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# People's Preference for News Items in Newspaper

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**ABSTRACT:** News values are "criteria that influence the selection and presentation of events as published news." These values help explain what makes something "newsworthy."

News values are not universal and can vary between different cultures. Among the many lists of news values that have been drawn up by scholars and journalists, some attempt to describe news practices across cultures, while others have become remarkably specific to the press of particular (often Western) nations. In the Western tradition, decisions on the selection and prioritization of news are made by editors on the basis of their experience and intuition, although analysis by Galtung and Ruge showed that several factors are consistently applied across a range of news organizations. Their theory was tested on the news presented in four different Norwegian newspapers from the Congo and Cuban crisis of July 1960 and the Cyprus crisis of March–April 1964. Results were mainly consistent with their theory and hypotheses. Johan Galtung later said that the media have misconstrued his work and become far too negative, sensational, and adversarial.

Methodologically and conceptually, news values can be approached from four different perspectives: material (focusing on the material reality of events), cognitive (focusing on people's beliefs and value systems), social (focusing on journalistic practice), and discursive (focusing on the discourse). A discursive perspective tries to systematically examine how news values such as Negativity, Proximity, Eliteness, and others, are constructed through words and images in published news stories. This approach is influenced by linguistics and social semiotics, and is called "discursive news values analysis" (DNVA).<sup>[5]</sup> It focuses on the "distortion" step in Galtung and Ruge's chain of news communication, by analysing how events are discursively constructed as newsworthy.

**KEYWORDS:** news items, newspaper, preference, tradition, eliteness, linguistics, sensational

## I. INTRODUCTION

Initially labelled "news factors," news values are widely credited to Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge.<sup>[2]</sup> In their seminal 1965 study,<sup>[2]</sup> Galtung and Ruge put forward a system of twelve factors describing events that together are used as defining "newsworthiness." Focusing on newspapers and broadcast news,<sup>1</sup> Galtung and Ruge devised a list describing what they believed were significant contributing factors as to how the news is constructed. They proposed a "chain of news communication," which involves processes of selection (the more an event satisfies the "news factors," the more likely it is selected as news), distortion (accentuating the newsworthy factors of the event, once it has been selected), and replication (selection and distortion are repeated at all steps in the chain from event to reader).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, three basic hypotheses are presented by Galtung and Ruge: the additivity hypothesis that the more factors an event satisfies, the higher the probability that it becomes news; the complementary hypothesis that the factors will tend to exclude each other; and the exclusion hypothesis that events that satisfy none or very few factors will not become news.<sup>3</sup>

In 2001, the influential 1965 study was updated by Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill, in a study of the British press. The findings of a content analysis of three major national newspapers in the UK were used to critically evaluate Galtung and Ruge's original criteria and to propose a contemporary set of news values<sup>4</sup>. Forty years on, they found some notable differences, including the rise of celebrity news and that good news (as well as bad news) was a significant news value, as well as the newspaper's own agenda. They examined three tabloid newspapers.<sup>[6]</sup>

In a rapidly evolving market, achieving relevance, giving audiences the news they want and find interesting, is an increasingly important goal for media outlets seeking to maintain market share. This has made news organizations more open to audience input and feedback, and forced them to adopt and apply news values that attract and keep audiences. Given these changes and the rapid rise of digital technology in recent years, Harcup and O'Neill updated their 2001 study in 2016,<sup>[7]</sup> while other scholars have analysed news values in viral news shared via social media.<sup>[8]</sup> The growth



of interactive media and citizen journalism is fast altering the traditional distinction between news producer and passive audience and may in future lead to a redefinition of what "news" means and the role of the news industry.<sup>5</sup>

