

Levels of Iraqi Newspapers' Commitment to Standards of Objectivity from the Perspective of the Public in Baghdad: A Field Study of the Public in Baghdad

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Abstract

The research discusses the levels of commitment to the standards of objectivity by Iraqi newspapers. Several standards of objectivity were identified, and the public was asked about the extent of their application in journalistic work from the point of view of the sample members, which consists of 375 individuals representing the public of the city of Baghdad of various ages, professions, educational levels, and gender. The research consists of a methodological framework, a theoretical framework, and an applied study. The researcher adopted the descriptive approach and a questionnaire form with closed questions.

Keywords: *Objectivity, Iraqi Newspapers, Objective Standards, Levels of Commitment, Neutrality, and Integrity.*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of objectivity and adherence to its standards constitutes one of the most prominent challenges facing the media, including journalism, because of the connection between objectivity and the issue of credibility of the media, determining the nature of the relationship between the media and the audience receiving the media message, and the effects and repercussions of all these issues on society and the prevailing political, social and cultural system in it.

Objectivity is a complex issue that is difficult to measure commitment to by the press, as it differs and varies according to time, place, journalistic work ethics, and media honor codes in each country.

This research seeks to reveal an approach to the issue of objectivity in the Iraqi press and the levels of commitment to it from the point of view of the public, represented by the public of the city of Baghdad, by defining standards that can be measured and applied according to modern media studies.

It consists of an introduction, a methodological framework, a theoretical framework, and a comprehensive analytical study through a questionnaire form with questions that answer the research objectives in detail.

The research adopted the descriptive survey method because it is the most appropriate for audience studies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Problem

Objectivity is a very important characteristic of any media and an essential factor for testing media content at a time when there are multiple media outlets, and information is constantly flowing.

Given that the media, including the press, represents the primary source for obtaining information, as the public relies on it to form its opinions and viewpoints regarding many issues, events, and topics, the objectivity of these media for the public is therefore linked to its selection of the specific media outlet over other means.

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The research problem was determined by explaining the most important standards of objectivity that characterize Iraqi newspapers from the public's point of view and knowing the dimensions of their application by Iraqi newspapers.

Research Aims

The research requires maintaining the following objectives:

Revealing the levels of commitment of Iraqi newspapers to standards of objectivity in their journalistic work.

Determine the basic standards of objectivity that Iraqi newspapers adhere to.

Explain the importance of objectivity in achieving the credibility of the Iraqi press.

Research Importance

The importance of the research stems from the following considerations:

The importance of the press in shaping the public's opinions and viewpoints on national and social issues and topics increased among public opinion.

The importance of objectivity in achieving the credibility of journalism and building mutual trust with the public.

The need to shed light on the experience of the Iraqi press in adopting special standards of objectivity that are consistent with media ethics in Iraqi society.

Scientific Importance

This field study can enrich scientific knowledge about the levels of commitment to standards of objectivity in the Iraqi press, which will deepen our understanding of the state of journalism and media in the region.

Improving scientific research: In addition, this study contributes to the development of scientific research in the field of journalism and media, as its results and recommendations can be used as a reference for future studies and other related research.

Directing policies and reforms: The results of this study may play an important role in guiding policies and reforms in the field of journalism and media in Iraq, as they can be used as a tool to improve journalism standards and enhance transparency and accountability.

Developing academic work: This study may contribute to developing academic work in the field of journalism and media, as it can be used as an applied lesson to teach students and train researchers in how to conduct effective field studies.

In general, this field study of the audience in the city of Baghdad carries great scientific importance that goes beyond the practical aspect, as it contributes to enhancing our understanding and development in the field of journalism and media.

The practical importance of a field study on the levels of Iraqi newspapers' commitment to standards of objectivity from the point of view of the Baghdad public appears in many practical aspects:

Improving the quality of journalistic content: By understanding the audience's expectations and demands, this study can help newspapers improve the quality of their content and adhere to standards of objectivity, which enhances their credibility and maintains public trust.

Enhancing transparency and accountability: The findings and recommendations that emerge from this study can be effective tools to increase the level of transparency and accountability in the Iraqi press, as the public expects transparency and integrity in the provision of news and information.

Enhancing community participation: This study can enhance community participation in the process of developing journalism. As the public feels that they are contributing to shaping professional standards and improving the quality of journalism they receive.

Supporting decision-makers: The results of the study can be an important reference for decision-makers in the field of media and journalism, as they can be used to guide policies and make decisions that enhance professional standards and support independent journalism.

