

WHAT ARE NEWSPAPERS' EDITORIALS INTERESTED IN?

Understanding the idea of criteria of editorial-worthiness

Abstract

Despite the large array of research dedicated to examining the concepts of news values and newsworthiness, journalism studies barely attempt to deal with the idea of editorial-worthiness at the theoretical level. This article proposes a conceptual foundation to reflect on the elements influencing how news organizations build their editorial positions. Studying the idea of editorial-worthiness is essential to catalogue the characteristics guiding newspapers' editorial decisions and production processes, as well as to understand the differences between professional rules and cultures shaping opinionated practices in contemporary journalism. By employing an approach based on a review of the literature, the article proposes a conceptualization of criteria of editorial-worthiness consisting of (1) editorial factors and (2) editorial values, further divided into 25 items. The proposal allows journalism research to acknowledge how the gatekeeping function plays out on editorial pages by categorizing the elements influencing editorial production routines.

Keywords: editorial journalism; editorial values; news values; editorial production routines; criteria of editorial-worthiness.

1. Introduction

Journalism research developed over the last decades has allowed us to better understand the internal and external aspects influencing the construction of the news stories offered to the public (Brighton and Foy, 2007; de Vreese et al., 2001; Reese, 2007). Considering a sociological point of view (Deuze, 2005; McNair, 2003; Schudson, 2011), or even a perspective internal to the newsrooms (Lewis, 2012; Machin and Niblock, 2010; Ryfe, 2006; Tuchman, 1978; Willig, 2012), a wide range of authors have investigated the transformations experienced by the press so far.

Esser (1998), for example, proposes a map highlighting – among the variables involved in the news production processes – items such as professional routines or the legal regulation of the journalistic field. In fact, the institutional dimension shaping the exercise of journalism has been addressed by researchers since the classical diagnosis of social control in the newsrooms (Breed, 1955).

The attempts to systematize the factors influencing news content began in the 17th century, with Tobias Peucer's thesis (Atwood and Beer, 2001). Among the efforts undertaken by the literature since the second half of the 20th century regarding this matter, we highlight the concept of news values and news production routines (Brighton and Foy, 2007; Galtung and Ruge, 1965; O'Neill and Harcup, 2009; Price and Tewksbury, 1997; Schultz, 2007).

However, while the discussion connected to news values has been largely studied (Bednarek and Caple, 2017; Usher, 2010), reflections on the production routines of opinionated pieces in journalism are not so common – especially concerning editorials. There are some contributions produced by opinion editors of important newspapers (Oakes, 1964; Wiggins, 1942); Firmstone (2008) was one of the scholars seeking to understand editorials production routines. Notwithstanding, she does not detail which would be the most relevant criteria of editorial-worthiness. Therefore, this article argues that scholars must look closely at how institutional opinion is built in contemporary journalism.

We might ask for example: To what extent do the criteria adopted for elaborating editorial pieces coincide with those used for news production? How are editorial issues and approaches defined? What do editors consider when choosing an actor or subject to address in opinionated pieces? Yet, what are the production routines of editorial journalism and how do they vary among newspapers?

Obviously, it is not possible to account for all these questions in a single article. Nevertheless, starting the discussion from a theoretical point of view is the first step to test the consistency of the idea of criteria of editorial-worthiness. Therefore, this work aims to argue in favor of the importance of such a concept and to propose a taxonomy on the elements usually considered when journalistic organizations build their institutional opinions; i.e., we aim to catalogue the characteristics guiding newspapers' editorial decisions and production processes. Our conception of criteria of editorial-worthiness comprises two dimensions: editorial factors (contextual elements influencing editorial production routines but that cannot be effectively measured only from reading the texts); and editorial values (elements more directly noticeable from the study of each piece itself).

Studying the criteria of editorial-worthiness enable us to understand the *phases* that historically characterize newspapers institutional positioning; to catalogue the *features* and *variations* of each journalistic organization; and to notice the differences between journalistic professional cultures in diverse countries or regions (Firmstone, 2008; Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

Our argument is structured as follows: The next section explores the relationship between news and opinion in journalism, since the discussion over news values is the basis for our proposal. Afterwards, we discuss the features of editorial journalism. Then, the article proposes a categorization of the criteria of editorial-worthiness. Next, we present a discussion about them, focusing on the limitations of our taxonomy. The conclusion points to the need of an empirical research agenda able to apply the conceptual framework we put forward.

2. News and opinion in commercial journalism

What are the intersections between news values and the principles taken into account by editorialists when producing a news organization's opinion? Before further discussion, it is important to briefly recognize the debate on the criteria of newsworthiness.