A variety of external and internal pressures influence journalistic decisions during the news-making process, which can sometimes lead to bias or unethical reporting. Many different factors have the potential to influence whether an event is first noticed by a news organisation, second whether a story will be written about that event, third, how that story is written,<sup>6</sup> and fourth whether this story will end up being published as news and if so, where it is placed. Therefore, "there is no end to lists of news criteria."<sup>[9]</sup> There are multiple competing lists of news values (including Galtung & Ruge's news factors, and others put forward by Schlesinger,<sup>[10]</sup> Bell,<sup>[11]</sup> Bednarek & Caple<sup>[4]</sup>), with considerable overlap but also disagreement as to what should be included.<sup>[12]</sup>

News values can relate to aspects of events and actors, or to aspects of news gathering and processing.<sup>[11]</sup>

Values in news actors and events:

- Frequency: Events that occur suddenly and fit well with the news organization's schedule are more likely to be reported than those that occur gradually or at inconvenient times of day or night. Long-term trends are not likely to receive much coverage.
- Timeliness: Events that have only just happened, are current, ongoing, or are about to happen are newsworthy.<sup>[4]</sup>
- Familiarity: To do with people or places close to the target audience. Others prefer the term Proximity for this news value, which includes geographical and cultural proximity (see "meaningfulness").<sup>[4]</sup>
- Negativity: Bad news is more newsworthy than good news. Sometimes described as "the basic news value."<sup>[11]</sup> Conversely, it has also been suggested that Positivity is a news value in certain cases (such as sports news, science news, feel-good tabloid stories).
- Conflict: Opposition of people or forces resulting in a dramatic effect. Events with conflict are often quite newsworthy. Sometimes included in Negativity rather than listed as a separate news value.<sup>[4]</sup>
- Unexpectedness: Events that are out of the ordinary, unexpected, or rare are more newsworthy than routine, unsurprising events.<sup>[11][4]</sup>
- Unambiguity: Events whose implications are clear make for better copy than those that are open to more than one interpretation, or where any understanding of the implications depends on first understanding the complex background in which the events take place.<sup>[11]</sup>
- Personalization: Events that can be portrayed as the actions of individuals will be more attractive than one in which there is no such "human interest." Personalization is about whether an event can be contextualised in personal terms (affecting or involving specific, "ordinary" people, not the generalised masses).<sup>7</sup>
- Meaningfulness: This relates to the sense of identification the audience has with the topic. "Cultural proximity" is a factor here—events concerned with people who speak the same language, look the same, and share the same preoccupations as the audience receive more coverage than those concerned with people who speak different languages, look different and have different preoccupations. A related term is Relevance, which is about the relevance of the event as regards the target readers'/viewers' own lives or how close it is to their experiences. Impact refers more generally to an event's impact, on the target audience, or on others. An event with significant consequences (high impact) is newsworthy.<sup>[4]</sup>
- Eliteness: Events concerned with global powers receive more attention than those concerned with less influential nations. Events concerned with the rich, powerful, famous and infamous get more coverage. Also includes the eliteness of sources - sometimes called Attribution.<sup>[11]</sup>
- Superlativeness: Events with a large scale or scope or with high intensity are newsworthy.<sup>[11][4]</sup>
- Consonance: Events that fit with the media's expectations and preconceptions receive more coverage than those that defy them (and for which they are thus unprepared). Note this appears to conflict with unexpectedness above. However, consonance really refers to the media's readiness to report an item. Consonance has also been defined as relating to editors' stereotypes and their mental scripts for how events typically proceed.<sup>[11]</sup>





## II. DISCUSSION

Values in the news process:

