

Extending news values: Rethinking positivity through the lens of empowering journalism

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Abstract

This study extends the understanding of positivity as a news value by exploring how empowering journalism operationalizes this concept. Through content analysis of 273 articles from three representative outlets—*World's Best News* (constructive journalism), *Christian Science Monitor's* education section (solutions journalism), and *Positive News* (positive journalism)—the research identifies four interconnected subcategories of positivity: positive expressions, solutions, future orientation, and empowering voices. Findings reveal hierarchical distribution patterns: positive expressions maintain consistent presence; solutions show reduced presence in leads but development in main texts; and future orientation and empowering voices as depth-dependent elements appear primarily in main texts. This also reflects that despite sharing empowering characteristics, each approach has distinct emphases: constructive journalism's "optimistic solution-oriented" model, solutions journalism's "solution-participant empowerment" approach, and positive journalism's "present-moment positive experience" focus. By reconceptualizing positivity as a composite news value with four functional dimensions, this study provides theoretical insights and practical guidance for journalism that seeks to both inform and empower audiences.

Keywords

news values, positivity, constructive journalism, solutions journalism, positive journalism

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Introduction

Although Walter Lippmann identified news selection attributes and conventions as early as 1922, it was Galtung and Ruge's 1965 news values system that established the influential theoretical framework in this field. This theory is regarded as a classic social science answer to the fundamental question of "what is news" (Richardson, 2005; Smith and Higgins, 2013). For over half a century, news values have played a decisive role in every aspect of news practice as key criteria for journalists to select, process, and present news.

Using McIntyre and Gibson's (2016) research as an example, in *The New York Times* coverage, 60% of news stories contained elements of conflict, and 68% involved power elites. This preference for negativity, conflict, and elite-focus in the news value system is not coincidental but stems from journalists' adherence to the traditional notion that "bad news is good news." Research has demonstrated that this negativity bias carries major consequences for audiences. Boukes and Vliegenthart (2017) found that news consumption's focus on negative content increases negative emotions among audiences, while studies have also shown that news negativity is a common cause of news avoidance behavior (Carbone et al., 2024; De Bruin et al., 2021; Murinska et al., 2022).

In response to these concerns and evolving societal needs, scholars began to reexamine this singular value orientation dominated by negativity. A concept paired with negativity—positivity—has entered the academic discourse. Harcup and O'Neill (2001), in their revision and expansion of Galtung and Ruge's news values system, introduced "good news" as one of the new categories, defining it as "stories with particularly positive overtones, including events like rescues or cures". Indeed, Bednarek and Caple (2017) established a linguistic perspective on news values, where "positivity" secured its place, closely aligning with the concept of "good news": the construction of events or actors in a news story as favorable or uplifting, characterized by positive emotions, evaluative language, and actions, often highlighting success, progress, or other beneficial outcomes.

Currently, several new journalism approaches centered on positivity are emerging to address news avoidance and trust issues (McIntyre and Gyldensted, 2017, 2018). Constructive journalism applies positive psychology to produce balanced stories that enhance well-being by highlighting solutions to societal challenges (McIntyre and Gyldensted, 2018). Solutions journalism emphasizes rigorous reporting on responses to social issues, encouraging audiences to consider solutions alongside problems (Bro, 2023; McIntyre and Lough, 2021), while positive journalism focuses on uplifting narratives that inspire hope through constructive stories (Dhiman, 2023). These approaches complement traditional news values, reflecting a shift from merely identifying problems to seeking empowerment and responding to the public's growing need for both vigilant reporting and hopeful pathways forward. Indeed, these practical approaches also provide new theoretical perspectives for systematically constructing positivity through transparent application of elements such as positive change, solutions, and constructive interviewing (Fölscher-Kingwill, 2023; Mast and Temmerman, 2021).

However, the academic understanding of positivity remains rather one-dimensional, often viewing it as either contradicting journalistic objectivity or as a marginal value

applicable only to specific news types, or merely as a peripheral element maintained to preserve the completeness of the entire news values system. The limited research focusing on positivity tends to merely validate its existence rather than interpreting its meaning at a deeper level, let alone drawing inspiration from other related journalistic theoretical frameworks. There remains a gap in examining how positivity is constructed in news texts within the news values theoretical framework, which this study addresses by analyzing how positivity operates in contemporary journalistic practice.

Literature review

Assessing positivity within current news values

Harcup and O'Neill (2001) introduced "good news" as a distinct news value, departing from traditional emphasis on negativity. Their 2017 update expanded this understanding to encompass acts of heroism, human resilience, and collective achievements, reflecting growing recognition of positivity's diverse manifestations. Indeed, Bednarek and Caple (2017) employ the term "positivity," which has gained wider academic acceptance than "good news." They conceptualize positivity as a dynamic discursive construction process rather than simple categorization (Baissa et al., 2024), manifesting across multiple dimensions through linguistic devices (quotations, evaluative language) and visual elements (facial expressions, ceremonies), forming a multimodal framework. They emphasize positivity's context-dependent nature, noting that traditionally negative events can be framed positively in specific contexts. Despite its increasing recognition, research on positivity as a news value remains limited. Bednarek and Caple (2017) suggest that its emergence often depends on specific news types or strategic objectives of news organizations, such as alternative media's preference for positive coverage. They also observe that positivity frequently interweaves with other news values, sometimes balancing delicately with negativity within the same story.

