

NEWS VALUES IN NEWS WEBSITES:

An empirical study of the criteria of newsworthiness in Argentina and Brazil¹

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Brasileira de Pesquisa
em Jornalismo

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ABSTRACT

In the theoretical approach to newsmaking we have on the one hand the organisation of the work of the newsroom and on the other, professional culture. Together, these two components determine the nature of the news-product and the conditions in which it is put together. The criteria for selecting newsworthy facts, known as criteria of newsworthiness or news values, consist of a group of elements by which the information apparatus deals with the superabundance of information that, in all kinds of ways, pours into the journalistic environment every day. If they are analysed as an organisational whole, news values can be seen as a logical framework that explains aspects of the production situation in newsrooms. In this article we intend to demonstrate how criteria of newsworthiness work in two news sites: *uol.com.br* and *clarin.com*. Based on an empirical study of the electronic pages, we hope to find some common points which will illustrate the process of selecting news in the digital information environment.

Key-Words: newsmaking, digital journalism, online journalism, newsworthiness, news values.

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we focus on an empirical corpus comprising the two most important news sites in Latin America: *clarin.com* and *uol.com.br*, which claim to be the largest portals (by number of pages and page views) in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking worlds. The aim is to discover which topics the two sites judge to be most important in their news service and to create a map of the news values found on the electronic pages during a given period. We are interested above all in discovering if the news areas in the World Wide Web are subject to the same criteria of newsworthiness as the printed products from which they are derived.

In 1897, the US daily *New York Times* took as its slogan “All the

news that's fit to print". This is a reference to the influence of journalists in determining the criteria of relevance which applied to messages worthy of being brought to the reader's attention. Those who deal with news greatly prize 'newsjudgement' which Tuchman (in Traquina, 2003) defines as "the sacred knowledge", a kind of "secret ability belonging to the journalist which sets him apart from other people".

In the approach to 'newsmaking', we have on the one hand the organisation of the work of the newsroom and on the other, professional culture. Together, these two components determine the concepts of the news-product and the conditions in which it is put together. The "group of elements by means of which the apparatus of information controls and manages the quantity and type of events that will be the basis of news selection" is called by Wolf (2003: 194-208) 'newsworthiness', understood as being "characteristics which events should have (or present to the eyes of journalists) in order to be turned into news". The definition and choice of what is newsworthy is directed by the "executable nature" of the information product, "being carried out in conditions of restricted time and resources".

News Value as Routine

As Tuchman says, "...without a certain routine which can be used to deal with unexpected events, press organisations, being rational undertakings, would collapse" (in Wolf, 2003: 196). There are so many variables linked to a fact that, if each journalist had to make an individual decision concerning each aspect, it would be impossible to meet deadlines and send material to the advanced production processes in order to arrive on the streets in a completed form. In addition to those aspects concerning each fact, there is also a "superabundance of events" as Wolf and Tuchman observe, from which it is necessary to select material and measure it into manageable amounts.

In the 17th century Tobias Peucer (2004:28-30) was already discussing questions concerning the newsworthiness, credibility, form and style of newspapers. He believed that facts are practically "infinite" and, perhaps anticipating Wolf and Tuchman's "superabundance of events", recommended "establishing a selection" to give preference "to those events that deserve to be recorded or known". With a view to what would at the same time interest the reader and also suit [the ruling powers] to divulge, Peucer drew up a list of newsworthy events.

We can reduce these to three main categories: 1) exotic or striking - "the prodigies, monstrosities, wonderful and works or deeds in nature or

art, terrible floods or storms, earthquakes or phenomena that have been recently found or discovered”; 2) fame or power - the different types of government, changes, movements, war and peace, strategic plans, laws, legal verdicts, political appointments and their holders, famous people, inaugurations and public ceremonies; 3) religion, the arts or social life - ecclesiastical and literary topics, new sects, “the most important writings of wise and learned people, literary disputes, the latest works of erudite men, institutions, misfortunes, deaths” and studies of natural history, society, the church or literature.

Peucer also reflected on how reporting events appeals to feelings - what we call today human interest or *faits-divers* stories: “The needless recording of pain suffered is a pleasure; and those who have escaped with no personal anguish look on the dramas of others with no pain because compassion in itself is also pleasurable”. He also discovered the strength of the criterion of proximity: “Every story is more pleasing if we are familiar with the place where it happened”. By creating these first categories for analysing ‘newspaper material’, Peucer inaugurated the basis of what today we call the elements of newsworthiness.

