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# THE JOURNALIST BETWEEN THE PROFESSION AND THE NEWSPAPER'S INTERESTS:

values and routines in the production  
of *Folha de S. Paulo's* editorials

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**ABSTRACT** - Notwithstanding journalistic editorials may evidence conflicts and negotiations involving public and private interests, their production process is little investigated in Brazil. The article examines the values and routines typical to the work of *Folha de S. Paulo's* editorialists to find out how they construct newspaper's positions. By applying Content Analysis to three in-depth interviews, we propose four thematic axes regarding the features of journalistic editorials: Political and marketing roles; their target audience; production routines; and editorial values of the newspaper. The results indicate that editorialists exercise limited autonomy, striving to fit the positions historically defended by the publication. Such a condition is seen as natural by the interviewees, with no record of tensions between their individual opinions and newspaper's positions.

**Keywords:** Journalism. Editorials. Professional autonomy. Production routines. *Folha de S. Paulo*.

## **O JORNALISTA ENTRE A PROFISSÃO E A EMPRESA: valores e rotinas na produção de editoriais da *Folha de S. Paulo***

**RESUMO** - Embora o editorial possa tornar evidentes conflitos e negociações envolvendo interesses públicos e privados na atividade jornalística, seu processo de produção é pouco investigado no Brasil. O objetivo do artigo é examinar, a partir do estudo de valores e rotinas inerentes à atuação dos editorialistas, os modos pelos quais os posicionamentos da Folha de S. Paulo (FSP) são construídos. A Análise de Conteúdo de três entrevistas em profundidade realizadas com profissionais da FSP permitiu sistematizar quatro eixos temáticos acerca dos editoriais: função política; público-alvo; rotinas produtivas; e valores da empresa. Os resultados indicam que os editorialistas exercem autonomia limitada, esforçando-se para se enquadrar no histórico de posições da empresa. Tal condição é vista com naturalidade pelos entrevistados, sem registro de tensões entre opiniões individuais e posicionamentos institucionais.

**Palavras-chave:** Jornalismo. Editoriais. Autonomia profissional. Rotinas de Produção. Folha de S. Paulo

## **EL PERIODISTA ENTRE LA PROFESIÓN Y LA EMPRESA: valores y rutinas en la producción de editoriales de *Folha de S. Paulo***

**RESUMEN** - Aunque el editorial sea capaz de evidenciar conflictos y negociaciones entre el interés público y privado en la práctica periodística, su proceso productivo es poco examinado en Brasil. El objetivo del artículo es analizar, a través del estudio de valores y rutinas inherentes a la actuación de los editorialistas, como los posicionamientos de Folha de S. Paulo son diseñados. El Análisis de Contenido de tres entrevistas en profundidad realizadas con profesionales de FSP ha sido organizada en cuatro ejes temáticos acerca de los editoriales: función política; público objetivo; rutinas de producción; y valores de la empresa. Los resultados indican que los editorialistas tienen una autonomía limitada y que se adaptan al historial de posicionamientos de la compañía. Esta adecuación es percibida con naturalidad, sin registro de tensiones entre opiniones individuales y posicionamientos institucionales.

**Palabras clave:** Periodismo. Editoriales. Autonomía profesional. Rutinas de producción. Folha de S. Paulo.

### **1 Introduction**

Journalism, acknowledged as a social field (Bourdieu, 1989), can be understood as a system geared towards production and dissemination of information and opinions about updated issues of public interest (Gomes, 2004). This does not mean that the material devised by journalists is randomly shaped or produced according to their idiosyncrasies. There is, in fact, influence of a series of criteria and routines taught to professionals aiming that they dominate a set of techniques. Such knowledge contributes to constitute specific deontology and *habitus*.

Moreover, it is necessary to recognize the influence of dimensions that go beyond the journalist's control when the productive process is at stake. Some factors, both internal (from the work structure offered by the company responsible for the publication to political and economic interests inherent to it) and external (access to sources or pressures exerted by agents from other fields, such as advertisers) to newsrooms, also play a key role.

However, considering the prevalence of standardized rules and procedures does not imply understanding – how companies and journalists often propagate – that their productive processes would be an activity necessarily controlled by obedience to principles such as objectivity (Barros Filho, 1995; Marques, Miola & Siebra, 2014; Motta, 2013). In this case, there is a market issue to be considered: when affirming itself as having objective news reporting, the journalism tries to broaden its focus of action to enhance the control it exerts on the sphere of public visibility (Biroli & Miguel, 2012; Cook, 2005; Sparrow, 2006; Strömbäck, 2015). In other words, the political role of journalistic institutions may be revealed precisely through the alleged observation of the criteria and productive principles.

Given the importance - rhetorical or practical - of the norms for the construction of the journalistic content, it is essential to analyze the production routines in order to understand how organizational constraints (Breed, 1955; Gronvall, 2015; Tuchman, 1972) are related to orientations connected to professional training and performance, for example. Although, in the Brazilian case, investigations about this phenomenon have expanded over the last decade (Athanásio, 2014; Guazina, 2011; Mick, 2015; Mick & Lima, 2013), there are few approaches seeking to scrutinize the production routines of opinionated texts (Guerreiro Neto, 2016).

