



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Evolution of New Trajectories in Journalism: Research Directions Approaching the Role and Impact of Solutions Journalism on Society

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Apr 24, 2024	Media often focus more on negative than positive news. This can lead to a pessimistic and disillusioned worldview among the public. Solutions journalism can help balance this trend by providing positive information and constructively addressing social issues. Globally, there are numerous studies on the role of journalism in social issues. Many argue that journalism conveys news to the public. However, others believe journalism should participate in social issues, creating mutual understanding within the community. Additionally, journalism can offer solutions to problems and promote social development. Therefore, besides conveying news, journalism should act as an "expert" on "hot" social issues, serving as a channel for consultation and problem-solving. Using analytical and synthetic methods, this article will introduce several research approaches regarding the role and impact of solutions journalism on society, contributing to a clearer understanding of this re-emerging journalism type.
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INTRODUCTION

Recent studies have shown that Constructive Journalism/Solutions Journalism is not a new invention but rather a revival of the journalistic trend of proposing solutions to persistent and pressing social issues. This approach originated from the viewpoint expressed in the Journalist's Creed (1914) by Walter Williams (University of Missouri School of Journalism, USA) and later in 1948 by the Good News Bulletin news service in New York. Constructive Journalism/Solutions Journalism focuses on successful projects and selects positive solutions for reporting. In recent years, Solutions Journalism (Constructive Journalism) has garnered significant attention from academia and has been widely adopted by numerous media outlets globally.

In Europe and the United States, "Constructive Journalism" is also known as "Solutions Journalism" and is considered a form of journalism aimed at creating positive impacts on society (Gyldensted 2011, 2015; Haagerup 2014; McIntyre 2015). As Benesch (1998) stated: Instead of pointing out what's wrong in the hope that someone will fix it, solutions journalism points out what's right in the hope that someone might emulate it.

To gain a deeper understanding of this issue, Lough & McInty (2018) conducted in-depth interviews with 14 journalists to better understand the position of solutions journalism. The authors explored

how the participating journalists perceived solution-oriented reporting and the impact of this approach on their thinking and news production habits. The study found that journalists are only willing to incorporate solutions into investigative articles and when there are social reactions. They believe that solutions journalism has broad relevance but must also maintain the objectivity of journalism. When applying the solutions approach, journalists change their thinking but largely maintain their old reporting habits. Finally, journalists recognize that editorial boards play a crucial role in either supporting or hindering the adoption of solutions journalism. This study shows that journalists' awareness of the importance of solutions journalism is not enough; consensus and support from leadership are also needed. Only then can solutions journalism be applied and fully realize its potential in promoting positive and sustainable social development.

The aforementioned study by Lough & McInty (2018) aimed to understand journalists' views and thoughts on solutions journalism, how they position it within the journalistic environment, and their news production habits. They also surveyed journalists' enthusiasm for this type of journalism. However, their number of interview samples was limited, so further expansion is needed for a deeper insight. Lough & McInty presented three main points: First, solutions journalism is similar to investigative reporting but with an added step of seeking solutions. Second, they found it appealing to many topics. Finally, they believe that this type of journalism plays a role in shaping the future of journalism, helping to rebuild readers' interest and trust.

Content Kyser Lough and Karen McIntyre continued to analyze the content of solution journalism. They focused on the use of images in solution-oriented articles, whether they portray an inappropriate message. Among the results obtained, it showed that the ability of an image to reflect a solution is higher when it is more emotionally appealing and expresses positive emotions. That is, the higher the emotional appeal and positive emotions found in the photo, the higher the chance that the photo reflects a solution. Images created by the media's graphics department are more likely to depict solutions than images taken from outside the field. A conflicting image can complicate the message of solutions in the story. The findings of the two authors Kyser Lough and Karen McIntyre show the importance of further research on the role of images in solution journalism, especially the selection of appropriate images for solution-oriented articles.

In summary, Solution Journalism or Constructive Journalism is a form of journalism based on the principles of positive psychology. It deeply integrates with other scientific disciplines to propose solutions that address societal issues in a multi-faceted, comprehensive, and thorough manner, without bias or prejudice. Its goal is to provide positive solutions, add value to news, and inspire action within society.