In the study they carried out concerning the appearance of news concerning the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus in four Norwegian newspapers - published in 1965 in the *Journal of International Peace Research* in an article entitled, *Structuring the News* – Galtung and Ruge discovered that when the frequency of an event is related to the frequency of appearance of the news carrier, its chances of becoming news are higher. They concluded that, the more an event satisfies certain conditions, the more easily it will be chosen as a news item. They established 12 criteria. The first five are related to the impact of the story: 1) breadth, 2) frequency, 3) negativity, 4) novelty, 5) lack of ambiguity. Four factors are connected to identification with the audience: 6) personalisation, 7) significance, 8) reference to elite nations, 9) reference to elite people. Three other factors are links to ways of covering news: 10) agreement, 11) continuity and 12) composition (in McGregor, 2005).

What it is important to emphasise in the classification made by Galtung and Ruge (in Traquina, 1993) are primarily the two news values described as “references to countries” and “references to elite people”. This was the first time that academics had identified the power to occupy space in the media of stories about countries and rich and important individuals. Under the criterion of “personalisation”, the authors show the emphasis given by the mass media to individual actions that could serve as examples to the public and which became recognised within

the “human interest” category. Also, under the category “negativity” they showed the value of bad news.

Before the work of the Norwegians (but after that of Peucer) in 1942, Stanley Johnson and Julian Harriss (1966: 33-37), of the University of Tennessee (USA) were already talking about the “news values”, “intrinsic characteristics” and “desirable characteristics” of events. They were also concerned with establishing measures of the importance of news. “Is there a scale to decide the specific gravity or importance of news, or to weigh it so as to calculate the attraction it may have for the reader? Are there any principles to guide the reporter and editor in selecting the most important news out of thousands of items?” Johnson and Harriss’ recommendations were very specific:

News items have intrinsic characteristics known as news values [emphasis in the original]. The presence or absence of these values decides its importance and thus guarantees the reader’s attention. These news values are, therefore, useful measures of the importance of events. If properly applied, they will determine if an event is news or not.

During the same period, these writers were considering news as a product of the break in the status quo. Thus, they observed that what was essentially contained in news was the element of change: without change there is no news. “... Change, or potential change, is the basic element of news. There are changes that are vitally important to readers, which affect them in some way, such as the fear of losing their jobs or of the factory closing; or other changes that give them hope, such as the election of a new mayor, the appointment of a new manager or news of newlyweds or the birth of a child.” (Johnson and Harriss, 1966:39) According to the Tennessee academics, “...news items compete for space and may be measured according to their comparative importance. They may also be measured according to their intrinsic importance, which determines their length and how they are presented”. Given the impossibility of having a scale or thermometer to evaluate newsworthiness, they propose the following “factors of magnitude”: 1) the degree of variation in the status quo (intensity), 2) the number of people affected (extension), 3) distance from the event (proximity), 4) time of the event (opportunity), 5) significance of results arising out of the event (consequences) and 6) diversity of news values (variety).

In the opinion of van Dijk (1990: 173-175), there is a correspondence between journalistic values and social cognition: the news values that

guide reporters in selecting events are legitimated by the public because they fit into the ideological code, the cultural map (Hall, in Silva, 2005) within which the public are placed and which they recognise. These news items function as representation markers, that is, they classify those events with which readers identify and those in which they feel themselves represented, within the effect of agenda setting already mentioned. News forms part of the group of mental processes, thought structures and social perceptions that give information a powerful role in modern society, now that the contribution of networked communication - digital and interactive - accelerates rate of production and spreads content to a high degree.

News values help make journalism fit the model of an inverted pyramid in that they emphasise the main topics of a series of facts and bring them to the news medium in the order of their importance. The pyramid, which began as a pattern of text and arrangement, can only reach the whole area of journalism, and become a paradigm because, by means of its news values, it succeeds in giving a psychological, philosophical and organisational rationale to the order which journalists choose to give to the data supplied.

We may observe the cultural map drawn by news values, for example, in the study of the picturesque, strange or exotic which is found within the classic concept of news. "Man bites dog" will always be news because it is part of our ideological code to know that men do not bite dogs. For reporters, the "strange rise in the incidence of rabies ...", would provide the opportunity to create a screeching headline" (Carta, in Meserani, Costa e de Giorgi, 1995:33) and would be a news item anywhere in the world.