- Continuity: A story that is already in the news gathers a kind of inertia. This is partly because the media organizations are already in place to report the story, and partly because previous reportage may have made the story more accessible to the public (making it less ambiguous).<sup>7</sup>
- Composition: Stories must compete with one another for space in the media. For instance, editors may seek to provide a balance of different types of coverage, so that if there is an excess of foreign news for instance, the least important foreign story may have to make way for an item concerned with the domestic news. In this way the prominence given to a story depends not only on its own news values but also on those of competing stories.<sup>12</sup>
- Competition: Commercial or professional competition between media may lead journalists to endorse the news value given to a story by a rival.<sup>8</sup>
- Co-option: A story that is only marginally newsworthy in its own right may be covered if it is related to a major running story.<sup>11</sup>
- Prefabrication: A story that is marginal in news terms but written and available may be selected ahead of a much more newsworthy story that must be researched and written from the ground up.<sup>11</sup>
- Predictability: An event is more likely to be covered if it has been pre-scheduled.<sup>11</sup>
- Story impact: The impact of a published story (not the event), for example whether it is being shared widely (sometimes called Shareability), read, liked, commented-on. To be qualified as shareable, a story arguably has to be simple, emotional, unexpected and triggered. Engaging with such analytics is now an important part of newsroom practice.
- Time constraints: Traditional news media such as radio, television and daily newspapers have strict deadlines and a short production cycle, which selects for items that can be researched and covered quickly.<sup>9</sup>
- Logistics: Although eased by the availability of global communications even from remote regions, the ability to deploy and control production and reporting staff, and functionality of technical resources can determine whether a story is covered.<sup>10</sup>
- Data: Media need to back up all of their stories with data in order to remain relevant and reliable. Reporters prefer to look at raw data in order to be able to take an unbiased perspective. An alternative term is Facticity - the favouring of facts and figures in hard news.<sup>11</sup>

One of the key differences in relation to these news values is whether they relate to events or stories. For example, composition and co-option both relate to the published news story. These are news values that concern how news stories fit with the other stories around them. The aim here is to ensure a balanced spread of stories with minimal duplication across a news program or edition.<sup>13</sup> Such news values are qualitatively different from news values that relate to aspects of events, such as Eliteness (the elite status of news actors or sources) or Proximity (the closeness of the event's location to the target audience).<sup>10</sup>

Conventional models concentrate on what the journalist perceives as news. But the news process is a two-way transaction, involving both news producer (the journalist) and the news receiver (the audience), although the boundary between the two is rapidly blurring with the growth of citizen journalism and interactive media. Little has been done to define equivalent factors that determine audience perception of news. This is largely because it would appear impossible to define a common factor, or factors, that generate interest in a mass audience. Basing his judgement on many years as a newspaper journalist Hetherington states that: "...anything which threatens people's peace, prosperity and well being is news and likely to make headlines."<sup>14</sup>

Whyte-Venables suggests audiences may interpret news as a risk signal.<sup>15</sup> Psychologists and primatologists have shown that apes and humans constantly monitor the environment for information that may signal the possibility of physical danger or threat to the individual's social position. This receptiveness to risk signals is a powerful and virtually universal survival mechanism. A "risk signal" is characterized by two factors, an element of change (or uncertainty) and the relevance of that change to the security of the individual. The same two conditions are observed to be characteristic of news.<sup>11</sup> The news value of a story, if defined in terms of the interest it carries for an audience, is determined by the degree of change it contains and the relevance that change has for the individual or group. Analysis shows that journalists and publicists manipulate both the element of change and relevance ('security concern') to maximize, or some cases play down, the strength of a story.<sup>12</sup>



Security concern is proportional to the relevance of the story for the individual, his or her family, social group and societal group, in declining order. At some point there is a Boundary of Relevance, beyond which the change is no longer perceived to be relevant, or newsworthy. This boundary may be manipulated by journalists, power elites and communicators seeking to encourage audiences to exclude, or embrace, certain groups: for instance, to distance a home audience from the enemy in time of war, or conversely, to highlight the plight of a distant culture so as to encourage support for aid programs.<sup>[16]</sup>

In 2018, Hal Pashler and Gail Heriot published a study showing that perceptions of newsworthiness tend to be contaminated by a political usefulness bias. In other words, individuals tend to view stories that give them "ammunition" for their political views as more newsworthy. They give credence to their own views.<sup>[17]</sup>

