

UNDERSTANDING OBJECTIVITY AMONG BRAZILIAN JOURNALISTS:

what you intend to be when you want
to be objective



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ABSTRACT – This paper presents the results from an online survey of 234 journalists from all regions of Brazil and their perceptions of journalistic objectivity. The survey questions presented different theoretical possibilities concerning objectivity and were organized around three main ideas: 1) ontological, which measures how journalists understand what the facts are; 2) epistemological, which asks about how accessible these facts are; and 3) methodological, which characterizes the understanding of what would be the most appropriate method for describing the facts. The data were obtained using Google Forms and analyzed using the SPSS software. Our findings, based on non-probability sampling, showed that journalists understand that the facts have a determination prior to the report, the meaning of which can be defined by approximation through an intersubjective method of verification.

Key words: Journalism Theory. Journalistic objectivity. Conceptualization. Perception.

SENTENDIMENTOS DE OBJETIVIDADE ENTRE OS JORNALISTAS BRASILEIROS: o que se pretende ser, quando se quer ser objetivo

RESUMO – O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar os resultados de um questionário online que contou com a participação de 234 jornalistas, de todas as regiões do Brasil, e que buscou identificar a percepção da objetividade jornalística por esses profissionais.

As perguntas apresentavam possibilidades teóricas distintas frente ao problema da objetividade e foram organizadas em torno de três eixos: 1) ontológico, que procurou medir como os jornalistas entendem o que são os fatos; 2) eixo epistemológico, que perguntou sobre a possibilidade de acesso a esses fatos; e 3) metodológico, que buscou caracterizar o entendimento sobre qual seria o método mais adequado para descrever os fatos. Os dados foram obtidos por meio de Google Forms, sendo sistematizados com o software SPSS. Conclui-se que, nessa amostra não probabilística, os jornalistas compreendem que os fatos possuem uma determinação anterior ao relato, cujo sentido pode ser definido por aproximação, por meio de um método intersubjetivo de verificação. **Palavras-chave:** Teorias do Jornalismo. Objetividade Jornalística. Conceitualização. Percepção.

ENTENDIMIENTOS DE OBJETIVIDAD ENTRE PERIODISTAS BRASILEÑOS: lo que quieres ser, cuando quieres ser objetivo

RESUMEN – El propósito de este artículo es presentar los resultados de una encuesta que contó con la participación de 234 periodistas, de todas las regiones de Brasil, y que buscó identificar la percepción de la objetividad periodística por parte de estos profesionales. Las preguntas presentaban distintas posibilidades teóricas en relación al problema de la objetividad y se organizaban en torno a tres ejes: 1) ontológico, que buscaba medir cómo los periodistas entienden cuáles son los hechos; 2) eje epistemológico, que preguntó sobre la posibilidad de acceder a estos hechos; y 3) metodológico, que buscaba caracterizar la comprensión de cuál sería el método más adecuado para describir los hechos. Los datos se obtuvieron a través de un cuestionario en línea, siendo sistematizados con el software SPSS. Se concluye que, en esta muestra no probabilística, los periodistas entienden que los hechos tienen una determinación previa al informe, cuyo significado puede definirse por aproximación, mediante un método intersubjetivo de verificación.

Palabras clave: Teorías del Periodismo. Objetividad periodística. Conceptualización. Percepción.

1 Introduction

The model of objectivity emerged at the end of the 19th century and has evolved into a journalistic principle, particularly after the two world wars and the second half of the 20th century. When investigating the U.S. context, which has served as a reference for several countries, Schudson (2010) indicates three reasons why objectivity emerged as a standard model in modern journalism, also called industrial journalism. One is a political-economic reason; another is of a marketing nature, and the third has to do with cultural order.

Intending to take advantage of the growth of the urban and literate population thus increasing the number of possible readers, the press (which up until that time was organized by and

linked to political groups that financed them) transformed into a company newspaper and adopted a new professional conduct of apparent political neutrality. New audiences were now buying and reading newspapers and started to expect a product that contained more facts and fewer opinions, thus shaping the format that would become recognized as inherent to journalism itself: the informative format, which demands the separation of fact from opinion. Finally, Schudson (2010) argues that the enlightenment ideology of liberty and autonomy can also be pointed to as a cause for the centrality of objectivity in journalism as we know it today. The idea that all subjects, when free and enlightened, can use reason to make their own judgments of events, led to journalism focusing on the “pure description” of facts.

Despite the relative historical clarity on the consolidation of the model of objectivity in journalism and the consensus of how important adopting this model was for the commercial success of the press in the 20th century, it is not as easy to come to a unanimous agreement on what it means to be journalistically objective.

Although he recognizes this difficulty and that disagreements always follow the discussion, Frey (2017) argues that debate on this concept continues to be fruitful and very important for journalism. Martine and Maeyer (2018), Schudson and Anderson (2009), and Hanitzsch (2007) also argue that the idea of journalistic objectivity is closely linked to the professionalization of the activity in the United States and define it, in general terms, as not only possible but also necessary, to separate facts from beliefs; principles and values of journalists who cover events.

Much has been published about the possibility, or impossibility, of information professionals, being able to successfully distance and remove themselves from their beliefs when reporting. But, careful not to label this pretense as naive, Carlson (2019) points out that the resilience of this notion as a registered norm, especially in the United States, is proof of its complexity. In a previous text, Carlson (2018) further defines what it means to be objective, reinforcing the centrality of removing journalist subjectivity when selecting or describing facts of public interest. “Normally, the journalist responds to external events, follows professional training to cover it, and represents it as faithfully as possible to the audience” (Carlson, 2018, p. 1760).

In a recent study on identifying variables that might change the question of objectivity for Virtual Reality (VR) journalism, Mabrook (2021) concludes that, even if a greater degree of subjectivity is

recognized in products of this nature, content producers in VR are not free from rigorous fact-finding and fact-checking processes. According to Ward (2019) and his concept of pragmatic objectivity, “pragmatically objective journalists are transparent about their partialities, sensitive to their undue influence, and willing to submit to public scrutiny and to present their reasons which other people can accept as valid” (Mabrook, 2021, p. 212). An understanding that completely displaces the sense of what it would mean to be objective.

McNair (2017) proposes that objectivity remains a central value of journalism, even in times he refers to as post-factuality or post-truth. In his essay, the author defends the idea that it is necessary to validate a good part of the critiques made to the concept over the decades and to move towards “procedural transparency and journalistic self-reflection [...] presented to audiences as being as much part of a news story as ‘the facts’” (McNair, 2017, pp. 14–15). This means recognizing, and even highlighting, the subjective influences of the journalist in the news story, yet it continues to be called “respect for the principle of objectivity”, which does tend to create a kind of conceptual embarrassment for the field.

Waisbord (2018), on the other hand, reinforces the criticism by taking issue with “the way journalism remains anchored in simplistic, realist notions of truth-telling” (p. 8). He goes on to argue that journalism must reposition itself as an institution that produces meaning since there is no longer a monopoly on determining the truth of events. “Truth is an outcome of collective sense-making rather than unilaterally decided by newsrooms” (p. 8). This kind of reflection can leave journalists even more confused as to what to pursue when they intend to be correct, precise, or objective.