At successive points in the productive process, news values come into action: in the rough draft; in the checking process; in editing materials in paginating and, most important of all, on the front page. The reporter's feelings become more acute when he finds an interesting detail while collecting data. The value of his material increases: he knows that the topic could be headline news. News with the greatest informative and attractive potential bring together the greatest number of news values because these, as Wolf points out, act "in packs", complementing each other. The more factors that are grouped together, the greater will be the result in terms of impact on the public, and we can measure this impact using Johnson and Harris' "measuring instruments" - proximity, intensity, extension and consequences.

Identifying a news value and giving it form and a place in a news

report are the journalist's aim: its appeal should reach the reader's feelings and capture his attention. Most reporters do this unconsciously - they generally use expressions that show the deep level at which decisions are made: "You have to feel the news," says Mino Carta (in Meserani, Costa and de Giorgi, 1995:33). At the same time, "this very special sensitivity" may be cited as the "first requisite of good journalism", showing that the question goes beyond rational level to arrive at the subconscious. There is a consensus which says that weak news values appeal to a smaller audience for the product. If, on the other hand, there is a high level of appeal, there is no way to hold back the news.

News values end up being internalised by professionals and incorporated into their culture. News values are dynamic (they change with time and show modifications), multiple (the number and type of topics are expanding) and segmented (they express thematic specialisations that influence organisation and coverage - sections, specialist opinions and special contributions). The organisation of material in newsrooms, type and number of reporters, the correspondents and specialists who are used, show the importance given to news and make it possible to follow the ideology of the news vehicle and of the public.

Systematisation of Values

Which fact has more value than another? What makes one news item receive more attention - and if it is a front page, sell more magazines or attract more attention on the magazine rack? It is to these questions that answers are sought through the news values which we might call 'gold' in the news industry. The main criteria would be the *interest* and *importance* (Wolf, 2003: 208-228). The *importance* of the fact is thus linked to four values: a) the status and level in the hierarchy of individuals taking part in the newsworthy event, b) the impact on the country and our national interest, c) the number of people involved (either actually or potentially) in the event and d) the relevance and significance of an event in relation to the future developments of a specific situation. The *interest* would be linked to subjective decisions such as, for example, the image the reporter has of the public and his ability to offer it material worth reading. In this category, we can place human interest, which has been cultivated since the profession began.

Next would come: *criteria related to the product* - this refers to the availability of material and its qualities as an informative product, such as brevity, objectivity and novelty, all subject to technical controls; *criteria related to the medium* - this refers to the evaluation of the newsworthiness of the event in terms of its possibility of providing 'good

material'; *criteria related to the public* - these concern the idea reporters have of their audience; *criteria related to the competition* - scoops, exclusive interviews and special sections.

Stylebooks usually consist of long lists of news values, like that of Martínez Albertos (1993: 288), based on the work of Carl Warren. Currency and proximity are considered to be “the most important and decisive” ingredients of news. There are other “random” elements: consequences, personal relevance, suspense, rarity, conflict, sex, excitement and progress. Silva (2005:95-107) invites us to take a different look at the processes of selecting facts and classifying them in terms of news values, taking newsworthiness to mean:

...each and every factor that is potentially able to act in the process of producing news, starting from the characteristics of the fact, the reporter's personal judgement, the professional culture of journalists, conditions that favour or restrict the media company, quality of the material (picture or text), relationship with the sources and with the public, ethical factors and even historical, political economic and social circumstances.

For the purposes of this study, we synthesise the factors of interest within the news in terms of:

- a) basic values - currency, proximity, celebrity, exoticism and human interest;
- b) thematic values - sex, conflict/power, love, mystery, money, crime/violence, death, leisure;
- c) other values - health and beauty, the environment, education, science, the arts, fashion, etc.

We must emphasise that these values are not unique and that each category may include other, related, ideas. In a more recent study than *Theories of Mass Communication* – in his article “News providers in research into communication” (1997), Mauro Wolf points out that we are faced with new procedures: 1) the de-professionalisation of the job of the reporter in newsrooms thanks to digital technology; 2) the bureaucratisation of newsrooms because “renovation has not been aimed at the information product but at the productive process”; 3) “the creation and packaging of the product, not its conception”. Newsrooms have become areas where the immense flood of news the papers receive is put into forms that allow them to be published almost immediately. In digital journalism, “it is now normal to say and think that it is not reporters who are looking for news, but the news that is looking for

reporters". Newspapers are dependent on agencies and are increasingly obliged to conform to the criteria of relevance laid down by the network of agencies.

But often these reports are no more than a literal rewording of pieces of articles or news items that have recently been published and which the editorial systems are able to recover and re-use very easily. In other words, the context in which the updating happens is that of a collage... any possible analysis is abandoned in favour of a low-level use of what the technologies allow. The newsworthiness of anything that does not pass through the agencies-newsrooms-data banks network of connections visibly diminishes or disappears.