Positivity as a news value extends far beyond simple "good news," representing a multidimensional system that enhances news appeal through positive evaluations, constructive impacts, and emotional connections (Zhang and Cheung, 2022), while functioning as a solution-oriented process of positive emotion construction (Guo et al., 2024). Research indicates that content embodying positivity gains greater traction on social platforms, tied to users' identity construction needs (Trilling et al., 2017). Practically, positivity manifests through reporting on scientific breakthroughs, heroic acts, and peace initiatives (Bednarek and Caple, 2017), while focusing on problem-solving approaches and social solidarity (Huan, 2023). In crisis reporting, positivity works with other news values to balance negative information by highlighting positive actions and social cohesion (Yu and Chen, 2023). This value construction varies by context: domestic coverage employs positivity to shape national image, while international reporting uses it for cross-cultural communication (Yu and Liu, 2023). Although positivity maintains lower priority than traditional negativity (Tse and Spiezio, 2022), its unique social functions in the digital age make it worthy of deeper investigation.

Academic research has also conducted specialized studies on positivity as a news value, demonstrating diverse theoretical exploration paths. [Cocking \(2018\)](#) proposes corresponding news value systems for different reporting approaches, maintaining a definition of positivity that aligns with [Bednarek's](#) conceptualization, reflecting scholarly consensus on this concept. [McIntyre \(2016\)](#) opts to test texts using Harcup and O'Neill's value system that excludes good news, while [Yu and Zhu \(2024\)](#) applies the Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) framework to study good news—both studies highlighting the significance of positivity as an independent news value. Indeed, the DNVA framework ([Bednarek and Caple, 2017](#)) is a linguistic approach increasingly used in media linguistics to examine how news values are constructed through textual and visual discourse. [Makki \(2020\)](#) trends continues in culture's analysis of Iranian police news, which, also based on the DNVA framework, reveals significant positivity tendencies in specific thematic coverage. [Parks \(2021\)](#) adopts a more open perspective, proposing the possibility of incorporating “joy” into the news value system. Although the consideration of joy differs from traditional positivity concepts, this exploration reflects academia's pursuit of openness in news value systems. Reviewing these studies reveals scholars' tendency to build upon [Bednarek's](#) theoretical framework to validate the presence of “positivity” across different news contexts, rather than fundamentally reinterpreting its concept. This phenomenon not only reflects the influence of key theories but also suggests room for further theoretical development of the positivity concept.

While theoretical exploration of positivity as a news value continues to deepen, its application in journalistic practice faces fundamental challenges. As [Parks \(2019\)](#) points out, “objectivity” remains journalism's core professional value, causing journalists to experience anxiety about potentially violating professional ethical standards when reporting positive content—even though they recognize that happiness and hope are inherent parts of human life, and audiences seek such positive emotional resonance in news. While news values are inherently socially constructed concepts that emerge through professional and cultural negotiations, this study does not view objectivity as an absolute truth detached from social context ([Swart and Broersma, 2024](#)). Rather, it understands objectivity as a professional standard that has been institutionalized through journalistic training, ethical codes, and newsroom practices ([Downie and Heyward, 2023](#)). Within this established framework of professional objectivity, positivity can be operationalized as measurable dimensions that complement rather than compromise journalistic standards.

Indeed, emerging scholarship offers new perspectives on reconciling positivity with objectivity in journalism practice. [Van Antwerpen and Fielding \(2023\)](#) demonstrate that constructive journalism techniques—including solutions, future orientation, inclusiveness and diversity, empowerment, context, and co-creation—can enable journalists to navigate the tension between personal subjectivities and professional standards while maintaining objectivity as a guiding principle. This study suggests that positive approaches in journalism need not compromise journalistic independence; rather, they can strengthen the professional ideal of balanced reporting by providing systematic frameworks for addressing complex social issues ([Hermans and Gyldensted, 2019](#); [Meneses-Fernández and Torvisco, 2024](#)).

Despite these emerging theoretical insights, the current understanding of positivity in journalism practice remains oversimplified and underexplored, often equating it merely with reporting positive events or conveying optimistic emotions. This simplistic interpretation both overlooks journalists' agency in actively constructing positive change and underestimates news reporting's potential role in advancing social progress. Against this backdrop, the emergence of empowering journalism provides a new theoretical perspective for reinterpreting positivity. This approach not only emphasizes news reporting's social empowerment function but also offers practical pathways for achieving positivity while maintaining professional standards (McIntyre and Lough, 2023; Steppat et al., 2020).