Rather, in spite of the relevance of such an object of research, the productive process of journalistic editorial texts is not examined enough (Ho & Quinn, 2008). The study of the dynamics of opinionated section helps to understand, for example, the newspaper's motivations to defend a particular agenda, as well as the origin of its political positions or even its transformations over the years. Investigating how the journalists involved in the editing process negotiate with their own convictions and react to the demands of the employer is of the utmost importance as it reveals an unexplored dimension of oscillations in professional autonomy. In other words, the newspaper owner may insist on more closely controlling the production of editorials

on occasions when the text refers to issues that he considers most sensitive to his particular interest (McKnight, 2010).

Therefore, this article intends to discuss the productive process of the editorial text - specifically, the debate about how such piece allows us to analyze the political role of journalism. The goal of this work is to understand, from the investigation of interviews with *Folha de S. Paulo's* editorialists (FSP), the ways in which the company's opinion is constructed and shaped, focusing on tensions, disputes and negotiations involved in the production of the speeches representing its institutional voice. Hence, the study opens an opportunity to discuss how the values of the journalistic organization are managed and consolidated in the editorial text.

In order to accomplish the goal, the paper presents a Content Analysis of three in-depth interviews conducted with editorialists and former editorialists of the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, emphasizing their thinking about four aspects: political role of editorials; target audience of such opinionated texts; productive routines of editorialists; and editorial values of the company.

The article is organized as it follows: the first section discusses particularities of the journalistic editorial and its status as an element that characterizes the newspaper's social and political role, based on national and international literature. The following topic reports the trajectory of the research object, namely *Folha de S. Paulo*, and details the methods of collection (in-depth interviews) and the examination of the material (Content Analysis). Finally, the research data are presented and compared with the relevant references from the previously established axes, which allows us to organize the research findings in different dimensions.

## **2 The editorial and the journalistic autonomy**

Editorials play a unique role in journalism (Azevedo, 2016; Beltrão, 1980; Demers, 2016; Gross & Castilla, 2009; Hallock, 2007; Melo, 1985, 2003). It is a journalistic genre that gives visibility to the tension between the news company's positioning, by revealing explicit opinions of a commercial organization that holds private interests (Wanta, 2015), and the journalistic institution's claim that it would be able to act in a neutral and objective way when reporting events (Beltrão, 1980; Mont'Alverne & Marques, 2015) – which allows it to bolster its self-legitimizing discourse (Gomes, 2009; Guerreiro Neto, 2013).

The editorial holds a prominent role because its presence gives the newspaper a unique power of agenda-setting and framing. It makes possible for the journalistic company to reinforce its position regarding the agenda that appears to be set in the rest of the newspaper (covers, internal pages). As Eilders (1999, p. 3) argues, editorials can “offer media outlets a chance to put special emphases on a certain issue or sub-issue and generate additional attention”. It is rather recurrent, then, that such pieces focus on issues not often debated in the information section (Eilders, 1999; Gross & Castilla, 2009; Tresch, 2012).

However, the predominance of an industrial model of journalism - in which the publication is produced on a large scale and according to specific rules (Moreira & Lago, 2017) – does not suggest complete thematic and framing independency even in editorials. The subjects and approaches adopted must encompass inherent characteristics of journalistic activity, such as actuality and comprehensiveness.

It means that the conformation of the journalistic product to the requirements of the activity also implies that the editorials are produced according to certain rules and criteria. For that matter, Firmstone (2008) indicates there is an assimilation process of the editorial line similarly to what happens to reporters as soon as they arrive in the newsroom and try to adapt to the work environment. The editorialists interviewed by the author argued that there are no explicit rules on the subjects and opinions to be defended in editorials, but even so, editorialists knew what they should and what they could write about.

In other words, the professionals responsible for writing editorials, as well as those who work directly with the news coverage, strive to know the guidelines adopted by the employer (Breed, 1955; Kahn & Kenney, 2002; Kerrick, Anderson, & Swales, 1964). Soloski (1999) argues that not only corporate guidelines, but the professional rules of journalism themselves, are internalized without the need to make them explicit. Sigelman (1973), some decades ago, said that, in several cases, there is a voluntary adhesion by the journalist to the editorial line of the company in which she is acting. Then, editorial guidelines are often seen as another element to be taken into account when editors elaborate their texts (Genro Filho, 1987; Gieber, 1956).

Regarding the editorial, it is necessary to consider that it is a text assigned to specific professionals, precisely in the expectation

that they already know the opinions of the institution they work for. As soon as they are integrated into the opinionated section, journalists seek to know what Arbex Jr. (1987) calls “jurisprudence”: the historical newspaper company opinions about a certain subject – in order to maintain the coherence, the consistency of its arguments and, mainly, its ideological position.