Wolf repeats that, in one sense, the limits of newsworthiness have been reduced: there is no requirement for any complement to the information. In another sense, the possibility of adding more news is increased through the use of databanks and digital archives. Other problems indicated are self-referencing and being media-centred; everything has come to revolve around the media and these are vehicles that promote their own agendas. The information used belongs to the circuit itself; in other words, UOL takes on board material from the *Folha de S. Paulo* [newspaper]; *O Globo Online* uses material from the Globo Agency; the *Clarín* site uses material from several other members of the group.

Frequency of News Values in *uol.com.br* and *clarin.com*

In this section we shall measure the frequency of news values in journalistic material gathered from the *uol.com.br* and *clarin.com* sites. An analysis was made of 675 units of information (both texts and multimedia material). The method adopted to gather the empirical corpus for the purposes of this study was that of the 'constructed week' (McCombs, in de la Torre and Téramo, 2004: 48), during the period March-April, 2006. The collection of data was preceded by observations in the field and interviews held in the offices of *clarin.com* in Buenos Aires and UOL in São Paulo during the months of July and November, 2005. This analysis focuses on the hard news sections of the two sites: *Últimos Momentos*, in *clarin.com*, and *Últimas Notícias*, in *uol.com.br*. The news values found on these sites were: Celebrity, Exoticism, Human Interest, Sex, Conflict/Power, Love, Mystery, Money, Death/Crime/Violence, Leisure, Health, Beauty, Ecology, Education, Religion, the Arts and Work.

As for Currency, it was understood that all the news being analysed was up-to-date so it was not necessary to mention this characteristic.

Proximity is a difficult value to measure: there is no *de facto* proximity in a website, since it is created for a public with no frontiers – those who are familiar with the language used to divulge news. We may take it as read that the Proximity value still controls many editorial decisions on the São Paulo and Buenos Aires sites and if we emphasise the local element it is to show that both regions maintain a connection with the original media, which are local and national.

We must insert a qualification here in terms of evaluating news values in a specific sample such as this one: they have been decided on by the researcher. When reading each of the items, the researcher made a note of the topics that appear or are suggested in the development of the text. Something may escape him, while he himself may concentrate on certain aspects which he feels are present in the content but which would not be so important to other people. In spite of everything, news values are a measure of the interest that reporters attribute to their public and are thus useful as an instrument for analysing what is printed on the page, that which journalists feel to be relevant or what they feel to be important for people to know. Like an ideological code, news values give us clues to follow concerning the types of content that have value at a specific moment.

First of all, we shall discuss the news values that appeared on the UOL page during the week that was studied. We observe that one value that appears in almost all news items is Money (93.8%), followed by Conflict/Power (92.5%) and Leisure (51.7%). Today, economic topics affect a significant part of newsworthy events and the linked themes of Conflict/Power, which appear in both urban conflict and war, in sport as well as in political quarrels, are an important factor in helping to raise the interest level of a news item. Whenever a famous person (a well-known politician, the country's President or an individual from the world of the arts) appears in an item, he or she increases the value of that report, which means that readers identify with personalities who appear in the media, whom they see as providing behaviour patterns. In this case, the fact of the values of Money, Conflict/Power, Leisure and Celebrity appearing with the highest frequency suggests that sport is the subject of frequent reports since that is the area where these factors come together.

The news value of Mystery (18.7%), also on UOL, is not isolated from the rest. It forms part of other stories - those involving any kind of crime (6.1%), mainly events concerning death (6%) and many conflicts. As with matters concerning the digital media, the Internet itself and the computer are generally seen by the public, rather as being mysterious

and unknown, representing an uncontrolled, ethereal world that is as diffuse as cyberspace, so we may understand that the Mystery news value belongs to the electronic world. Topics concerning the Internet always bring together an element of Mystery. We should not forget what Moulthrop (1991) says in possibly ironic homage to the Beatles: "Nothing is real, just like the eternal and abundant fields of strawberries in virtual dreams." Whatever the reason, Mystery is an important ingredient in arousing interest and has a highly frequency on the UOL site.

Sex and Work appear in similar proportions (a little over 7%), a higher percentage than some of the other values for human well-being: Human Interest (5.2%), the Arts (6.1%), Health (6%), and well above the figures for other concerns that would seem to be dear to Brazilians: Love/Hate and Education (1.3%), the news values that appear least frequently. Attention should also be drawn to the frequency of the Exoticism news value (4.9%) on the UOL site, which is very low for a society that pays much attention to what is different, foreign or comes from outside.

