possible, in order to empower them as citizens to address problems in society through democratic structures. There should be no place for »subjective valuations in journalistic presentations of reality« (Mothes 2014: 54). Instead, actors could present critique and evaluation in the articles. In this interpretation, neutrality would be »merely an objective and impersonal form of presentation« (Voigt 2016: 53). The separation of news and opinion is then »to be understood more as a separation between one's own and external aims in communication« (Schäfer-Hock 2018: 59).

However, it is also possible to argue that the choice of topic itself contradicts the ideal of reporting without personal valuation, even before the report itself comes into being. Neutral reporting is impossible, argues Arnold, because the »problem of selection and relevance« (Arnold 2009: 198) itself demands subjective evaluation. When journalists address one topic and do not cover another as a result, they are evaluating relevance. Yet despite this, there are frequent calls for journalists not to use valuation, at least in news texts (Arnold 2009: 56).

Other analyses also focus on the language used. Fahr states that »objective, impersonal language« (Fahr 2001: 25) is an aspect of neutrality, and that violating this indicates a tendency that can be measured by speaking for or against something (Fahr 2001: 83). McQuail (1992: 233) argues that part of the definition of neutrality is avoiding sensationalist reporting and instead reporting in a »dispassionate, cool, restrained and careful« way. Sensational presentation that targets emotions – including excessively dramatizing or personalizing content – is far removed from this, he argues. Neutrality thus stands in direct opposition to the need to attract the recipients' attention. As a result, it is easier to achieve the ideal of neutrality when the journalists are aware that the recipients are already highly motivated by the topic (McQuail 1992: 233). In this context, he continues, stereotypes and comparisons are particularly relevant. Although they are also needed for simplification in short news stories (McQuail 1992: 234f.), they are also associated with positive or negative images. Their use is therefore always a threat to neutrality, as they bring a valuation along with them (cf. also Hooffacker/Meier 2017: 106).

4. Difficulties in recording neutrality

The separation of news and opinion is easy to demand in practice – it is with its specific implementation and research that problems arise. Although Voigt (2016: 53), for example, writes that neutrality is simple to record, in the experiment she describes – in which neutrality was just one of several quality aspects investigated – the participants found it difficult to recognize articles that had been classified as valuing and to evaluate them accordingly (Voigt 2016: 209). Those surveyed in the experiment were divided into two groups, each of which was given an article on the topic of »raising the pension age to 67 years« (Voigt 2016: 163) – a subject that was the subject of much public discussion at the time of the experiment. The two articles differed in terms of how balanced their choice of sources was and whether the author spoke out against raising the pension age (n=179) or did not express a valuation (n=169). As an example of the evaluation in the first group's article, the author names the »title, in which he [the apparent author of the article] labels a pension age of 67 unfair and unrealistic« (Voigt 2016: 163). Having read the article, the participants were asked to evaluate it based on a series of quality criteria. One of the items was: »The article is written in a neutral voice, i.e. the journalist does not give his own valuation of the situation« (Voigt 2016: 203). The analysis showed no significant difference between the way the two groups assessed neutrality. However, it did become clear that the duration of reception had an influence on the evaluation of neutrality. The longer the participants spent on an article, the more widely their evaluations differed. The respondents in the group with the valuing article gave a lower value for its neutrality on average. From this, Voigt draws the conclusion that, »when it comes to perceiving the neutrality of a news item, recipients have problems even where there are clear quality deficiencies« (Voigt 2016: 209). The reasons behind this in the experiment are unclear. One hypothesis could be that the respondents did not perceive the valuation because they felt it was an adequate description of reality. The hostile media effect or framing research would be good places to start in explaining this.

The hostile media effect is the phenomenon that recipients perceive »even balanced newspaper reports [as] biased« (Eberl 2020: 9). It has been proven that political opinion plays a role here. Where recipients are heavily involved in a political topic, they tend to accuse journalistic pieces of supporting the opposite side. Like political opinion, a recipient's personal value priorities could also influence the perception and effect of journalistic pieces.

If one follows framing research, it is impossible to adhere to the assumption that facts and valuations can be kept separate. According to this theory, frames are patterns of interpretation that highlight certain aspects while marginalizing or ignoring others. The aspects or frame elements are linked together in a

certain way (Kühne 2014: 25). In this, frames comprise four elements: (1) defining the problem in the context of shared cultural values, (2) describing the causes, (3) evaluating the causes and their effects, and (4) attributing the solution (Entman 1993: 52). As the »terms« (Brosius/Dan 2020: 267) used for the frames play a vital role here, the language itself can be considered problematic in achieving the standard of value neutrality, as it is »never totally neutral or value-free« (Fischer 2020: 33). In the »lexicalization of sematic content« (Fischer 2020: 34), argues Fischer, meanings and thus valuations are always attributed. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that value-free presentation as such is not possible, even in news.