Expanding the understanding of positivity from empowering journalism

Among journalistic practices embracing positivity, constructive, solutions, and positive journalism demonstrate positivity's diverse possibilities across professional practice, problem-solving, and emotional experience dimensions. Constructive journalism views positivity as a value constructed through professional practice, emphasizing six key elements (solutions, future orientation, inclusiveness, empowering people, context, co-creation) while maintaining journalistic standards (Hermans and Gyldensted, 2019). Solutions journalism adopts a focused approach, equating positivity with presenting problem solutions—*The New York Times*' "Fixes" column exemplifies this practice, enhancing audiences' self-efficacy through systematic solution reporting (Van Antwerpen et al., 2022). Positive journalism takes a more straightforward approach to positivity (Dhiman, 2023).

While these three approaches are distinct in their scope and emphasis, they share a fundamental understanding of positivity that goes beyond mere optimistic reporting (Leung and Lee, 2015; McIntyre and Gyldensted, 2017). Their collective conceptualization of positivity is essentially rooted in empowerment—whether through constructive frameworks, solution-oriented reporting, or positive emotional engagement. Hence, this study proposes to term them collectively as "empowering journalism" to capture their shared philosophical foundation: they all view positivity as a means to enable and empower individuals and communities to engage with social challenges more effectively. Although "being positive" could serve as an umbrella term, it may not fully capture the broader journalistic vision embodied in constructive and solutions journalism. The term "empowering journalism" better reflects their common understanding that true positivity in journalism lies in its capacity to activate and empower stakeholders.

Four subcategories of positivity derived from empowering journalism

Constructive journalism emphasizes building positivity through professional practice, with its elements of solutions, future orientation, and empowering people directly reflecting a multidimensional understanding of positivity in news production (Hermans and Gyldensted, 2019). Solutions journalism, focusing on solutions as its core, emphasizes systematic reporting to inspire audience participation in social change—aligning with the

solutions element in constructive journalism (Lough and McIntyre, 2023). Positive journalism concentrates on positive expression and emotional resonance, closely matching the definition of positivity in news values theory (Leung and Lee, 2015). These approaches collectively point to four dimensions of positivity: positive expressions (inherited from traditional news values and positive journalism), solutions (from solutions journalism), future orientation, and empowering voices (both from constructive journalism). This multidimensional framework not only integrates core elements from all three approaches but also expands the theoretical scope of positivity beyond mere “positive orientation” in news values.

Looking more closely, first, positive expressions, following the definition of “positivity” as a news value and aligning with positive journalism’s understanding, refers to constructing news events or actors through positive language, emotions, and evaluations (Bednarek and Caple, 2017). This expression encompasses both the presentation of positive outcomes like success and progress, and the emphasis on beneficial social impacts. Second, solutions transcend traditional journalism’s focus on conflict and negativity by not only exposing problems but also exploring and presenting actionable solutions, ultimately positioning journalists as catalysts who inspire action and engage audiences constructively through well-researched information (Bro, 2023). This dimension requires journalists to deeply investigate solution details, implementation processes, and actual effects, providing actionable references for audiences (Usery, 2022). This includes not only macro-level solutions but also solutions addressing citizens’ daily challenges and difficulties (Curry and Hammonds, 2014). Third, future orientation transcends current issues to explore potential development paths and opportunities for change (Hermans and Gyldensted, 2019). This forward-looking perspective includes both analysis of long-term trends and predictions of imminent actions, helping audiences build positive expectations and a sense of engagement with the future. Fourth, empowering voices empowers interviewees through specific interview strategies and reporting frameworks. Journalists guide interviewees to demonstrate their initiative and agency by asking questions about resources, collaboration, consensus, and solutions (McIntyre and Gyldensted, 2017). This empowerment not only transforms interviewees’ traditionally passive image in news but also provides readers with new perspectives on understanding problems and solutions through diverse viewpoints (Gyldensted, 2015).

As positivity evolves from a single value orientation into a composite news value with four subcategories, journalists’ selection criteria and reporting perspectives shift accordingly (Guo et al., 2024). The vague concept of “positive attributes” transforms into concrete, constructive evaluation indicators, avoiding both thematic limitations and the subjective-positivity dilemma. Importantly, this new understanding of positivity doesn’t negate traditional news values but rather complements and deepens the existing system. Even when reporting on negative or serious events, journalists can maintain their watchdog function while promoting public engagement and social dialogue by exploring potential solutions, discussing future directions, and activating stakeholders’ agency (Huan, 2023).

Based on the interpretation of operational manuals for emerging journalism approaches and combined with the original definition of positivity in news values, positivity

within professional journalism frameworks is a collective concept that can be operationalized into four systematic subcategories: positive expressions, solutions, future orientation, and empowering voices (Guo et al., 2024). These respectively reflect positive language expression, attention to problem solutions, outlook on future development, and activation of source agency. This integration preserves journalism's commitment to the professional ideal of fair and balanced reporting while responding to societal expectations for positive content, endowing positivity with more constructive roles and reflecting journalism's evolving functions in the digital age.

Indeed, the preceding review reveals empirical gaps that constrain both theoretical development and practical application of multidimensional positivity. Current research lacks analysis of how positivity dimensions distribute across news elements, how these dimensions interact within narratives, how they build sequentially to engage readers, and how different outlets deploy them strategically. Addressing these gaps will advance news values theory while providing practical guidance for editorial decision-making in the digital age. To address these research gaps, this study proposes the following research questions:

RQ1. How are the four subcategories of positivity distributed across headlines, leads, and body text in empowering journalism outlets—and what does this distribution reveal about the functional roles of positivity within the news value system?