The only explanation we can offer for this is that exotic subjects have a special place on the UOL site, the *UOL Tabloid* section, in which the 'features', a light and humorous type of writing, are rewritten so as to be amusing and to capture the reader's attention by appealing to the more picturesque details of stories. Another hypothesis we might propose is to relate the high percentage of news items based on the Conflict/Power value to topics concerning politics. As the headlines on the UOL site at this time were almost all about political subjects – the Brazilian "political crisis" and the scandals of misuse of money and corruption – we may conclude that there was little space left over for the general items that seldom occupy the tops of pages.

Secondly, we move on to analyse the news values of the *Clarín* site. The top news value in the *Clarín* ranking is the double theme of Conflict/Power (69.4%), with Money (56%) in second place and Leisure (37.2%) in third. Thus, we can confirm what was said earlier concerning the predominance of news concerning sport, which brings together the three news values of Conflict/Power, Leisure and Money. Celebrity (31%) is the other factor which confirms this claim because where a well-known sportsman (or, often, a politician) appears, the other values of Conflict/Power and Money appear, as well as the Leisure value provided by sport.

As part of the attempt to make comparisons between the two sides, we shall see in Table 1 that the order of values is very similar. The percentages show the importance each site gives to each news value.

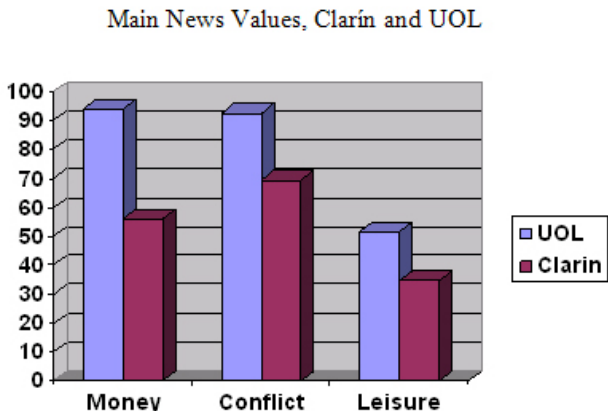
Table 1-Ranking of news values in Clarin and UOL

	Clarín	Average news value %	UOL	Average news value %
1.	Conflict/Power	69.4	Money	93.8
2.	Money	56.0	Conflict/Power	92.5
3.	Leisure	37.2	Leisure	51.7
4.	Celebrity	31.0	Celebrity	43.3
5.	Crime	17.3	Mystery	18.7
6.	Death	16.7	Work	7.6
7.	Mystery	12.0	Sex	7.4
8.	Health	9.3	The Arts	6.1
9.	Work	8.4	Crime	6.1
10.	Human Interest	6.7	Death	6.0
11.	Ecology	5.3	Health	6.0
12.	Religion	3.0	Human Interest	5.2
13.	Sex	2.4	Exoticism	4.9
14.	Exoticism	1.5	Education	1.3
15.	The Arts	0.9	Love/Hate	1.3
16.	Education	0.9	Ecology	-
17.	Love/Hate	0.6	Religion	-

When we compare the *clarin.com* and *uol.com.br* sites, we notice first that the number of topics shown is greater in the *Clarín* site (17 news values) than in UOL (15 news values). The percentages (see Graph 1) show that the distribution of values is more homogeneous in *Clarín*, where they are not as concentrated as in UOL - Money and Conflict/Power have percentage values above 90%, that is, they appear in almost all stories - nor are the values as high, achieving a maximum of 69.4% also in the Conflict/Power news value.

In our sample, *Clarín* may have low figures for the Arts (0.9% as opposed to 6.1% in UOL) and education (0.9% as opposed to 1.3% in UOL) but it pays more attention to Ecology (5.3%) and Religion (3%) than UOL, where these topics do not appear. On the other hand, Exoticism achieves a higher percentage on the UOL site (4.9%) than on *Clarín's* (1.5%), which can be seen as reflecting the nature of each site (one focuses more on

Graph 1



entertainment; the other more on news) and their respective publics.