5. Values in the German media system

Furthermore, it is worth considering whether value neutrality is actually desired in German journalism. Arnold (2009), for example, points out that there are legal differences between the media in Germany, where the press does not have a legal obligation to neutrality in the sense of separating news and opinion. Nor does the Press Code mention any obligation in this regard under professional ethics. Objectivity is considered part of the duty of care, for example in state press laws, but the idea is more to prevent »excessively sensational presentation« (Arnold 2009: 197) than to limit valuations by journalists. In contrast, for public service media, the general provisions of the State Media Treaty (MStV) § 6 state that news and comment are to be separated and that, in the case of comment pieces, the author must be named. In addition, public service broadcasters »should take into account the principles of objectivity and impartiality in reporting, diversity of opinion, and the balance of their services« (§ 26 Para. 2 MStV). Yet although the State Media Treaty prescribes a separation of news and opinion, in line with the classic quality criteria of journalism that provides neutral information, it also calls on public service media to promote certain values. In relation to broadcast services, for example, § 26 MStV not only demands that they present »international, European, national, and regional events« (§ 26 Para. 1 MStV), but also that they promote »international understanding, European integration, and social cohesion at federal and state level« (§ 26 Para. 1 MStV).

In addition to the State Treaty that applies across Germany, there are also specific rules for each of ARD's public service broadcasters at state level. These also contain different values, based on the German Basic Law among others. Services provided by NDR, for example, are »tied to the constitutional order« (§ 7 Para. 1 NDR State Treaty) and must »respect and protect human dignity« (§ 7 Para. 2 NDR State Treaty). Alongside this, the norms of the state treaties contain values such as freedom and peace, as well as an array of regulations defining

international and regional connections. Although a large part of what the public service broadcasters offer is entertainment, these standards also apply to their journalistic formats.

It is far from certain, however, whether the prescribed values really influence the content of the journalism offered by the public service broadcasters. So far, no specific research into this has been conducted. Yet some studies do suggest that media evaluate and, in doing so, keep an eye on certain values (cf. Scheufele/Engelmann 2013). This is not necessarily a new development. As far back as 25 years ago, Schönbach (1977) investigated whether and how media in Germany stick to the stipulation of separating news and opinion (Schönbach 1977: 29). To do this, he analyzed how newspapers and broadcasters reported on the »Berlin problem« at the time (Schönbach 1977: 33) and how comment pieces were linked to the news section.

In Schönbach's view, however, the standard of neutrality means more than just not allowing valuation to infiltrate news. He argues that the standard of neutrality can be divided into (1) *explicit* mixing of news and opinion, where »valuing formulations [appear] in reporting« (Schönbach 1977: 48), and (2) *implicit* mixing, where news and opinion appear in separate texts, but run in parallel in a medium and the reporting is distorted or abbreviated as a result (Schönbach 1977: 52ff.). By *running in parallel*, he means that the reporting is adapted to the comment pieces.

As the assumption behind his argument, Schönbach describes how editorial offices are organizations that represent certain norms, to which their employees adapt: the »editorial line« (Schönbach 1977: 131). This line is set by social mechanisms, relatively stable, and may or should influence the opinion section of a journalistic medium. When, however, the choice of news fits in with the arguments from the comment pieces, the news selection adapts to the editorial line in the opinion section and the reporting becomes distorted (Schönbach 1977: 132). Journalism is only neutral, he continues, if it is based on generally recognized selection mechanisms defined by news factors. After all, these are the features that are worth reporting on for most journalists (cf. Galtung et al. 1970: 259ff., quoted in Schönbach 1977: 140). Yet the fact that something is worthy of reporting is, in turn, merely attributed by the journalists.