Journalism's Solutions During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a lot of anxiety, racial discrimination, and opposition to public health recommendations in society. To understand the impact of constructive journalism in this context, Christian Staal Bruun Overgaard (2021) conducted a random survey of 492 people, asking them to view news updates on social networks. The results showed that positive and constructive headlines helped reduce feelings of anger and anxiety in readers compared to negative headlines. This finding shows the usefulness of solution journalism and constructive journalism in times of crisis, helping to direct public opinion to practical aspects and attract the attention of experts. Moreover, the research also clarified the impact of reporting news via social networks in the context of a crisis, while emphasizing the role of factors such as headlines, images, and content shared in directing the emotions of readers. The findings are discussed in relation to the theory of intelligence and emotions. This study raises concerns about the impact of negative information on

the mental health of the public during pandemics and crises. Besides, this study also suggests a solution orientation by "filtering" graphic images in the news as a potential solution for constructive journalism. However, more research is needed to effectively integrate information emotion theory into other negative news stories. In addition, Cai Wen (2021) analyzed the historical role and changes of Chinese constructive journalism in the context of media development and technological progress. The research results show that the "constructive" nature of Chinese journalism is reflected in the following characteristics:

Directly participate in fair governance: The press cooperates with the government to propagate and implement public policies.

Monitor public power and find solutions to problems.

Intervene and help solve people's livelihood problems.

Mobilize and organize the public with constantly updated strategies and methods.

Establish consulting organizations to expand services. From there, agencies and the public can choose appropriate solutions to overcome their own problems. Besides, You Li's (2021) research compared the effectiveness of the role of solution journalism in reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic in 25 countries and regions. The results showed that although solution journalism plays an important role in intervening, supporting, and orienting citizens, its feedback and target audience are different in different regions. The press on solutions in East Asia and Western countries (except the United States) - where there are low COVID-19 infections - has focused on the roles of intervention and support more when reporting on government-led virus prevention activities. In general, solution journalism plays an important role in promoting the sustainable development of society.

In Africa, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed a severe information deficit, highlighting the desperate need for reliable information. Recognizing this urgency, many African media outlets endeavored to diversify their coverage of the pandemic to meet the public's information needs. While some media campaigns in Nigeria inadvertently caused panic among 85% of survey participants in Imo State, research by Cajetan et al. (2021) also demonstrated that media remained a crucial channel for authorities to educate the public about COVID-19 and other health issues.

In 2022, Uwe Kruger, Markus Beiler, and colleagues conducted a survey of several media organizations in the Federal Republic of Germany, including editors-in-chief and journalists, which took place from September 14 to December 10, 2021, with a total of 79 participants completing the questionnaire. The survey results revealed that constructive journalism in Germany is still relatively new. When asked when they started reporting constructively, more than half indicated after 2010. The years from 2014 to 2020 saw the highest number of participating journalists, with 4 to 10 per year (peaking in 2017). Furthermore, the types of media used to disseminate their constructive products were published: online media (67%), magazines (43%), social media (34%), newspapers (25%), radio (19%), television (19%), news agencies (3%), and other channels, including books, films/documentaries, podcasts, and customer magazines/brochures (5%). Therefore, journalism needs to identify opportunities, developments, and strengths, not just focus on difficulties and negatives. Although the survey was relatively small and new in the field of journalism in Germany, it attracted a diverse group of participants in terms of age and high levels of education. However, the survey results showed a limited understanding of the role of journalists in solutions journalism among those who had little or no knowledge of this field.

Solutions journalism in crisis management in the public sector

Also in 2022, Mohammed Abdullateef conducted a study assessing the role and necessity of solutions journalism in public crisis management. He surveyed media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in four African regions (West: Nigeria, East: Kenya, North: Sudan, and South: South Africa) during 2020 and 2021. The goal was to examine the extent to which media adhered to the principles of Social Responsibility of Mass Media while reporting on the pandemic. Abdullateef's research found that African media actively and continuously updated news about COVID-19, contributing to raising public awareness of health protection measures such as wearing masks and washing hands. However, many journalists often their social responsibility in reporting solutions and responses to social issues. Instead, they focused on sensational stories, potentially causing confusion, agitation, and social disharmony (Abdullateef, 2022; Kanval et al., 2024).

The study exposed the shortcomings of journalism in some African countries in meeting the public's information needs on critical issues, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of providing in-depth analysis and practical solutions, many media outlets only briefly reported COVID-19 stories as daily news, even using sensational language that caused panic. According to the survey, journalists mainly presented general information about the pandemic, some of which were misleading and could lead the public to become indifferent to or distrustful of the media. Although Abdullateef did not propose specific solutions to address this situation, the study emphasized the significance and importance of solutions journalism in reporting on the pandemic. Solutions journalism not only provides comprehensive and accurate information but also proposes practical solutions to help society respond to crises.