The notion of news values refers to the strategies used in journalism to guarantee some degree of objectivity when producing news content (Fuller, 1996; Hackett, 1984). Once they are shared by journalists, news values serve for example to rank the main facts occurred in a day, providing a set of working rules (Brighton and Foy, 2007).

A pioneering proposal of news values classification was presented by Galtung and Ruge (1965), whose focus was the Danish press coverage of international news. Later, other authors identified some limitations in this initial classification and suggested a new set of categories (Bednarek and Caple, 2017; Brighton and Foy, 2007; Campbell, 2004; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Golding and Elliot, 1979; Östgaard, 1965; Palmer, 2000).

Harcup and O'Neill (2001) offered a solid contribution when they adapted the original values to the landscape in the last decades of the 20th century. The authors pointed out the following items as being of journalistic interest: stories about celebrities and political elites; entertainment; relevance of the matter for the audience, among others. A few years later, the same authors proposed a new classification considering the changes brought about by digital media (Harcup and O'Neill, 2016).

Although the contributions by Harcup and O'Neill allow us to observe how news values vary according to time, place, professional culture, and the target public, they do not exhaust the specialized literature. In fact, it is precisely due to such variations that different researchers do not risk offering a conclusive list of elements (Brighton and Foy, 2007; Gans, 1979; O'Neill and Harcup, 2009; Preston, 2015).

Elaborating a positioning that expresses a newspaper's opinion, in turn, is a task usually entrusted to those who have a long time in the organization. Journalists who are in charge of this mission need to construct editorials' arguments by prioritizing some organizational values (Espinosa, 2003; Ettema, 2007; Hallock, 2007). The agenda choice, the writing style, and the use of a particular vocabulary imply the very presence of a distinct grammar which guides editorials' preparation.

Literature, however, could be more specific in systematizing newspapers' editorial decisions and production processes by discussing which criteria explain for example the editorial-worthiness of an issue. In fact, news values are not the single elements defining agendas and positions adopted by newspapers. Hence, the distance between newsworthiness and editorial-worthiness exists insofar as the opinion of the organization seems to be less related to the presumed readers' interests, and more concerned with the editorial policies of a paper (Firmstone, 2008).

In dialogue with Brighton and Foy (2007), our argument examines two dimensions playing a role in editorial decisions: an individual one (from a writers' perspective, trying to isolate the aspects of an event which make it editorial-worthy) and an institutional one (the features of news organizations, including aspects that are external to the newsrooms, such as their relationships with actors from other fields).

3. What is different about editorial journalism?

Editorial pieces in quality papers (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) implies the publication of non-signed texts in which a newspaper presents its opinions on matters of social relevance. From a normative standpoint, the institutional positioning of newspapers is recognized as a legitimate procedure. It is also a strategy by which the journalistic organization can – since it keeps the principle of separation between “church” and “state” (Conill, 2016) – propose debates outside the “hot” agenda of daily coverage.

Rutenbeck (1994) holds that editorials did not always have the status witnessed nowadays. In the United States, until the 19th century, the editor was the main responsible for this kind of piece – which represented her own opinion. When analyzing this same period, James Wiggins (1942) affirms that editors used to express their particular opinions with “force, vigor, violence and intemperance” in editorials. Such a scenario has changed over the last decades (Hallock, 2007), since the tendency has been to follow more institutionalized and professional procedures.

However, editorial journalism involves tasks other than presenting newspapers’ opinions. Through editorials, a newspaper offers moral judgments and interpretations about what it considers to be the public interest (Fogoaga, 1982; Ryan, 2004). The argument in favor of editorials as a readers’ guide is registered in the writings and statements by editors of relevant publications, such as Wiggins (1942) and John Oakes (1964) – the first one worked at the Washington Post; the second, in the New York Times. Jack Lule (2002), in turn, defends that editorials are also a space in which the newspapers react to events, such as the 9/11 attacks. Thus, it is precisely through these pieces that the news organizations situate themselves in controversial issues.

Firmstone (2008) holds that editorials may establish a dialogue with authorities; i.e., in different situations, editorials directly address the government and its agents. Oakes’ (1964) testimony evinces that presidents such as John Kennedy were affected by the NYT editorials. Indeed, this editor says that authorities’ reactions to opinions presented in editorial texts could influence how these pieces are produced. According to him, this interaction not necessarily compelled the NYT to change its behavior, but he admitted that editorialists could feel like privileged interlocutors in the give-and-take of opinions.