The study results show that the editorial lines had an influence on the reporting and that the separation of news and opinion was »not normal« in the media investigated (Schönbach 1977: 114). As the starting situation of both journalism and society has changed significantly since 1977 (cf. Steindl et al. 2017: 404ff.), it is presumed here that the specific results on the individual news media cannot be applied to today. In addition, later studies show that the evaluation in the articles by quoted sources, the »opportune witnesses« (Hagen 1992), correlates with the editorial line (a summary table in Bachl/Vögele 2013: 349). Other results, on the other hand, question whether the editorial line can really be used to draw conclusions on the political evaluations in journalistic work (cf. e.g. Scheufele/

Engelmann 2013: 544). However, the editorial line was often located as a point on a left-right dichotomy here. More recent studies could take this on board and examine the connection between editorial values and journalistic output in a more targeted way.[2]

There is, however, also the argument that deliberate evaluation in journalism may be necessary in some circumstances. This argument goes that the standard of neutrality itself relates to values of democratic theory in most cases – values that journalists need to defend (Lilienthal 2020). The German Basic Law defines ethical limits, and »there can be no neutrality where red lines are crossed« (Lilienthal 2020: 44). Going yet further, Brüggemann et al. (2022) even argue that neutrality can get in the way of the standard of depicting reality as accurately and objectively as possible. The authors use the example of the climate emergency to illustrate their point. If, in reporting on this topic, journalists depict positions that are not based on empirical findings, and the journalists evaluate them as such, recipients will be able to gain a better understanding of the situation. This idea is advocated by transformative journalism, in order to stand up for the »ultimate public good« (Brüggemann et al. 2022: 2; cf. Krüger 2022): in this case, maintaining the planet's ecological balance.

It is clear, therefore, that completely neutral journalistic work is an ideal that, for various empirical and epistemological reasons, cannot be put into practice in its entirety. There is thus little to be gained from examining neutrality as such in a binary way. In order to move the discussion on neutrality and values in journalism forward, a promising approach instead appears to be examining the opposite: researching evaluation in the presentation of journalistic reports, without seeing it exclusively as a violation of the norm. This will require further differentiation, since clearly not all evaluation is created equal. Although evaluation is connected to valuation, the connection has so far been somewhat vague. Even ›valuation‹ as a term is unclear (cf. Kjellberg/Mallard 2013). Yet the ›sociology of valuation‹ does provide some approaches that could also be beneficial to further studies in journalism studies.

6. Differentiating between value, values, valuing, and evaluating

When it comes to analyzing empirical value attribution and evaluation phenomena, Krüger and Reinhart (2016) recommend two separations of the terms. Firstly,

---

2 Privately-owned newspapers and online media sometimes publicly commit to values – another potential approach to analysis. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), for example, sees itself as a »liberal-conservative voice in business, politics, and culture,« while the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* proclaims a »clear position against exploitation, inhumanity, and intolerance,« and the right-wing weekly newspaper *Junge Freiheit* names »nation,« »freedom,« »conservatism,« and »Christianity« as values that it upholds.

they argue, the processes of *valuation* – in the sense of attributing value – and *evaluation* must be consciously separated from one another. Secondly, the same should be done for the theoretical concepts of societal *values* and the *value* of an object.

According to the authors, value (singular) describes the categorization of certain features of people, practices, and objects as valuable or valueless, and forms the basis for assessment and comparison (Krüger/Reinhart 2016: 497). »Central to the useful interpretation of subjective experiences« (Krüger/Reinhart 2016: 490), it is not inherent to the objects, people, or processes themselves, but is attributed to them. To take the experiment by Voigt (2016) mentioned above as an example from journalism, if the author describes the plan to raise the pension age to 67 as »unfair« (Voigt 2016: 163), he attributes meaning to the fairness in this plan and categorizes fairness as a feature for assessment – i.e. as value. Like others, this value draws on further social concepts in order to contribute to interpretation. »Ideas about what is specifically valuable always arise in the context of societal values« (Krüger/Reinhart 2016: 491). Despite this inseparable connection between value (singular) and values (plural), they are two distinct concepts.

To distinguish them from value, societal values can be defined as »ideational entities to which a particular binding force for action is attributed« (Krüger/Reinhart 2016: 490). Values could be seen as benchmarks for action. The problem that arises when researching values is similar to that for neutrality: Values, too, are constructed, immaterial phenomena that cannot be experienced intersubjectively; it is important to set out what exactly values are (Fornoff 2018: 67).

Other authors, too, see values as »the most general basic principles of action orientation« (Schäfers 2016: 39). Many draw on Max Weber's theory that human actions are orientated on values (Weber 1904: 25f.). The values serve to provide justification: In a relation between ends and means, they are the ends that determine how appropriate the means – i.e. actions – are. However, in order to gain meaning in society and thus the ability to justify human actions, they must first be socially recognized. After all, in theory, many things could be conceived as values (cf. Joas 1999). »De facto values in the sense of a heuristic concept in social sciences are [only] values that have been or are being recognized in community and, through this independence from a historical society, are in principle changeable, relative, and particular« (Fenner 2020: 191).