### III. RESULTS

An evolutionary psychology explanation for why negative news have a higher news value than positive news starts with the empirical observation that the human perceptive system and lower level brain functions have difficulty distinguishing between media stimuli and real stimuli. These lower level brain mechanisms which function on a subconscious level make basic evaluations of perceptive stimuli, focus attention on important stimuli, and start basic emotional reactions. Research has also found that the brain differentiates between negative and positive stimuli and reacts quicker and more automatically to negative stimuli which are also better remembered. This likely has evolutionary explanations with it often being important to quickly focus attention on, evaluate, and quickly respond to threats.<sup>[13]</sup> While the reaction to a strong negative stimulus is to avoid, a moderately negative stimulus instead causes curiosity and further examination. Negative media news is argued to fall into the latter category which explains their popularity. Lifelike audiovisual media are argued to have particularly strong effects compared to reading.<sup>[18]</sup>

Women have on average stronger avoidance reactions to moderately negative stimuli. Men and women also differ on average in how they enjoy, evaluate, remember, comprehend, and identify with the people in news depending on if the news are negatively or positively framed.<sup>[14]</sup> The stronger avoidance reaction to moderately negative stimuli has been explained as it being the role of men in evolutionary history to investigate and potentially respond aggressively to threats while women and children withdrew. It has been claimed that negative news are framed according to male preferences by the often male journalists who cover such news and that a more positive framing may attract a larger female audience.<sup>[18]</sup> However, other scholars have urged caution as regards evolutionary psychology's claims about gender differences.<sup>[19]</sup>

Media bias is the bias of journalists and news producers within the mass media in the selection of many events and stories that are reported and how they are covered. The term "media bias" implies a pervasive or widespread bias contravening of the standards of journalism, rather than the perspective of an individual journalist or article. The direction and degree of media bias in various countries is widely disputed.<sup>[1]</sup>

Practical limitations to media neutrality include the inability of journalists to report all available stories and facts, and the requirement that selected facts be linked into a coherent narrative.<sup>[2]</sup> Government influence, including overt and covert censorship, biases the media in some countries, for example China, North Korea, Syria and Myanmar.<sup>[3][4]</sup> Politics and media bias may interact with each other; the media has the ability to influence politicians, and politicians may have the power to influence the media. This can change the distribution of power in society.<sup>[5]</sup> Market forces may also cause bias. Examples include bias introduced by the ownership of media, including a concentration of media ownership, the subjective selection of staff, or the perceived preferences of an intended audience.<sup>[15]</sup>

There are a number of national and international watchdog groups that report on bias of the media.<sup>[27]</sup>

The most commonly discussed types of bias occur when the (allegedly partisan) media support or attack a particular political party,<sup>[6]</sup> candidate,<sup>[7]</sup> or ideology.

In 2000, D'Alessio and Allen studied three possible sources of media bias:<sup>[8]</sup>

- Coverage bias<sup>[6]</sup> when media choose to report only negative news about one party or ideology,
- Gatekeeping bias (also known as selectivity<sup>[9]</sup> or selection bias),<sup>[10]</sup> when stories are selected or deselected, sometimes on ideological grounds (see spike). It is sometimes also referred to as agenda bias, when the focus is on political actors and whether they are covered based on their preferred policy issues.<sup>[6][11]</sup>
- Statement bias (also known as tonality bias<sup>[6]</sup> or presentation bias),<sup>[10]</sup> when media coverage is slanted towards or against particular actors or issues.<sup>[16]</sup>