RQ2. How do these positivity subcategories interact complementarily within news content to produce a multidimensional positivity narrative?

RQ3. How do positivity elements build sequentially from headline through body text to create reader engagement pathways, and what implications does this have for editorial content structuring?

RQ4. How do different empowering journalism outlets strategically deploy positivity subcategories, and what do these variations reveal about the evolution of professional journalistic ideals in the digital age?

Methodology

Data collection

This study employs quantitative content analysis across three representative outlets: World's Best News (WBN), education section in Christian Science Monitor (CSMedu), and Positive News (PN). Indeed, CSM's education coverage uniquely encompasses both policy and daily life dimensions, offering topic continuity and diversity compared to sections influenced by single events (like the 2024 U.S. election) or looser lifestyle topics, enabling comprehensive analysis of solutions journalism characteristics (Nurhidayah, 2023).

These outlets represent distinct positivity-oriented journalism approaches: WBN, a Danish digital pioneer of constructive journalism (began in 2010 as an awareness campaign, launched news stories in 2013, and ceased operations in 2020), originated from constructive journalism's theoretical birthplace, combining these principles with UN

Sustainable Development Goals. As an independent non-profit supported by the UN and Danish organizations, WBN's practices carry representativeness and credibility ([World's Best News, 2017](#)). CSM represents mainstream American media's solutions journalism adoption, serving global audiences since 1908 and emphasizing "solutions that unite rather than divide" ([Solutions Journalism Network, 2024](#); [Squires, 2015](#)). PN, a UK quarterly magazine (est. 1993) dedicated to positive journalism, focuses on "what's going right" globally. As a community benefit organization owned by 1500 readers from 33 countries, PN demonstrates professional positive journalism reflecting genuine audience demand ([Baden et al., 2019](#); [McIntyre et al., 2018](#)). These outlets represent theoretical origins (Denmark), mainstream adoption (US), and dedicated practice (UK) of positivity-oriented journalism across diverse contexts.

Articles from each outlet were screened manually using identical criteria: inclusion of news reports and features, exclusion of opinions and letters. Each article was individually classified based on journalistic conventions ([Ekman and Widholm, 2024](#)). News reporting and features represent editorial decisions based on journalistic judgment rather than subjective commentary, making them optimal for examining positivity as a news value, while opinions and letters were excluded as they reflect authorial perspectives outside standard editorial processes ([Lin et al., 2023](#)).

This study employed a mixed sampling strategy adapted to each outlet's operational status. WBN, a small-scale outlet, published 98 articles during November 2013 to January 2020. After excluding opinions and letters, 91 qualifying news reports and features remained, constituting a complete census of eligible content. The sampling approach prioritized capturing each outlet's characteristic editorial practices during active operation. Since WBN ceased publication, its complete archive was analyzed. For the active outlets, recent content was selected from CSM's education subsection and PN's main section to examine contemporary positivity practices rather than historical patterns, enhancing the study's practical relevance for current journalism. Using WBN's census as the baseline, purposive sampling was applied to active outlets to ensure numerical balance (91 articles each) ([Neuendorf, 2017](#)). Data collection began from October 2024 and proceeded chronologically backwards, manually screening articles within inclusion criteria until reaching the target sample size ([Riffe et al., 2023](#)). CSMedu articles spanned August 2023 to October 2024, while PN articles covered May to October 2024, reflecting their respective publication frequencies.

Data analysis

Individual news articles serve as coding units. The coding scheme (see [Table 1](#)) is designed based on the previously constructed theoretical framework, aiming to systematically evaluate the specific manifestation of four dimensions in news texts. It employed 19 variables across four positivity dimensions, plus general article characteristics. The positivity variables were operationalized using binary (yes/no) measurement to identify the presence or absence of specific content characteristics across different news elements, while general characteristics were recorded using categorical coding.

Table 1. Coding scheme of four subcategories of positivity.

Dimension	Operationalization	Variables
General characteristics	Basic attributes of news articles that provide contextual information for analyzing positivity patterns across different media outlets	1. Media 2. Year 3. Month 4. Region 5. Topic 6. Tone
Positive expressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using positive language, emotional framing, or evaluative frameworks when discussing news events or actors - Presenting successful outcomes, progress, or other socially beneficial results - Emphasizing positive impact or significance of events/individuals 	7. Photo positive expressions 8. Headline positive expressions 9. Lead positive expressions 10. Main text positive expressions
Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing specific solutions or response strategies for macro and micro challenges - Systematically analyzing solution implementation, effectiveness, or limitations - Offering verifiable or replicable successful experiences 	11. Headline solutions 12. Lead solutions 13. Main text solutions
Future orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing predictions or outlooks for future development - Discussing long-term trends or potential opportunities for change - Exploring long-term solution pathways for issues 	14. Headline future orientation 15. Lead future orientation 16. Main text future orientation
Empowering voices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guiding interviewees to demonstrate initiative and problem-solving capabilities through interview strategies - Encouraging interviewees to discuss available resources, collaboration opportunities, and shared goals - Presenting interviewees as change agents rather than passive recipients 	17. Headline empowering voices 18. Lead empowering voices 19. Main text empowering voices