Thus, it is plausible that editorialists have some degree of autonomy, since they were selected by the newspaper’s management to a position of trust. If this gives a certain freedom to such professionals, it should not be forgotten that they continue to be supervised during the construction and presentation of the company’s opinions (Beltrão, 1980; Firmstone, 2008; Guerreiro Neto, 2016; Melo, 2003; Meltzer, 2007). Understanding how the boundaries of such autonomy are negotiated and how the editorialists assess their role is helpful to clarify the tensions between the boundaries of the public interest and the private (belonging to the company) or professional interests.

### 3 Methodology

The data examined in the empirical section of this article come from three in-depth interviews conducted with two editorialists and one former editorialist from the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* (hereinafter referred to as FSP or *Folha*). This newspaper was selected because it integrates the reference press in Brazil and reached the status of the most read newspaper in the country. Furthermore, FSP has the third largest press circulation in the Brazilian territory. Thus, its prestige gives it the power to guide to some extent other information vehicles (Mesquita, Moisés, & Rico, 2014; Vimieiro & Maia, 2011), reverberating its influence towards diverse opinion makers (Azevedo, 2016; Kucinski, 1998). In addition, FSP was a pioneer in the publish its own Manual of Style and Usage (1984), a document in which the publication claims to prevail over the internal plurality of opinions.

Previous studies, such as that by Guerreiro Neto (2013) in Brazil, by Meltzer (2007) on the US case, and by Firmstone (2008) in the United Kingdom, use interviews as the appropriate data collection technique to verify: (a) how the processes of writing the editorials happen and (b) the ways in which such genre is understood within the journalistic enterprise.

From the methodological perspective, it is known that the use of interviews as a technique of information gathering imposes on the researchers the challenge of guaranteeing objectivity and representativeness to the analysis. In addition, there is a limitation to this technique: not every answer from interviewees correspond to what they actually think or practice. However, to obtain certain types of data, interviews are presented not only as appropriate tools, but they are often the only possibility of accessing them. The interview technique, therefore, “allows us to clarifying situations or accessing information that would not be noticeable only by observation” (Lima, 2016, p. 39).

The argument here also considers the particularities that surround interviews with journalists, since they are familiar with this type of technique (Pereira, 2014; Pereira & Neves, 2013), and this scenario may impose additional challenges. Therefore, it was decided to follow the recommendation made by Pereira & Neves (2013) regarding the constitution of a representative corpus, the structuring of a long and flexible interview and the minimization of the official line in the informants' discourse.

The three interviews were conducted in person, in the city of São Paulo, in June 2017, based on a questionnaire previously prepared for this research. Although the focus of the conversations was on the points covered by the questions, we could address complementary issues that emerged during the meetings. Each of the interviews lasted approximately one hour and were recorded and fully transcribed. Two of them took place in the newspaper's headquarters and the other in an external environment. Each journalist was heard separately by two researchers, in order to avoid that the opinion of one source could influence the information provided by another.

It is important to emphasize the care in choosing the editorialists for interviewing. We opted for informants with different professional profile, and considered their academic background, trajectories and positions held in the journalistic company. The first interviewee, who requested anonymity, was an editorialist at FSP for more than a year. The second source is Uirá Machado, who has been working at FSP since 2004 and served as editor of the opinionated section between June 2013 and February 2017. He worked as an editorialist from 2012 to 2017. At the time of the interview, Uirá held the position of editor of the section “Ilustríssima”. The third informant is Gustavo Patu, editor of the

opinionated section since March 2017. He acted as a reporter in FSP since 1992.

Therefore, the research interviews privileged informants: experienced professionals who know the internal dynamics of this newspaper. In order to organize the collected information and to improve the objectivity of the analysis, it was decided to align the Content Analysis (Bardin, 1977; Krippendorff, 2004) of the interviews in four axes, which were established following the characteristics of the previously elaborated questionnaire. Data exploration, then, was built in harmony with the structure of the interviews. The dimensions considered are as follows:

1) *Political and marketing roles of the editorial:* Encompasses statements that contemplate the discussion about the newspaper's political activity through its editorials, as well as on the role played by such type of text to distinguish the newspaper from its competitors.

2) *Editorial target audience:* Addresses excerpts aimed at clarifying who the editorialists consider to be the reader of the editorials. It also discusses the relationship of those texts with audience's expectations.

3) *Production routines of editorialists:* It considers the responses of interviewees when they elucidate the editorial production routines. It covers the debate about the editorialists' autonomy, as well as the hierarchical relationships established in the newsroom and the degree of interference/participation of the editorial board in the decisions.

4) *Editorial values of the journalistic company:* Reverberates the parts of the interviews mentioning the relationship between opinion and news and that examine the editorial line of the publication.

It should be emphasized that these four dimensions determined the conformation of each node contemplated in the software NVivo. Thus, each segment of the answers from the three interviews was classified in a single node among the four outlined above. This measure helps to highlight, more precisely, what each editorialist explains about the topics of research interest. It should also be spotlighted that the axes work as organizing instances of the analyzed content, but they deal with issues that are close to each other. Therefore, the analytical dimensions cannot be completely dissociated.