As a way to face the theoretical-practical difficulty of the issue of objectivity, this research borrows from the work of Guerra (2008), Sponholz (2009), and Gauthier (2015), in terms of reinforcing the centrality of the problem on one hand and trying to scientifically overcome the dichotomous responses to the idea of objectivity on the other. Similar to these authors, we start from the premise that it is not a question of being in favor or against anything or of affirming the existence or non-existence of objectivity in news reporting, but rather seeking a conceptual distinction about what is being demanded of the practice and, consequently, of journalistic products.

A very common mistake that occurs in Brazil is understanding objectivity as merely a formal issue, a style of text, as also indicated

by Guerra (2008) and Sponholz (2009), in addition to Demeneck (2009). According to this perspective, you are only objective when you get straight to the point, when you are blunt or when you manage to synthesize what is most important to be reported and ensure a high degree of communicability in the text. Instead of dealing with appropriateness, correspondence, possible representation, or even adequate reconstruction/interpretation of events of public interest, objectivity, when understood simply as a technical issue, is reduced to a resource that is available to and desired by journalists.

In this regard, we can see objectivity as understandability where being objective means using simple and direct language that can be easily understood by the public. Objectivity can also be understood as an obligation to present information by descending order of relevance, arranging information in a relevance-based hierarchy where the classic lead is its most visible consequence.

In a seminal text on the notion of journalistic objectivity, Tuchman (1993) problematized the simplification of this issue by reducing it to formal aspects related to procedures and textual presentation. From this perspective, the use of quotation marks, for example, was a way of being objective as it shows that the interviewee's opinion is not necessarily shared by the reporter or the media outlet.

Another misperception is understanding objectivity as impartiality, as pointed out by Miguel and Biroli (2010), for whom this understanding “[...] is, in itself, an obstacle to the expansion of plurality” (p. 60). In the authors' assessment, like any other discourse, journalism is built socially due to several factors such as the origin and social identity of information professionals, in addition to constraints and limitations from internal and external variables in the field of journalism. Thus, despite presenting itself as universal, journalistic discourse fails to fulfill the promise of listening to all the voices involved in an issue of public interest: “[...] social diversity is poorly represented in journalism, which universalizes the perspective agents, presenting it as neutral” (Miguel & Biroli, 2010, p. 70).

The problem here lies in the attempt to remove (and make it appear that one has excluded) all the opinion, understanding, or any hint of subjectivity from the journalist: from collecting information to writing the news report. Added to the idea that “the facts speak for themselves” (facticity), these understandings of objectivity hamper the journalistic investigation itself, for example, by producing news

that just accurately transcribes what has been said. When reporting on the news, journalists cannot express their personal opinion or position, cannot qualify statements, cannot pass judgment or qualify what is said, and their reports should not make interpretations, on any level, about statements given by public authorities.

This investigation starts from the perspective that these understandings of the term do not answer – nor even address – the real issue, which is to try and understand, with the least amount of judgment as possible, what it means to mediate between facts of journalistic interest and facts of public interest. In this perspective, being more accurate and stringent when being journalistically objective equates to theory-based journalism; however, being more accurate and stringent is also the most appropriate way to reveal the main goal of this practice, which is to give an account of the events as they occur.

Thus, in order to create an online questionnaire for a survey such as this, which aims to identify how information professionals in Brazil view journalistic objectivity, we first needed to categorize the different understandings of what it means to be objective. We then were able to verify the level of agreement and identification of professionals who hold these positions. This does not mean that journalists are simply theoretical subjects who carry manuals and journalism theory papers around with them at all times, consulting them any time a question may arise during their field investigations or even when writing their texts in the newsrooms. It also does not mean that journalists never have any doubts or questions about the positions they hold or that they can easily identify the school of thought their work is based on.

What we would like to point out is that the works on objectivity center around specific understandings about the model, based on pre-existing theoretical-practical assumptions about not only undergraduate and graduate courses in Journalism, but also in the production sector where these professionals work. What's more, we set out to defend the idea that, even without any problematization or philosophical thematization on the question of objectivity, one is not able to write (or even read, for that matter) any line from any journalistic product without having some idea that reporting reality is at least implied or presupposed as “obvious” and “evident”.

The first difficulty in an investigation of this nature presents itself here, as few authors have conducted a classification

that organizes the set of conceptual responses to the problem of objectivity outside defending or attacking the model. In order to try to substantiate the survey on the perceptions of Brazilian journalists, this investigation will briefly present and discuss the proposed typification from three authors. Guerra (2008) separates the works which effectively discuss objectivity into two broad avenues: news as a reproduction of reality, represented by realism; and news as a construction of reality, in which subjectivism and constructionism represent two distinct understandings.

In realism, not only can the news be written from the careful observation of the facts, but it should be, in order so it may function as the eyes and ears of the audience, reproducing reality in an accurate, neutral, and impartial way, each one of these qualities acting as a complement to the other. In short, the idea is that when certain ethical and methodological obligations are met, journalism can accurately match facts with the news.

Despite recognizing the autonomy and priority of facts, the subjectivist perspective argues that journalists always subjectively alter the essence of events when reporting them. This occurs because of personal tastes, preferences, and predilections, and because of the pre-existence of major frames of meaning that circulate in the historical-cultural context in which journalists live, and even due to limitations and organizational demands of the companies where these professionals work. Thus, the facts presented by journalism always include some level of interpretation of the events, and never the occurrences in them; a conclusion that complicates objectivity as a parameter for correcting news reports.

Lastly, Guerra includes constructionism as an approach to the problem of journalistic objectivity which explains that a journalist builds, and does not simply reproduce, the reality he or she reports on. The facts, the events of news interest, are already subjectively established, after which the news report takes on some level of departure from reality, but it is reality itself that is constructed and only validated socially. Indeed, it is precisely the idea that events have nature and substance prior to their relationship with journalists that are completely rejected on this front. In its place, we can say there is a kind of indistinction in which subject and object belong together, which makes the model of objectivity a great error of principle, as it is commonly defined.

In Sponholz's classification (2009), depending on the author, the notion of journalistic objectivity can be understood from the

ideas of 1) facticity; 2) understandability; 3) relevance; 4) neutrality; 5) impartiality and pluralism or fairness; 6) objectivity as a customary strategy; 7) relativist position; 8) consensus; 9) “realist” position; and 10) pragmatic objectivity. This author’s work intends to supersede these conceptions by presenting a specific view of the question of objectivity: objectivity from an epistemological point of view. This is precisely the same perspective on which Guerra’s (2008) classification is based, which subdivides this path into three possibilities.