Furthermore, this kind of opinionated text seeks to persuade readers. Then, through its editorials, a newspaper acts as a player willing to suggest relevant issues or to urge the authorities to respond to public grievances (Eilders, 1997). There are also occasions when editorials act circumscribed to a specific event. In this case, there is a temporal alignment between the news agenda and the opinionated agenda (Adam et al., 2017; Eilders, 1999).

Compared to the news, editorials may have more freedom in their writing styles. Notwithstanding, this does not guarantee a complete freedom to their authors, since editors and managers look after the goal of maintaining the regularity in how newspapers build their opinion over time. One consensus that remains stable among professionals over the decades (Meltzer, 2007; Mont’Alverne et al., 2018; Oakes, 1964; Wiggins, 1942) is the idea that the opinion presented in editorial texts belongs to the institution. The article by Riffe, Sneed and Van Ommeren (1985: 898) brings testimonies of opinion editors that establish the boundaries between institutional opinion and those belonging to collaborators: “The artwork is that of the artist, but the message is that of the newspaper”.

The opinionated production routine, thus, implies an accurate editing activity. In the end, despite the willingness of each newspaper to prioritize some criteria of editorial-worthiness over others, there is a common structure to express the positioning of journalistic organizations.

4. Categorizing the criteria of editorial-worthiness

The selectivity of editorial pieces becomes evident when we consider at least three types of choice involving their production: the agenda to be addressed; the selection of the position the newspaper is willing to stand for; the hierarchy to which the editorial is submitted in the graphic design featuring the newspaper (Hallock, 2007).

While this latter dimension gains more prominence in the written press, the first two are closely related. By addressing a limited range of subjects (since the number of editorials published in one edition is smaller than the amount of news), the newspaper establishes a more thoughtful selection process regarding editorials – what may indicate the ideological preferences of the publication (Day and Golan, 2005; Eilders, 1997). In other words, the leaning for positioning itself in some disputes indicates which subjects are viewed by a journalistic organization as being editorial-worthy (Ansolabehere et al., 2006).

The elements responsible for influencing the editorial agenda and point of view have not yet been sufficiently investigated, despite other works have discussed this matter. Although Firmstone (2008) is a mandatory reference, we must acknowledge the contribution she offers does not distinguish the nature of the elements related to the criteria of editorial-worthiness. In order to advance in our scientific grasp regarding editorial journalism, the categorization proposed below considers both (1) editorial factors – contextual elements influencing editorial production that cannot be verified by directly analyzing the piece –, and (2) editorial values – elements that can be empirically investigated by analyzing the features of each text. In other words, we argue that to understand the criteria of editorial-worthiness it is necessary to differentiate editorial factors from editorial values.

It is important to stress the usefulness of the distinction proposed by Ryfe (2006) between constitutive rules and regulative rules to make clear what we mean when arguing in favor of the differences between editorial factors and editorial values – even if this author consider them when examining news content.

According to Ryfe, constitutive rules are responsible for defining objects in general terms (situations, social roles, etc.), so the objects would not exist without such rules; i.e. constitutive rules are elements of a general environment influencing content production. Regulative rules offer a more direct information on the object: regarding news making, this is the case of appealing to official sources to follow the principle of objectivity. Therefore, regulative rules can be more clearly perceived all over the text. To sum up, constitutive rules are responsible for defining what an object is, while regulative rules provide information about the techniques used in production processes, for instance.

In the proposal outlined below, there is, on the one hand, a parallel between editorial factors and constitutive rules, since they contribute to defining at large which aspects comprise an editorial. On the other hand, editorial values operate in the same condition as regulative rules, by offering direct instructions on how the opinionated piece must be configured. Moreover, separating the two dimensions addresses the critics made by Willig (2012) about ethnographic studies in journalism. According to her, they would not be able to capture the macro level structure forces guiding journalism routines. Therefore, the editorial factors and values allow us to discuss the construction of those opinionated texts regarding elements such as the media system of each country (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) without losing relevant details that can only be identified through *in loco* investigations.

Before presenting the elements influencing the construction of editorial pieces, it is important to emphasize that some editorial values we outline are similar to the news values proposed by classifications such as Galtung and Ruge (1965) and Harcup and O'Neill (2001, 2016). Some labels of our categories were taken from the original classification in order to facilitate subsequent comparisons.

Lastly, we used the following methodological steps to propose the taxonomy detailed below: in addition to the literature review, it is important to mention the experiences registered in previous researches and interviews we conducted with quality papers' opinion editors (Mont'Alverne et al., 2018; Mont'Alverne and Marques, 2015). We also considered interviews and documents provided by opinion editors from different countries and who worked in other periods of time (Firmstone, 2008; Oakes, 1964; Wiggins, 1942), what increases the potential for our taxonomy to be somewhat generalized. In other words, the categorization proposed below is supported by evidence from primary and secondary sources. All these elements cooperated with the use of the deductive method to design the categories discussed next.