In everyday life, values usually firm up through norms (Schäfers 2016: 39). Norms can be understood as rules and standards for action that »can claim to be generally binding« (Fenner 2020: 190). »While values have a general function in providing orientation, the norms provide instruction on the concrete implementation of the abstract values« (Fenner 2020: 191). In contrast to norms, which are secured by social sanctions (Popitz 1980: 21), »stepping over the line« (Fornoff 2018: 68) and punishment for this is not possible when it comes to mere norms.

It is thus easy to understand the idea of values as »ideas of what is desirable, i.e. ideas or ideals that serve to assess desires and cannot be equated with the pursued objects« (Reinhardt 2016: 98).

It is widely assumed that each society has a dominant system of values that forms »the basic framework of the culture« (Schäfers 2016: 39). This is contradicted by the idea that multiple systems of values compete with one another in a system and are sometimes in a conflict-ridden relationship with one another (Neuberger 2020: 49). This relationship is hard to pin down, however, because values are largely immaterial constructs. Yet is it indisputable that they influence the way people perceive reality – or, to put it philosophically, »We need values, because they are nothing in themselves, but they can be anything (possible) to us. Values are not given to us. They are made. By us, for us« (Sommer 2016: 163). If values are made, they can be subject to change. They »transform in interaction of groups and individuals« (Sommer 2016: 171), and are also transitory (Sommer 2016: 165). At the same time, this makes it clear that values of a group or society may have been formed through a mixture of its history and more or less random events.

When considered this way, it is no surprise that some of the values in the various value catalogs overlap, while others do not. For McQuail (2013: 67), for example, »freedom; justice/equality; order/solidarity« are the essential values of a »western society« (McQuail 2013: 54). Yet they are not found in this form in a study by Scheufele and Engelmann (2013) – the closest match there is the »solidarity principle« (Scheufele/Engelmann 2013: 539), although they do relate their values more specifically to political fields such as finance, business, work, and social affairs. The specific values they mention include environmental sustainability, market liberalism, and peace/pacifism (cf. Scheufele/Engelmann 2013: 539). Different again, Neuberger sets out seven values with which to evaluate the quality of democratic public life. Alongside the overall societal values of freedom and equality also named by McQuail, Neuberger also lists diversity, distribution of power, criticism and control, integration, and security. In addition, he considers the communication-specific values of information and discourse quality relevant in evaluating democratic public life (Neuberger 2019: 437, 2020: 42). Both are derived from deliberation theory. In relation to his catalog of values, Neuberger admits that it is not a conclusive system, but it meets his needs (Neuberger 2020: 41).

In modern democracies in particular, it can be assumed that there are different perspectives on values, for example different systems of values, that apply at the same time. After all, although values develop their effect in the context of society, »a relation to the subject of the valuation indelibly clings to the term of the ›value‹« (Joas 1999: 39). Numerous subjects result in numerous perspectives. On the one hand, this can mean that the democratic state can only »demand a

minimal consensus on democratic values« (Neuberger 2020: 3) in order to shape the desired pluralism of values legitimately.

As well as between value and values, Krüger and Reinhart (2016: 492) also differentiate between the processes of valuation and evaluation. Valuation is to be understood as the attribution of value – a process in which objects, people, or processes are initially »defined as potentially valuable or valueless« (Krüger/ Reinhart 2016: 497). This ascribes meaning to them within the complex reality. As a result, the attribution of value can be considered »constitutive for any social order and the social construction of reality« (Krüger/Reinhart: 487), they argue. This process is »always also [related to] questions of generating the power of interpretation« (Nicolae/Endreß/Berli/Bischur 2019: 14).

On the other hand, it is this attribution that then allows the second process: evaluation. This can be understood as considerations with which objects, practices, and people are assessed comparatively as better or worse, based on certain criteria« (Krüger/Reinhart 2016: 497). The difference between the two social processes, they say, is largely of an analytical nature; empirically, they are »practically indissolubly linked together« (Krüger/Reinhart 2016: 494). This can be demonstrated using the example of the unfair pension plan again: While the author attributes the value of fairness to the plan, he also conducts an evaluation that allows a comparison with other plans.

7. Summary and outlook

The analytical separation of these two processes and of the two terms ›value‹ and ›values‹ could aid understanding of valuations in journalism, their differences, and their consequences. This would allow a more sophisticated examination of who is attributing value and who is evaluating the people, objects, or situations. In turn, this would make it possible to examine the idea that journalists should only include evaluations from stakeholders in their work (Voigt 2016: 53). The effect on recipients could also be examined here.