Given the subjective nature of constructs such as “positive expression,” to achieve reliable coding of these positivity concepts, a three-phase training process was implemented: First, the author and a research assistant conducted conceptual alignment by jointly reviewing all four subcategories and their variables, debating definitions and examples until full agreement. Second, calibration on ambiguous cases focused on challenging instances—e.g., borderline positive phrasing or imagery, identifying truly empowering voices versus conventional sources—and updated the codebook with clarifications. Finally, pilot coding & reliability check involved double-coding 42 articles

(14 from each media outlet, representing 15.4% of the overall sample of 273 articles), yielding Cohen's kappa coefficients ranging from 0.846 to 1, revealing substantial to almost perfect agreement between the two coders.

Results

Overview of news text characteristics

WBN primarily covered multi-national cases (51.6%) and African development (29.7%), aligning with its SDG-focused mission. In contrast, CSMedu exclusively reported on U.S. domestic issues, while PN concentrated on British local news (68.1%).

Thematically, WBN emphasized social issues (42.9%), environmental protection (16.5%), and public health (13.2%). PN prioritized environmental coverage (36.3%), followed by arts and culture (23.1%) and lifestyle (15.4%).

The outlets demonstrated distinct approaches to news tone. While WBN maintained predominantly positive coverage (92.3%) with limited neutral (6.6%) and negative (1.1%) content, CSMedu adopted a more balanced approach with positive (50.5%), neutral (28.6%), and negative (20.9%) stories. PN exclusively featured positive coverage across all 91 articles, fully embodying its positive journalism principles.

Positive expressions: Outlet-specific distribution patterns

WBN and PN demonstrated remarkable similarity in positive expression usage, characterized by statistically significant presence in headlines (WBN: 87%, $p < .001$; PN: 81%, $p < .001$) and main text sections (WBN: 86%, $p < .001$; PN: 91%, $p < .001$). In contrast, CSMedu exhibited a more variable distribution. The outlet showed a statistically significant absence in lead paragraphs (19 instances, $p < .001$), contrasting sharply with its presence in other content elements. In headlines, CSMedu's positive expression usage (39 instances, 42.9%) did not reach statistical significance ($p = .173$). Main text sections demonstrated moderate application (55 instances, $p = .046$), with a less definitive statistical profile compared to WBN and PN. Furthermore, correlation analysis revealed that WBN and CSMedu demonstrate moderate correlations in positive expression usage between headlines and main texts (Cramér's $V = 0.419$ and 0.428 respectively, $p < .001$), suggesting deliberate continuity in emotional framing within these outlets. Additional insights were gained through visual analysis of leading photographs: WBN and CSMedu employed positive expressions at comparable levels (56.0% and 48.4% respectively), while PN maintained a comprehensive positive visual representation ($p < .001$ across outlets).

Given CSMedu's inconsistent positive expressions, correlation analysis explored positivity's structural dynamics. Results showed moderate to strong associations between positive expressions and overall tone, with particularly strong correlations in headlines (Cramér's $V = 0.471$, $p < .001$), photographs (Cramér's $V = 0.573$, $p < .001$), and main text (Cramér's $V = 0.820$, $p < .001$). These patterns reveal CSMedu's selective implementation strategy: employing positive expressions purposefully as tone-setting

mechanisms rather than universally, distinguishing solutions journalism from the consistent positive framing in constructive and positive journalism approaches.

Solutions: A unified narrative strategy across journalism approaches

The solutions dimension revealed a consistent distribution pattern across all three media outlets, characterized by a distinctive “checkmark” trajectory that transcends individual journalistic approaches. This uniform strategy suggests a shared narrative methodology in addressing complex issues. In headlines, all three outlets demonstrated a relatively stable initial presentation of solutions, with comparable usage rates: WBN at 50%, CSMedu at 44%, and PN at 48%. Statistically, these rates did not reach significance ($p = .345$, $p = .753$, $p = .600$), indicating a similar preliminary framing of potential resolutions. Moreover, a striking convergence emerged in lead paragraphs, where all outlets significantly reduced solutions-oriented content. The dramatic decline was consistent across WBN (26 instances, 28.6%), CSMedu (3 instances, 3.3%), and PN (19 instances, 20.9%), with a statistically significant negative preference ($p < .001$). This pattern suggests a deliberate journalistic approach of first highlighting challenges and contextual complexities before proposing solutions. Further, a transformation occurred in main text sections, where all outlets substantially and significantly emphasized solutions: WBN: 78 instances (85.7%), CSMedu: 77 instances (84.6%), PN: 71 instances (78.0%). These high percentages, all statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicate that solutions emerge as a primary narrative mechanism within the complete textual context. Further, CSMedu’s significant correlation between headlines and main texts in the solutions dimension (Cramér’s $V = 0.413$, $p < .001$) further confirms its systematic approach to solution framing across content elements. Indeed, solutions are strategically introduced in headlines, temporarily suppressed in leads to establish contextual depth, and then comprehensively explored in main text sections. This approach suggests a method of constructing positive narratives that prioritizes comprehensive understanding over immediate resolution.