4.1 Editorial factors

Newspaper identity: Identity is a crucial element to acknowledge how the newspaper privilege certain approaches or agendas over others. For example, in the case of journalistic organizations specialized in covering a subject (e.g., economy), the editorial interest in criticizing personality traits of a political representative may be lower. Moreover, some issues can be considered editorial-worthy because they converge with the public image the company seeks to cultivate before its audience (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017).

Decision-making procedures inside the journalistic organization: Firmstone (2008) highlights that decision-making processes are more democratic in some organizations than in others. In some cases, the editorial manager or the newspaper owner directly write or supervises the text that presents the organization's opinion (McKnight, 2010). However, studies like Meltzer's (2007) indicate some degree of autonomy entrusted to editorialists. There are cases in which the newspaper's position also stems from a consensus among the opinions of the several groups making up the organization's ownership. This is verified by one of our recent studies (Mont'Alverne et al., 2018), in which the interviewed editorialists revealed that the agenda is chosen in a conference gathering editors, columnists and other active voices in the newsroom.

Internal divergences: Individual beliefs of professionals who take part in the decision-making processes are a relevant factor for building editorial opinion (Benson and Neveu, 2005). Those with easy access to opinion editors or managers can bring forward an issue that has not yet been discussed (van Dijk, 1995). Oakes (1964) claims that the team responsible for writing NYT's editorials had a homogeneous thought when he worked there as opinion editor. For that matter, internal disputes over the organization's opinions were not that frequent.

Eventual collaboration: The newspapers usually have professionals specialized on certain topics who are invited to write editorials (Oakes, 1964). However, when the newspaper wants to deal with a topic that goes beyond the editorial production routine (an issue tied to a local

conflict, for example), the opinion editor may feel more comfortable if she borrows the expertise of a reporter or an opinionated staff writer qualified to express a position consistent with the principles of the newspaper. If the matter gains a temporal projection greater than it had been predicted before, it may be agreed that a professional not initially assigned to work as editorialist will be deployed to write the organization's opinion on that specific issue (Firmstone, 2008).

Research time: By investigating editorials production routines in US newspapers, Endres (1987) concluded that the time spent by editorialists in researching on a certain issue also influences the production process. If an editorialist does not master the subject, she will need a longer range of time to search and then construct the opinion piece – what may influence the willingness to pick an issue.

Independence from audiovisual elements: Editorials are not usually influenced by the availability of audiovisual content. Therefore, this is another item considered when opinion editors decide what will be discussed. Indeed, the debate about the extension and graphic composition of editorials has been a topic in journalism studies for decades (Baker and Macdonald, 1961).

Competition with other journalistic organizations: The search for a solid market positioning often force a newspaper to express its opinion on a topic. Firmstone (2008) holds that editorialists track what competitor newspapers have published and, depending on the mood of those texts, they may write a diverging editorial. Being the first to defend causes invisible to the public sphere can give the newspaper a leading position when compared to the competitors. According to Oakes (1964), the editorial opinion differentiates a newspaper from other publications. He argues that editorials must take a strong stand to draw the public's attention.

Expectations from the audience: Editorial texts bring the need to meet the audience's expectations, what implies estimating the possible repercussion of a given opinion. In the case of publishing an opinion different from what most of the audience expect, a newspaper risks to receive a wave of complaints from its readers. Moreover, criticisms regarding editorial positions may also reverberate on social networks sites. Firmstone (2008) argues that the perception of the editorialists about which subjects are of public interest can also be responsible for building the editorial agenda.

Political Economy: Market interests may also prevent a newspaper from taking a position on specific controversies. An example is a case studied by Dobek-Ostrowska (2012), in Poland. The author argues that despite quality papers in the country are dominated by an advocacy style of journalism, some of them are owned by foreign investors and avoid engaging in political and ideological issues for fear of compromising their profits. We may also observe the influence of the organization's political economy by considering the role played by its owners regarding editorial journalism – especially when owners' first activity is related to fields other than journalism (Gamson et al., 1992; Schudson, 2002). Studying an example of the last one, Thrift Jr.'s (1977) concludes that a chain of media companies whose actions go beyond the journalistic field usually publish less controversial editorials. However, market pressures could be more prominent in some newspapers than in others. Oakes (1964), for example, described the pressure exerted by NYT's advertisers. He said that smoking companies strongly reacted to critics they have received in editorials, but the editor stress that "they absolutely have no effect on the editorial page". There are also differences when the

government is the main owner of a newspaper (for example, Chinese state publications have regularly criticized policies adopted by other countries¹).