In 2024, Bulendu, D.E. & Yanqiu, Z. published an analysis on the perspectives and practices of constructive journalism in the United Republic of Tanzania (Africa). The authors aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of constructive journalism activities in Tanzania. Their research analyzed the interplay between negativity and positivity in news reporting, exploring its practice and impact on readers.

Bulendu and Yanqiu surveyed 169 individuals, conducted in-depth interviews and group discussions with 30 people, and analyzed 240 news stories from eight media outlets, examining the combination of positive and negative elements. The results revealed that while media outlets and journalists tend to focus on negative news, the public prefers more positive content. The study also found that many survey participants were familiar with the concept of constructive journalism. Specifically, 122 respondents (75.8% of the total) were acquainted with the concept, while 39 respondents (24.2%) had never encountered it. The concept was particularly prevalent among young people, especially those aged 18 to 35, despite not being included in educational curricula. An in-depth analysis of 240 news stories from eight media outlets will dissect editorial viewpoints on framing and presenting information, particularly focusing on the combination of negative and positive elements. This reveals an interesting paradox: Although media outlets and journalists often focus on negative news, the public prefers more positive information. However the authors did not provide a complete definition of solution journalism or constructive journalism, but rather summarized various perspectives on it. The research findings emphasize the importance for Tanzanian media outlets and journalists to reassess their approach to news selection and presentation, aiming for more balanced and constructive stories. Tanzania's long history has shaped its journalism model. After gaining independence, Tanzania inherited a media system from the colonial era, characterized by tight government control over information and media outlets. However, recent changes have brought a fresh perspective to Tanzanian journalism. While political events and activities of prominent figures often dominate daily newspapers, other areas like sports, entertainment, and everyday life issues are also gaining significant attention on radio, television, and digital platforms.

Challenges remain, as many Tanzanian journalists tend to focus on negative news, overlooking opportunities to educate readers about utilizing Tanzania's abundant resources. Despite the growing market for positive news in Tanzania, journalism often overemphasizes negative news. This may be due to the immediacy and appeal of negative events like shootings, wars, or epidemics. In contrast, positive news like decreasing crime rates, expanding peace, or increasing life expectancy is often seen as gradual and less captivating, even considered "propaganda" or advertising. This bias towards negative news can have serious consequences, distorting reality and fostering a pessimistic outlook on life among the public. However, it's important to recognize that many aspects of life have witnessed significant progress in recent decades¹. Research by Soroka et al., published in September 2019, surveyed over 1,000 people from 17 countries on the negativity bias in news and its impact. The results showed that people tend to pay more attention to negative news than positive news, and journalism often leans towards negativity due to the immediacy of events.

According to Charlie Beckett and Mark Deuze (2016), three main factors drive journalists to use emotions in journalism as a tool:

- **Economic factors:** The fierce competition for advertising revenue and readership requires journalists to use emotions to capture attention and retain readers.
- **Technological factors:** Emotionally charged images attract more readers. Encouraging people to share journalistic content is crucial, and positive emotional impact helps achieve this.
- **Psychological factors:** Understanding human behavior, culture, and neuroscience enhances comprehension of how people approach and interact with news. Emotional factors play a key role in both news production and reception.

The research team emphasized that quality news reporting and editing always have emotions at their core. They also presented clear ways to create "impactful" news and supported this research path as promising for the future. Therefore, deeper research is needed on the impact of emotions in journalism on aspects such as political economy, cultural identity of each nation, ethnicity, and gender. These studies will provide a more comprehensive and objective view of using emotions effectively and responsibly.

Based on the theory of psychological empowerment, a research team from Bournemouth University (UK) conducted a study assessing the reactions of the UK public when exposed to news in the style of solutions journalism. The results showed that negative news, framed catastrophically, stimulates negative emotions, reduces the intention to take positive action, and negatively affects the reader's spirit. In contrast, positive news presented in a solutions journalism framework evokes positive emotions, encourages action, and brings positive impact to the recipient.

The study also showed that readers prefer solutions-oriented news over traditional negative news. This confirms the potential of solutions journalism in better serving society. Furthermore, readers are aware of the empowering role of solutions journalism, especially in boosting morale, reducing anxiety, and enhancing happiness. Overall, solutions journalism is seen as an effective tool to encourage the public to interact and participate more actively in social issues.