On the *Clarín* site, more news values were found concerning Crime (17.3%) and Death (16.7%) than on UOL. On the other hand, on UOL the Mystery element is more frequent than Crime and Death. One conclusion that may be drawn is that on the *Clarín* site there are more news items concerning violence, while on UOL Mystery occurs in a larger number of items whether or not these actually refer to crimes and deaths. *Clarín* pays a little more attention to Health (9.3%) than Work (8.4%). Human Interest news items are also more frequent in *Clarín* (6.7%) than UOL (5.2%). This is one of the factors that cause difficulties to the researcher: a large number of topics are of emotional and psychological interest, which are characteristics of the news value we call Human Interest. However, this analysis has chosen to classify as Human Interest only topics that satisfy the primary characteristics of this category - in other words, those that affect readers' emotions - and not those that make some remote reference to human interests.

Similarities and Differences

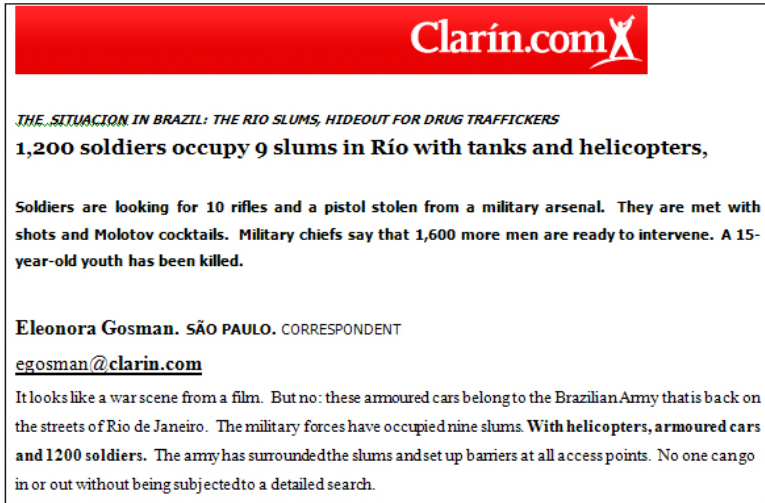
We shall now show some examples of what has been discussed. On one of the data-collection days, first of all at *clarin.com*, where two news items concerning Brazil stand out: the three-day state visit of the Brazilian President to the United Kingdom and the occupation of slums in Rio by the Brazilian army.

The report on the invasion of the slums by soldiers, with the by-line of *Clarín's* correspondent in Rio (Figure 1) consists of one main topic (top-layer); the box "A Story of Poor Ghettos...." is in a second layer (Figure

2). The main report makes a strong appeal to the Mystery news value (by association with violence), the box uses strong expressions to attract attention, which we may translate as: “The situation in Brazil: the shanty towns of Rio, hideout for drug traffickers, “with tanks and helicopters, 1200 soldiers...”, “a 15-year-old youth has been killed” (Figure 1). A striking lead sentence maintains the air of mystery.

Figure 1 - *Clarín*

(Part of) Main News Item about Shanty Towns in Rio



Clarín.com

THE...SITUATION IN BRAZIL: THE RIO SLUMS, HIDEOUT FOR DRUG TRAFFICKERS

1,200 soldiers occupy 9 slums in Río with tanks and helicopters,

Soldiers are looking for 10 rifles and a pistol stolen from a military arsenal. They are met with shots and Molotov cocktails. Military chiefs say that 1,600 more men are ready to intervene. A 15-year-old youth has been killed.

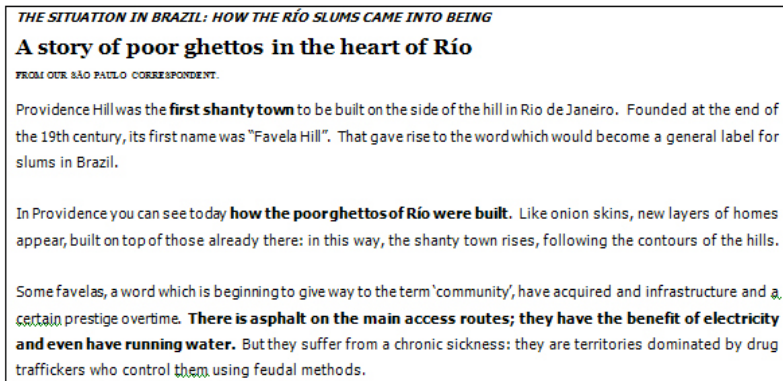
Eleonora Gosman. SÃO PAULO. CORRESPONDENT
egosman@clarin.com

It looks like a war scene from a film. But no: these armoured cars belong to the Brazilian Army that is back on the streets of Rio de Janeiro. The military forces have occupied nine slums. **With helicopters, armoured cars and 1200 soldiers.** The army has surrounded the slums and set up barriers at all access points. No one can go in or out without being subjected to a detailed search.