Journalistic culture: Editorial-worthiness may also vary according to the journalistic culture of each country or region. Scandals involving human rights, for example, may gain prominence in democratic countries that have lived recent dictatorships or in countries where there are conflicts related to religious traditions (Elmasry et al., 2013; Fahmy and Neumann, 2011; Norris et al., 2003). Thus, the sociability and the training that journalists receive in certain contexts interact with how these professionals view the world (Deuze, 2002; Esser, 1998). Similar to what happens to criteria of newsworthiness (Schultz, 2007), it is possible to say that some criteria of editorial-worthiness are more suitable to certain contexts than to others. In other words, there are different degrees of institutionalization of those criteria when we regard not only a specific country, but also how a newspaper enforces them. In this regard, the journalistic culture could be one of the invisible structures (Willig, 2012) that influences the work in a newsroom – and it is not easily distinguishable.

Arrangements with political and economic partners: Depending on the media system in which a newspaper runs, we can speculate on the influence of the political power and market forces as determining editorial angles and guidelines (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012; Hadland, 2012; van Dijk, 2017). Therefore, editorial production routines can be more or less directly controlled by organizations' owners.

Sources: The characteristics and beliefs of the sources usually invited by the newspapers (personal contacts close to editorialists), as well as other research sources (such as libraries or websites) (Hansen et al., 1987), influence editorial production routines too. Even if journalism research usually considers the role of sources on the news, it is necessary to weigh how agents external to the newsrooms (those who work in think tanks, for example) may influence the adoption of specific perspectives or agendas.

4.2 Editorial values

The power elite: When a newspaper deals with holders of prominent positions (like the president or the prime minister), the need to cover events related to political authorities is quasi-automatic (Cook, 2005). Therefore, the head of government lives a peculiar situation when compared to other political agents, since she does not have to worry about being in the spotlight (van Dalen, 2012). In the end, this editorial value corresponds to the news value largely mentioned in journalism research.

Magnitude and relevance: Similarly to what happens in news coverage, the logic of editorial production is also under pressure since some events cannot be disregarded due to their magnitude and relevance (Espinosa, 2003; Firmstone, 2008; Ryan, 2004). The magnitude and relevance of an event can be determined, for example, by how many people are affected by a natural phenomenon.

Conflict: A fundamental value an event must fulfill to be discussed in editorials is the existence of a controversy. For example, a brawling between drivers caused by a car accident has the potential to turn into news, but will face greater resistance to become an editorial matter (Eilders, 1999). In other words, conflict is a relevant news value (Armoudian, 2015;

Harcup and O'Neill, 2016; Opperhuizen et al., 2018), but the picture is somewhat different regarding editorials.

Topicality: This value refers to the preference for covering events present in the public agenda in a given moment (Firmstone, 2008). The election period, for example, influences the newspaper's willingness to address candidates and their proposals. A tragedy or scandal may push the newspaper to take a public position. Lule (2002) sustains that NYT's editorial production routines were influenced by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It is also worth mentioning that commemorative dates (e.g., an anniversary of independence) may end up provoking manifestations by journalistic organizations.

Newspaper agenda: Editorials may opt to grant visibility to agendas little discussed by the public opinion. The greater freedom to suggest matters is essential for the journalistic organization to defend what it considers to be of public interest. In other words, the newspaper can judge itself in a position to bring a given problem to the public sphere (Eilders, 1999; Hallock, 2007; Kahn and Kenney, 2002). However, the defense of an own agenda implies that the newspaper could resist discussing other issues, even when these matters fulfill the requirements of editorial values.

Jurisprudence: A newspaper's opinion tends to be stable over time. This is what some professionals and scholars call "jurisprudence" (Arbex Júnior, 1987; Hansen et al., 1987; Mont'Alverne et al., 2018). The daily reading of editorials collaborates to train professionals to acknowledge how a newspaper thinks about public issues. In other words, previous editorial decisions work as a parameter for latter manifestations. This means, as stated by Oakes (1964), that editorial opinions are not determined by whoever writes the piece, but are subject to the editor's control in the long run.

Meaningfulness: Orosa et al.'s (2013) argument that editorials tend to prioritize subjects in which a newspaper has a greater chance to be listened is corroborated by other studies. Galtung and Ruge (1965) mention the idea of meaningfulness to defend that readers consider more relevant those events involving phenomena or people with whom they maintain some proximity. Regarding editorials, this significance is given, for example, when a newspaper endorsement influences voters who regularly read the local media (Kahn and Kenney, 2002).