¹ Bulendu, D. E.& Yanqiu, Z.(2024). Perspectives and Practices of Constructive Journalism in Mainland Tanzania.East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences, 7(1), 274-284

As the public continues to criticize the media for delivering too much negative news, we can refer to the research of Karen Elizabeth McIntyre & Rhonda Gibson (2016) to illustrate the importance of psychology in journalism. The authors conducted a survey of 307 workers in the US to examine the impact of story value (positive, negative, or neutral) on readers' interest, emotions, and intention to share. The survey sample included 65% men and 74% white people (9% Asian and 8% African American). The average age was 32, although ages ranged from 18 to 72. Workers were spread across the US, with about a quarter from each of the Northeast, Southeast, and West regions. They were well-educated: 38% had a bachelor's degree, 29% had some college, 13% were high school graduates, 10% had an associate's degree, and 9% had completed graduate school.

The research results showed that positive news has a positive impact on readers, making them feel happy and more likely to share information. Additionally, important stories that highlight positive outcomes from negative events can also benefit media outlets emotionally. The study by Karen McIntyre and Rhonda Gibson (2016) used a psychological approach to explain why people enjoy positive news. However, this study was limited to examining the impact of a single news story and did not consider continuous exposure to multiple positive and negative news stories. Additionally, the study only focused on the appeal and impact of positive news compared to negative news, without evaluating the role of the media in shaping readers' approaches to information.

A subsequent study by Karen McIntyre and Cathrine Gyldensted in 2017, "Constructive Journalism: Applying Positive Psychology Techniques to News Production," revealed a trend of focusing on negative information and conflict in the reporting of most media outlets. The reason given is that negative information often creates a stronger, longer-lasting emotional and psychological impact on the recipient. The use of negative information to attract public attention can lead to negative consequences such as:

- Reduced compassion, tolerance, and the spirit of mutual support and assistance towards strangers.
- Impact on individual psychological states.
- Decreased trust in leaders and the creation of a negative image of a corrupt and dangerous society.

Furthermore, Karen McIntyre and Cathrine Gyldensted (2017) propose applying psychological principles to the reporting techniques of Constructive Journalism. According to them, applying these principles can enhance the effectiveness of journalism while maintaining its core functions. Specifically, the two authors suggest positive psychology techniques that can be applied to the news production process of Constructive Journalism, including:

- Applying a positive psychology model to the news production process.
- Evoking positive emotions in articles, even those on negative topics.
- Using constructive and solution-oriented interviewing techniques.
- Focusing on solutions to social problems.

By applying these techniques, Constructive Journalism can create effective, engaging media products that positively impact the public.

Many news organizations focus on "traditional" negative reporting, making readers passive and less engaged in civic life. To address this, Constructive Journalism is proposed as an alternative, focusing on positive and inspiring stories. With influences from positive psychology, Constructive Journalism is suggested as a way to improve the public's mental health and interaction with news by enhancing the public's critical role in journalism.

Natasha van Antwerpen (University of Adelaide, Australia and colleagues) conducted a study to demonstrate the impact of constructive journalism on the public's psychology, titled "The effects of constructive journalism techniques on mood, comprehension, and trust," aiming to contribute to the evidence of the impact of solutions journalism on the public's psychological state. The research team conducted a survey with 238 participants (51.3% male, 47.5% female, and 1.3% undisclosed), and the results showed that: Participants who read constructive articles reported higher positive emotions and lower negative emotions compared to those who read non-constructive news. However, this research team has not yet delved deeper into the techniques for adjusting the positive impact of constructive journalism on the information delivery of news.

These findings, in part, reinforce the need to measure the impact of journalism and journalistic solutions on the public's psychology. They further affirm the importance of applying psychological techniques in journalism and media activities to enhance communication effectiveness, which is extremely necessary and beneficial. The aforementioned studies have adopted an interdisciplinary approach to research solutions journalism. By combining the field of psychology to record the characteristics of solutions journalism and its various branches.

CONCLUSION

Through the above analysis, it can be affirmed that solution journalism plays a key role and important responsibility in promoting a more prosperous, sustainable, and happy society. It can help people solve social problems such as crisis management in the public sector, during epidemics, help people live more actively, and promote public social actions...Therefore, in the coming time, solution journalism has great potential to become a powerful force for more positive change in society. Solution-oriented journalism encourages journalists to think about the social responsibility of the press and their own responsibility in promoting change. However, do journalists always act in the best interests of society in their journalistic processes? That is a complex question that has not yet been thoroughly answered.

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