Assuming that evaluations are perceived differently by different people, it would be interesting to get to the bottom of whether the legality of the values is behind the valuation. If the value that forms the basis of the evaluation can be used to draw a conclusion as to the values behind it, it would be possible to differentiate here. For example, one could test the theory that (e)valuations are not perceived as such when they are based on values that are shared by the recipients. After all, in this case, the recipients could perceive it as a self-evident and adequate description of reality. Within this, it would be interesting to see whether there are differences between groups. However, even with this differentiation, drawing a conclusion on values based on the value is not easy. There is a

»connection« between them that is »difficult-to-determine« (Krüger/Reinhart 2016: 490). Other studies that have looked at values have come to the same conclusion. Scheufele and Engelmann (2013: 563) used similar methods to examine »value frames.« In this study, the reliability in the coding of the values was just 67 percent – although this was considered acceptable in the study, with the following justification:

> »Firstly, it is important to note the high level of abstraction in the category, which means that very high values such as those in simple topic analyses cannot be expected. Secondly, the coders did not recognize completely different values (e.g. freedom instead of solidarity), but often values with a similar content (e.g. equality instead of justice). Thirdly, these cases are compensated when the values are combined during analysis. Fourthly, the reliability was not lower than in comparable studies (cf. Eilders/Lüter 1998: 59f.; Voltmer 1997: 181)« (Scheufele/Engelmann 2013: 539).

Krüger and Reinhart (2016: 495) also note that the origin of value attribution could be another relevant aspect for social research. They assume that emotions play a particular role here – one that has been neglected up to now. This approach, however, requires further elaboration. As part of this, they argue, it would be possible to examine when journalists consider an evaluation appropriate and whether the attribution comes from them, or they adopt it from someone else.

Values have an impact on everyday communication and thus on journalism, too. One way in which this impact is seen is in the value that journalists attribute to people, processes, or objects, or that they use for assessment there. As this paper shows, differentiating conceptionally between this value and societal values can help to adopt new perspectives in journalism studies. In addition, it enables us to differentiate between value attribution and evaluation, to develop studies that can be used to record the effect of valuing journalism in a new way: Why and how do journalists value? What effect does this have? Why are certain valuations apparently accepted while others are not? All this could then be used as a basis for learning more about the influence of societal values on journalism. After all, evaluation by journalists can help us to draw conclusions on societal values. So far, however, this approach remains highly theoretical in nature – it would need to be set out in more concrete terms for empirical investigations. The most important part will be to work out which values are to be considered. The aforementioned value catalogs provide a starting point for this, but they are not fully developed systems either.

This would, however, allow the societal values complex to be incorporated into analysis of journalistic work. As a result, journalism could be considered in a more sophisticated way – especially evaluations in journalistic presentation. The approach thus takes the real situation into account. As already demonstrated in this paper, evaluative journalism can help to describe reality more accurately and thus to fulfil the normative goal of objectivity better than when journalism

adheres to complete (value) neutrality. Because this is not possible, for the reasons described, it also appears more useful to move away from recording neutrality in binary form. Instead, examining valuing and evaluating journalism in a sophisticated way against the background of standards of democratic theory could also contribute to the discussion of the extent to which valuing and evaluating are seen as specific qualities in journalism.

About the author

David Muschenich (*1996) is currently a trainee at *die tageszeitung*. He studied journalism at the University of Leipzig and social sciences and economics at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Erfurt.

Translation: Sophie Costella

References

Arnold, Klaus (2008): Qualität im Journalismus – ein integratives Konzept. *Publizistik*, 53(1), pp. 488-508. https://doi.org/10.1007/PL00022233

Arnold, Klaus (2009): *Qualitätsjournalismus*. Die Zeitung und ihr Publikum. Konstanz: UVK.

Arnold, Klaus (2016): Qualität des Journalismus. In: Löffelholz, Martin; Rothenberger, Liane (eds.): *Handbuch Journalismustheorien*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 551-563.