Developing local journalism: This study can contribute to developing the local journalism sector in Iraq, as it provides the necessary guidance and recommendations to enhance capabilities and improve journalistic practices.

In short, studying the levels of commitment of Iraqi newspapers to standards of objectivity from the perspective of the public in the city of Baghdad is of great practical importance in improving the quality of journalism, enhancing transparency and accountability, and developing local journalism.

Research Population and Sample

The population of this research is the Iraqi public. Since the size of the audience was large, it was difficult to capture it; the researcher chose Baghdad, the capital, as a representative sample of the Iraqi audience, considering that Baghdad is the capital of the country, which includes different segments of the entire population of the country and is the largest in the area and most densely populated.

The sample, which was chosen according to the stratified random sampling method, consists of 375 individuals of different ages, professions, and educational levels, male and female, to represent the research community honestly and accurately.

Research Methodology and Tools

The researcher adopted the descriptive survey method because it is the most appropriate to know the public's attitudes towards a particular phenomenon, and he was not satisfied with the description but rather went beyond it to analysis, conclusion, and study. The research tool is a questionnaire form with closed questions that cover the research objectives and questions.

Research Limits

Temporal limits:

It extends during the period from the first of June to the first of September 2023, which is the period for conducting the questionnaire and completing the theoretical and procedural research requirements.

Spatial boundaries:

It is limited to the city of Baghdad, the capital, which is considered a miniature model of the country in terms of population, education, and economic aspects.

Objective limits:

It was limited to studying the standards of objectivity in Iraqi newspapers only and the levels of commitment to them by Iraqi newspapers.

Honesty and Persistence

To achieve honesty, the researcher adopted apparent honesty, which is the simplest type of honesty, by presenting the questionnaire form to a group of experts, specialized in the media for the purpose of evaluating it and examining the paragraphs. He implemented their recommendations of deletion, modification, and addition to be consistent with the research objectives.

The arbitrating experts are:

Professor Dr. Muhammad Hussein Alwan - Specialization: Radio and Television Media - Al-Qadisiyah University.

Professor Dr. Fawzi Hadi Al-Hindawi - Specialization: Journalism - University of Baghdad.

Assistant Professor Dr. Zainab Laith Abbas - Specialization: Public Relations and Advertising - University of Baghdad.

Assistant Professor Dr. Hawra Qasim Al-Mubarqa - Specialization: Research Methods and Psychology - Al-Mustansiriya University.

As for reliability, the researcher applied it by re-taking the questionnaire two weeks after the first questionnaire. The results were very close between the two questionnaires, which indicate its stability to a great degree. He chose a small sample of 50 respondents from the original research sample.

Scientific Research Questions

Here are some questions that can be part of your scientific research on the levels of Iraqi newspapers' commitment to standards of objectivity from the perspective of the Baghdad public:

What are the public's expectations from Iraqi newspapers regarding objectivity and integrity in covering news and various topics?

Does the public consider that Iraqi newspapers adhere to the standards of objectivity in providing information?

What are the criteria that the public uses to evaluate the degree of objectivity in Iraqi newspaper reports?

Does the level of objectivity in Iraqi newspaper coverage affect public confidence in it?

How do factors such as political or religious affiliation affect the public's assessment of the objectivity of Iraqi newspapers?

Are there differences in evaluating the objectivity of newspapers between different age groups in the public of Baghdad?

What are the general attitudes of the public regarding objectivity and integrity in newspaper reports, and do these attitudes differ between different newspapers?

These questions can be a good start for your research, and you can also expand or modify them according to the specific needs and objectives of the study.

Scientific Research Hypotheses

Some scientific research hypotheses can be part of our study:

The first hypothesis: There is a positive correlation between the extent to which Iraqi newspapers adhere to standards of objectivity and the public's confidence in them.

The second hypothesis: It is that political and cultural factors affect the public's assessment of the level of objectivity in Iraqi newspaper reports.

The third hypothesis: There are differences in evaluating the objectivity of newspapers between different age groups in the Baghdad city audience.

Fourth hypothesis: The levels of commitment of Iraqi newspapers to standards of objectivity vary based on their political or religious orientations.

Fifth hypothesis: The level of education and media awareness of the public affects its assessment of the objectivity of Iraqi newspapers.

We can analyze these hypotheses using the data and information you collect during our field study and use the results to prove or disprove these hypotheses and reach reliable and useful conclusions.

Methodology for Measuring Scientific Research

You can follow several steps and various methodologies. There are basic steps you can follow:

Define Variables

We are working to identify the main variables associated with newspapers' levels of commitment to standards of objectivity, such as clarity, accuracy, transparency, credibility, and others.