On one hand, the author distances herself from the radical constructivist perspective – which Guerra (2008) calls constructionism – as far as she bets on the possibility of correspondence between what is said and what occurred. On the other hand, Sponholz also distances himself from the perspective of the (realist) mirror, in which the subject of the knowledge manages to remove himself, performing only the neutral and impartial mediation between reality and citizens. “In this sense, the result of a knowledge process is neither mirroring, nor invention or [total] construction, but rather a reconstruction of reality” (Bentele, 1993, p. 160 as cited in Sponholz, 2009, p. 19). This reconstruction does not follow the subject’s will, but it must somewhat rely, fundamentally, on an operation that only said subject can conduct.

Sponholz (2009) reaffirms objectivity in an attempt to escape from certain subjectivisms, that is, from the subject’s discretion and misuse that might put at risk the very determination of what is true and what is not. The author claims that maintaining true to the method and intersubjective verification are a way to achieve this approximation.

Demeneck’s (2009) investigation, in turn, classifies the answers to the issue of objectivity according to three perspectives: The first is realism, described on the same basis as the two authors mentioned above and the second is skepticism, which denies the possibility of access to rational knowledge of reality, which has marked consequences for journalistic activity. In addition to these two opposing pairs, the author identifies and characterizes a third perspective, pragmatic objectivity, as proposed by Canadian author Stephen Ward.

This perspective constitutes a “new” form for defending objectivity in journalism based on other philosophical principles. It aims to build solid foundations for its theory and to effectively guide journalistic practice.

In this third perspective, the separation between facts and value judgments, so precious to the traditional notion of objectivity, is characterized as humanly unrealizable. Knowing, on the contrary, becomes an active and global process. According to Ward, journalists' opinions are not necessarily deviations from objectivity, they are not something to be avoided, but rather a condition for assessing the different possible interpretations of the same phenomenon. Neutrality is, in this way, replaced by disinterest, which means that the search for the truth cannot and should not bend to any other type of lesser interest.

Ward does not advocate the primacy of subjectivity. He intends to overcome the polarization between subject and object, where either the subject determines the primary nature of the events or the object needs to be collected passively, without any interference from the journalist, so as not to tarnish its purity. In this sense, similar to Sponholz (2009), Ward claims that the methodological dimension gains fundamental importance: being objective would mean "[...] the methodological commitment to follow the facts where they lead, without jeopardizing the story, to represent honestly points of view" (Demeneck, 2009, p. 112).

In our understanding, any position on the issue of objectivity would need to simultaneously answer: 1) an ontological question, since it implies knowing what the facts are, what their nature is, and how these events are structured; 2) an epistemological question, as it concerns a certain understanding of the possibility of accessing what happens; and 3) a methodological question, which needs to characterize the understanding of what the most adequate methods and procedures are to adequately describe the facts. Despite the high level of quality of all these works, their classifications focus on only one or two of these aspects, assuming they are obvious and evident, which implies that some of these three aspects are, in fact, connected and unavoidable when explaining the problem of correspondence between news reports and reality.

For example, Sponholz (2009) and Demeneck (2009) focus their efforts on the epistemological and methodological aspects. The issue of having to adapt social reality to media reality is presented as a question of knowledge. However, in terms of classification, the authors assume that ontologically speaking, the reality, about which an epistemologically adequate account is intended to be produced, is already ready and finished. Implicit within the authors' typification is

the ontological view that reality has a structure and meaning before the relationship between journalists and events.

Guerra's (2008) classification, on the other hand, focuses on the ontological and epistemological dimensions, leaving out the subsequent and important discussion about the most adequate procedures for mediation between facts and the public. This paper understands that ontological, epistemological, and methodological views are inseparable and define theoretical and practical choices in an intensely juxtaposed and interconnected way. Furthermore, one may determine that the subjectivism proposed by Guerra incorporates quite different understandings and that they deserve to be classified separately. Considering the acceptance that there can be no hierarchy or priority regarding any of the three aspects and the authors' typification of them, this paper will start by classifying the positions regarding the issue of objectivity.

In a previous publication (Henriques, 2019), this author presents the following categorization, providing four different answers to the issue of journalistic objectivity: 1) Realism, whose most representative authors are Amaral (1996), Gauthier (2015), and Tambosi (2003); 2) Intersubjectivity, represented by studies from Demeneck (2009), Franciscato (2005), Gomes (2009), Groth (2011), Guerra (2008), Martino (2014), Meyer (1989), Nuzzi and Barros Filho (1998), and Sponholz (2009); 3) Dialectic, the most significant studies provided by Genro Filho (2012), Moretzsohn (2002, 2007), and Souza (2016); 4) Strategic ritual, where Tuchman (1993) is listed as the only representative. As this paper intends to identify the perception and understanding that professionals working in Brazil have of journalistic objectivity, this type of typification has been limited to texts in Portuguese which are highly circulated throughout the country.

A summary table with this proposed classification providing details for each of the dimensions explains how each typical response to the issue of objectivity solves the issue of mediation between citizens and reality. This table can be found in the same previous publication (Henriques, 2019) (Table 1):

Table 1 - Summary of responses to the issue of objectivity

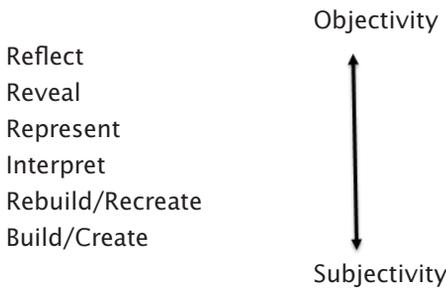
RESPONSE/ DIMENSION	ONTOLOGIC	EPISTEMOLOGIC	METHOD
REALISM	Reality is built on the division between subject and object. These two instances are autonomous and independent, meaning the objectivity lies within itself because it is independent of relation. The existence and nature of the facts do not depend on the subjects.	It is possible to know, but the only real, certain, and sure knowledge is the knowledge of objectivity in itself. Therefore, "pure" facts should be the goal of journalism. Knowing is accurately revealing/ representing objectivity.	The most correct and adequate journalistic method to reach objective truth is the one that eliminates any interference from journalists in the facts.
INTERSUBJECTIVITY	Reality is built on the division between subject and object; however, these two instances are not autonomous or independent as objectivity is built intersubjectively. The existence of facts does not depend on the subjects, but their nature is linked to subjective action.	It is possible to know, but the only real, certain and sure knowledge is intersubjective. The goal of journalism should be to get as close to the facts as possible, regardless of interpretations. Knowing is representing/ recreating objectivity in itself.	The most correct and adequate journalistic method to get as close as possible to objective truth is one that minimizes any interference from journalists in the facts.
DIALECTICS	Reality is built from the dialectical relationship of subject-object. These two instances are not autonomous and independent as objectivity is built subjectively, just as subjectivity is built objectively. The existence and nature of facts depend on the construction of subjects. Outside the subjective interpretation, there is only the undetermined objective flow.	It is possible to know, but that means revealing and interpreting reality at the same time. For the result to be true, the journalist must always follow the objective elements. However, not only do journalists need to perceive and comprehend the event, but they also need to build the facts from certain extracts from the objective flow.	Despite being the linchpin of all reality, objectivity must be given meaning by the subjects. The most adequate journalistic method is therefore one that seeks to provide transparent interpretation from which journalistic facts are constructed, following parameters and criteria of not only journalism as an institution but also of the journalistic organization responsible for the product.