Follow-up: When controversies or cases of social repercussion endure in the public debate and meet newspapers' interests, a series of editorials can be written to cover a same topic. However, the importance of such editorial value is linked to the emergence of new facts on the matter at stake – opinionated texts will possibly avoid returning to a subject without any pertinent reason.

Reach: The main geographic scope of a journalistic organization works as a relevant editorial value. In local circulation newspapers, for example, it is necessary to consider that it often does not make sense for the editorial to express an opinion on issues of international scope (Hallock, 2008). Geographical reach is more prominent when newspapers publish multiple editorials per day. Oakes (1964) says that when hot news stories are not enough to define the editorial agenda, the editors usually deem that the geographical closeness between a newspaper and its public becomes essential to define what is editorial-worthy.

Zeitgeist (or "the spirit of the time"): The decision regarding whether to include a topic in editorials is connected to the cultural, social, and political context of a given epoch.

Depending on the transformations each society undergoes, it may be no longer acceptable to defend certain speeches or arguments in public, as well as to use terms a social group considers offensive. Thus, editorial journalism needs to tune in with social values then in force. Otherwise, it can be seen as outdated by the audience. Studies dedicated to understanding how specific groups are portrayed by journalism over time tend to find coverage changes according to the historical moment (Bowe and Makki, 2016; Mendes, 2011; Trevino et al., 2010).

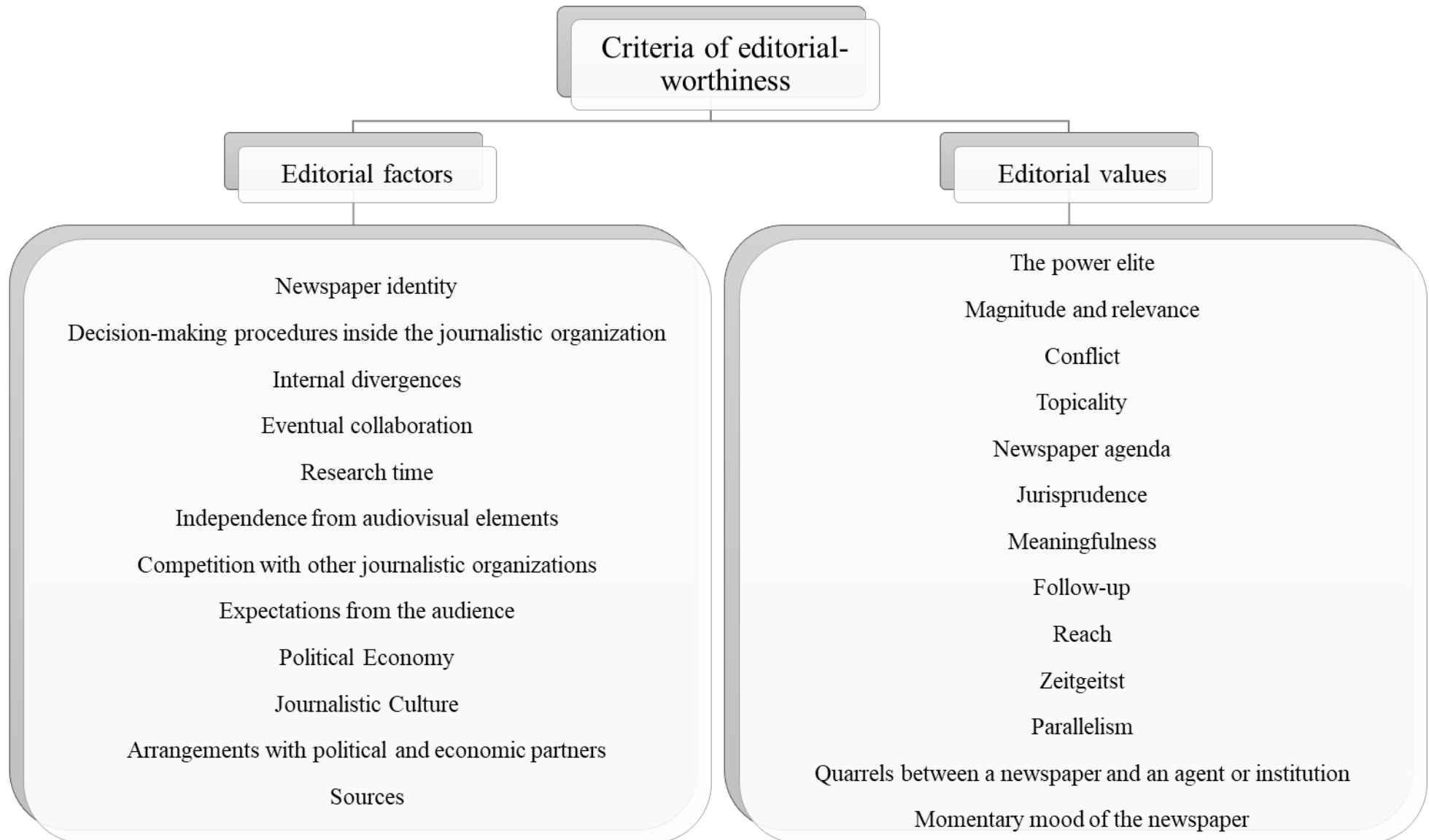
Parallelism: In this case, we can highlight the ideological adherence journalism organizations voluntarily share with other institutions. Mancini (2015) states that in contemporary societies the weakening of political parties makes newspapers no longer to be considered as directly aligned with them, but rather with specific policies and values.