#### **4 Between the profession and the company's interests: editorialists' perception about the editorial production routines**

FSP has been circulating in Brazil since 1921, being one of the quality papers of national scope – in this respect, similar newspapers are *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *O Globo*. The institutional position of *Folha de S. Paulo* has been historically printed on the second page of the newspaper (A2) or, on occasions of greater editorial weight, on the cover. Since 2006, the editorial project has included two daily texts and, in exceptional situations, only one (Athanásio, 2017; Diniz, 2014).

Data presentation is organized according to the four axes outlined. Therefore, it is possible to observe the perspectives of the interviewees about the production routines and the values considered by the FSP when yielding their editorials. Additionally, it is important to emphasize that each following topic involves the comparison between what was said by the interviewees and the notions previously elaborated in the literature, with the intention of going beyond the description and, thus, offering more consistent subsidies for analysis.

#### **Political and marketing roles of the editorial**

The interviewed editorialists emphasize the relevance and prestige of the editorial. In their opinion, the newspaper company's opinion implies a qualified position that, if not quantitatively strong (editorials are not the most read text in newspapers), has a qualitative influence for evidencing the journalistic company as a player willing to dialogue with authorities of other fields, such as Politics and Economy.

(...) the editorial will never be the most read text in the newspaper, it is a more complex text, it does not have that news temperature, not always flashy, neither always has a bombastic opinion: it will rarely be the most read one. (...) So you do not measure the importance of an editorial by the number of clicks, but by the kind of reader and by its influence on the rest of society (Patu, interview, June 4, 2017).

The three interviewees are unanimous in stating that the editorial maintains its prestige in the contemporary journalism. Machado (interview, June 4, 2017) argues that this genre remains

a beacon for the discussions. Other interviewee emphasizes the newspaper's intention to guide decision-making by public authorities.

It is always quite prestigious when the newspaper notes that an opinion issued by it was welcomed. I think this is the ambition of an editorial many times: to guide decision-making. You are always talking, you always signal where you are going, and the agents signal every time how they reacted to what you said (...) I think all the Brazilian media controllers have political pretensions, they want the ideas they express to be adopted or endorsed by an agent of the political game (Anonymous Interview, June 4, 2017).

The answer above dialogues with the editorial literature that points out, among the objectives of such texts, its influence over the political agents (Arbex Júnior, 1987; Billeaudeau, Domke, Hutcheson & Garland, 2003; Eilders, 1999; Espinosa, 2003; Melo, 1985; Mont'Alverne, 2017).

Besides the political dimension in the editorials function, we must also consider the marketing aspect. In the interviewees' testimony, we can see how the editorial collaborates to guide FSP advertising campaigns.

I think it [the editorial] is very important, including the orientation of advertising campaigns, as we have seen recently, like that one "*Folha* thinks about it, you don't, but agreeing or not you have to read *Folha*. Follow *Folha*". So, I think the editorial guide indeed. It is part of the editorial project and it is used strategically by the company's commercial department, by saying that *Folha* defends this feat (Anonymous Interview, June 4, 2017).

Moreover, the editorial acts as one of the elements responsible for distinguishing the FSP from other companies in the market. There is a comparison with *O Estado de S. Paulo*:

Newspapers identities are very well defined, *Folha* and *Estado* are very well defined, an editorial is rarely made and then we read *Estado* and said "oh, *Estado* wrote an editorial similar to ours". Never, even when we accidentally write about the same theme at the same day. Anyone, I think, can read one and another and say, "this is *Folha*, that is *Estado*". (...) I think the identities are very clear (Patu, interview, June 4, 2017).

However, the difference in relation to the competitors is not the only reason listed to explain why these opinionated texts have singular settings. According to the editorialists, some positions go through principles supported by the newspaper company:

I think the editorial is a place of many symbolic disputes and there are specific opinions that you take for the sake of principles, not because of competition. Obviously, it will have an effect, but they are supported because they are seen as correct. So, in these cases you see a wrong editorial from a competitor and you want to do it right. It's not so much a matter of competition, of captivating an audience that disagrees with that, but it's just to say that we disagree with it. This is important in and of itself (Anonymous Interview, June 4, 2017)

Furthermore, the three editorialists are wary of the idea that the position of the competitor newspaper would influence FSP editorials.

Very, very rarely [competitors rule FSP editorials]. Perhaps in these more acute moments of crisis such as the one we live in now, for market reasons too, singularities in the newspaper etc. You can even, among a range of factors, consider somehow what competitors have already said, if they have said or will probably say, on the subject. But they don't set the tone. If *Estado* or *O Globo* write an editorial on a topic, this is not a reason for *Folha* to write or stop writing on that. And that is not what will determine *Folha's* position; in most cases it is irrelevant (Machado, interview, June 4, 2017).

The findings about the relationship between other newspapers' and FSP's opinion corroborate the results presented by Firmstone (2008). Like the editorialists interviewed for this investigation, the professionals Firmstone listened to did not believe that the competitors positions rule the newspapers in which they work. However, they are aware of which political space their newspaper company occupies in the British media system, whose case is analyzed by that research.