You can also identify moderating variables such as education, political affiliation, religious factors, and others that can influence the audience's assessment of levels of objectivity.

Using and developing a questionnaire or interviews:

We are developing a questionnaire or interview guide targeting the public's opinion on the levels of objectivity of Iraqi newspapers.

Make sure that the questions cover different aspects, such as the quality of press coverage, transparency, credibility, and the influence of political or cultural factors.

The Research Sample

A sample of the public was selected in the city of Baghdad, representing different communities in terms of (age, gender, education, culture, etc.).

Make sure the sample is representative and diverse to obtain comprehensive results.

Data Collection

We carry out questionnaires or interviews to collect data from the selected audience and ensure that all data is documented accurately and systematically.

Data Analysis

Use appropriate data analysis tools, such as (frequency analysis, statistical analysis, etc.) to analyze the data you collected and interpret the results and relationships between the various variables.

Theoretical Aspect

Objectivity: its concept, dimensions, and standards

Objectivity is a very complex concept that is difficult to measure due to its closeness to idealism and its great relativity depending on time, place, media outlet, source, sender, etc.

Objectivity goes beyond the issue of honesty, credibility, or validity to variables that are, in turn, linked to the various subsystems in the social system represented by the media, public opinion, and the prevailing political, economic, social, and cultural climate in a particular society.

Disagreement has prevailed over the concept of objectivity in media studies due to the multiplicity of elements of the communication process and the diversity of media outlets. Some see it as the objectivity of the media source or the objectivity of the media message through searching for characteristics that make the media more objective, and others view the objectivity of traditional or new media outlets by comparing them.

Most researchers describe objectivity as a characteristic or characteristic that is perceived through several dimensions, and this is evident through:

1. Objectivity is a quality that is perceived as it does not exist in a subject, person, or information. Therefore, when the objectivity of something is discussed, the extent to which individuals realize its objectivity is actually discussed.
2. The perception of objectivity results from evaluating multiple dimensions in one framework.

Thus, objectivity is described as a multi-dimensional construct that measures the believability or evaluation of the message, source, or medium, and other researchers see it as indicating the individual's awareness of the veracity of information and news. It is a multi-dimensional characteristic that works as a tool that helps the recipient of the information estimate the honesty of the source in its relationship with the information, which is related to the following: By the recipient's appreciation of the objectivity of the information itself.

Objectivity reflects the public's evaluation of media content. Dr. Azza Abdel Aziz defines it as "a professional, cultural and ethical treatment of journalistic material in which all dimensions of the subject are present in a balanced manner based on evidence, evidence, accuracy in presenting information and separating it from personal opinions, and free from whims and private interests, provided that it is Journalistic material reflects the public's priorities of interest."

The most important standards of objectivity, according to the views of media studies, are:

Balance in presenting opinions and other opinions during press coverage.

Careful review of information before publishing it.

Clarity of ideas on topics, issues, people, and events.

Attributing a statement to its source while trusting this source.

Abstaining from working for a specific party, not adopting that party's point of view, and not neglecting or ignoring other points of view.

Do not hide or withhold any information from the reader.

Honesty and fairness in reporting news.

Multiple sources.

Taking into account journalistic conscience.

Presenting pure, unadulterated facts.

Stay away from personal whims, political inclinations, or national, religious, and party affiliations.

Financial integrity of the journalist.

Separating news and opinions.

Neutrality and lack of bias with or against one party for the benefit of another party.

Honesty in transmitting and disseminating news and information².

Analytical Study

First: sample characteristics

Table 1. The distribution of the sample according to gender (sex).

No.	Type	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	Males	262	69.9%	First
2	Females	113	30.1%	Second
Sum		375	100%	

Table No. 1 shows that the number of males in the sample was 262, at a percentage of 69.9%, while the number of females was 113, at a percentage of 30.1%. The total number of sample members was 375.

Table 2. The distribution of the sample according to age.

No.	Ages	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	20-30	126	33.6%	Second
2	31-40	158	42.1%	First
3	41-65	75	24.3%	Third
Sum		375	100%	

Table No. 2 shows that the age group of 20-30 years consists of 126 individuals, representing 33.6% (second place), while the number of the age group 31-40 years is 158, representing 42.1% (first rank), and the age group consists of 41-65 years. Out of 91, with a rate of 24.3% (ranked third).

Table 3. The distribution of the sample according to educational level.