Future orientation: Position-dependent distribution

Future orientation exhibited a content element dependency across all analyzed media outlets. Headlines and leads consistently demonstrated a significant absence of this subcategory, with all three outlets showing frequencies significantly below theoretical expectations in both elements (headlines: WBN 17.6%, CSMedu 13.2%, PN 18.7%, $p < .001$; leads: similar significant negative deviations, $p < .001$). This uniform pattern suggests a strategic editorial choice to minimize future-oriented framing in the initial engagement points with readers.

The pattern shifted dramatically in main text analysis, revealing approach-specific approaches. Solution-focused outlets (WBN and CSMedu) demonstrated a strong positive preference for future orientation in their main texts ($p < .001$), integrating forward-looking perspectives as complementary elements to their solution-centered reporting. While PN showed increased application of future orientation in main texts (present in

57 articles), this increase did not reach the same level of statistical significance as the other outlets ($p = .016$). This position-dependent distribution reveals future orientation as primarily a depth element in empowering journalism—largely reserved for main text development rather than initial framing, with its integration strength varying by journalistic approach.

Empowering voices: Approach-specific application

Similar to future orientation as another positivity subcategory, this dimension was consistently de-emphasized in headlines and leads across all media platforms, with significantly lower-than-expected frequencies (headlines: WBN 11.0%, CSMedu 25.3%, PN 23.1%, $p < .001$; leads: similarly significant negative deviations across all outlets, $p < .001$). This pattern suggests a strategic editorial approach that reserves empowering voices for more developed content sections rather than initial framing.

In main texts, CSMedu, representing solutions journalism, demonstrated the most emphatic commitment to empowering voices, achieving complete coverage (100%) in main texts. PN, representing positive journalism, similarly prioritized empowering voices in main texts, showing statistically significant positive preference ($p < .001$), aligning with its audience-centric philosophy. WBN, the example of constructive journalism, adopted a statistically neutral approach (46 articles, $p = .917$), neither significantly favoring nor avoiding empowering voices in main texts—indicating a more balanced or selective application strategy within their broader framework. [Figure 1](#) illustrates the distribution of positivity subcategories across content elements in empowering journalism.

Discussion

Verifying the presence of four positivity subcategories in empowering journalism

The universal presence of four subcategories across all three journalism approaches confirms that empowering journalism operationalizes positivity through distinct but interconnected dimensions. Rather than treating positivity as monolithic, findings demonstrate that empowering journalism elaborates positivity into four functioning subcategories—positive expressions, solutions, future orientation, and empowering voices—that collectively annotate the broader news value of positivity. Despite varied philosophical foundations, these approaches share common operational understanding through these subcategories, which provide the technical vocabulary and practical framework transforming abstract positivity from theoretical orientation into concrete journalistic actions.

The crucial role of positive expressions is particularly noteworthy: taking CSMedu as an example, even when an article demonstrates significant presence in solutions, future orientation, and empowering voices, the absence of positive expressions makes it difficult for the overall news tone to achieve positivity. Positive expressions may serve as a fundamental dimension in constructing positivity news value, with its presence or absence

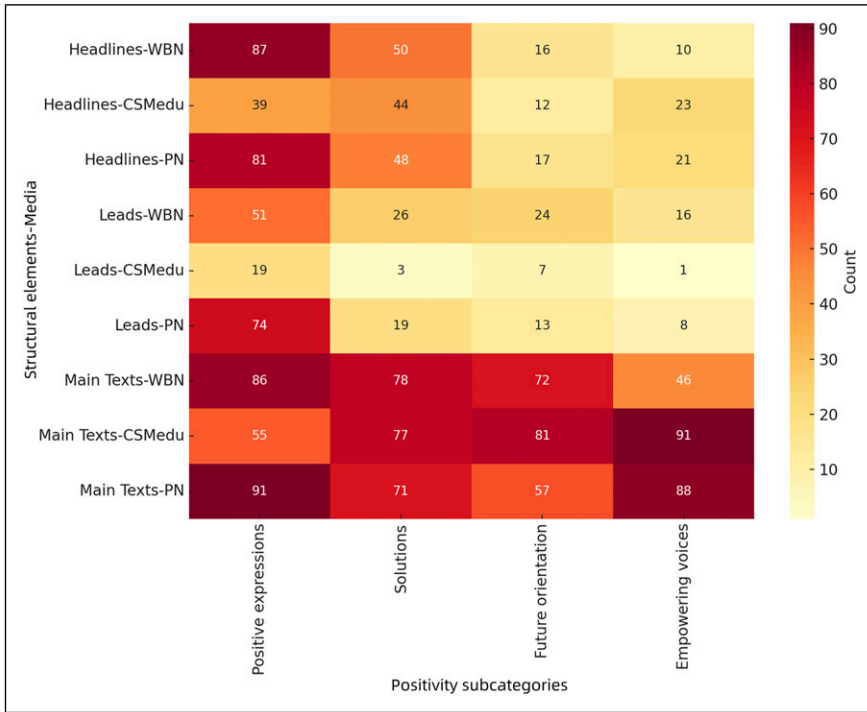


Figure 1. Distribution of positivity subcategories across content elements in empowering journalism. Note: Heatmap showing the absolute counts of four positivity subcategories—Positive expressions, Solutions, Future orientation, and Empowering voices—across three structural elements (Headlines, Leads, Main Texts) for WBN, CSMedu and PN (Each outlet N = 91). Darker cells indicate higher frequencies.

directly determining whether a news text possesses complete positivity value attributes (Caple and Bednarek, 2013).