Thus, it is possible to affirm that the editorial suits commercial and political dimensions. In the first case, this occurs as the opinion text establishes a reading agreement with its audience, allowing it to distinguish itself from the competitors and to shape the public image of the newspaper seeking to consolidate its credibility. In the second case, it plays a political role as it proposes to influence other social fields outside the limits of journalism, seeking to establish itself as a player in the democratic environment, as discussed below.

### Editorial target audience

FSP editorial team forecasts that the audience of the editorials is composed by people influent in public opinion. At this point, it should be emphasized the consensus between the answers of the professionals interviewed.

I want to be read by as many people as possible, but I will never write an editorial in a silly language to please more people. I will not write more aggressively, more flashy terms. You want to convince by logic, by argument, by the themes you choose. So, you want to attract a reader who is interested in something deeper, of high quality. I'm talking about lawyers, engineers, teachers, people who are in the public debate, a middle class. What we call public opinion, people who are participating in some way of the public debate (Patu, interview, June 4, 2017).

According to the interviewees, the readers of the political elite deserve special attention, since the newspaper “intends to dialogue mainly with the country’s opinion leaders. I think this is the ambition of the newspaper: to influence the public debate” (Anonymous Interview, June 4, 2017). As stated by Uirá Machado (interview, June 4, 2017):

Politicians surely read, and people from the Judiciary power, most prominent academics read... The most qualified press officers probably read, they must follow to know. Because it gives a weight, it helps these advisors to measure where the wind is blowing, whether a conduct is too reprehensible or not, whether one should support it, retreat it, or go forward.

Beyond the audience forecasted by the interviewees, we might mention the existence of a tension related to the expectations of the public and the issues dealt with in the editorials. There is some disagreement among respondents regarding how much the expected reactions to editorials influence the production process. For Machado (interview, June 4, 2017), the potential controversy associated with the agenda does not prevent it from being discussed in the texts. The greatest concern lies on the variation of the issues covered by the texts, because they should not be always the same. Patu (interview, June 4, 2017) identifies that polemic issues, such as drugs decriminalization, require distinct treatment.

We know from experience that some themes are polemic for the audience, and not all readers agree with them, which will cause some discomfort. We do not stop dealing with these issues, but we have extra care. (...) The most troubling issues are those that require more argumentation (Patu, interview, June 4, 2017).

Another aspect refers to the recognition that certain positions can be rejected by some readers, which impacts the brand of the newspaper. Machado (interview, June 4, 2017) argues that some editorials are strategic, especially those that are published on the cover, which should "(...) consider several factors. Because especially the first page brings a much larger institutional weight, it is a decision that has to consider all aspects of the newspaper".

The relationship with the audience is therefore relevant not only to the adoption of editorial positions. The testimonies evidence the editorial as a place for the construction of the newspaper's own identity towards the reader, who often uses the editorial in the expectance of the orientation that the publication is going to offer (Moraes, 2007).

The general assessment of the interviewees thus seems to be that publishers and news publishers in general are different, although there may be some overlap. In the same way, we must consider that the opposition or support of the public in relation to editorials manifests itself in diverse ways (and has different effects in journalistic work). It is the case of receiving a complaint about the posture of the newspaper by an ordinary reader or by a Supreme Court Minister.

Lately, editorial practice is understood by professionals as a unique dialogue that the newspaper establishes with a reference public. Thus, the positions assumed by newspapers aim to balance the agreement with the audience, but mainly to give the newspaper the power to express opinions about political decisions.

### **Production routines of editorialists**

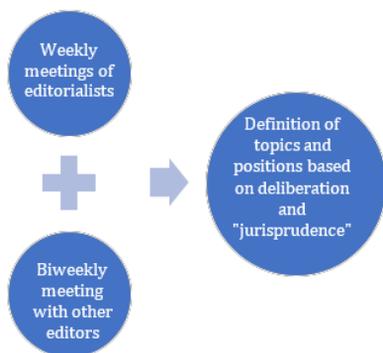
The three interviews highlight that there is an established routine regarding the production of editorials – and even more about how the published opinions are defined. FSP editorialists team discusses potential themes with the editor of opinionated section in a weekly lunch. On the occasion (not very formal, according to the interviewees), issues, positions and arguments

are suggested. In addition, there are two daily conversations of the editor of opinionated section with the newsroom manager, Octávio Frias Filho: in the first one, after lunchtime, the guidelines of the day are presented, and in the second one, late afternoon, they review the texts. Thus, editorials are submitted to the newspaper owner's sieve every day (Patu, interview, June 4, 2017; Machado, interview, June 4, 2017).

Every two weeks, those responsible for the main editorial sections also participate in the meeting with the company's top editors. On such occasions, according to a testimony collected, the editor of opinionated section selects two or three themes, chooses a rapporteur and puts the matter under debate. The idea is that all of them may collaborate in setting the newspaper opinion (Patu, 2017). Despite those routine meetings to define the agenda, the interviewees indicate that discussions initiated from hard news tend to override editorial planning, often changing the schedule of themes that editorials are going to address. In these moments, when a sudden matter arises, the editorials are reconfigured, and decisions are made faster.