STRATEGIC RITUAL	This dimension is not discussed.	This dimension is not discussed.	The journalistic method is the result of a strategic ritual that claims objectivity and determines a series of procedures for safeguarding journalists from professional pressure and possible legal proceedings.
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Source: Henriques (2019, pp. 2–3)¹.

Another way to summarize ideas in a graph to represent the different theoretical and practical understandings of the work that is involved in journalism is through verbs used by the authors. Since these verbs define the specific action being carried out, choosing which ones to use is not based on just a matter of style or understandability, it is also about forging a relationship between journalism and events (fig. 1).

Figure 1 - Journalism X Reality relationship scale



Source: Henriques (2019, p. 4).

Based on this classification, the objective of this paper was to identify the perception of objectivity held by Brazilian journalists. An online questionnaire was organized around three dimensions: 1) ontological; 2) epistemological; and 3) methodological. Each of these dimensions contained two sentences, and the alternatives presented assertions on the four distinct theoretical-practical positions of the classification used in this study.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

A total of 234 Brazilian journalists participated in the survey: 56.4% women; 41.9% men; 0.4% transgender; 0.4% non-binary, and 0.9% unknown. Their length of time in the field varied between “less than 5 years” (24.8%), “between 5 and 10 years” (23.5%), “between 11 and 20 years” (29.1%), and “over 20 years” (22.6%). The participants worked in press relations (45.5%), newsrooms (44.6%), and teaching and researching journalism (42.7%). Most participants working in press relations work in the area of public assistance (45.8%) and business assistance (32.4%), while others work in the service sector (10%) and for unions (4.5%). The participants working in newsrooms work mostly for the mainstream press (47.1%) and the public press (24.4%), followed by the alternative press (16.1%) and union press (2.5%). 61.6% of participants working as teaching and research professionals work for public institutions while 37% work for private institutions.

The survey was conducted with journalists from 22 states, most of whom work in the states of Espírito Santo (21.4%), Bahia (17.9%), São Paulo (13.2%), Federal District (8.5%), Rio de Janeiro (7.3%), Rio Grande do Sul (6.4%), Ceará (3.4%) and Minas Gerais (3.4%). The remaining states (Amazonas, Goiás, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Pará, Paraíba, Paraná, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte, Santa Catarina, Sergipe, and Tocantins) registered on average less than 2.6% each.

2.2 Instruments and procedures

Data were collected from an online questionnaire on the Google platform consisting of multiple-choice questions in different types: dichotomous, multiple alternatives, and five-point Likert scale. The final question was open-ended and not mandatory. Links for accessing the questionnaires were emailed to former bachelor and postgraduate journalism students from three scientific associations in the field of communication: SBPJo², Compós³, and Intercom⁴. Some links were also shared via WhatsApp groups. In all cases, journalists were asked to forward these links to other information professionals. The questionnaire was made available between 05/01/2019 and 07/01/2019.

Non-probabilistic sampling techniques were used for the 234 Brazilian journalists in this study. This means that there was no strict control over which participants would be selected for membership in the sample and there was a quantifiable probability greater than zero for each member of the Brazilian journalist population. Snowball sampling was the technique chosen for this study due to its relatively convenient format; it involves existing subjects forwarding links to future subjects in a type of recruitment procedure.

Oliveira (2001) explains that non-probabilistic sampling is an efficient technique and can lead to interesting discoveries. What's more, according to this author, is that non-probabilistic sampling may often be preferable to probabilistic sampling. For example, in cases where there is no intention to generalize the results; or when the population to be investigated is reasonably homogeneous; or on occasions when time, financial and human resources constraints make it impossible to carry out any other type of sampling. On the other hand, Oliveira (2001) recognizes the limitations of this type of sampling in terms of the accuracy of its results, which "[...] may contain biases and uncertainties that make the quality of information inferior to that of probabilistic sampling" (Oliveira, 2001, p. 15).

One limitation associated with this type of research which needs to be identified is that knowing whether all the people included in the sample are representative of the population is not possible. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that, as a requirement of the snowball sampling technique, the participants who are invited to participate were made very aware of what the objectives of the investigation and the desired interviewee profile were. These details were also clearly laid out in the Terms of Free and Informed Consent, as described in the Google Forms header. However, it was "impossible to fully control how people recommend which researchers to be members of their personal network" (Vinuto, 2014, p. 208).

Even though the sampling was built unconditionally, the almost equal distribution of participants concerning gender, length of employment, and area of expertise stands out. We would also like to draw attention to the wide geographic coverage of the sample, with 81.5% of the states represented by journalist participation, although the number of respondents is not related to the population of each of these states. This does show a selection bias in regions where there was more direct contact with journalists who were not only invited

to participate but were also encouraged to forward the invitations to other information professionals so that they may participate.

The participants answered the questions giving their level of agreement with the statements. These questions were included in the three dimensions on which we built the four-answer classification for the issue of journalistic objectivity, using a 5-point Likert scale:

Table 2 - Likert Scale

Scale	Value
1	strongly disagree
2	disagree
3	neither agree nor disagree
4	agree
5	strongly agree

The following groups of statements were used to measure the ontological understandings of the four alternatives in the classification:

Table 3 - Ontological dimension

Ontological Dimension	
Classification	Position
Realism	the facts are reality
Intersubjectivity	the facts are independent of the subject
Dialectics	the facts are always the result of an interpretation of reality
Strategic ritual	the issue of objectivity does not concern the nature of the facts

To verify the perception of the epistemological dimension, the alternatives were grouped in the following way:

Table 4 - Epistemological dimension

Epistemological Dimension	
Classification	Position
Realism	understanding correctly is understanding objectivity in itself
Intersubjectivity	understanding is approaching objectivity
Dialectics	understanding is revealing and also interpreting objective reality
Strategic ritual	the issue of objectivity does not concern understanding

The groups for the methodological dimension consisted of:

Table 5 - Methodological dimension

Methodological dimension	
Classification	Position
Realism	the applied method eliminates all subjective interference
Intersubjectivity	the applied method minimizes all subjective interference
Dialectics	the applied method must respect the objectivity and add transparency to the subjective
Strategic ritual	the applied method is a safeguarding strategic ritual for journalists

In each of the three dimensions, the statements representing each position were presented in random order.

Data analyses were performed using the SPSS software (version 2.3) to describe the frequency and identify the distribution of the four positions on the issue of journalistic objectivity. For this purpose, descriptive analyses of frequency, mean, standard deviation, and quartiles were performed. A frequency analysis was also used for the last multiple-choice question, which asked for a general definition of journalistic objectivity. For the groups of similar questions on ontological, epistemological, and methodological conceptions, a standardized average was obtained with subsequent comparisons made according to gender, length of employment, sector of professional activity, and type of press – for those who work in newsrooms⁵.