“A Story of Poor Ghettos in the Heart of Rio” starts with a historical lead sentence, recounting the origin of the word ‘favela’.

Figure 2 – *Clarín*

(Part of) Box with main report on slums in do Rio



THE SITUATION IN BRAZIL: HOW THE RÍO SLUMS CAME INTO BEING

A story of poor ghettos in the heart of Río

FROM OUR SÃO PAULO CORRESPONDENT.

Providence Hill was the **first shanty town** to be built on the side of the hill in Rio de Janeiro. Founded at the end of the 19th century, its first name was “Favela Hill”. That gave rise to the word which would become a general label for slums in Brazil.

In Providence you can see to day **how the poor ghettos of Río were built.** Like onion skins, new layers of homes appear, built on top of those already there: in this way, the shanty town rises, following the contours of the hills.

Some favelas, a word which is beginning to give way to the term ‘community’, have acquired an infrastructure and a ~~certain~~ **certain** prestige overtime. **There is asphalt on the main access routes; they have the benefit of electricity and even have running water.** But they suffer from a chronic sickness: they are territories dominated by drug traffickers who control ~~them~~ using feudal methods.

In the examples of the *clarin.com* website concerning Brazilian subjects we find a certain connection with other Brazilian themes reported in Argentina. In contrast to Brazil, the Argentines show an interest in the development of the economy and in the culture of their Brazilian neighbour. Coverage of Brazil is therefore a constant expression of the curiosity that Argentina has concerning Brazil.

The UOL website also gave prominence to these news items, putting them, along with photographs, on its front page: “Army personnel occupy Mangueira shanty town in Rio” and “Lula received by Queen in London”, but the reports had a different focus from those of *Clarín*. The *Clarín.com* report detailed the topics to be discussed by the President in London, among them the death of Jean Charles de Menezes. The UOL material emphasises the bad news: the Brazilian President failed to observe British punctuality and arrived late. Also, the serious style of the first report contrasts with the ironic tone of the second, which treated the event as if it were merely a holiday. *Clarín* tends more towards the Mystery and Death news values while UOL concentrates on the Celebrity value while criticising the Brazilian President with the use of words like “gaffe” and implying that he was unpunctual because “the Queen had to wait a little longer”.

Final Considerations

The news has long been analysed and described as if it belonged to the printed media. From the moment radio and television news programmes began to transmit news, it became clear that this product was malleable and adaptable to different environments. Now, with the Internet, we are travelling along a similar path. The creation of electronic websites, the setting up of virtual communities and the emergence of weblogs has brought about a new relationship with the public. These new bases for news indicated change in the three-part process of newsmaking - product/organisation/agents. At the same time, the medium that is “more performance-oriented” (Debray, 2000:53) that which operates with the lowest economic level of costs and the greatest area of activity - gives the impression of participating in the event, energising and encompassing the other media. Because of the omnipresence of technology in our lives we have the impression that everybody today reads the news on the Internet and that news sites reign supreme in the panorama of the CyberMedia.

The progress of the *Clarín* and Folha groups of companies - the two enterprises that initiated the *Clarín.com* and *uol.com.br* sites - shows

that in the second half of the 20th century they participated in the global movement that led news-providing companies to go onto the Internet and become part of the innovations in information technology and telecommunications. This development, which led to a new form of media, the Internet, and new ways of transmitting information digitally, has brought about great changes. And whenever there are changes in the way we see ourselves, our environment and our history (and the idea of a network is not simply a physical connection) it seems that the old structures are no longer valid (Touraine, 2007:11), which is not true. The old and the new will continue to coexist in our lives for some time, with moments of tension and relaxation.

The paper-based newspaper, such as the *Folha de S. Paulo* and *Clarín* newspapers, survives alongside television, radio and digital news. Older forms of media are not dying - they are merely *mutating*. Analysing news values is one way of understanding this moment of change. If the frontiers between news genres remain fluid; if the format of news itself undergoes changes in order to adapt to new medium; if there are new ways of creating, both in the ethical and aesthetic concept of products on the Internet as well as in the organisational culture that determines production strategies, changes are taking place. These mutations in the news, which include a new relationship with the public and give a new order for news values, may be summarised thus in the present study:

1. In this study, we have focused our attention on the hard news published on the two websites in question - the left-hand column of the front page of the *clarin.com* website (Último Momento) and the Breaking News section on UOL (Últimas Notícias). *Clarín* shows the difference between news and entertainment by means of a graphic separator. UOL, however, mixes the topics (although they are organised in editorials) on the first page;