It is important to highlight that, still according to the reports, the editorial director follows the activities of the editorialists closely, talking twice a day with the editor of opinionated section and giving the final endorsement for the texts that will be published.

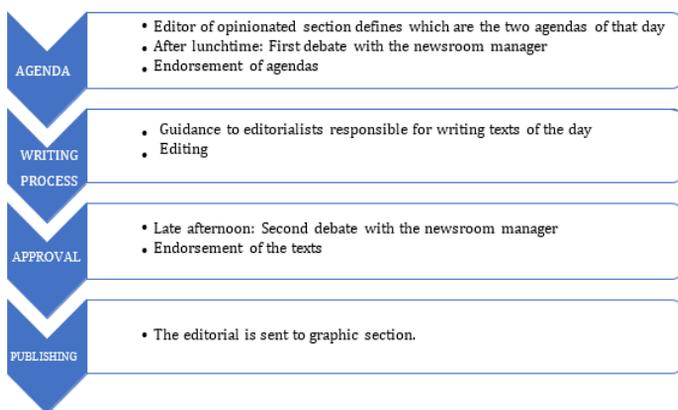
**Figure 1** – Process for defining FSP editorial positions



Source: Authors (2018).

This mechanism of the opinionated text production is foreseen by the literature. However, the diagnosis regarding the degree of autonomy of these professionals is perceived in distinct levels by the works on the area. Researchers say that, in large companies, editorial opinion has few ties with the owner's positions (Meltzer, 2007; Melo, 2003), while other scholars insist that they interfere directly in this genre (Beltrão, 1980). In the case of FSP, there is no such kind of autonomy diagnosed by Meltzer (2007) when this author carried out interviews and ethnographies in a study on North American newsrooms.

**Figure 2** – FSP daily editorial decision-making flowchart



Source: Authors (2018).

In fact, we can see that the autonomy of FSP editorialists also depends on the history of previous positions held by the company. Some of these postures have been sustained for decades. This guides the production of new editorials and conforms them to what the interviewees call “jurisprudence”. Therefore, opinions provided by the newsroom manager are not the only factor explaining editorial positions. However, it should be mentioned that the real importance of jurisprudence is questioned by Arbex Jr. (1987). At the time of publication of the referenced text, this scholar defended that FSP did not have a consistent ideological line, being susceptible to oscillations of public opinion. For him, such a configuration would deprive the instrument of jurisprudence, insofar as the opinion defended could be altered according to market conveniences.

The interviewees also identify some autonomy for proposing the issues agenda, which does not mean that their suggestions are going to be accepted. “Everyone has autonomy for proposing, but of course it always happens inside the borders of the newspaper’s thoughts and edition conveniences” (Patu, interview, June 4, 2017). Moreover, it is possible to remark the difference in the level of autonomy according to the professional position inside the opinionated section team.

Editorialists, in theory, are those who have less autonomy. The editor of opinionated section has quite a lot of autonomy, editorialists have few. But, yes, you tell the editorialist the theme and she can naturally propose another issue. Then, she has some autonomy for proposing, she just does not have the power for the final decision. If that is going to become an editorial or not. (...) So they have wide autonomy at that moment [writing the text inside the parameters informally established]. If the text is bad, not in consonance with the editor’s thoughts, he is free to change it (Machado, interview, June 4, 2017).

Another crucial point that the interviewees mentioned was the selection of issues covered by the editorials. Even though the editorial does not have to follow the same criteria that guide the information section, the three respondents agree that its content is connected to the news section. “(...) in general, I would say that the editorial is constituted by 60% of reactive comments and by 40% of prospective, in response to the news section. It is a consequence rather than a guide for the news” (Anonymous interview, June 4, 2017). However, it must be noticed the interpretation of all these journalists concerning the approach between criteria of newsworthiness and those criteria that guide the elaboration of editorials (criteria of editorial-worthiness).

I don’t know if they [criteria that guide editorials] are very different from the criteria related to the news. Obviously, thematic relevance [is one of them] – I mean of the theme itself, but also for the readers of the newspaper. (...) I think about how current the theme is. We [do not] make editorials absolutely off the agenda, unless the newspaper wants to set the agenda or think that it is the right moment for discussing that theme. For the editorial, it is not valid the criterium of exclusivity that is mandatory for the news. It is almost the opposite: editorials, in general, cover themes that were already covered by the news (Machado, interview, June 4, 2017).

However, this does not imply that the issues covered by the news must be discussed in editorials or that those texts are restricted

to comment the news agenda. Concerning the autonomy of the opinionated agenda, Patu (interview, June 4, 2017) recognizes that there is space for bringing themes that are not in the news spotlight on that moment.

(...) we have more freedom in the editorial section for making different things. We do not have to make something out of obligation. Oh, "the headline of the newspaper is this, so we have to make [the editorial] about the newspaper headline", no. We are free for making it about another theme (Patu, interview, June 4, 2017).