Several studies have already pointed out the strengths and weaknesses of the use of online questionnaires in scientific research. In an extensive review of literature, Evans and Mathur (2018) summarize the advantages and disadvantages of this research tool, drawing attention to the convenience, low cost, ease of use, and reach that internet forms can provide, but they also highlight its impersonality, its difficulties in understanding the questions, in controlling and selecting the sample, and even its low response rate, as its main weaknesses.

In terms of investigation, the journalists in this research are a reasonably homogeneous group and, on the whole, they do not have difficulties accessing the internet, at least not in the workplace, where connection and functionality are strong. We also find it important to state that using the online questionnaire allowed for: a) faster collection of the professionals' answers, particularly those in remote locations throughout the country; b) facility of data entry, tabulation, and analysis; c) the convenience of participants being able to answer the questions at a time best suited for them; and d) the operational simplicity to direct certain questions to specific members of the public (teachers/researchers, editorial staff or advisors).

The main drawback of using this online tool is the difficulties it presents in controlling and selecting the sample among demographic and professional characteristics relevant to the research issue. This difficulty comes from the fact that the analysis seeks to measure the perceptions of journalists from all over Brazil on a difficult and abstract concept. Another disadvantage was the impersonal feel of the survey, something which is inherent to an online questionnaire. The questions had to be worded carefully, they needed to be absolutely clear and direct in order to avoid any misunderstandings on the part of the participants which could end up compromising the results, or even result in participants not responding to the survey, which would influence the response rate. As the results show, journalists did indicate a slight difficulty in understanding the concept, which may also be a consequence of the way the sentences were worded in the questionnaire.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Ontological dimension

3.1.1 Realism

The first sentence from this group of statements regarding the nature of the facts reads: "The facts are the raw material of journalism and correspond to the reality before whatever journalistic coverage is being performed". The results are shown in the table below:

Table 6 - Results from the first sentence on understanding realism as an ontological condition

Average		4.02	
Agree or strongly agree		76%	
Neither agree nor disagree		12.8%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		11.1%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.06	4	4	5

The second sentence on ontological realism reads: "When they come into contact with reality, journalists are faced with events whose meanings are already there but have yet to be discovered".

Table 7 - Results from the second sentence on understanding realism as an ontological condition

Average		2.7	
Agree or strongly agree		32%	
Neither agree nor disagree		20.5%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		47.4%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.29	2	3	4

The overall average frequency of understanding realism as an ontological condition was 3.35 (DP = 0.92), ranging from 1 to 5. About 37% of the participants tend to agree or strongly agree with this position (1st quartile = 2.5; 2nd quartile = 3.5; 3rd quartile = 4) and

approximately half of the participants tended to be “impartial”, with responses between 2.5 and 3.5.

3.1.2 Intersubjectivity

The first sentence from this group of statements reads: “The facts themselves are objectivity, in other words, they are the reality, regardless of their contact with journalists”.

Table 8 - Results from the first sentence on understanding intersubjectivity as an ontological condition

Average		2.8	
Agree or strongly agree		38.8%	
Neither agree nor disagree		22.6%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		53.5%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.40	1	3	4

The second sentence from this same group reads: “Representing pure reality, before any subjective interference by the journalist, means to reveal things as they are”.

Table 9 - Results from the second sentence on understanding intersubjectivity as an ontological condition

Average		2.53	
Agree or strongly agree		26.5%	
Neither agree nor disagree		20.9%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		52.6%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.34	1	2	4

The overall average frequency of understanding intersubjectivity as an ontological condition was 2.66 (DP = 1.17), ranging from 1 to 5. About 21% of the participants tend to agree or strongly agree with this global position (1st quartile = 2.5; 2nd quartile = 2.5; 3rd quartile = 3.5) and approximately 70% of the participants did not agree, with responses less than 3.

3.1.3 Dialectics

The first sentence from this group of statements reads: “The existence of facts independent from subjects cannot be affirmed. Journalistic facts, for example, are the result of an interpretation of reality, operated by journalism as an institution”.

Table 10 - Results from the first sentence on understanding dialectics as an ontological condition

Average		4.19	
Agree or strongly agree		80.8%	
Neither agree nor disagree		9.8%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		9.4%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.08	4	5	5

The second sentence from this same group reads: “Instead of an essence hiding behind events, what we call reality always depends on the perspective that is adopted to determine the world”. The results were similar to those from the statement above.

Table 11 - Results from the second sentence on understanding dialectics as an ontological condition

Average		4.18	
Agree or strongly agree		83%	
Neither agree nor disagree		9.4%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		7.7%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
0.99	4	4	5

The overall average frequency of understanding dialectics as an ontological condition was 4.18 (DP = 0.89), ranging from 1 to 5. About 76% of the participants registered frequencies greater than 4 and agreed with this position (1st quartile = 4; 2nd quartile = 4,5; 3rd quartile = 5).

3.1.4 Strategic ritual

The first sentence from this group of statements reads: “Journalists are concerned with presenting facts that appear objective, as a way to avoid any possible legal proceedings”.

Table 12 - Results from the first sentence on understanding strategic ritual as an ontological condition

Average				2.5
Agree or strongly agree				23.1%
Neither agree nor disagree				26.9%
Disagree or strongly disagree				50%
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile	
1.22	1	2.5	3	

A second sentence from this same group of statements reads: “Reality in journalism is the result of a method that seeks to not involve journalists in the process of building news reports”.

Table 13 - Results from the second sentence on understanding strategic ritual as an ontological condition

Average				2.61
Agree or strongly agree				33.3%
Neither agree nor disagree				15.8%
Disagree or strongly disagree				50.9%
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile	
1.36	1	2	4	

The overall average frequency of understanding strategic ritual as an ontological condition was 2.55 (DP = 0.98), ranging from 1 to 5. About 87% of the participants registered frequencies lesser than 3.5 and did not agree with this position (1st quartile = 2; 2nd quartile = 2.5; 3rd quartile = 3.5).

The results from this dimension show that the journalists in our sampling are not very clear about the nature of the events. While the journalists do agree that the facts need to be interpreted by the subjects, in terms of selecting the objective flow, they also strongly agreed with a sentence that expressed the idea that the

facts correspond to reality before building the news report. They do not seem to see any contradiction between defending the essential anteriority of the events and the active position of a journalist who seeks out the pre-existing meanings of the events.

3.2 Epistemological dimension

3.2.1 Realism

The first sentence from this group of statements regarding the possibility of knowing reality reads: “Journalism produces accurate knowledge only when it achieves objectivity. To accomplish this, it is necessary to eliminate the subjective interferences in the whole journalistic procedure”.

Table 14 - Results from the first sentence on understanding realism as an epistemological condition

Average				2.39
Agree or strongly agree				24.3%
Neither agree nor disagree				17.1%
Disagree or strongly disagree				58.6%
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile	
1.32	1	2	3	

A second sentence from this same group of statements reads: “Journalism finds the truth when it presents the facts as they are, without any subjective interference; the truth is reached when journalism manages to reveal the objective reality”.