The complementary interplay of positivity subcategories

The complementary nature of subcategories elevates positivity beyond mere emotional attributes, transcending simple “good news” or “positive narratives.” Instead, it constitutes a dynamic, multidimensional system of positivity news value, where components are both relatively independent and mutually supportive, simultaneously addressing needs for emotional resonance, information transmission, problem-solving, and social engagement across different contexts (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). The present study reveals a hierarchical distribution pattern of positivity subcategories across news text structures. First, foreground elements, exemplified by positive expressions in WBN and PN, demonstrate significant presence beginning from headlines and continuing throughout the text, forming a “continuous reinforcement” distribution. Second, U-shaped elements,

particularly solutions, exhibit a unique “checkmark” trajectory—moderately presented in headlines, notably diminished in leads, and comprehensively developed in main texts, reflecting a “problem-context-solution” narrative structure. Third, depth-dependent elements, namely future orientation and empowering voices, are consistently absent in headlines and leads while appearing significantly in main texts, indicating these dimensions require more substantial narrative space to effectively unfold (Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2016).

These four subcategories of positivity operate as an interconnected system rather than isolated elements, each playing a complementary role in constructing positive narratives. Positive expressions create entry points through emotional resonance, providing a foundation for psychological identification; however, this emotional underpinning is not unidirectional but establishes a basis of trust for the deeper development of other dimensions. The presence of solutions transforms this emotional identification into practical orientation, reinforcing the real-world significance and applied value of news reporting through concrete problem-solving approaches (McIntyre, 2017). Future orientation further expands the temporal dimension, directing attention not only to current solutions but also to future possibilities, thereby fostering long-term engagement and sustained participation (Gyldensted, 2015). Empowering voices elevates individual experiences to collective wisdom by granting agency to news subjects, facilitating a transformation from passive reception to active participation (Bas and Grabe, 2015; Journalism University, 2024). This transformation expands news functionality while revealing positivity’s potential to empower society and drive public discourse, making it a crucial dimension in modern journalism practice (McIntyre, 2016). The synergy of subcategories elevates positivity beyond an audience engagement tool, imbuing news with constructive, sustainable, and social value, thus reinforcing journalism’s functional role in advancing social progress (Aitamurto and Varma, 2018; Dhiman, 2023).

Positivity frames across news elements: A reader’s journey

Headlines and visuals serve as the news entry point, where constructive and positive journalism outlets demonstrate a strong presence of positive expressions alongside selected solutions to engage readers emotionally while signalling practical value (Ruaro, 2018). Even solutions journalism outlets, with their problem-solving focus, display a certain proportions of positive expressions in headlines than conventional news coverage (Ittefaq et al., 2025). This approach serves to both attract readers through affective resonance and substantive content value.

Professional discontinuity in leads is evident as all four subcategories show reduced presence, with only PN maintaining significance in positive expressions. This “discontinuity” reflects media’s deliberate return to traditional journalism’s objective principles in lead writing, serving multiple functions: establishing credibility through balanced narration, conforming to established news-writing conventions, and creating narrative engagement that motivates readers to continue (Astrero and Torres, 2020).

In the main texts section, positivity expression reaches its maximum: all media outlets contain at least three significantly present subcategories, forming a complete positivity

spectrum. From a reader's perspective, this hierarchical distribution suggests a progression in how positivity is conveyed: readers appear to engage first with emotional resonance and problem awareness in headlines, then encounter more neutral framing in leads, and finally experience the fullest multidimensional positivity in main texts (Bostan et al., 2020). These patterns likely reflect implicit journalistic norms or intuition. Further research—such as audience response studies or interviews with practitioners—would be valuable to understand how consciously (or not) such structures are adopted.

Media differentiation and the reflection of journalistic ideals

Three media outlets represent three journalism approaches based on positivity. Constructive journalism, as exemplified by WBN, demonstrates a distinctive “optimistic solution-oriented” positivity construction model characterized by comprehensive investment in both positive expressions and solutions. This approach maintains consistently high proportions of positive expressions across all content elements—from headlines to main texts—while strategically amplifying solutions and future orientation in main text sections. Such deliberate structural progression creates a narrative architecture that builds from emotional engagement toward substantive resolution frameworks, reflecting the progressive depth structure as foundational to constructive journalism's empowerment function (Grijalva, 2018).