Nevertheless, the timing cannot be dismissed in the editorials production, which means, the freedom of agenda is not unconditional, and it is guided by daily events.

(...) we have the first [editorial] which is more up-to-date, they are about more general themes, but in the second one we have more freedom with it. We can make them about more local themes, international ones, we can address themes that aren't hard news (Patu, interview, June 4, 2017).

The speech above is aligned to perceptions as Espinosa's (2003), which defends that there are events with too much importance to be ignored in editorials. Also, for that matter, Firmstone (2008) indicates that the news values are aspects considered in the selection of the subjects to be addressed when elaborating the opinion of the company.

### **Editorial values of the journalistic company**

The opinions taken by FSP and its editorial project - which declares itself centered on the principles of nonpartisanship, pluralism and impartiality<sup>13</sup> - have strong commercial appeal (Kucinski, 1998). Considering the editorial as a relevant ingredient in constructing the newspaper's public image, the journalistic company strategically opts for values that add more credibility. Thus, although the editorial is an institutional opinion space, FSP seeks to behave in a way that is perceived as balanced even in the opinion spaces. Thus, in relation to the difficulty of expressing opinion in a space of tensions, professionals comment on how rigorous the company seeks to be in an attempt to avoid the permeability in the wall that divides facts and opinions, something

that the international literature has already worked to measure (Adam et al., 2017; Berkel, 2006; Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Eilders, 1999; Gronemeyer & Porath, 2015; Ho & Quinn, 2008). Machado (interview, June 4, 2017) treats the separation between opinion and information as a consensus, assigning its resolution to the rules established in the Manual of Style and Usage.

(...) there is not much tension because it is said in the Manual of Style and Usage and this is something very clear in here, that the editorial does not drive the news, the editorial is the place where the newspaper stands, so the newspaper continues to be nonpartisan and plural, although it may express a defined position in relation to some themes covered by the editorials.

There is a clear concern of the interviewee to indicate the dissociation between the editorial position of the newspaper and its news coverage.

Although the editorial, in *Folha's* case, does not lead the coverage in any way, it seems automatic to me that outsiders imagine that it signals something in relation to what the newspaper will cover and it would be strange if this did not happen (Machado, interview, June 4, 2017).

Patu (interview, June 4, 2017) acknowledges the impossibility of separating opinion from information in journalism but emphasizes the effort to make it happen. "There is no such thing as saying something that is fully objective... (...) But there is an effort. Effort is what makes a difference. (...) I think any good newspaper should try to have a degree of objectivity, even if it expresses an opinion". The editorialist also recognizes an important function in the opinionated expression of the newspaper, to clarify the reader about newspaper positions.

The reader is reading the newspaper and she knows what 'the newspaper' thinks. It's even a way for her to filter what she is reading in the newspaper. We try to separate the news from the opinion as much as possible, but it is important for the reader to know the newspaper's opinion (Patu, interview, June 4, 2017).

Another important aspect pointed out by the interviewees is the changes of the newspaper over time, both in terms of positions defended or concerning the tone of the texts. Patu (interview, June 4, 2017) argues that FSP has become more mature. Machado (interview, June 4, 2017) lists some changes of opinion, such as the defense of

drugs legalization and the restriction of the privileged jurisdiction. From the editorialists' statements, it can be said that these positions are also associated with the image that the newspaper intends to cultivate.

In the face of the impressions reported by professionals, it is worth considering that, although the interviewees statements ensure the untying between fact and opinion, international studies dedicated to investigating such interference have found some porosity between opinion and news sections, both in terms of issues agenda (Druckman & Parkin, 2005), concerning the direction adopted by opinions (Eilders, 1999) or the sources heard (Adam et al., 2017). Thus, the perception of the interviewees about the independence of news reporters in relation to institutional opinion (characterized in the opinion section) is not enough to ensure that the positions presented in the editorials do not spill over the direction of the news reports. We should also pay attention to the fact that the interviewees may have a biased view because this topic is sensitive to the journalistic field, and because of their professional position into the company.

In this respect, it is possible to perceive the effort of the professionals to adapt themselves to the demands from the company and the journalistic activity itself, even if they are not strictly subject to the same production rules of other professionals in the newsroom. In addition, it is noticeable the coexistence of values of distinct characteristics that drive the journalistic production routine: a) values of the journalistic field, followed by FSP, such as the respect for the detachment between news and opinion; b) values associated with the newspaper's editorial line, such as public policies the newspaper supports. In diverse ways, both set of values contribute to the maintenance of the newspaper's identity.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper aimed to reflect on the role and the professional routine of editorialists to understand the tensions, disputes and negotiations involved in the production of contents that present the institutional voice. It was based on the premise that the identification and understanding of the internal dynamics of producing such materials need more explanatory elements. Hence, the research makes it possible to better understand the political function of journalism by Brazilian research.