Bachl, Marko; Vögele, Catharina (2013): Guttenbergs Zeugen? Eine Replikation und Erweiterung von Hagens (1992) »Die opportunen Zeugen« anhand der Berichterstattung über Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg im Kontext der Plagiatsaffäre. In: *Medien/Kommunikationswissenschaft*, 61(3), pp. 345-367. https://doi.org/10.5771/1615-634x-2013-3-345

Barfuss, Thore: Journalismus sollte immer neutral sein. In: *Welt*, 16.06.2020. Verfügbar unter https://web.archive.org/web/20200630141443/https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article209709283/Medien-Journalismus-sollte-immer-neutral-sein.html (8 May 2022)

Beisch, Natalie; Schäfer, Carmen (2020): Internetnutzung mit Großer Dynamik. In: Medien, Kommunikation, Social Media. Ergebnisse der ARD/ZDF-Onlinestudie 2020. In: *Media Perspektiven*, (9), pp. 462–481.

Benham, Janelle (2020): Best Practices for Journalistic Balance: Gatekeeping, Imbalance and the Fake News Era. In: *Journalism Practice*, 14(7), pp. 791-811. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2019.1658538

Bilke, Nadine (2008): *Qualität in der Krisen- und Kriegsberichterstattung. Ein Modell für einen konfliktsensitiven Journalismus*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Boykoff, Maxwell. T.; Boykoff, Jules. M. (2004): Balance as bias. Global warming and the US prestige press. In: *Global Environmental Change*, 14(2), pp. 125-136. DOI: 10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2003.10.001.

Brosius, Hans-Bernd; Dan, Viorela (2020): Framing im Nachrichtenjournalismus. In: Köhler, Tanja (ed.): *Fake News, Framing, Fact-Checking: Nachrichten im digitalen Zeitalter.* Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, pp. 265-282.

Brüggemann, Michael; Engesser, Sven (2017): Beyond false balance: How interpretive journalism shapes media coverage of climate change. In: *Global Environmental Change* 42, pp. 58-67. DOI: 10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2016.11.004

Brüggemann, Michael; Frech, Jannis; Schäfer, Torsten (2022): Transformative Journalisms: How the ecological crisis is transforming journalism. In Hansen, Anders (ed.): *The Routledge Handbook of Environment and Communication* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge. Preprint DOI: 10.31219/osf.io/mqv5w

Eberl, Jakob-Moritz (2020): Medienbias. In: Borucki, Isabelle; Kleinen-von Königslöw, Katharina; Marschall, Stefan; Zerback, Thomas (eds.): *Handbuch Politische Kommunikation*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-26242-6_32-1

Entman, Robert M. (1993): Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. In: *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), pp. 51-58.

Fahr, Andreas (2001): *Katastrophale Nachrichten? Eine Analyse der Qualität von Fernsehnachrichten*. Munich: R. Fischer.

Fenner, Dagmar (2020): *Ethik. Wie soll ich handeln?* (2nd, completely revised and expanded edition). Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag.

Fischer, Carolin (2020): Die Flüchtlingsflut in unseren Köpfen: Metaphorisches Framing von Geflüchteten im deutschen Zeitungsdiskurs. In: *Journalistik*, 3(1), pp. 33-48. https://doi.org/10.1453/2569-152X-12020-10310-de

Fornoff, Roger (2018): *Migration, Demokratie Werte: Politisch-kulturelle Bildung im Kontext von Deutsch als Zweitsprache*. Göttingen: University Press.

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung: Porträt der F.A.Z. In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22.06.2017. https://verlag.faz.net/unternehmen/ueber-uns/portraet/portraet-der-f-a-z-wissen-fuer-kluge-koepfe-11090906.html (8 May 2022)

Geuß, Annika (2018): *Qualität im Journalismus. Eine Synopse zum aktuellen Forschungsstand*. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press.

Hagen, Lutz (1992): Die opportunen Zeugen. Konstruktionsmechanismen von Bias in der Zeitungsberichterstattung über die Volkszählungsdiskussion. In: *Publizistik*, 37(4), pp. 444-460.

Herrmann, Ulrike (2021): Medien und Neutralität: Neutralität gibt es nicht. In: *taz, die Tageszeitung*, dated 14 October 2021. https://web.archive.org/

web/20211102023447/https://taz.de/Medien-und-Neutralitaet/!5804654/ (8 May 2022).

Hooffacker, Gabriele; Meier, Klaus (2017): *La Roches Einführung in den praktischen Journalismus: Mit genauer Beschreibung aller Ausbildungswege Deutschland · Österreich · Schweiz* (20. Aufl.). Wiesbaden: Springer VS. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-658-16658-8

Hopmann, David N.; Van Aelst, Peter; Legnante, Guido (2011): Political balance in the news: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. In: *Journalism*, 13(2), pp. 240-257. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911427804

Joas, Hans (1999): *Die Entstehung der Werte*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.