No.	Educational level	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	High School	52	13.9%	Second
2	Bachelor	278	74.1%	First
3	Postgraduate degrees	45	12%	Third
Sum		375	100%	

Table No. 3 shows that among the sample members, 52 respondents held a high school diploma, representing 13.9% (second place). At the same time, the number of bachelor's degree holders reached 278, representing 74.1% (first rank), and the number of graduate degree holders reached 45, representing 12% (third rank).

Table 4. The distribution of the sample according to occupations.

² Howaida Mustafa, Credibility in the Egyptian Media, Cairo, Egyptian Journal of Media Research, Issue 21, October 2002, p. 7.

No.	Occupation	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	Government jobs	252	67.2%	First
2	Private sector	123	32.8%	Second
Sum		375	100%	

Table No. 4 indicates that the number of workers in government jobs among the sample reached 252, or 67.2% (first place), while the number of workers in the private sector was 123, or 32.8% (second place).

Second: Presentation and interpretation of the questionnaire results

The first question: To what extent do Iraqi newspapers adhere to the standard of accuracy in transmitting and publishing news and information?

Table 5. The sample answers to the accuracy criterion.

Value	1	2	3	4	5
Alternatives	Strongly Agree	Agree	I agree to some extent	Disagree	Disagree at all
Frequency	45	138	80	66	46
Percentage	12	36.8	21.3	17.6	12.3

It is clear from Table No. 5 that only 45 of the sample members, or 12%, strongly agree that Iraqi newspapers are committed to accuracy in transmitting and publishing news and information. One hundred thirty-eight respondents, or 36.8%, agree with this, and 80 respondents, or 21.3%, agree to some extent, and they do not agree. Sixty-six respondents, 17.6%, agree with this paragraph, while 46 respondents, 12.3%, completely reject it.

The results indicate that most of the sample members agree with this paragraph, that is, with the criterion of accuracy in conveying and publishing news and information in Iraqi newspapers.

The second question: To what extent are Iraqi newspapers committed to applying the standard of balance in presenting the viewpoints they publish?

Table 6. The sample answers to the balance criterion.

Value	1	2	3	4	5
Alternatives	Strongly Agree	Agree	I agree to some extent	Disagree	Disagree at all
Frequency	201	54	98	16	6
Percentage	53.6	14.4	26.1	4.3	1.6

It appears from Table No. 6, 201 respondents, representing 53.6%, strongly agree with this paragraph, and 54 respondents, representing 14.4%, agree with it, while 98 respondents, representing 26.1%, agree to some extent with them, and 16 respondents, representing 4.3%, disagree. It has 6 respondents, representing 1.6%, which is a very small percentage compared to the sample size and they are disagree at all. The results indicate that most of the sample members strongly agree with this paragraph, i.e., the criterion of balance in presenting different points of view.

The third question: To what extent do Iraqi newspapers adhere to the standard of the right of reply for those whose names appear in journalistic topics?

Table 7. The sample answers to the right of reply standard.

Value	1	2	3	4	5
Alternatives	Strongly Agree	Agree	I agree to some extent	Disagree	Disagree at all
Frequency	63	168	120	14	10
Percentage	16.8	44.8	32	3.7	2.7

In Table No. 7, only 63 respondents (16.8%) strongly agree that Iraqi newspapers guarantee the right to reply to those whose names appear in press topics, and 168 respondents (44.8%) agree with this. In comparison, 120 respondents (32%) agree with this paragraph to some extent. Fourteen respondents, at a rate of 3.7%, disagree with it, while 10 respondents, at a rate of 2.7%, disagree with it at all.

The results indicate that most of the respondents agree with the paragraph in the sense that Iraqi newspapers guarantee the standard of publishing the right of reply.

Question four: To what extent are Iraqi newspapers committed to preferring news and opinion? That is, they do not intend to mix between facts and information on the one hand and opinions and comments on the other.

Table 8. The sample answers about the separation between news and opinion.

Value	1	2	3	4	5
Alternatives	Strongly Agree	Agree	I agree to some extent	Disagree	Disagree at all
Frequency	-	2	26	144	202
Percentage	-	5	7	38.5	54

The results of Table No. 8 show that 144 disagreed that Iraqi newspapers do not separate news from opinion, with a percentage of 38.5%, and 202 respondents strongly disagreed with this paragraph, with a percentage of 54%. In contrast, only two respondents agreed with it, with a percentage of 5%, and agreed with it to some extent, 26 only 7% surveyed.

The results indicate that most of the sample members do not believe that Iraqi newspapers separate news from opinion, which indicates a lack of adherence to an important standard of objectivity in journalistic work.

Question five: To what extent are Iraqi newspaper editors committed to staying away from the standard of personal whims and political inclinations in their journalistic writings?

