

Reconceptualizing Evidence and Evidence Types for Digital Journalism Studies

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Abstract : In the digital age, evidence-based reporting is touted as a best practice for seeking the truth and keeping the public well-informed. Journalists are expected to rely on evidence to demonstrate the validity of a factual statement and lend credence to an individual account. Evidence can be obtained from various sources, and due to a rich supply of evidence types available, the definition of this important concept varies semantically. To promote clarity and understanding, it is necessary to break down the various types of evidence and categorize them in a more coherent, systematic way. There is a wide array of devices that digital journalists deploy as proof to back up or refute a truth claim. Evidence can take various formats, including verbal and visual materials. Verbal evidence encompasses quotes, soundbites, talking heads, testimonies, voice recordings, anecdotes, and statistics communicated through written or spoken language. There are instances where evidence is simply non-verbal, such as when natural sounds are provided without any verbalized words. On the other hand, other language-free items exhibited in photos, video footage, data visualizations, infographics, and illustrations can serve as visual evidence. Moreover, there are different sources from which evidence can be cited. Supporting materials, such as public or leaked records and documents, data, research studies, surveys, polls, or reports compiled by governments, organizations, and other entities, are frequently included as informational evidence. Proof can also come from human sources via interviews, recorded conversations, public and private gatherings, or press conferences. Expert opinions, eye-witness insights, insider observations, and official statements are some of the common examples of testimonial evidence. Digital journalism studies tend to make broad references when comparing qualitative versus quantitative forms of evidence. Meanwhile, limited efforts are being undertaken to distinguish between sister terms, such as “data,” “statistical,” and “base-rate” on one side of the spectrum and “narrative,” “anecdotal,” and “exemplar” on the other. The present study seeks to develop the evidence taxonomy, which classifies evidence through the quantitative-qualitative juxtaposition and in a hierarchical order from broad to specific. According to this scheme, data, statistics, and base rate belong to the quantitative evidence group, whereas narrative, anecdote, and exemplar fall into the qualitative evidence group. Subsequently, the taxonomical classification arranges data versus narrative at the top of the hierarchy of types of evidence, followed by statistics versus anecdote and base rate versus exemplar. This research reiterates the central role of evidence in how journalists describe and explain social phenomena and issues. By defining the various types of evidence and delineating their logical connections it helps remove a significant degree of conceptual inconsistency, ambiguity, and confusion in digital journalism studies.

Keywords : evidence, evidence forms, evidence types, taxonomy

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