Junge Freiheit: Leitbild der JF. Dated 17 July 2019. https://assets.jungefreiheit.de/2019/07/17-Leitbild-der-JF.pdf (8 May 2022)

Kjellberg, Hans; Mallard, Alexandre (2013): Valuation Studies? Our Collective Two Cents. In: *Valuation Studies*, 1(1), 11-30. https://doi.org/10.3384/vs.2001-5992.131111

Krüger, Anne K.; Reinhart, Martin (2016): Wert, Werte und (Be-)Wertung. Eine erste begriffs- und prozesstheoretische Sondierung der aktuellen Soziologie der Bewertung. In: *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, 26(3-4), pp. 485-500. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11609-017-0330-x

Krüger, Uwe (2021): Geburtshelfer für öko-soziale Innovationen: Konstruktiver Journalismus als Entwicklungskommunikation für westlich-kapitalistische Gesellschaften in der Krise. In: Borchers, Nils S.; Güney, Selma: Krüger, Uwe; Schamberger, Kerem (eds.): *Transformation der Medien – Medien der Transformation. Verhandlungen des Netzwerks Kritische Kommunikationswissenschaft*. Frankfurt/M.: Westend, pp. 356-380. (Open Access), DOI: https://doi.org/10.53291/SDTM5470

Krüger, Uwe (2022): Transformativer Journalismus: Ein neues Berichterstattungsmuster für das Anthropozän. In: KLIMA° vor acht e.V. (eds.): *Medien in der Klimakrise*. Munich: oekom, pp. 161-171.

Kühne, Rinaldo (2014): *Emotionale Framing-Effekte auf Einstellungen: Eine theoretische Modellierung und empirische Überprüfung der Wirkungsmechanismen*. Baden-Baden: Nomos. https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845259383

Lilienthal, Volker (2020): Rechtspopulismus als Herausforderung für die Medien: Die Medienkritik der AfD und der journalistische Umgang mit der Partei. In Grimm, Petra; Zöllner, Oliver (eds.): *Digitalisierung und Demokratie: Ethische Perspektiven*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, pp. 37-51.

Loosen, Wiebke; Reimer, Julius; Hölig, Sascha (2020): *Was Journalisten wollen und sollen: (In-)Kongruenzen zwischen journalistischem Rollenselbstverständnis und Publikumserwartungen* (Projektbericht Nr. 49). Hans-Bredow-Institut.

Maurer, Marcus; Jost, Pablo; Haßler, Jörg; Kruschinski, Simon (2019): Auf den Spuren der Lügenpresse. In: *Publizistik*, 64(1), pp. 15-35. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-018-00466-y

Matzat, Lorenz: Thesen zum Transformativen Journalismus. In: *Das Klimathema*, 01.02.2022. https://das-klima-thema.de/thesen-zum-transformativen-journalismus (8 May 2022)

McQuail, Denis (1992): *Media performance. Mass communication and the public interest*. London: Sage.

McQuail, Denis (2013): *Journalism and society*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Meier, Klaus (2018): *Journalistik* (4th revised edition). Konstanz: UVK.

Mothes, Cornelia (2014): *Objektivität als professionelles Abgrenzungskriterium im Journalismus. Eine dissonanztheoretische Studie zum Informationsverhalten von Journalisten und Nicht-Journalisten*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Neuberger, Christoph (2019): Öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk und Qualitätsdiskurs: Substanzielle und prozedurale Bestimmung des gesellschaftlichen Mehrwerts. In: *Media Perspektiven*, (10), pp. 434–443.

Neuberger, Christoph (2020): *Funktionale und defekte Öffentlichkeit in der Demokratie: Analyse und Anwendung am Beispiel der Schweiz*. Wissenschaftliche Studie im Auftrag des Bundesamtes für Kommunikation BAKOM, Abteilung Medien. https://www.bakom.admin.ch/dam/bakom/de/dokumente/bakom/elektronische_medien/Zahlen%20und%20Fakten/Studien/analyse-und-anwendung-am-beispiel-der-schweiz.pdf.download.pdf/2020_Gut_BAKOM_Funktionale_und_defekte_%C3%96ffentlichkeit_Neuberger.pdf (08 May 2022)

Nicolae, Stefan; Endreß, Martin; Berli, Oliver; Bischur, Daniel (2019): Soziologie des Wertens und Bewertens. Zur Einführung in die Reihe »Sociology of Valuation and Evaluation«. In Nicolae, Stefan; Endreß, Martin; Berli, Oliver; Bischur, Daniel (eds.): *Soziologie des Wertens und Bewertens*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 3-20.