Quarrels between a newspaper and an agent or institution: The antipathy of the newspaper for an authority can be cultivated over the years, leading to the production of adversarial opinionated texts. This may occur in situations in which a newspaper systematically opposes a traditional political leader in the country or when a State institution is seen as an enemy of what a news organization considers to be the public interest. Albuquerque (2016) argues, for example, that in the Brazilian and the South African cases, journalism posed itself as opposed to the center-left parties that ruled those countries.

Momentary mood of the newspaper: The opposition or support a newspaper expresses toward someone may be fleeting. For example, when a scandal emerges, a newspaper may feel compelled to manifest its opinion. The same can happen when a news company supports policies implemented by its historical adversaries. After the 9/11 attacks in New York, Lule (2002) affirms that NYT editorials started to support the actions taken by leaders such as George W. Bush. Therefore, the newspaper's momentary mood followed the harmony marking the actions of political leaders at that time. Thus, in exceptional situations, newspapers may present a more favorable position to a government they are not necessarily aligned to (Billeaudeau et al., 2003; Schudson, 2008).

The chart below summarizes the editorial factors and the editorial values we have discussed so far.

Figure 1 – Elements encompassing the criteria of editorial-worthiness



After describing the main categories encompassed by the idea of criteria of editorial-worthiness, we must notice that there are elements occupying a “grey zone” between editorial factors and values. In line with this, the next topic discusses some limitations of the taxonomy proposed here.

5. Criteria of editorial-worthiness: So, what?

As said before, there is a parallel between the argument here outlined and the classical one about the idea of news values. Some of the editorial values overlap with news values, such as “the power elite”, “magnitude and relevance” or “conflict”. Another point of convergence is that neither news values nor the criteria of editorial-worthiness demand that all the elements be fulfilled at the same time to make an issue newsworthy or editorial-worthy.

However, it would be unreasonable to look at news values and editorial values as if they had the same nature, since they count on distinct characteristics. The attempt of applying the same taxonomy to different journalistic genres is one of the problems identified by Brighton and Foy (2007) regarding the classification proposed by Galtung and Ruge (1965).

Furthermore, we are not suggesting that editorial factors and values are suitable for all contexts. In fact, the criteria of editorial-worthiness we propose are a framework aiming to help the analysis of editorial production routines and to identify the peculiarities of each case. Thus, the contribution of the categorization we outline is precisely to elaborate a panorama that can be applied to different contexts, keeping in mind that there are several variations in the ways how editorial factors and editorial values are applied in each situation. We also acknowledge this is a meta-analysis, which used data and arguments provided by other authors to develop the taxonomy. This strategy allowed us to dialogue with empirical findings from other researches – but empirical tests remain imperative.

Two issues need to be more deeply addressed before concluding this article.

The first one refers to the editorial production routines of each news organization. The classic ethnographies proposed in the 1970s documented and analyzed the professional and organizational practices of commercial journalism (Tuchman, 1978; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2009; Willig, 2012). Nonetheless, even inside the same newsroom, regular journalists and the editorial board have specific work routines (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2009). Willig (2012), thus, defends the importance of studying the specific *habitus* of the professionals responsible for producing editorials. In other words, considering that newspapers have different ways of operationalizing editorial production routines (Firmstone, 2008; Mont’Alverne et al., 2018; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2009), a newsroom ethnography of such a process would clarify how the criteria listed here interact with each other.

This article reinforces the need to go beyond the study of editorial production routines in mainstream organizations, as argued by Wahl-Jorgensen concerning the news section (2009). This would make it possible to acknowledge other procedures, cultures, and internal and external newsroom constraints which could unveil editorial factors and values this article may not have discussed.