CSMedu, representing solutions journalism, distinguishes itself through the strategic selective application of positive expressions, while simultaneously investing most heavily in solutions, future orientation, and empowering voices—with the latter achieving remarkable 100% coverage in main texts. This approach creates a distinctive dual-core model of “solution-participant empowerment.” Indeed, the outlet maintains a measured approach to all subcategories in headlines and leads, but significantly expands their presence in main texts, particularly emphasizing solutions, future orientation, and empowering voices. This structural characteristic aligns with CSMedu's content format, featuring predominantly long-form articles that average six interviewees per piece and consistently incorporate empowering voices throughout the narrative.

As a representative of positive journalism, PN demonstrates the most comprehensive application of positive expressions (including visual elements) and makes investment in solutions and empowering voices, while showing relatively weaker emphasis on future orientation. This pattern reveals a distinct tendency toward “present-moment positive experience.” The outlet strategically emphasizes positive expressions while downplaying other dimensions in headlines and leads, subsequently achieving comprehensive enhancement of all positivity dimensions in the main text sections. This evolutionary pattern reflects positive journalism's effort to maintain its core principle (positive expression) while actively incorporating advantageous elements from other journalism approaches (Baden et al., 2019). Notably, PN's emphasis on solutions and empowering voices in main texts indicates positive journalism's transition from purely emotional appeal toward deeper social empowerment, demonstrating a composite strategy of “positive tone + constructive content” (Positive News, 2024). Although a significant proportion of PN's solutions focus on personal life improvements, this micro-perspective approach equally

reflects positivity's constructive logic - empowering readers to achieve individual-level positive changes through actionable suggestions. From the analyzed main texts, PN and WBN show more similarities, both establishing strong positive expressions in headlines and maintaining high levels in main texts (McIntyre and Gyldensted, 2017).

If constructive journalism views positivity as a holistic framework balancing positive tone with constructive content, solutions journalism uses it as a catalyst for problem-solving, emphasizing the deep integration of problem resolution and subject empowerment. Meanwhile, positive journalism attempts to expand its social function while maintaining emotional resonance. The differences among these empowering journalism approaches not only enrich the connotations of positivity but also provide diverse pathways for future journalistic practice.

Limitations

This study's deductive coding approach enables systematic comparison but limits discovery of additional categories that open coding might reveal. Analyzing one outlet per journalism approach may not fully represent each approach's diversity. While four positivity subcategories are identified, their actual emotional impact on audiences requires experimental validation. Finally, news topics may influence positivity construction, as some topics naturally suit certain subcategories better than others.

Conclusion

This study reveals how empowering journalism operationalizes positivity through four interconnected subcategories: positive expressions, solutions, future orientation, and empowering voices, transforming positivity from abstract concept into concrete journalistic practices. Content analysis of three representative outlets demonstrates that positivity has evolved beyond a single-dimensional orientation to become a multifaceted system deployed across news content elements. Despite their varying philosophical foundations, constructive journalism (WBN), solutions journalism (CSMedu), and positive journalism (PN) all implement these subcategories with different emphases. The hierarchical distribution patterns—foreground, U-shaped, and depth-dependent elements—reveal sophisticated structural logic across headlines, leads, and main texts.

These findings have key implications for journalism theory and practice. Theoretically, this study expands news values theory by demonstrating that positivity operates as a multidimensional framework rather than a binary characteristic, enabling journalism to transcend the traditional dichotomy between simply reporting problems and offering naive optimism (Mast and Temmerman, 2021). The identified subcategories from empowering journalism present a constructive third path that acknowledges challenges while activating audience engagement, suggesting professional standards can accommodate multidimensional positivity without compromising credibility (Gyldensted, 2011; McIntyre and Gyldensted, 2017; Van Antwerpen and Fielding, 2023).

For reporters and editors, understanding news as composed of multiple elements is crucial, as impacting audiences requires strategic deployment rather than relying on single

elements. The four positivity subcategories can be deployed individually or in combination across news positions: headlines prioritize solutions and future orientation for engagement, leads maintain professional credibility, and main texts allow progressive development of all dimensions. These patterns align with established news writing fundamentals while expanding constructive potential, equipping journalism to fulfil its social function by not only informing but also empowering audiences with solutions, future directions, and models for agency (Fai and Stubbs, 2023; Schäfer et al., 2022).

Future research should explore audience responses to different combinations of these subcategories, investigate how they function across diverse news topics and formats, and examine their application in additional journalistic contexts. As news organizations continue to navigate the complex demands of the digital age, this multidimensional understanding of positivity provides both theoretical insight and practical guidance for journalism that seeks to not only inform but also empower.

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Author contributions

H.Y. was responsible for Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Writing, and Review & Editing. W.S. contributed to Formal Analysis, Investigation and Writing. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Ethical statement

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study as it did not involve human participants, human data, or human tissue.

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Data Availability Statement

The quantitative coding data generated from the content analysis of news articles will be made available in a public repository upon publication of this article. The original news articles analyzed

in this study are publicly available on the following news websites: *World's Best News* (URL: <https://worldsbestnews.org/>), Education Section of *The Christian Science Monitor* (URL: <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education>), and *Positive News* (URL: <https://www.positive.news/articles/>), collected up to October 2024.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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