Newman, Nic; Fletcher, Richard; Schulz, Anne; Andı, Simge; Robertson, Craig. T.; Nielsen, Rasmus K. (2021): *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Ojala, Markus (2021): Is the Age of Impartial Journalism Over? The Neutrality Principle and Audience (Dis)trust in Mainstream News. In: *Journalism Studies*, 22(15), pp. 2042-2060, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2021.1942150

Popitz, Heinrich (1980): *Die normative Konstruktion von Gesellschaft*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

Pöttker, Horst (2010): Der Beruf zur Öffentlichkeit. In: *Publizistik*, 55(2), pp. 107-128. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-010-0083-4

Rusch, Roman (2017): Erfolgreich mit Konstruktivem Journalismus?! Ergebnisse einer Zuschauerbefragung im öffentlich-rechtlichen Magazinjournalismus. In: *ComSoc*, 50(4), pp. 509-520. DOI: 10.5771/0010-3497-2017-4-509

Reinhardt, Sibylle (2016): Wertorientierte Demokratiepolitik. In: Friedrichs, Werner; Lange, Dirk (eds.): *Bürgerbewusstsein. Demokratiepolitik:*

Vermessungen – Anwendungen – Probleme – Perspektiven. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 95-109.

Schäfer-Hock, Christian (2018): *Journalistische Darstellungsformen im Wandel. Eine Untersuchung deutscher Tageszeitungen von 1992 bis 2012*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Schäfers, Bernhard (2016): Soziales Handeln und seine Grundlagen. Normen, Werte, Sinn. In: Korte, Hermann; Schäfers, Bernhard (eds.): *Einführungskurs Soziologie. Einführung in Hauptbegriffe der Soziologie* (9. Aufl.). Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 23-48.

Scheufele, Bertram; Engelmann, Ines (2013): Die publizistische Vermittlung von Wertehorizonten der Parteien. Normatives Modell und empirische Befunde zum Value-Framing und News Bias der Qualitäts- und Boulevardpresse bei vier Bundestagswahlen. In: *Medien/Kommunikationswissenschaft*, 61(4), pp. 532-550. https://doi.org/10.5771/1615-634x-2013-4-532

Schönbach, Klaus (1977): *Trennung von Nachricht und Meinung. Empirische Untersuchung eines journalistischen Qualitätskriteriums*. Freiburg [Breisgau], Munich: Alber-Broschur.

Schultz, Tanjev (2021): Der Reporter-Blick von nirgendwo? Journalismus in der Spannung zwischen Objektivität und Subjektivität. In: *Publizistik*, 66(1), pp. 21-41. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-020-00624-1

Schwiesau, Dietz (2016): Faszination Nachricht. In: Schwiesau, Dietz; Ohler, Josef (eds.): *Nachrichten – klassisch und multimedial. Ein Handbuch für Ausbildung und Praxis*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 1-10.

Sommer, Andreas U. (2016): *Werte. Warum man sie braucht, obwohl es sie nicht gibt*. Berlin: J.B. Metzler.

Steindl, Nina; Lauerer, Corinna; Hanitzsch, Thomas (2017): Journalismus in Deutschland. Aktuelle Befunde zu Kontinuität und Wandel im deutschen Journalismus. In: *Publizistik*, 62(4), pp. 401-423. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-017-0378-9

Süddeutsche Zeitung: SZ-Wertepapier. Unser Wert, unsere Werte. In: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24.01.2020. https://projekte.sueddeutsche.de/artikel/verlag/sz-wertepapier-unser-wert-unsere-werte-e766877/ (8 May 2022).

Voigt, Juliane (2016): *Nachrichtenqualität aus Sicht der Mediennutzer. Wie Rezipienten die Leistung des Journalismus beurteilen können*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Weber, Max (1904): Die »Objektivität« sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis. In: *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 19(1), pp. 22-87. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-50770-8

Weischenberg, Siegfried; Malik, Maja; Scholl, Armin (2006): Journalismus in Deutschland 2005. Zentrale Befunde der aktuellen Repräsentativbefragung deutscher Journalisten. In: *Media Perspektiven*, (7), pp. 346-361.

Welchering, Peter (2020): Gesinnung oder Haltung: Klärung in einer journalistischen Werte- und Erkenntnisdebatte. In: *Journalistik*, 3(3), pp. 234-249.

Westerståhl, Jörgen (1983): Objektive News Reporting. General Premises. In: *Communication Research*, 10(3), pp. 403-424.