Table 9. The sample's answers to the criterion of staying away from personal whims and political inclinations.

Value	1	2	3	4	5
Alternatives	Strongly Agree	Agree	I agree to some extent	Disagree	Disagree at all
Frequency	202	150	20	2	-
Percentage	54	40.1	5.3	5	-

Two hundred-two respondents (54%) strongly agree that Iraqi newspaper editors stay away from personal whims and political inclinations in their journalistic writings. One hundred fifty respondents (40.1%) agree with this paragraph, 20 respondents (5.3%) agree with this paragraph to some extent, while 2 respondents (5%) disagree with it.

This indicates that most of the sample members strongly agree with the content of the paragraph, meaning that they believe that editors refrain from introducing personal whims and political inclinations into their journalistic work.

Question Six: To what extent are Iraqi newspapers committed to the standard of neutrality and not biased with or against the parties covered in news and press reports?

Table 10. The sample answers for the bias criterion.

Value	1	2	3	4	5
Alternatives	Strongly Agree	Agree	I agree to some extent	Disagree	Disagree at all
Frequency	18	226	128	2	-
Percentage	4.8	60.4	34.2	5	-

Table No. 10 shows that 18 respondents (4.8%) strongly agree with this paragraph, 226 respondents (60.4%) agree with them, 128 respondents (34.2%) agree to some extent, and only two respondents (5%) disagree with this paragraph. These data indicate that most of the sample members agree with this paragraph, meaning that they believe that Iraqi newspapers adhere to the standard of neutrality and are not biased with or against any party in their journalistic work.

Question Seven: To what extent are Iraqi newspapers committed to the standard of avoiding religious, sectarian, and racist beliefs in their work and coverage of news and political events?

Table 11. The sample's answers to the criterion of avoiding religious, sectarian, and racist beliefs in its journalistic work.

Value	1	2	3	4	5
Alternatives	Strongly Agree	Agree	I agree to some extent	Disagree	Disagree at all
Frequency	316	46	10	-	2
Percentage	84.5	12.3	2.7	-	5

In Table No. 11, 316 respondents (84.5%) strongly agree that Iraqi newspapers are committed to the standard of avoiding religious, sectarian, and racist beliefs in their work and coverage of news and events. Forty-six respondents (12.3%) agree with this, and 10 respondents (2.7) agree to some extent with this paragraph. While none of the respondents disagreed with this, two of the respondents disagree at all with the paragraph, at a rate of 5%. These results confirm that most of the sample members strongly agree with this paragraph, meaning that Iraqi newspapers are committed to the standard of avoiding religious, sectarian, and racist beliefs in their journalistic work and coverage of events.

Question Eight: To what extent are Iraqi newspaper editors committed to the standard of integrity in their journalistic work?

Table 12. Sample answers to the integrity criterion.

Value	1	2	3	4	5
Alternatives	Strongly Agree	Agree	I agree to some extent	Disagree	Disagree at all
Frequency	184	170	14	2	4
Percentage	49.2	45.5	3.7	5	1.1

It is clear from Table No. 12 that 184 respondents (49.2%) strongly agree that Iraqi newspaper editors are characterized by integrity in their work. One hundred seventy respondents (45.5%) agree with this, and 14 respondents (3.7%) agree to some extent with this paragraph, while only two respondents disagree with it. At a rate of 5%, 4 respondents disagree at all, at a rate of 1.1%. These results confirm that most of the sample members strongly agree with the paragraph on the integrity of editors in their journalistic work {Aziz, 2006 #5}.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Iraqi newspapers adhere to most standards of objectivity as a result of their long history characterized by adherence to media honor codes and the previous presence of government censorship over them.

Failure to adhere to the standard of separating news from opinion, i.e., mixing facts and comments. The reason for this is due to the inability of editors to separate and distinguish between the arts of journalistic editing.

Lack of clarity on some standards of objectivity among newspaper administrations and employees.

Lack of awareness among journalists regarding the mechanisms for applying standards of objectivity during journalistic work.

Recommendations

Establishing an independent press center or one affiliated with the Journalists Syndicate whose mission is to monitor the application of objectivity standards in Iraqi newspapers and alert about violations that occur therein.

Raising the skills of Iraqi journalists in the field of standards of objectivity and how to apply them.

Holding professional courses and training workshops on mechanisms for applying objectivity.

Enriching the theoretical and cultural heritage through books, research, and theoretical and applied studies on the problems of objectivity in theory and practice.

An annual award is allocated to the best newspaper and the one most committed to the standards of objectivity in the Iraqi press.

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