The in-depth interviews indicate the systematization of the editorials' production, and its specific routines, as well as showing the filters through which the elaboration of the company's positions pass. The professionals emphasize the importance of the editorial genre in the newspaper structure and reaffirm the place that the organization expects to fill in the public debate, by influencing decisions made by other social fields. Moreover, the marketing and ideological functions of such text are clear. Regarding the audience, the interviewed editorialists acknowledge that the editorial is not a text with the intent to reach all readers, although they admit that there is some influence of the public's reaction on its content.

In addition, the prestige assigned to this journalistic genre and the expectation of a selective audience are related to the political role played in this opinion space. The interviews made it possible to attest that one of the main ambitions of newspaper editorials is to interfere in the significant issues of the Brazilian agenda, by dialoguing with political actors and consequently claiming credibility from the public. This is a key aspect to enhance the company's social legitimation. To some extent, it represents both marketing and, mainly, political strategy. Since this text is intentionally produced to persuade the reader and to position the newspaper on the controversies debated in society, it spells out its political action, presenting itself as an institution that holds interests to be defended - even if it does not show them as private commitments.

The process through which the newspaper defines its opinion on the issue is a discussion between editors and editorialists, and it is essentially based on the newspaper's historical opinions. Thus, editorials are consistent with past opinions. Furthermore, FSP's owner/manager interferes directly in the opinion production, by supervising issues and arguments presented.

The professional autonomy and the production of an institutional text pass through a negotiation process, similarly to the tensions between the political role of Journalism and the different interests involved in its work. However, it should be emphasized that it is possible to say that the three interviewees are adapted to the logics and routines of FSP editorial production, which does not mean only fitting new schedules into personal life or attending top organizational meetings. It is mostly about informants' natural view of the need for professionals who work in the process of writing the company's opinion to know and to adapt to "jurisprudence" - a term that can also mean a strategy

to neutralize the weight of adaptation to political and ideological positions of the newspaper at various times. Thus, professionals significantly adapt to the role of “company’s voice”. In other words, instead of tensions between personal convictions and the bosses’ instructions, we can see the daily fulfillment of tasks in which the journalists lend their expertise to the conformation of the institution’s positions.

\*Translated by Isabele Mitozo

## NOTES

- 1 The interview was developed to address broader research questions, such as: What is the political function of newspaper editorials in Brazil? Who is the target audience of those texts? What criteria are used to select issues and opinions to be presented? How is the editorial routine organized? Which is the degree of autonomy offered to the editorialists?
- 2 The research “Brazilian News Consumption” (nov/2016) affirms that FSP is the most read newspaper in Brazil. Retrieved from [www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2016/12/1840208-folha-e-o-jornal-mais-lido-do-pais-diz-pesquisa.shtml](http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2016/12/1840208-folha-e-o-jornal-mais-lido-do-pais-diz-pesquisa.shtml)
- 3 Circulation data provided by the National Association of Newspapers. According to the national ranking, FSP is the third Brazilian newspaper in circulation; it prints 314.107 copies on Sundays and 295.319 on week days. Retrieved from <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/brasil/fc3004200709.htm>.
- 4 “Official discourse” is understood as the “idealized narratives, which are crystallized in the imaginary of the interviewees”, i.e. what can be adopted by the informants as the standard line regarding what is asked to them. In the case of editorialists, it concerns the professional ideal, the social role of the Journalism and the public image of the company itself. The strategy of minimizing this type of discourse comprises “an inquisitive effort with the objective of breaking with this type of discourse” (Pereira & Neves, 2013, p. 42).
- 5 The transcription of the interviews are available on demand to the authors.

- 6 *Ilustríssima* is the Folha de S. Paulo's section specialized in news on culture and art.
- 7 The scope delimited for the work was concerned to assess editorialists' views, since they are professionals subject to a hierarchy and to dynamics distinct from the news. Thus, the newspaper managers were not interviewed, since such a movement would imply covering a different object.
- 8 The nodes are a NVivo software tool that allows us to group references around the same topic, place or category. In this text, the nodes correspond to the four categories previously presented. Then, each interview was classified according to each node. Details at [http://help-nv10.qsrinternational.com/desktop/concepts/about\\_nodes.htm#MiniTOCBookMark2](http://help-nv10.qsrinternational.com/desktop/concepts/about_nodes.htm#MiniTOCBookMark2).
- 9 *O Estado de S. Paulo* is one of the Brazilian quality papers and the main market competitor of *Folha de S. Paulo*.
- 10 *O Globo* is one of the most important Brazilian quality papers, based in Rio de Janeiro.
- 11 Brazil has been struggling with an economic and political crisis over the last years. One of the consequences of this scenario was the impeachment of the former President Dilma Rousseff in 2016.
- 12 The editorial sections considered more akin to the editorial, which are: *Poder* (politics), *Mercado* (economy), *Mundo* (international), *Cotidiano* (cities), and *Ilustríssima* (culture).
- 13 The latest version of *Folha Editorial Project* can be found at: <http://temas.folha.uol.com.br/projeto-editorial-da-folha/projeto-editorial-2017/introducao.shtml>

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