A second issue concerns an alleged loss of influence that editorial pieces would have faced over the last decades. There are two aspects to approach regarding this issue. The first one is the greater prominence of niche media organizations, with columnists or opinionated staff writers gaining a relevance they did not have before (Cook and Sirkkunen, 2013; Machin and Niblock, 2010; Seymour-Ure, 1998; Stroud, 2010). The partisanship of a news media is an aspect important when citizens choose their sources of information (Stroud, 2010). This is illustrated by the fact that the main information providers for voters in the 2016 US elections varied according to the candidate they supported (Pew, 2017).

On the one hand, this phenomenon implies considering a hypercompetitive scenario for the audience's time and attention. There are several actors in such a dispute, including columnists, bloggers, social movements, and ideological or opinionated media outlets which also publish what they call editorials. It is important to highlight, however, that in this article we are looking more specifically at editorials published by quality papers. Since the relevance of publications such as tabloids does not lie in their credibility, we may say that their editorials do not have the same importance – and probably the criteria presented by us are not valid to them.

Another relevant point regarding the role of editorials in a hypercompetitive and niche-oriented landscape is the possibility of a spillover from opinionated texts to the reportage – Oakes (1964) called our attention to this problem in his interview. Whilst this process is real, it is worth mentioning that quality papers do not abandon the discourse of keeping a dialogue with the widest audience possible – even as an attempt to differentiate themselves from “non-credible” sources².

At the same time, Oakes (1964) argues that people probably paid more attention to columnists' opinions than they did to editorials, revealing that this is not a debate started recently. However, he said that this would depend on the newspaper at stake: he holds that NYT editorials work as opinion leaders, making them keep their relevance in quality papers. In this regard, the pertinence of editorials also comes from their relations with political actors³.

Concerning the audience, Hallock (2007) presents data from a 1994 study of editorial page readership prepared for the National Conference of Editorials Writers. He found out that 79 percent of adult daily newspaper readers look at the editorial page. Druckman and Parkin (2005) also unveil the impact of editorial slants in voters' decisions. More recently, the contemporary relevance of editorials is corroborated by the opinion editors interviewed by the Mont'Alverne et al. (2018). The interviewees hold that editorials remain a beacon for public discussions.

In the end, we do not defend that editorials are the most important pieces of the newspapers' daily content. They face a strong competition from other sources of information, especially ideological or opinionated ones. The digital media brings new challenges to editorials, despite there are still few empirical studies on this matter. However, editorials have a multifold function and are designed according to specific procedures, reinforcing the relevance of understanding their production processes.

6. An empirical agenda to test the criteria of editorial-worthiness

This article contributes to the research on journalism since it considers the aspects guiding the selection of issues and approaches in editorial pieces. Even if editorials are texts through which a newspaper can express its opinion without obeying to the same rules as it does regarding news coverage, there are some criteria adopted throughout editorial production which need to be discussed more carefully.

Our proposal of criteria of editorial-worthiness is divided into two groups. The first one consists of editorial factors (contextual elements responsible for influencing the editorial-worthiness of an event); the second one refers to editorial values (elements more directly observed in the texts).

Similarly to what Harcup and O'Neill (2001) hold when they study news values, we do not intend to offer a definitive taxonomy for understanding editorial-worthiness. Our main aim was to bring to light a set of elements able to allow future research to test the pertinence of the categories we list.

From this study, we expect the research in journalism might find clues to address answers to some questions, such as the following ones: Should newspapers make their criteria of editorial-worthiness clear to foster their transparency? To what extent is the homogenization process diagnosed for news (Lee, 2007) also applicable to editorials? How do the transformations in the media landscape change editorial production routines? How do the criteria of editorial-worthiness manifest themselves on platforms that go beyond printed versions (e.g., TV and radio)? Is it possible to say that the criteria of editorial-worthiness vary when issues from the political field are on the agenda?

Applying the categorization presented above will be more effective if one observes editorials production routines *in loco*. Interviews with editorialists working for different newspapers would complement the investigations on the editorial as a product. We hold that journalism research should verify the suitability of the idea of criteria of editorial-worthiness to measure to what extent – and with which variations – they are incorporated into the texts.

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¹ Available at < <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/16/business/china-media-trump-tariffs.html>> and in <<http://europa.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201810/29/WS5bd702e9a310eff303285424.html>>. Access on 27 nov. 2018.

² The recent ads by the NYT are examples of this. The American newspaper reinforces its commitment to the truth. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gY0FdZ350GE>. Access on 30 November 2018.

³ An example is Donald Trump's responses to critics made by several media outlets in the US. Available at < <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2018/08/16/trump-responds-after-hundreds-of-newspaper-editorials-criticize-his-attacks-on-the-press/>>. Access on 27 nov. 2018.