Table 15 - Results from the second sentence on understanding realism as an epistemological condition

Average				2.61
Agree or strongly agree				34.2%
Neither agree nor disagree				14.5%
Disagree or strongly disagree				51.3%
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile	
1.38	1	2	4	

The overall average frequency of understanding realism as an epistemological condition was 2.5 (DP = 1.21), ranging from 1 to 5. About 72% of the participants registered frequencies lesser than 3 and did not agree with this position (1st quartile = 1.5; 2nd quartile = 2.5; 3rd quartile = 3.5).

3.2.2 Intersubjectivity

The first sentence in this group of statements reads: “It is necessary to minimize subjective interferences in the journalistic production process to get as close as possible to objectivity; the only source of certain and secure knowledge”.

Table 16 - Results from the first sentence on understanding intersubjectivity as an epistemological condition

Average		3.02	
Agree or strongly agree		42.3%	
Neither agree nor disagree		18.4%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		39.3%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.35	2	3	4

A second sentence from this same group of statements reads: “As it is not possible to access pure facts, truth in journalism is a relentless search for an approximation of objective reality. The more voices that agree with a particular reading, the greater the chance for journalism to be closer to the truth”.

Table 17 - Results from the second sentence on understanding intersubjectivity as an epistemological condition

Average		3.61	
Agree or strongly agree		62.8%	
Neither agree nor disagree		37.2%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		20.5%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.25	3	5	5

The overall average frequency of understanding intersubjectivity as an epistemological condition was 3.32 (DP = 0.99), ranging from 1 to 5. About 73% of the participants registered frequencies greater than 3, of which 38% agreed strongly with this position (1st quartile = 1.5; 2nd quartile = 2.5; 3rd quartile = 3.5).

3.2.3 Dialectics

The first sentence from this group of statements reads: “To know is to interpret. Journalism adequately knows reality when it interprets events according to its principles and procedures”.

Table 18 - Results from the first sentence on understanding dialectics as an epistemological condition

Average		3.6	
Agree or strongly agree		63.3%	
Neither agree nor disagree		18.4%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		18.3%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.23	3	4	5

A second sentence from this same group of statements reads: “Truth in journalism is the result of the relationship established between journalists and events. As this relationship is determined historically and socially, this truth is always partial”.

Table 19 - Results from the second sentence on understanding dialectics as an epistemological condition

Average		4.05	
Agree or strongly agree		81.9%	
Neither agree nor disagree		14.1%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		8.5%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.06	4	4	5

The overall average frequency of understanding dialectics as an epistemological condition was 3.83 (SD = 0.84), ranging from 1 to 5. About 89% of participants reported frequencies greater than 3, of which 58% strongly agreed with this position (1st quartile = 3; 2nd quartile = 4; 3rd quartile = 4.5).

3.2.4 Strategic ritual

The first sentence from this group of statements reads: “The knowledge produced by journalism is the result of the application of a methodology that intends to free journalists from being responsible for what they publish”.

Table 20 - Results from the first sentence on understanding strategic ritual as an epistemological condition

Average				2.49
Agree or strongly agree				26%
Neither agree nor disagree				19.2%
Disagree or strongly disagree				54.8%
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile	
1.23	1	2	4	

A second sentence from this same group of statements reads: “Journalistic techniques and procedures exist to give news reports the impression of truth and relieve journalists of any implications”.

Table 21 - Results from the second sentence on understanding strategic ritual as an epistemological condition

Average				2.79
Agree or strongly agree				37.7%
Neither agree nor disagree				17.5%
Disagree or strongly disagree				44.9%
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile	
1.34	2	3	4	

The overall average frequency of understanding strategic ritual as an epistemological condition was 2.64 (SD = 1.11), ranging from 1 to 5. About 55% of the participants registered frequencies between 2 and 3.5 and did not agree with this position (1st quartile = 1.87; 2nd quartile = 2.5; 3rd quartile = 3.5).

The results from this dimension show that the journalists in our sampling agree that knowing is interpreting reality. Thus, the news always depends on the context in which it is made, producing a partial truth about the events. Participants also strongly agreed that intersubjective verification can help achieve objectivity. However, once again, we would like to draw attention to two lines of understanding regarding the concept. While strongly recognizing that access to reality always occurs via interpretation, the participants of our online questionnaire seem to agree that there needs to be some kind of limit to subjective interpretation, identifying the contrast between the subjects as a possibility. Subjectivity, in this sense, appears to pose both a risk and a solution to the problem of accessing reality via interpretation, and it cannot be just any one of these options, it must be the one that is capable of effectively approaching objectivity.

3.3 Methodological dimension

3.3.1 Realism

Concerning the most appropriate method for reporting the facts, the first sentence reads: “In order to correctly reveal reality, journalism adopts a procedure to remove all of a journalist’s subjectivity from the news report. Restricting the use of adjectives and other evaluative terms is one of those methodologies”.

Table 22 - Results from the first sentence on understanding realism as a methodological condition

Average		2.49	
Agree or strongly agree		56.9%	
Neither agree nor disagree		23.1%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		20.1%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.23	1	2	4

A second sentence from this same group of statements reads: “To fulfill the mission of being the eyes of society, the journalistic method must guarantee the neutrality and impartiality of the reporter as a way to produce a report that is truthful to reality”.

Table 23 - Results from the second sentence on understanding realism as a methodological condition

Average		3.17	
Agree or strongly agree		47.4%	
Neither agree nor disagree		18.8%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		33.8%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.41	2	3	4

The overall average for understanding realism as a methodological condition was 3.37 (SD = 1.11), ranging from 1 to 5. About 55% of the participants registered frequencies greater than 3.5 and agreed with this position (1st quartile = 2.5; 2nd quartile = 3.5; 3rd quartile = 4.5), with approximately a further 42% who strongly agreed with this position, registering frequencies greater than 4.

3.3.2 Intersubjectivity

The first sentence on minimizing subjective interference in this group of statements reads: “It is not possible to always prevent opinions from appearing in news reports, even if implicitly. Even so, an appropriate strategy will help minimize these interferences, such as listening to several different versions of the same fact”.

Table 24 - Results from the first sentence on understanding intersubjectivity as a methodological condition

Average		4.29	
Agree or strongly agree		86.3%	
Neither agree nor disagree		8.5%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		5.1%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
0.93	5	5	5

A second sentence regarding minimizing subjective interference reads: “Journalism has the task of transmitting what really happened, but objectivity is never fully achieved. So, the journalist must gather and look at different views of the events as a way of getting closer to the reality of the facts”.

Table 25 - Results from the second sentence on understanding intersubjectivity as a methodological condition

Average				4.5
Agree or strongly agree				92.3%
Neither agree nor disagree				5.6%
Disagree or strongly disagree				2.1%
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile	
0.73	4	5	5	

The overall average for understanding intersubjectivity as a methodological condition was 4.42 (SD = 0.7), ranging from 1 to 5. About 85% of the participants registered frequencies greater than 4 and strongly agreed with this position (1st quartile = 4; 2nd quartile = 4.5; 3rd quartile = 5).