- Based on the findings of Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Stone, they summarize two forms of media bias in the literature driven by different motivations: demand-driven bias and supply-driven bias. Demand-driven bias includes three factors: "reputation", "intrinsic utility from beliefs", and "delegation (or advice)".<sup>[12]</sup>
- Other common forms of political and non-political media bias include:
- Advertising bias, when stories are selected or slanted to please advertisers.<sup>[13]</sup>
- Concision bias, a tendency to report views that can be summarized succinctly, crowding out more unconventional views that take time to explain.
- Content bias, differential treatment of the two parties in political conflicts, and to write biased news that benefits one side.<sup>[14]</sup>
- Corporate bias, when stories are selected or slanted to please corporate owners of media.
- Decision-making bias, means that the motivation, frame of mind, or beliefs of the journalists will have an impact on their writing. And it is generally pejorative.<sup>[14]</sup>
- Distortion bias, when the fact or reality is distorted or fabricated in the news.<sup>[14]</sup>
- Mainstream bias, a tendency to report what everyone else is reporting, and to avoid stories that will offend anyone.<sup>[26]</sup>
- Partisan bias, a tendency to report to serve particular political party leaning.<sup>[15]</sup>
- Sensationalism, bias in favor of the exceptional over the ordinary, giving the impression that rare events, such as airplane crashes, are more common than common events, such as automobile crashes.<sup>[17]</sup>
- Structural bias, when an actor or issue receives more or less favorable coverage as a result of newsworthiness and media routines, not as the result of ideological decisions (e.g. incumbency bonus).<sup>[25]</sup>
- False balance, when an issue is presented as even-sided, despite disproportionate amounts of evidence.
- Undue weight, when a story is given much greater significance or portent than a neutral journalist or editor would give.
- Speculative content, when stories focus not on what has occurred, but primarily on what might occur, using words like "could," "might," or "what if," without labeling the article as analysis or opinion.<sup>[18]</sup>
- False timeliness, implying that an event is a new event, and thus deriving notability, without addressing past events of the same kind.
- Ventriloquism, when experts or witnesses are quoted in a way that intentionally voices the author's own opinion.
- Demographic is also a common form of media bias, caused by factors such as gender, race, and social and economic status.<sup>[18]</sup>

For example, in some European countries, female politicians receive fewer mentions in the media than male politicians, due to gender bias in the media.<sup>[19]</sup>

Other forms of bias include reporting that favors or attacks a particular race, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnic group, or even person<sup>[19]</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Bias is often reflected in which language is used, and in the way that language is used. Mass media has a worldwide reach, but must communicate with each linguistic group in some language they understand. The use of language may be neutral, or may attempt to be as neutral as possible, using careful translation and avoiding culturally charged words and phrases. Or it may be intentionally or accidentally biased, <sup>[24]</sup>using mistranslations and trigger words targeting particular groups. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are three mutually intelligible languages, Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian. Media that try to reach as large an audience as possible use words common to all three languages. Media that want to target just one group may choose words that are unique to that group. In the United States, while most media is in English, in the 2020 election both major political parties used Spanish language advertising to reach out to Hispanic voters. Al Jazeera originally used Arabic, to reach its target audience, but in 2003 launched Al Jazeera English to broaden that audience.<sup>[20]</sup>

Attempts to use language designed to appeal to a particular cultural group can backfire, as when Kimberly Guilfoyle, speaking at the Republican National Convention in 2020, said she was proud that her mother was an immigrant from Puerto Rico<sup>[23]</sup>. Puerto Ricans were quick to point out that they are born American citizens, and are not immigrants. There are also false flag broadcasts, that pretend to be favoring one group, while using language



deliberately chosen to anger the target audience. Language may also introduce a more subtle form of bias. The selection of metaphors and analogies, or the inclusion of personal information in one situation but not another can introduce bias,<sup>22</sup> such as a gender bias. Use of a word with positive or negative connotations rather than a more neutral synonym can form a biased picture in the audience's mind. For example, it makes a difference whether the media calls a group "terrorists" or "freedom fighters" or "insurgents". A 2005 memo to the staff of the CBC states:

Rather than calling assailants "terrorists," we can refer to them as bombers, hijackers, gunmen (if we're sure no women were in the group), militants, extremists, attackers or some other appropriate noun.<sup>21</sup>

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