2. There is a clear division between the publics served by the two websites. On the one hand, there is the paying public of *uol.com.br*, which has a monthly subscription in order to be able to access news and entertainment content and is mainly based in São Paulo (in first place), then Brasília and then other capitals of Brazilian states along the South-Southeast axis. On the other hand, there is the audience of *clarin.com*, which does not have to register to access the site's free content, which concentrates on what happens in Greater Buenos Aires, in the main regions of Argentina, in the neighbouring Spanish-speaking countries and in Brazil;

2. The variety of topics in *Clarín* is a little broader than that on UOL: the former is more balanced than the second in the selection of topics, with more items dedicated to a news-consuming public; UOL seems to insist on those themes it feels are preferred by a public that is more keen on entertainment than news;

3. The cultural map drawn by UOL's news values could indicate that its public belongs to a competitive society, values money and, in its spare time seeks leisure activities in the form of sport. The ideological code indicated by *Clarín* is that of a reader keen on bringing himself up-to-date on what is happening in the world, mainly in relation to political questions in Argentina, the arts and culture, and for whom sport is also an important element;

4. In Table 1 we find that Human Interest - the topic which had its Golden Age in the 1970s and 80s, with the so-called 'New Journalism' - is no longer a leading news value. Could a situation like this be found in web journalism as a whole? This is a question to be answered in further research;

5. It seems that the news areas on the Web are guided by the same criteria of newsworthiness as in the printed product. Thus, topics covered are the same (Conflict/Power, Leisure, Proximity, Currency, Celebrity, etc.), but their presence in the digital medium shows signs of variation. One example of this is the emphasis on items that introduce the question of conflict, along with entertainment, as is the case of events involving sport. To prove this hypothesis would require a more detailed study comparing the printed newspaper or magazine with its respective Internet site, a possibility that could be looked into.

6. According to this study, *Clarín* gives more importance to Ecology (5.3%) and Religion (3%) than to the Arts (0.9%, as opposed to 6.1% on UOL) and Education (0.9% as opposed to 1.3% on UOL). At the time of the study, environmental topics enjoyed more coverage because of the dispute between Argentina and Uruguay concerning the Papeleras, the cellulose factories on the frontier with the latter country. The Exoticism value is greater on UOL (almost 5%) than on the *Clarín* site (1.5%), which shows the general trend of each site: the former shows a clear emphasis on entertainment, and the element of oddity or rarity is an ingredient of Leisure; the latter pays more attention to news (in the sense of hard news) and its public seems to be more interested in politics and economics.

7. On the other hand, more topics involving the news values of Crime (17.3%) and Death (16.7%) were found on the *Clarín* site than on UOL. On UOL, the Mystery factor was greater than those of Crime and

Death, which might lead to a discussion on relevance or the tendency of the public to value investigative journalism. As for the Human Interest element, we may suppose that this is no longer a very important news value today, judging from the relative lack of emotional or sensational reports on the news pages of both sites. The higher percentage is on the *Clarín* site (6.7%) while on UOL these items represent little more than 5% of news reports.

8. We can ask, as Wolf once suggested, whether all the reduction in the digital information environment (reduction in the number of reporters in newsrooms, reduction in the number of topics covered by news sites, reduction in the number of sources, and the concentration on agency) is producing “a more transparent society,” on the contrary: the speed with which information appears is merely producing a “more opaque” society.

NOTES

- 1 Empirical research on the *Clarín* and UOL websites was the basis of the writer's doctoral thesis “News in a state of mutation. A study on news reporting and editing in digital journalism”, defended at the University of Brasília's Postgraduate Programme in Communication in August, 2007.
- 2 In fact, Wolf (2003: 148) discusses two ‘binaries’ 1) professional culture and 2) the organization of the work of journalists and the production processes they use. However, we can see three themes there, including the product.
- 3 The adage is: “If dog bites man, it is not news; if man bites dog, that´s news” (BURRELL, 1992: 2).
- 4 The empirical corpus of this research was made of 675 unities of information, from which 456 (67,56%) were object of analysis. *Clarín.com* has the most part of unities (389), from which 301 were examined (77,38%). In UOL, 286 were registered, and 155 (54,20%) were analysed. There were 44 hours of observation – 24 hours in UOL and 20 in *Clarín* – and 17 interviews in UOL and 27, in *Clarín*. At a third stage of the research, the sample was reduced to 75 texts, that would be analysed in detail.
- 5 7th March, 2006.
- 6 About layers: Darnton, in Salaverria, 2006.

7 There was a third report, on the football player Ronaldo.

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