3.3.3 Dialectics

The first sentence in this group of statements reads: “Instead of trying to conceal themselves in the news report, journalists must always make the perspective from which they are interpreting the events clear”.

Table 26 - Results from the first sentence on understanding dialectics as a methodological condition

Average				3.72
Agree or strongly agree				62.9%
Neither agree nor disagree				19.2%
Disagree or strongly disagree				17.9%
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile	
1.22	3	4	5	

The second sentence in this group reads: “Journalists should be transparent about the conditions, motivations, and interests that lead them to interpret the events as they are portrayed. These are the factors that establish and guide the news report”.

Table 27 - Results from the second sentence on understanding dialectics as a methodological condition

Average		4.23	
Agree or strongly agree		74.4%	
Neither agree nor disagree		20.5%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		5.1%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
0.92	4	4,5	5

The overall average for understanding dialectics as a methodological condition was 3.97 (SD = 0.9), ranging from 1 to 5. About 65% of the participants registered frequencies greater than 4 and strongly agreed with this position (1st quartile = 3.5; 2nd quartile = 4; 3rd quartile = 5).

3.3.4 Strategic ritual

The first sentence regarding methodology as a ritual for protecting journalists reads: “The journalistic method is a way to protect journalists from possible problems with information sources or even the law. This is why professionals use textual strategies to erase any traces of opinion or position”.

Table 28 - Results from the first sentence on understanding strategic ritual as a methodological condition

Average		3.12	
Agree or strongly agree		45.7%	
Neither agree nor disagree		21.4%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		32.9%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.29	2	3	4

A second sentence from this same group reads: “Journalism must use its methodology of writing and representing reality to protect the rights and safety of professionals who strive to make events of general interest public”.

Table 29 - Results from the second sentence on understanding strategic ritual as a methodological condition

Average		3.83	
Agree or strongly agree		65.8%	
Neither agree nor disagree		23.9%	
Disagree or strongly disagree		10.3%	
D.P.	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile
1.03	3	4	5

The overall average for understanding strategic ritual as a methodology was 3.47 (SD = 0.93), ranging from 1 to 5. About 78% of the participants registered frequencies greater than 3 and agreed with this position (1st quartile = 3; 2nd quartile = 3.5; 3rd quartile = 4), with approximately 41% of the participants registering frequencies greater than 4 and strongly agreeing with this position.

The results from this dimension show strong agreement with statements expressing different understandings about which methods and procedures would be most appropriate for accurately corresponding between facts and news. One of the sentences about strategic ritual (an understanding that generated a fair amount of disagreement in the other dimensions) actually reached a reasonable level of agreement in the methodological dimension. This result indicates that the journalists in our sampling do not link the different journalistic procedures with their ontological and epistemological origins. They understand the methodology autonomously and independently, indicating that procedures resulting from different foundations can, in fact, be complementary.

One way to look at these results is that perhaps journalists are, in theory, dialectical and intersubjective but they become realists or strategic ritualists in terms of the practical needs of the profession. Or maybe the interpretation of events, which is central to the dialectical understanding, does not follow any criteria and is not at the service of the subject's discretion. Varying levels of agreement/disagreement with a method of different origins can also mean that

the conflict of intersubjectivity is not based on any truth but the truth as a correlation.

This is how the agreement or strong agreement with the statements that “[...] journalism adopts a procedure to remove all of a journalist’s subjectivity from the news report” and “Restricting the use of adjectives and other evaluative terms is one of those methodologies” can be interpreted. Contrary to objectivity, subjectivity is disrupting and needs to be avoided. It should be noted that despite the high percentage of agreement, the average frequency of this sentence was not very high ($M = 2.49$), which means that many journalists completely disagreed with the statement, forcing the value down.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the sample in the methodological dimension agreed more strongly and assertively with the ideas of 1) bringing together and confronting different views on events (pluralism), very valuable to intersubjective understanding, and 2) the need that journalists must always make the perspectives from which they are interpreting the events clear, a procedure linked to the idea of a dialectical part of reality.

3.4. Multiple choice question

The search for journalistic objectivity is...

The vast majority of journalists in our sampling stated that the search for journalistic objectivity is “The goal, even if admittedly unattainable, to represent the events as they happened and as close to reality as possible” (67.9%). The remaining journalists were divided and described journalistic objectivity as “a misunderstanding since facts are always the result of journalism’s own way of perceiving and producing reality, objectivity is not a good parameter for journalistic activity” (11.1%); as “an obligation to reveal what happened exactly as it happened” (9.8%) as “a strategic ritual, a form of presenting news which focused on protecting journalists” (6.8%); and others (4.3%).

Despite agreeing with several of the sentences that challenge the idea of objectivity as a matter of intersubjectivity, when posed with a question where the journalists had to give their position on only one understanding, most of them agreed that the understanding of objectivity through approximation, although unattainable, is a goal that must be followed as a parameter for producing information.

3.5 Agreement with each position according to variables on professionals and their areas of expertise

In order to verify whether the information professionals' perceptions of the issue of objectivity varies according to certain characteristics they may hold, the average frequencies of each of the four positions of the classification were compared with the variables of gender, length of professional career, area of expertise, and type of press. These categories were already presented in item 2.1 of this article. There was no significant difference in average frequency in any of these specific characteristics. A few small differences in the averages do stand out, which may indicate that:

1) Those who work with teaching and research agree less with realistic sentences ($M = 2.92$; $DP = 0.89$) when compared to those who work in newsrooms ($M = 3.14$; $DP = 0.84$), with an even greater difference among those who perform advisory or consultancy work ($M = 3.24$; $DP = 0.86$). Even still, it is important to recognize that, based on the average result, to say that any of these groups agree with the realist position is not possible. Although quite small, this difference between teaching and research when compared with journalism professionals may indicate that the more classic view of objectivity (represented by realism) is not held by those who are more familiar with the critical and specific bibliography in the area, which appears to be the case for teachers and researchers.

Table 30 - Difference in agreement with realism according to journalists' field of work

Journalists' field of work	Average
Teaching and research	2.92
newsroom	3.14
Advisor/consultant	3.24

2) Journalists who work in the alternative press tend to agree more with dialectics ($M = 4.14$; $DP = 0.54$) than journalists who work in the mainstream press ($M = 3.85$; $DP = 0.63$), although the averages point to a very moderate attachment to this position in the two groups. Although statistically speaking this difference is not considerable, it does seem to point to a greater disagreement with the dichotomous understanding of the issue of objectivity,

identified by the efforts of professionals who work for media outlets to exclude or minimize the entire subjectivity of the journalistic product (realism and intersubjectivity), the same journalists who are classified as alternative and supposedly represent more nonconformist values of journalism. Dialectics distances itself from the classical notion of objectivity as it defends the idea that subjectivity is a complementary, inseparable, and even desirable stage in the knowledge process.

Table 31 - Difference in agreement with dialectics according to journalistic writing

Journalistic writing	Average
Alternative press	4.14
Mainstream media	3.85

3) Professionals in the mainstream press agreed less with the strategic ritual ($M = 2.89$; $DP = 0.69$) than those who work in the alternative press ($M = 3.37$; $DP = 0.61$), although the average of the latter did not indicate agreement with this position. When compared to mainstream press professionals, alternative press journalists agreed more with the affirmative sentences on understanding strategic ritual, which criticize the traditional practice carried out by mainstreams media outlets.

Table 32 - Difference in agreement with strategic ritual according to journalistic writing

Journalistic writing	Average
Alternative press	3.37
Mainstream press	2.89

4 Final considerations

At its core, this investigation defends the idea that the issue of journalistic objectivity needs to be treated as a matter of revelation, correspondence, accuracy, possible representation, or even the reconstruction/appropriate interpretation of events of public

interest. Doing this helps shift the problem of superficiality to what is decisive: the qualified mediation between reality and the public.

This perspective presents new questions about the nature of reality (ontological dimension), about the possibility of accessing that reality (epistemological dimension) or even concerning the best means to determine it (methodological dimension). So much so that journalism is expected to carry out very different actions, as we have seen in this text, depending on the understanding that one adopts. For example, revealing reality entails a very different activity from interpreting reality.

This paper sought to explain that the understanding of journalistic objectivity as a matter of qualified mediation is the only possible path towards clarifying what one intends to be when one wants to be journalistically objective and, as a consequence, is a way to overcome the limitations on news coverage where the discursive strategies used to present events seem to be more important than the very nature of those events. Journalism is not just a discourse and cannot come down to a matter of text or rhetoric. Nor is it possible to reduce the issue of objectivity to a matter of method, forgetting to clarify the two other dimensions which are often assumed as “transparent” and “already resolved”: what is the understanding of the nature of events and their possibility of apprehension when producing information?

This perspective also opens the way for the necessary and unavoidable acceptance that, like other forms of knowledge, journalism is a particular form of perception, interpretation, organization, and presentation of reality. Indeed, the facts never “speak for themselves” and the task of “translating what happens” is never, and could not be, performed automatically. All the expected neutrality or passivity of a journalist in the name of supposed “objectivity” actually results in an opportunity for uncritical reports and, ultimately, for disinformation.

As we mentioned earlier, this investigation was not based on the assumption that journalists are theorists with clear affiliations to schools and philosophical ideals or theories of Journalism, that being the case, we did not expect to find such conceptual differences on the issue of journalistic objectivity. However, our findings did show a considerable level of conceptual inconsistency. This discrepancy may have been the result of the online questionnaire and the fact that the participants needed to have a good understanding of philosophical and abstract issues to appropriately assess the questions.

The questionnaire was based on the three dimensions and also resulted in a certain degree of contradiction, as the foundation of the investigation supported the inseparability of the dimensions: ontological, epistemological, and methodological. This separation, which systematized and recognized three dimensions, may have actually led to some confusion surrounding the concepts, and thus comprised the understanding that the three dimensions are interconnected and interdependent, and that they occur in the same act of knowledge production. Even still, it would have been even less productive to ask journalists directly if they are realists, intersubjectivists, dialecticians, or in agreement with strategic ritual, without any transposition into sentences that express how each of the classifications responds to the issue of the nature of reality and its accessibility.

Although we do recognize these shortcomings, we can safely state that the results of this study help to characterize the perception of journalists on the issue. In short, the journalists in our sampling defend the idea that the facts have a nature and determination that does not depend on the subject. As a result, the information professional has to get as close as possible to this reality, actively interpreting and seeking to discover the pre-existing meanings of events, even if that is perceived as being an unattainable ideal. The most adequate method to achieve this objectivity is one that minimizes the subject's arbitrary interference and gives space to and opportunity for different voices to be heard on the same topic, while always making the perspective from which the events are being interpreted clear.

It is important to note that these results largely corroborate the findings of Martine and De Maeyer (2018), who strongly criticize the idea that objects have a ready and finished determination "in and of themselves" and that at the base of all events there would be a split between the events as they happen and the subjects, whose duty is to find this first nature of reality. The authors label this understanding of objectivity as naive empiricism and point out that most journalists and journalism scholars in the field are wary of the absolutist excesses of this rationalist-positivist view, which in the classification adopted by this work, is represented by realism.

For Martine and De Maeyer (2018), "most conceptions of journalistic objectivity share an overall relativist-constructivist perspective, opposed to the rationalist-positivist view" (p. 5). The

problem the authors point out is precisely the difficulty, even among those who refuse positivism, in practicing outside the central premise that defines objectivity as what resides and is determined solely outside the subject. This is an issue, as explained in this article, which can only be well understood from its ontological and epistemological nature, and which cannot neglect the good conceptual foundation of the events. When the premise that the basis of reality is the separation of subject and object is taken for granted, and that knowing brings these two instances together, whose essences are separated, “[...] the leap above the fundamental gulf that separates the subject and the object is impossible, they [journalists] can only dismiss the whole concept of objectivity entirely, recast it as something else [...] or accept to see the core value of journalism as an unattainable – and therefore incredibly frustrating – horizon” (Martine & De Maeyer, 2018, p. 5).

But then why has the notion of journalistic objectivity persisted for so long, even though its limitations are recognized? For Massaquoi (2016), the most important reason is that “nothing better has replaced it and many of the journalists who are shining lights in the profession believe in it, at least as a necessary goal” (p. 23). This is an example of one more investigation that points to the same findings from this paper: from the understanding that the meanings of facts do not depend on information professionals, the task of journalism is precisely to seek, to at least approach objectivity through methods that reduce possible subjective interferences.

Lastly, there are other limitations regarding this investigation that have been registered and should be addressed in future studies. As this is a descriptive-exploratory study where its main analyses were of frequency, it was not possible to infer causal relationships between the variables. Also, as it is a representative and non-probabilistic sample, generalizations could not be made. Finally, it is understood that the interpretation and consistency of the participants partially influenced the responses of the scales about the positions classified by this investigation, which makes it important to adopt stronger scales based on the shortcomings identified in this work. The development of other studies is suggested to approach how the variables are related, using more advanced statistical methods.

NOTES

- 1 For more details on this classification, see Henriques (2019).
- 2 Brazilian Journalism Research Society (SBPJor), founded in 2003, currently has more than 700 associated researchers.
- 3 National Association (Brazil) of Post-Graduate Programs in Communication (Compós), created in 1991, currently consists of 53 Post-Graduate Programs in the field of communication from the five geographic regions of Brazil.
- 4 Brazilian Society for Interdisciplinary Studies in Communication (Intercom), founded in 1977, currently has around 1.200 associated researchers.
- 5 The collection and systematization of data, through SPSS, were carried out with the help of a PhD in Psychology from UFES, Catarina Gordiano Paes Henriques.

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